

PART I

Socialism as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy—The Party’s Project

The following two chapters address the project of the party state to establish, maintain, and develop socialism in the GDR. Chapter 1, “From Marx to Conscious Social Transformation,” takes a longer historical perspective. It goes back to the very roots of the state socialist project in the writings of those men the party state has self-consciously adopted as “classics”: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. The central narrative line of this chapter follows the historical unfolding of something of a paradox. In spite of Marx’s base-superstructure model that analyzes consciousness as an epiphenomenon, the actually existing socialisms of Eastern Europe have attributed central importance to ideology for the formation of socialist institutions. At least for the GDR I can show that the efforts to construct and maintain a socialist consciousness assumed ever-greater importance as a tool of politics. Once it became clear that the rearrangement of ownership structures (i.e., socialization) and work flow (the introduction of collectives), which both combine a politics of articulation with a politics of incentives, did not work as planned, a politics of education moved to the foreground. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the party’s understanding of its own project increasingly boiled down to the hope that if only everybody would internalize the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, while sincerely acting in accordance with them, socialism would realize itself in an ever more perfect way because Marxism-Leninism was the only true science of the social that has ever existed. What was required, then, of politics was to make a heroic effort to create a countrywide monolithic intentionality, which meant strengthening the one organization that could actually bring that change about (the party) while enabling it to bring everybody else on board through a systematic program of proselytization. This was seen as all the more important because socialism saw itself entangled in a mortal battle with capitalism. From these self-understandings followed logically, first, a particular kind of ethics that was supposed to compel everybody into relentless self-objectification vis-à-vis that goal of the party state, and

second, a specific form of accounting for errors that carries all the marks of a theodicy. The longer historical breath of this chapter serves also another purpose. It reveals the historical and theoretical roots of central notions of actually existing socialism's self-understanding that have left deep traces in its institutional structure. Once it has become clear what assumptions the party made about the social world, it will also become much more transparent why it wagered its very own survival on the production and policing of monolithic intentionality.

The second chapter, "Aporias of Producing Right Consciousness," provides an overview of the institutional means by which the party state aimed to implement its consciousness-driven model of social transformation. I will in particular point to three prongs of the institutional fabric of the GDR that are important here. There were first the organizational principle of democratic centralism and central planning that operated like fractals through all contexts of organized socialist life. These principles were meant to create for the party the conditions for the possibility of central control while at the same time mobilizing and rallying the population behind its project. From here the party followed basically two strategies of creating a monolithic intentionality. It pursued a politics of education actively proselytizing for the truth of Marxism-Leninism through a wide-ranging, steadily increasing propaganda apparatus. However, the party state understood that for a host of reasons, the machinations of the class enemy abroad being the most important one, propaganda could also fail. More, as the key instrument of politics, propaganda was thought to be especially vulnerable to the ideological attacks of the enemy. Hence an agency was necessary that could address both the consequence of propaganda failure and that could also secure the smooth operation of propaganda itself. That did in fact become one of the central tasks of the secret police (Stasi), especially after fighting espionage became less demanding in practice after the building of the Wall. Moreover, the party institutionalized a comprehensive web of prohibitions of contact with ideas and people and thus again a politics of (dis-)articulation that was meant to buttress its own efforts of forming socialist consciousness. Among the web of prohibitions were travel restrictions, censorship, and the prohibition to form groups or organizations that were independent of the party. The forms of validation I introduced in the last chapter will serve as a handy way to think systematically through the intended effects of these policies.

One important message of chapter 2 is that the secret police was an entirely integral, within its own logic, consequent, and necessary part of the socialist project as it existed in Eastern Europe. Even though the Stasi was the institutional anchor for the aforementioned tasks, which carried with them a particular kind of habitus, it would be easy to show that this habitus, this secret police way of doing things, was in fact permeating all socialist or-

ganizations, just as propaganda and democratic centralism were constitutive parts of the Stasi as an organization. Rather than being an aberration of history, ideological policing was an integral part of the Soviet socialist project. After all, the first socialist secret police, the Bolsheviks' Cheka, was founded within weeks of Red October and quickly began to play a central role in institutionalizing socialism. In many ways, the prevalence of secret policing as a political tool is a consequence of an array of interacting political understandings. A second major intention of this chapter is to isolate aporias of socialist politics, that is, to provide an analysis of how the single-minded pursuit of the goals of the party created unintended consequences that threatened to undermine the attainment of these goals. These aporias pertain especially to the aforementioned key tools of politics of the party: central planning, proselytization, and prohibitions. Each posed a conundrum that the party within its established institutional means could not solve.

I

From Marx to Conscious Social Transformation

The young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness . . . and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way. . . . The youngest ones of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare that they are only fighting against "idle talk." They forget, however, that to this idle talk they themselves are only opposing other idle talk, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world.

MARX, *GERMAN IDEOLOGY*

As everybody knows, communist society . . . cannot be the result of the realization of historical necessity. This society gets created . . . on the basis of the deeply conscious, goal-directed activity of every single one of us.

STANDARD SOVIET PROPAGANDA HANDBOOK¹

In contradistinction to all former social formations, socialism is created and developed by the conscious, planned action of the people.

ERICH HONECKER²

INVERTING MARX'S "INVERSION" OF HEGEL

Anybody who approaches the "actually existing socialisms" (Bahro 1977) of Eastern Europe with the Marxian base-superstructure model in mind and with the vague notion that socialist countries have realized some Marxian model of state and society is up for a big surprise. For socialist practices and

1. The quote is from the second German edition of a Soviet handbook on political education widely used in training party propagandists throughout the GDR during the 1970s and '80s (Wischnjakow et al. 1974, 8).

2. The quote is from the report of the central committee to the VIIIth party congress of the SED, delivered by its first secretary Erich Honecker (ZK 1971, 111). As with many key quotes from party documents it has been used as a reference point in countless other documents (e.g., ZK 1972, 18).

ideologies have de facto inverted that model. This can be well illustrated by a central passage of the program of the Socialist Unity Party (Benser and Naumann 1986, 98–169) of East Germany.

Marxism-Leninism is, in the unity of all its parts, the *theoretical foundation* for all actions of the party. Only on the basis of this generally valid scientific theory and its further creative development, is it possible to fight the revolutionary battle for the interests of the working class and of all working people. Marxism-Leninism is the *reliable compass* for creating the developed socialist society in transition to communism. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany provides *direction and aim for the conscious, planned activity of the working people*; it consolidates and *strengthens socialist class consciousness*;³ it awakens and promotes the creative initiative of the people for the creation of the socialist society and socialist manners and customs. It is the main goal of the political-ideological actions of the Socialist Unity Party to equip the working class and all working people with the *revolutionary ideas* of Marxism-Leninism, to *explain* to them the policy of the party, to develop their *socialist thinking, feeling, and acting*, to mobilize them for the solution of the tasks at hand, and to fortify them against the influence of imperialist and *bourgeois ideology*. Every member of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany must be an active fighter at the *ideological front*. Wherever communists live and work, they will disseminate and defend Marxism-Leninism as the *roadmap for conscious action* on behalf of the interest of the working class and of all working people, they will demonstrate the superiority of socialism, of its values, and of its accomplishments. (My emphasis, 159–60)

Echoing this vision of what socialism was about, the Stasi officers who were my interview partners have all stressed the importance of ideology as the *basis* of social life in the GDR. This is how Herbert Eisner put it:

Socialism is very sensitive to ideological disturbances. The bracket that keeps the whole thing together is ideology, and if this bracket is weakened the whole system falls apart. In capitalism this bracket is money. Thus we

3. In what follows I will often refer to the socialist concept of “consciousness.” Wherever I use the term it is in reference to its use in the socialist tradition. I use *understanding* as the core analytical concept of this study to analyze content and genesis of “consciousness.” The term consciousness appears primarily as “class-consciousness,” in which the term simply means that one actually understands oneself as a member of a class with corresponding consequences for action. In the course of time “conscious” increasingly came to mean that the person so qualified knows socialist theory as currently defined by the party to be a true understanding of the world. In other words, “conscious” people differentiated and integrated the world in accordance with current party doctrine leading them to act at all times in the party’s interest.

always spoke of the ideological work, the party-educational work that aimed to make everybody identify with it. The idea was that I will raise my children, that I will influence the neighborhood, the parents' council at school, the national front, the association of fishermen, whatever, in accordance with party policy. We wanted everybody to internalize the policy of the party.

Now, had Eisner uttered these precise words at a party meeting during the lifetime of the GDR, chances are that he might have been censored for deviating from the party line in the direction of idealism, although it is quite clear that he more or less puts into his own words the whole thrust of the program passage quoted above. At least he would have had to acknowledge that capitalism and socialism both have an economic base and that socialism is not just kept together by ideology. However, all former Stasi officers I could talk with, alongside a great number of former party officials who have published their memoirs and even the party itself, emphasize the centrality of ideology for socialism's success.

It is, then, one of those ironies of history that central practices and institutions of Eastern European socialisms cannot be understood properly until one begins to appreciate the fundamental role ideology has played in a variety of ways in its everyday operations and in its historical development as especially more recent scholarship has pointed out (Verdery 1991; Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Lampland 1995; Kotkin 1995; Kharkhordin 1999; Halfin 2000; Boyer 2005; Hellbeck 2006; Yurchak 2006). Indeed, I shall argue, one can not understand Eastern European socialisms unless one confronts them as forms of *idealism* with strong *rationalistic* underpinnings. The irony does not lie in the fact that the people embodying these institutions and practices were idealists in the common sense of the word, or that they thought of themselves as working for a greater good. Given the harm often willingly incurred in the pursuit of this good, this is rather a tragedy of shattering proportions. The irony lies much more in the fact that these institutions and practices were idealistic in the philosophical sense that ideas were de facto afforded primacy over "material," that is, physical and social realities. In fact, socialism fetishized certain ideas. Thus, a gulf emerges between socialist practices and part of socialism's self-avowed theory, Marxism, because the latter was constructed precisely against the foil of philosophical idealism, which was not only the perennial target of Marx's and Engels's vigorous criticism but also the favorite object of their biting derision. In spite of the frequent invocation of Marx in socialist rhetoric, then, socialist practice was in an important sense very un-Marxian. It inverted the Marxian "inversion of Hegel" once more in developing what was, in effect, a *consciousness-driven model of social transformation*. In the end, Eastern European socialists were Marxists almost in spite of themselves and in a rather paradoxical sort of

way. In the rest of this chapter I hope to show how this happened. The ensuing history of socialism's self-understandings, which includes a consideration of the meta-understandings that were used in producing them, would be worth a book in its own right. What follows are, in fast forward mode, what I see as highlights and turning points.

Marxian Beginnings

To get a better sense about divergences and congruencies between Marx's theory and Eastern European socialist practice it may be useful to recapitulate briefly what Marx had to say about the relationship between understandings and other kinds of institutions. As we shall see, the base-superstructure model is only one, if a strong streak, in his thought on this relationship. In the *German Ideology* (1958a) Marx famously assigns consciousness (and with it what I have referred to as discursive understandings) to the superstructure, his umbrella term for the total set of determined institutions. Besides consciousness, it also includes politics, the state, science, and the arts. He calls the determining set of institutions base, which includes the fragmentation of society into two antagonistic classes, a system of productive relations (such as property regimes) and a constellation of productive forces constituted by the integration of the social organization of production in a concrete division of labor with a particular set of skills and technologies as well as with available material resources. Arguing for a particular direction for the flow of effect, Marx asserts rather unambiguously that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life (1958a, 27)." The explicit reasoning behind postulating a unidirectional determining effect flow from economic institutions to all other kinds of institutions is Marx's assumption that as physical creatures human beings need to reproduce themselves materially; humans have to be (whether they like it or not) above all *Homo faber* to satisfy their historically specific material needs.

Moreover, Marx sees ideas not only as a direct outgrowth of a mode of production, but he also sees these ideas as completely misrepresenting social life. In a society ruptured by the abyss of class, everybody lives in false consciousness. The reason is simple. With the help of intellectuals, the dominant class forms its understandings exclusively from within its own social position, that is, in response to its own experiences, problems, and anxieties, which is to say from one particular perspective. By universalizing these understandings grounded in the particularity of standpoint and history they do not only become apologetic but also fundamentally false. Wages, for example, are interpreted by capitalists with the help of liberal economists as market prices determined by the universal law of supply and demand. From where they stand neither capitalists nor the economist working for them can

see that prices are the result of a historically specific set of power relations resulting from a particular mode of production. They could neither understand, much less admit, that it is the power inherent in an economically defined position rather than merit that affords them income and status, nor that the wages they pay amount to exploitation (or as he later [e.g., 1962b] argues in greater processual detail: that in fact they need to be exploitative if they are to remain competitive as capitalists).

Since the dominant class also has at its disposal the institutional means to impose its way of thinking on the dominated class, these ideas also become *generalized*—in capitalism, for example, through the institutions of the state and the state-run educational system. Accordingly, “the thoughts of the dominant class are in every epoch the dominant thoughts, that is, the class which is the dominant material power is at the same time the dominant intellectual power” (1958a, 46). Together, false universalization and generalization make the understandings generated by or on behalf of the dominant class *ideological*.⁴ Interestingly, Marx does not move from here to conclude that these ideologies, false and misleading as they may be, might still have a stabilizing effect on the institutional order of society. For the writer of the *German Ideology* they remain without consequences, they are a mere epiphenomenon. In this sense, the term *ideology* (as opposed to science, as we shall see) has both practically and theoretically a thoroughly negative meaning for Marx. For him, ideologies are dead (but strangely not as Horkheimer and Adorno [1971] have argued: deadening) collections of symbols.

The base-superstructure argument is by no means only a feature of the early Marx’s thought. The preface to the 1859 *Critique of Political Economy* (1961) provides an often-quoted formulation of the argument in summary form:⁵

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite, necessary relations that are independent of their will. These are relations of production that correspond to a given stage in the development of their material forces

4. Interpreting thought under capitalist conditions as distorted on all sides puts Marx into the interesting position of having to account for himself and the truth claims connected to his theory (cf. Postone 1996). The question is not only how somebody of (auxiliary-)bourgeois origin (Marx’s father was a civil servant) could begin to think thoughts that are obviously not reflective of his class position, but the question is also how anybody could think revolutionary thoughts at all. His answer is that “the existence of revolutionary thoughts in a particular epoch presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class” (1958a, 47). A revolutionary class emerges when alienation has reached such proportions that the contractions between ideology and the social life become blatantly obvious (1958a, 34).

5. It is this comparatively slender volume that has historically been the source of the base-superstructure distinction, since *German Ideology* was not published until 1932.

of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual process of life per se. It is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—which is just a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have operated until now. From frameworks for the development of productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then starts an era of social revolution. With the change in the economic basis, the whole tremendous superstructure gets overturned more or less speedily. In the consideration of such transformations, one always has to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and argue it. As little as one judges individuals by what they deem themselves to be, one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness. To the contrary, this consciousness must be explained with the help of the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production.

There has been quite some dispute about the proper interpretation of this passage, which pertains to the relationship between productive forces and the relations of production.⁶ However, there is no doubt that both together constitute a historically specific mode of production that is the material base that in turn determines the superstructure, including discourse.

As behooves a passionate dialectician, Marx's thinking about the relationship between understandings and other institutions is, however, more complex than his base-superstructure model suggests (Williams 1977). The latter's place within the development of Marx's thought can only be appreci-

6. The issue is essentially whether one could say that the productive forces determine the relations of production, or whether there is more of a dialectical relationship of co-constitution between both. Some of the confusion may have occurred due to some stylistically well-meaning translation effort that has sacrificed accuracy with respect to the imagery invoked. Given that the text in question is Marx's effort to bring to publication at least some of the thinking he has developed in *Grundrisse* (which take the form of a long, raw thought piece), and since the *Grundrisse* themselves make it crystal clear that Marx has a dialectical relationship in mind, less ink might have been spilled.

ated if one takes into account that the origin of this model lies in his fierce polemic against the left neo-Hegelians. In fact, he feels an almost violent urge to distance himself from them, not least because they stand for a part of his own becoming. In the obsessive attempt to avoid anything that might even faintly smack of idealism, the Marx of *German Ideology* therefore drains the baby with the bath water; he is unable to conceive of a genuine action-reaction mediated dialectic between understandings and other kinds of social institutions. Nevertheless, true to his own, in the twenty-six-year-old's exhortation pronounced in his "eleventh thesis on Feuerbach," Marx aspired not just to interpret the world but also to change it (1958b, 7). And he did so not primarily by becoming a labor organizer—others were much better at this than impatient, quarrelsome Marx—but by becoming a writer and theorist. This is, after all, what he excelled in. Accordingly, Marx leaves no doubt that even his most theoretical writings must be understood as in the service of his political agenda. But how, then, does he understand the relationship between theory and political practice? Why does he think that *his* theorizing is not yet another interpretation, as futile or as misleading as those of the ridiculed neo-Hegelians?

While discussing the relationship between communists and proletarians more generally in the *Manifesto* (1959, 474), Marx and Engels already argue: "The communists [being internationalists] are therefore the most decisive, always advancing part of the labor parties of all countries. The *theoretical insight* into the conditions, the dynamics and the general results of the labor movement is their advantage over the remaining mass of the proletariat [my emphasis]." So, no doubt, understandings, including conscious, discursive understandings, have orienting power for Marx. They can inform action, even revolutionary action, and thus they can have an effect on the institutional fabric of a society. The advantage of communism, according to Marx, is precisely that its actions are highly conscious and rational. It provides a theory that through its materialist *scientific* foundations can transcend the limitations not only of local perspective but also of the delusional universalization of ideology. Scientific communism offers an ordering that can always place occurrences into the context of universal historical development.⁷ Real

7. In the *Brumaire* (1960), Marx makes a related yet even farther-reaching move. He reasons that "human beings make their own history. However they do not make it according to their own will, not under self-chosen, but immediately found, given and socially transmitted circumstances" (1960, 119). Part of these transmitted circumstances are the understandings developed in the past and deployed in the present. They are essential for getting the action going, argues Marx, even where they are in some ways bound to misrecognize the present moment, thus involuntarily creating the comical effects (French revolutionaries in "Roman costumes") that Marx so much relishes in describing. The argument Marx makes here, especially with regard to the revolutionaries of 1789– and 1848–, is quite akin to Sorel's (1999) notion of the empowering

social science (as opposed to ideology) can be as effective in directing action as the natural science that finds its way, for example, into the production process, and that properly seen has to be understood as a part of the productive forces.⁸

In this spirit, Marx aims to show throughout his oeuvre how scientific theoretical-historical analysis can provide a road map for the actions of the labor movement. The point of such analysis is not merely to satisfy some curiosity but also to free the proletariat from its unwitting participation in the reproduction of the economic and political institutions of the time, *to the degree that this is possible under the given historical circumstances*. Marx aims to provide insights into what kinds of actions would be most effective in bringing about change within the institutional strictures of a particular time and place. In the awareness of the immense difficulties (and often plain futility) of human-induced institutional change, Marx tries to provide an analytics that helps the labor movement to decide which battles to fight and which ones to avoid in any concrete moment—including the determination of the right moment for revolutionary action.

Contrary to what one would expect from a literal interpretation of the base-superstructure model, therefore, Marx works, in many of his writings, with an implicit concept of understanding-enabled agency that has the power to form institutions. In chapter 5 of *Das Kapital* he finally sets out to develop such a theory more explicitly by describing the labor process (1962b) as an idea-directed operation. There, Marx avers that understandings are not only important in the planning phase that “ideally” anticipates the product of the process before it begins, but that they also function as a regulative throughout the process. To carry this through, Marx argues (leaning on Kant—and the Bible), that the laborer has to make himself subject to his own law and thereby transforms himself. “He develops the potentialities of his nature and subjects the play of its forces to his own command” (1962b, 192). In other words, in learning to labor, humans cultivate their own agency. And understandings are a constitutive element of this process, which leads to a simultaneous transformation of self, product, and understanding.⁹

myth (e.g., the general strike that will never happen and yet infuses the actors with the will to go on). He hastens to add that such productive misunderstandings were only necessary for the revolutions of the past. The proletarian revolution has to be guided by *true* understandings of the laws of historical development.

8. Indeed, Lenin (e.g., 1967e) and after him the Soviet Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, has seen scientific communism in the form of “Marxism-Leninism” or “dialectical materialism” as a decisive factor behind the accelerated development of the productive forces in socialist countries.

9. Obviously, the kind of labor process Marx is describing here is not capitalistic wage labor. It is the kind of activity that Hannah Arendt (1998) (building on Heidegger’s phenomenology) calls “work,” a type modeled in Marx as in Arendt’s case on the production process of a skilled

What matters here are not just discursive understandings. Marx is keenly aware that the social world in which we live always transcends the concepts we have about it. Even if rational planning is possible, it is impossible to conceive of the entire social world as rationally planned, because actual *practice* always explodes its conceptualization. Especially in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* (1983), Marx mentions several reasons for this, not the least of which is that the abstraction inherent in conceptualization presupposes the plurality of concrete forms. In other words, concepts presuppose that some state or process could be otherwise, more precisely, that the actor can de facto *imagine* them to be otherwise. In this sense “gender” is contingent on the possibility that something could be either male or female; the notion of occupation is necessary only once there are several to pursue; the concept of culture can emerge only where one becomes keenly aware that people could think, feel, and act, differently, and so on. Of course, this is anything but a rejection of the link between understandings and institutions. It is rather an earlier call for a practice theory¹⁰ and in effect a plea for the systematic consideration of other kinds of understandings, unconscious kinesthetic ones included. It is also a plea for the recognition that mercifully not all of social life is institutionalized, that besides understandings, whatever their mode, there is understanding as an open ongoing process.

Looking at the ways in which Marx thinks and lives the relationship between theory and activism raises the issue of his method. He hopes for, analyzes, and predicts, and in the failure of his prediction is forced to revise his theory several times in order to furnish a better road map for action. In analyzing the failures of the 1848 revolution in France, for example, Marx offers in the *Brumaire* (1960) significant improvements of his conceptualization of class and the historical forms and functions of the state over earlier writings. In the same spirit, his analysis of the ill-fated Paris Commune of 1871 (1962a) offers a refinement of his thesis of the withering away of the state, and the forms of political organization replacing the state after a proletarian revolution. This process of theoretical development in response to an analysis of real-world events, this cultivation of his own sociological imagination, leads to an impressive differentiation and refinement of his theory, the logic of which comes to be worked out with increasing rigor. However, Marx never sees reason to completely overhaul major parts of his theoretical apparatus. The core elements of his thought remain firmly in place so that

craftsperson who completely makes a finished product from basic raw materials. Wage labor is much more the Taylorist pure exertion of energy, which Arendt calls “work,” for which the worker needs no concept.

10. Quite rightly, then, Bourdieu (1977; 1990) has taken his departure for his formulation of a theory of practices from Marx.

earlier works like the *Manifesto* or *German Ideology* can always be read as adumbrations of *Capital*.

After his initial revolution of “turning Hegel on his head,” Marx works exactly in the mode that Kuhn (1962, 23–42) has described as “normal science.” Even though Marx and Engels have a clear understanding of the historicity of their science (Engels 1962, preface) and the need for its continuous development, they do not anticipate or even consider the possibility of further revolutionary transformations of their social science, especially of its fundamental concepts and ontological foundations. That is, they did not expect this for the historical stage of bourgeois capitalism. They thought they had freed social thought once and for all from the funny mirrors of ideology, much in the same way that Enlightenment scientists thought they had broken out of the darkness of myth into the eternal light of knowledge. That is to say, Marx and Engels (and Lenin and the official stalwarts of Soviet ideology after him)¹¹ operated with meta-understandings that did neither foresee, much less welcome, the possibility of radical transformations of their own understandings.¹²

In sum, the explicit and continuous emphasis on the base-superstructure model notwithstanding, Marx works with a much more sophisticated, in its consequences, dialectical theory about the relationship between understandings and other institutions. However, Marx’s dialectical reasoning has a definite boundary. In the last instance, he asserts that no matter how good our understandings are, no matter how much we have succeeded in cultivating ourselves as agents, *the course of history* will not be changed by it. As he says in the preface to the first German edition of *Das Kapital*: “Even where a society has tracked down the natural law of its motion—and it is the final purpose of this oeuvre to uncover the law of economic dynamics of modern society—it can neither jump over, nor declare as void *natural* phases of development. But it can shorten and mitigate the pains of birth” (1962b, 16; my emphasis). The choice is only that between a rougher and a gentler ride along the inevitable path of history. Marx, one of the founding fathers

11. Marx and Engels did not have the benefit of living through the complete ontological remake of modern physics, beginning with Einstein’s special theory of relativity, that is, a revolution *within* science rather than a revolution from other forms of knowledge-making *to* science. Lenin and especially his successors did.

12. This raises an interesting counterfactual question: Might the whole fate of socialism have been a different one, had Marx and Engels allowed for such a possibility, that is, had the commitment of socialism not been to some original formulation, but to the project of an ontologically open, critical social science with an emancipatory agenda? Perhaps. Asked from the perspective of a political epistemology, the important question is why on the one hand such a meta-understanding could never take hold in the institutional center of Soviet-type party states, and on the other hand what the consequences of this particular kind of meta-understanding is for the actual generation of political understandings, for politics and self-politics.

of social scientific institutionalism, has drawn a hard line around the possibilities of human agency and immanent understandings of social processes. According to him, at least in the *longue durée* the dynamics of society do not follow an institutional but instead a “natural” logic that only communism will eventually break. The institutional order of a time is, with minor variations, ultimately the set piece of a metaphysical order that is radically (i.e., ontologically) removed from all human influence. The “immediately found” circumstances under which we make history are to a considerable degree literally *not humanly mediated*. The infrastructure-superstructure argument about the relationship between economic organization and understandings set forth in the *German Ideology* is replicated at a higher level throughout Marx’s oeuvre in the superstructure of institutional spheres that are driven by the infrastructure of *natural* historical laws. And thus (as critical thinkers in the Marxist tradition such as Castoriadis 1987, or Unger 2004, but also critics of Marxism such as Popper 1966, have seen quite rightly) he performs a venerable philosophical act: that of revealing what appears as real as a mere shadow that must be investigated in the glaring light of the absolute. Marx’s critical theory has with its philosophy of history a rigid metaphysical core. One could also say it has in its middle an anticritical blind spot.

This does not disqualify Marx as a theoretician otherwise full of brilliant insight. But it does mean that if one wants to use Marxist theory to guide political action, *eventually* one has to come to terms with this metaphysical core lest one succumb to the fetishization of understandings. The actually existing socialisms in the GDR never did. And this had serious consequences, for it eventually led the party state, as we shall see, to literally close the door to the world, locking official understandings into a dogmatic hall of mirrors. Yet, this did not happen out of ill will, spite, or a lack of intelligence as conservative critics have always been ready to surmise. It was a consequence of how, within the socialist movement, and then within socialist countries, understandings about the world came to be validated. Political epistemology has to show how Marx’s metaphysics came to appeal and then institutionally remained action-guiding. I cannot say more about the original appeal here than this. It is not hard to see and understand the inspirational qualities of Marx’s metaphysics. In dark hours (and there were many) it was a tremendous source of hope. Still the Stasi officers’ enthusiasm for the socialist project is thoroughly suffused with it, especially in the immediate postwar years. More, the very success of the labor movement is inexplicable without it. Importantly however, that very success with its seeming climax in Red October was in official state socialist accounts of it always celebrated as an indirect corroboration of Marx’s philosophy of history. To see how it became institutionalized, thoroughly woven into the

fabric of socialist society, I have to continue my narrative about the increasing importance of ideology in socialist theory and practice.

Soviet Developments

Marxist thinkers continued to develop further the idea that sound theory must inform the struggle of the labor movement. In fact, the relationship between theory and revolutionary practice in form of poignant analysis of the present and their consequences for the revolutionary struggle was what writing in the tradition of Marx was centrally concerned with. The *Manifesto's* vanguard party idea, which combines theoretical guidance with tight, central organization, found further development especially in Lenin's "What Is to Be Done?" (1967h). There Lenin asserts that "without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement" (117). This had fundamental consequences for how Lenin evaluated the priorities of party work, for he argues that "the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory" (Lenin's emphasis; 118). That means for the party members and their leaders:

In particular, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied. The task will be to spread with increased zeal among the masses of the workers the ever more clarified understanding thus acquired, to knit together ever more firmly the organization both of the party and of the trade unions. (119)

Elsewhere, that leads him to the conclusion that "the development of the consciousness of the masses will always remain the basis and the main content of the entire work of the party" (CW 11, 164).¹³ Given the centrality Lenin affords to theory, it is also no surprise that he advocated the foundation of a central newspaper (his *Iskra*) as the most important instrument to organize, unify, and motivate the party with its otherwise dispersed local activities (1967h, part V). Stalin (1952a, III) has later summarized the Leninist position on the relationship between theory and practice in clear reference to Kant's epistemology:

13. From the perspective of Western Marxist thought one would have to speak about the changes in the understanding of the relationship between base and superstructure and the more positive evaluation in the works of Lukács 1968, Gramsci 1971, and Althusser 1971. However, considered renegade pieces in socialist Eastern Europe they did not lead to a positive redefinition of the concept of ideology in actually existing socialism.

Theory is the experience of the worker's movement of all countries in its generalized form. Of course theory becomes useless where it is not connected with revolutionary practice; and in the same manner, practice turns blind if it does not illuminate its path through theory.

This increasing positive evaluation of the power of discursive understandings to influence processes of institutionalization is nothing if not a consequence of revolutionary and reformist socialist practice itself. A whole series of events corroborated meta-understandings, which increasingly overshadowed base-superstructure reasoning. In many countries the labor movements were successful in effecting significant political change. Not only was the franchise in most western European countries increased to encompass eventually the entire adult population, which led to strong socialist parties, pursuing newfound possibilities through the means of electoral politics, but also legally more-protected and better-organized trade unions eventually effected real wage increases. Social legislation led in many countries to the emergence of what later would be called the welfare state (e.g., Steinmetz 1993; Wehler 2007). These improvements in the standards of living of laborers happened against the explicit predictions of Marx, who famously foresaw a process of continuing immiseration. The mainstream labor movement systematically interpreted these new institutions as the results of their ideas and their political struggle. Most importantly, however, the first socialist party-sponsored revolution was undertaken in a society that was in Marxian developmental categories at best in transition from late feudal to early bourgeois phase and therefore nowhere near the stage in which a proletarian revolution could be expected to occur and even less, be successful in the longer run. Yet revolution succeeded in Russia, of all places. Thus, Lenin's continuing emphasis on the power of the right kind of theory seemed better corroborated than ever by the very success of his and his party's theory, organization, and determination.

The formation of Soviet institutions must be understood through the interplay of a multiplicity of understanding-guided actions, reactions, and validations that I described in the last chapter. Charged with the task to form the political, economic, social, and cultural institutions of the Soviet Union, understandings about what they ought to look like played a major role in bringing them about—besides the decaying institutional context of late czarist Russia (e.g., Figs 1998). Without direct historical precedent they had to be imagined with the help of analogies. Lest I be misunderstood: by emphasizing the importance of understandings, I do not want to argue that these institutions were drafted as plans and realized as planned. For that the imaginations in question were far too vague, if still powerfully suggestive. Lenin (1967e) famously imagined the entire economy of postrevolutionary

Russia on the model of a large state enterprise such as the post office (304), indeed the entire socialist society as an “office and a factory with equal work and equal pay” (345). In search for more concrete models he famously looked to Germany’s war-planning efforts as a type of state capitalism. This he argued was the first step to socialism. He says (1967k):

Here we have “the last word” in modern large-scale capitalist engineering and planned organisation, *subordinated to Junker-bourgeois imperialism*. Cross out the words in italics, and in place of the militarist, Junker, bourgeois, imperialist *state* put *also a state*, but of a different social type, of a different class content—a *Soviet* state, that is, a proletarian state, and you will have the *sum total* of the conditions necessary for socialism. (Lenin’s emphasis, 697)

It is important to note that there was neither just one understanding about what these institutions ought to look like and how, with what degree of popular participation by whom and potentially at what cost and what risk of losses in human life, the politics of forming them ought to begin. For Lenin was by no means the sole undisputed leader (e.g., Fitzpatrick 1993; Service 2002), and at least until the 1921 Petrograd strikes and the final sailor uprising of Kronstadt (Getzler 1983) the leadership of the Bolshevik party faced not only counterrevolutionary forces but also democratic opposition from without (Brovkin 1988). In fact, the revolutionary process inspired imaginations of a new society, in the arts, architecture, the sciences, and in practically all dimensions of social life, and not only by intellectuals but also by common man (Stites 1989; Rosenberg 1984). Accordingly, Lenin had to fight for his ideas, which he presented (imitating Marx) more often than not couched in a sharp polemic tone against others, including leading comrades. Nor were the institutional arrangements so stable and predictable that plans could be realized as decreed. The chaotic circumstances of a lost world war, of revolution, and of civil war made it hard to know which institutions still worked in what way and where, what newer kinds of institutions might have sprung up locally, and if so how they operated. The threat of physical violence and the lack of resources weakened or transformed understandings; it disrupted communication, transportation, and memory practices; and it deprived actors of time and the material resources necessary for action. In this way it disrupted action-reaction effect flows and therefore the reproduction of institutions. Since all institutions must rely for their own stabilization on the stability of other institutions (in the introductory chapter I used the image of a “thicket” of processes that all mutually support one another), politics is usually, under such circumstances, even harder to realize than under relatively stable institutional arrangements. Not surprisingly, then, this

situation forced continuous adjustments to constantly fluctuating situations that sometimes led to outright political flip-flop movements. The contradictory agricultural policies of the Bolsheviki, using land reform, socialization, forced requisitioning, and reprivatization in short succession, are a case in point.

A necessary precondition for the ongoing possibility of politics under these circumstances was the existence of a set of relatively stable institutions that could successfully reestablish regular, distributed action-reaction effect flows, with the possibility to revive the carcass of the state to resume its privileged position as a former of institutions. Historically, this role was played by three institutions: Dzierzynski's¹⁴ Cheka (i.e., the secret police later known under the acronyms GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MGB, and KGB; Knight 1990), Trotsky's Red Army, and above all by the party, especially its central leadership. It is the success of the Bolsheviki's vanguardism in the historical context of world war, revolution, and civil war that has, in the mind of communist leaders in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, *definitively* corroborated the vanguard party model as the way to organize and subsequently guard the achievements of revolutionary transformations. In socialist lore, instead of the state, the party became the master former of institutions; it became the center of constitutional politics.

There is another side to chaos, however. It is an impediment to institutionalization only to the degree that it deprives politics of the necessary support of *already existing* institutional arrangements. Along with the potential for support however, institutional obstacles to ignite and make sustainable novel formations may also come to be removed. Thus, a unique opportunity for politics emerges for players with the ability to orient themselves with the help of firm understandings and who can in spite of the disorder projectively articulate distributed action-reaction linkages across time and space, while also mobilizing necessary resources. In other words, chaotic times present a unique political opportunity for strong-willed, disciplined, tightly organized and distributed organizations. Not surprisingly, given their keen political sensibilities, Lenin and after him Stalin often skillfully used opportunities offered by chaos (Service 2002; 2005). What is more, they deliberately created disorder through organized waves of terror, precisely to destroy institutions they foresaw as impediments to their own politics. The two most famous terror waves unleashed with such intention are the Red Terror of 1918–22 and the Great Purges of 1936–38. In the first case, the bridging institutions

14. Dzierzynski's name is transliterated from the Russian with the usual variations. However, since he was ethnically a Pole, and since East German sources stuck to the Polish spelling of his last name, I will keep it that way throughout the book.

achieving projective articulation across space and time were again the core of the party, the Red Army and the Cheka. The target institutions were those of the state, the economy (and there especially agriculture) and the periphery of the party. For example, the party leadership utilized the civil war to establish lasting party centralization (Service 1979). Prolonged armed conflict prompted the absence of many local party leaders who served in the army. Under these circumstances the party stepped in to nominate party officers to its liking, who were then formally elected—in effect merely acclaimed—by the local rank and file. These war procedures established a practice that became lastingly institutionalized to be later legitimated as the principle of “democratic centralism.” In the case of the Great Purges of 1936–38, the bridging institution was now the secret police, at that time called NKVD, which was used to terrorize the party itself into an even more centralized, now essentially bureaucratic organization in which authority is conferred exclusively by the center, expressed in rank and position, rather than, for example, by charismatic gifts acquired during the October Revolution.

It is therefore also because of and not just in spite of an almost decade long series of events shattering the institutional fabric of imperial Russia, that Lenin and Stalin managed to guide the formation of a set of political and economic institutions that in the end were quite compatible with Lenin’s admittedly general ideas of what such institutions ought to look like. Understandings and politics proved crucial for the creation of the fabric of Soviet social institutions, economic structures included.¹⁵ This does not mean that the economic conditions of Russia did not matter. However, the formation of the Soviet Union is an excellent example for how processes of institutionalization are best understood through a genuine dialectic between understandings and other kinds of institutions, rather than through some kind of base-superstructure thinking, whatever the “base” and the “superstructure” may be.

One last step in the growing concern with a theoretically educated consciousness as the basis for socialism needs to be presented here. Lenin remained persuaded to his end by the classical Marxian thesis that revolution needed to be a wider international phenomenon if it were to succeed in the longer run. Throughout the early years of Bolshevik rule, Lenin expected, and through Comintern later tried to encourage, revolutions in the major industrialized countries of Europe, especially in Germany, but elsewhere as well. He thus hoped to break the young Soviet Union’s international isola-

15. For studies about this drawing-board-to-reality practice of socialism, see, for example, Kotkin’s (1995) study of the invention and construction of Magnitogorsk, the city and its mines, and Scott (1998), with a host of further references about the collectivization of agriculture.

tion, a move he hoped would stabilize the fruits of the revolution from without. However, these hopes were dashed in a series of dramatic failures. Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic survived for little more than three months; the 1919 November revolution in Germany established a fragile liberal democracy rather than a republic of soviets; the 1920 Munich Soviet Republic was defeated barely a month after it was declared; the 1923 risings in Saxony, Thuringia, and Hamburg were crushed even before they could really begin. After Lenin's death, it was the party's left wing around Trotsky that held on to an orthodox Marxian view against Stalin who developed the notion of "socialism in one country," arguing that the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union could proceed without revolutionary support from abroad (Stalin 1952b [1926]). This mattered theoretically and practically especially with regard to the relationship between the urban proletariat and the peasants. The land reform launched on the heels of revolutionary takeover and a little later also the "new economic policy" (NEP) had in Lenin's own understanding (1967b) turned peasants *partly* into allies of the proletariat—as they were poor, working people, but partly also into enemies—because they did indeed engage in haggling and price speculation over the sale of their privately grown produce. The question of the possibility of a socialist society in which class antagonisms can be greatly reduced thus boiled down to the issue of whether the Russian peasantry could be transformed, or better: would allow itself to become transformed through the collectivization of agriculture into a rural proletariat without marshaling major resistance. Not surprisingly, then, one of the major bones of contention between Stalin and his opponents lay in the proper assessment of the revolutionary consciousness of the peasantry measured by its insight into the necessity of the collectivization. Says Stalin (1952b [1926], section 7):

What is the *disbelief* in the victory of socialism in our country? This is above all the lacking *conviction* that owing to the state of development of our country the main masses of the peasantry can be included in the project of constructing socialism. This is, secondly the lacking *conviction* that the proletariat in our country has ascended to the command post of the economy, that it is incapable to include the main masses of the peasantry into the project of constructing socialism. (My emphasis)

Even though Stalin still employed the language of conditions in his rationale for the possibility of socialism in one country, a major reason was that if the construction of socialism was in fact the aim in the near future, there were few alternatives. Counterarguments about the impossibility of such a move were brushed aside in the knowledge that such seeming impossibilities had been overcome before with the October Revolution. With a certain right,

Stalin could see himself as the true heir to the Leninist spirit. Just as Lenin had brushed aside with his “April Thesis” (1967f) the Marxian doctrine of a sequence of two separate, epoch-making revolutions—a bourgeois revolution preceding a proletarian one—Stalin now brushed aside Marx’s globalizing logic. The unlikely trajectory and ultimate success of the Bolshevik establishment of power in the Soviet Union seems to have finally led to an understanding that what mattered most in the establishment of novel institutions was firm belief, the certainty that this could be done, executed by a party exhibiting a monolithic intentionality. The reality of socialism was close to becoming a matter of a sheer will to power. And not just because the narcissistic imagination of a genuine autocrat desired it to be that way, but because the course of history rendered such a presumption plausible through a number of indirect corroborations that came to be recognized time and again in central party rituals as well as in the sacred texts people were asked to make their own.

MONOLITHIC INTENTIONALITY: A CONSCIOUSNESS-DRIVEN MODEL OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

If anything, the historical significance of ideas is even more palpable in Eastern European socialisms. Even if the conditions in some countries were more akin to those imagined by Marx as the grounds on which proletarian revolutions could develop (especially in East Germany and Czechoslovakia), none of them developed indigenous revolutions triggered by the contradictions between productive forces and relations of production. In fact, Eastern European transitions to socialism were not even the result of mostly indigenous politics—as, after all, Russia’s February and October revolutions had been. Instead, Eastern Europe’s socialisms were the product of political, administrative, military, and police strategies and tactics carried forward by the Soviet Union, which enforced them as liberator from Nazi rule and victorious occupying power. It always did so in collaboration with local communist parties, which were, however, more or less tightly controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) through Comintern, the third international (e.g., for Germany: Schroeder 1998; Staritz 1996). In the long run, this control worked best under conditions of military, economic, or personal dependence. That is to say, it worked where the Soviet Union became the ultimate guarantor of communist party rule through its willingness to engage itself militarily should communist party rule become threatened, where the country in question was economically dependent on Soviet supplies, and where the leading members of the Eastern European communist parties had survived persecution by spending the war in the

Soviet Union, where they were schooled (and tested for loyalty) for some potential future work in their home countries.¹⁶

In driving the transformations of Eastern European countries, the Soviets applied a number of lessons the Bolsheviki had learned in the context of the October Revolution, the ensuing civil war, and the initial years of Soviet rule. First, the establishment of a socialist order can succeed whether or not the conditions Marx had laid out for a proletarian revolution are in fact met. Second, the radical transformation can be successfully accomplished in a top-down manner by seizing control of the state and by remaking it under tight control of a communist party. Third, the latter has to be organized as a Leninist vanguard party that offers through its disciplined self-politics and broad base extraordinary means of engaging in politics. Fourth, the disorder and weakening of institutional arrangements created through violent conflict by hampering the webbed action-reaction effect flows constituting these older institutions can be usefully exploited for the superimposition of a new institutional order. Fifth, where such weakening has not taken place by the effects of war, and where older institutions pose a threat to the establishment of a socialist order, harassment or terror may serve the same purpose. Sixth, all of this said, violent means can be ineffective and certainly are exceedingly costly. Thus, long-term strategic goals may necessitate tactical compromises with other categories of actors. In particular this means that the establishment of a full range of socialist institutions will take time. And most importantly, the key to the long-term success is an ideologically unified, centrally organized, tightly disciplined vanguard party as the most powerful political organization with absolutely peerless institution-formation capabilities.

With the exception of Albania (which was neither liberated nor occupied by the Red Army) and Yugoslavia (in whose liberation from Nazi rule the local resistance played a major part), and national communist postures notwithstanding (as in Romania—and temporarily almost everywhere else), the Eastern European socialist governments remained militarily and often also economically (e.g., through the soft-currency supplies of raw materials and energy) dependent on the Soviet Union. Political and economic dependence typically entailed ideological followership.¹⁷ In everyday life of the Warsaw Pact countries—with the exception of Romania under Ceaușescu (Kligman 1998; Verdery 1991)—this was visible in constant verbal tributes to the Soviet

16. The purges notwithstanding, which claimed a considerable toll among émigré communists as well among Soviet party members, these leaders often felt a deep sense of connection with the Soviet Union (e.g., Wolf 1998; Eberlein 2000; see also Epstein 2003).

17. See, by contrast, how the practical independence of Tito and Mao also created greater intellectual independence.

Union, as friend, as helper, as liberator, and as mentor. Friendship with the Soviet Union was celebrated as a constitutive factor of Eastern European socialism, and there is no list of socialist virtues that would not include in some prominent place the demand to maintain and develop relations with “the big brother.”¹⁸ Thus, the introduction of socialism proceeded, although with differing local input owing to the different postwar situations, in all of these countries on the basis of Soviet blueprints. In the Soviet Union the revolution had succeeded (even if few people at this time seemed to have any idea at which cost); socialism in one country had become a reality; and now the Soviet Union had beaten Nazi Germany; and thus the general slogan under which the Sovietization of Eastern Europe proceeded was, “Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win!”

Crafting German Socialism

For Germany World War II ended in total defeat. The country had lost more than 10 percent of its population (military and civilian deaths), its major cities lay in ruins, and its industrial and agricultural productive capacities were significantly reduced. Twelve years of Nazi dictatorship had at least dislodged if not destroyed many institutions of civil society while orienting much of the institutional fabric of the country toward direction by the Nazi Party, which had ceased to exist. The sizable eastern parts of the country, East Prussia, Danzig, Pomerania, and Silesia, were annexed mostly by Poland,¹⁹ which in turn had to cede Galicia, with its capital city Lviv/Lwow, to the Soviet Union. The population of these territories (along with the German ethnic minority in Czechoslovakia) was expelled if it had not already been “evacuated” by the Nazis as the Red Army was advancing. This created a situation where the immediate postwar population in the remaining parts of Germany was, in spite of the war losses, much higher than before the war. In combination with the destruction of the housing stock and the decline in productive capabilities this created enormous supply shortages, which were further exacerbated by the presence of several million displaced persons—in their majority slave laborers the Nazis had brought into the country. Under

18. With regard to a Western audience I should clarify that what the expression “big brother” did for many socialists in Eastern Europe has no Orwellian ring whatsoever. It could not have such a ring, as Orwell’s text was typically not made officially available. This does not mean, however, that its use could not carry different kinds of ironic allusions—as in fact it often did, at least in the GDR where functionaries who had visited the Soviet Union were regularly flabbergasted by the much lower Soviet standard of living.

19. The northern half of East Prussia was annexed directly by the Soviet Union, extending the Baltic territory under its control. After the independence of the three Baltic states, this territory formed a Russian exclave.

these conditions criminality and disease rates exploded (Kleßmann 1986). Perhaps not surprisingly, German participants remember these days less as “liberation” than as “the collapse” (*der Zusammenbruch*), telling stories attesting to the breakdown of all common standards of morality.

The remaining central and western parts of Germany were divided into four occupational zones: the southwest was occupied by France; the southeast and the western core lands came under the control of the Americans; the northwest was taken over by the British; and the areas between the Baltic Sea in the north and the Ore Mountains in the south, between the Harz Mountains in the west and the Oder River in the east, with Berlin more or less in the center, were occupied by the Soviets. In a strange microcosmic fetishization of the capital city, Berlin, too, was divided into four occupational zones, with the French, British, and Americans in the west and the Soviets in the east. Even though the four allied powers were originally bent on administering Germany together and as a whole, each power reigned supreme in its territory, and major differences between them began to emerge not least due to significant differences in occupational policies.

The introduction of socialism into the Soviet-occupied territories of Germany was a piecemeal process driven at least as much by political expediency as by the desire of the Soviet government and German communists to establish socialism on German soil. Only in hindsight may it seem as if the various steps on the road to socialism were irreversible turning points. The reason is that it was not immediately clear to Stalin how to make best diplomatic and economic use of the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany. He oscillated between hopes to get more than the share he had bargained for at Yalta and notions of a unified if neutralized German buffer zone between the two emerging blocs. Thus, many of the steps taken by the Soviets were responses to the international situation, and often enough, mere reactions to the increasing economic and political integration of the western zones.²⁰

Politically, the most important steps in the application of Soviet models to Germany were these: Immediately after the war the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) reestablished German local and regional administrations in which members of the communist party played a

20. There has been a Cold War historical controversy about the degree to which Stalin did in fact pursue an unambiguous strategy of Sovietization, or whether he seriously considered other alternatives for the future of Germany. The West German government’s official line (also argued by some social democrats) was that Stalin dreamed of turning all of Germany into a satellite state of the Soviet Union. Any offer to negotiate anything else was in this vein seen as a mere tactical maneuver. The other side has always emphasized that the path leading eventually to two Germanys as model representatives of their respective blocs was a much more contingent give and take between east and west. The latter interpretation has become widely shared after 1989, even by conservative social scientists writing on the history of the GDR (e.g., Schroeder 1998).

decisive role—not necessarily everywhere in the most visible top rank, but always in the areas of personnel, security (police), mass media, and education (Schroeder 1998; Leonhard 1955). This process went hand in hand with a de-Nazification strategy that aimed at removing former members of the Nazi Party from important positions in public administration and the economy. Although SMAD allowed the formation of other parties than the KPD, they were organized—at first rather loosely—with the communists in a “united front of the anti-fascist-democratic parties.” The next important step was the unification of communists (KPD) and social democrats (SPD) to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in 1946,²¹ thus creating a large workers’ party with about 1.3 million members—dwarfing its closest competitor by a factor of six.²² In the elections to the parliaments of the five states founded on the territory of the Soviet occupational zone, the only free elections in this area between 1933 and 1990, the SED mustered on average 47 percent of the vote (Schroeder 1998)—historically speaking a respectable result and yet still much less than it had hoped for. Starting in 1948, with the Cold War now in full swing, the SED began a formal process of conversion into a Leninist vanguard party. Statehood as the German Democratic Republic followed in the fall of 1949, five months after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Economically, the transformation began right in 1945 with the expropriation of all land holdings in excess of 100 hectares (2,471 acres) and their redistribution to small holders, many refugees among them. At the same time the property of firms whose owners were active Nazis were confiscated. In 1946 many larger corporations were expropriated by the Soviets and organized as so-called Soviet Joint Stock Companies (*Sowietische Aktiengesellschaften*) in order to service the war reparations imposed on eastern Germany. On the basis of the already socialized industry, the process of central planning was begun in 1948. The western currency reform in the same year, with its introduction of the later mythical “Deutsche Mark” (or D-Mark for short), was answered in kind in 1948 by launching the “Mark of the GDR.”

21. The Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was originally founded at the beginning of the Weimar Republic as a left-wing splinter formation breaking away from Germany’s main labor party the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Although some social democrats in the Soviet occupation zone had already proposed such a move in 1945, the actual KPD-SPD unification in 1946 was sponsored by the Soviet Union and succeeded only in its occupational zone, with strong criticisms of the move among social democrats in the western occupational zones. However, the unification had considerable legitimacy among significant numbers of social democrats simply because the rise of the Nazis was in part understood by them as the failure of the left to find a united voice.

22. Of these, about 620,000 were communists; 680,000 were social democrats. Among the other parties the biggest was the CDU, which reached its highest membership in 1948 with 231,000 members.

The stepwise and differential socialization of the GDR economy is best illustrated with a few statistics. By the end of 1948 more than 60 percent of the industrial product of the GDR was generated by socialized firms.²³ By 1949 this number had reached about 75 percent, slowly expanding into the mid-1950s to somewhat more than 90 percent of the industrial product. At the same time, the socialized sector employed more than 80 percent of the industrial workforce (SZS 1956, 1957; Steiner 2004, 42). In industry, this share of the socialized sector stayed constant up to the beginning of the 1970s (SZS 1970, 99), when in the context of reorganizing industrial production units into larger *Kombinate* the remainder became socialized. By comparison, in the mid-1950s still almost all of the traditionally strong artisanal sector of production (i.e., carpentry, car repair, baking, tailoring, etc.) was provided by private companies. By the end of the 1950s, artisanal production was met with a socialization wave that increased the socialist share of the gross product to 30 percent in 1960. This number climbed steadily to about 50 percent in the late 1960s with no further growth to the end of the GDR.²⁴ Retail trade was another area where socialization arrived only in the late 1950s, and where until the end of the GDR more than 10 percent of the turnover was still produced through private outlets (SZS 1990, 271). The land reform of 1945 led to a large increase in the number of small operators that were often very poorly equipped with capital. Thus, compared to prewar levels, the total number of farms on the territory of the GDR increased by almost 50 percent to nearly 890,000 units (SZS 1961, 419; SZS 1957, 347). These farms were then collectivized in two waves in 1952 and 1959/60. This transformation is dramatically visible in the share of arable land tilled by socialist production units of various kinds. In 1950 this number was barely above 5 percent; from 1952 to 1953 it jumped from 7 to 25 percent, growing steadily throughout the rest of the 1950s, reaching almost 50 percent in 1959 to explode to well over 90 percent in 1960 (SZS 1961, 419).

Arguably, then, economic socialization of East Germany proceeded in waves concentrated in the mid-1940s, early 1950s, and late 1950s, with a final wave occurring as late as the early 1970s. For this gradual approach there were of course not only reasons of foreign policy, but there were also important issues of internal governance that cautioned the Soviets (and part of the SED leadership) to proceed gradually with the introduction of socialism in the GDR. For a number of reasons the majority of Germans looked much

23. By socialized I mean here both, directly state owned and operated as well as cooperatively owned and operated.

24. The statistics show a decline of the state sector, which, however, owes itself to changes in data collection procedures that unfortunately render the time series harder to interpret (SZS 1970, 163).

less favorably upon the Soviet occupation than that of the western Allies. Older anti-Russian prejudices dating back at least to the eighteenth century when the land of the czars became the antithesis of Enlightenment and civilization, mingled with Weimar-era anticommunist sentiment to become amplified by more than a decade of anti-Soviet hate propaganda during the Nazi period. These negative historical understandings of “the Russians” and “the Bolsheviks”²⁵ resonated with the fear and fact of loosing property and with the initially often-violent experiences and stories about such experiences with Soviet troops (rape and looting) and the extensive war reparation program imposed by the Soviet Union on its occupational zone.

After the currency reform of 1948, West Germany’s economy “took off,” quickly starting to create visible wealth differentials between both parts of the country. These were particularly palpable to Berliners, who could not only move freely between the western and eastern sectors, but who often continued to work in the respective other part of the city. Thus in part prejudiced, in part scared by what had already happened, in part fearful of what still was to come, and in part lured by the new economic opportunities in the west, many people, especially those already displaced by the war, seized opportunities to move westward. Notably, peaks in the refugee numbers followed major political events, such as the formation of the GDR in 1949 (with an increase in refugee numbers in the next year of over 50 percent²⁶). They also followed waves of collectivization/socialization. When the SED declared at its second party conference in 1952 that the GDR had now reached the phase when the “construction of socialism” would begin in earnest, while connecting this announcement to a massive collectivization drive in agriculture that also fed into the uprising in 1953 (Schöne 2005), the number of refugees increased by 80 percent in the following year. Since Walter Ulbricht, the SED’s first leader, was reigned in by Moscow—the CPSU leadership had judged the announcement of the “construction of socialism” to be “premature”—the SED had to slow down. Thus, the collectivization of agriculture was not finished until 1959/60, again triggering a large increase in the number of refugees to 40 percent in the following two years. The refugee movement effectively deprived the GDR of valuable, often highly qualified members of the workforce who were badly needed in the reconstruction of the country. Only the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961—in the midst of the sustained refugee peak following the 1959/60 collectivization drive—finally put a stop to the massive loss of people. Hence, the population

25. The propagandistic use of “the Russians” or “the Bolsheviks” (interestingly never “the Soviets”) was often heightened by the singularization of the plural into “the Bolshevik” or “the Russian.”

26. Figures calculated from Diemer and Kuhrt 1994, 238.

of the GDR stabilized at a level of roughly 17 million inhabitants. Between the official foundation of the GDR on October 7, 1949, and the construction of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, roughly 2.7 million people fled from east to west, that is, nearly every sixth inhabitant.²⁷

I want to conclude this section with a rough comparison of the temporal patterns underlying the introduction of socialism in the Soviet Union and the GDR. In one of the first internal accounts of the success saga of the Bolsheviks, Lenin (1967b) points to the universal historical significance of the Soviet experience. Historical differences notwithstanding, other communist movements can learn “Bolshevik theory and tactics” for purposes of their own revolutionary transformations, argued Lenin. In this context it is interesting to note that there are obvious structural similarities between the highly contingent Russian progression toward socialism and the stepwise more planned transformation of Soviet-occupied Germany into a socialist state. Above all, there was, first, an immediate land reform and the socialization of big industry that had initially provided the Bolsheviks with an enormous surge of legitimacy. No doubt, a similar effect was hoped for in Germany. This was followed by a policy of more moderately paced socializations of smaller firms, of artisanal production, as well as of the retail trade that in the Soviet Union was known as “new economic policy.” Finally there was the delayed collectivization of agriculture, the timing of which was in both countries fiercely debated.

Consciousness and the “Main Task” of Qualitative Economic Growth

Marx argues consistently that the possibility of communism, which is characterized by the simultaneous withering away of the state and the dissolution of any kind of class differentiation, is based on a surge in the development of productive forces well above the level attainable under capitalist conditions. The surge has to be of such magnitude that everybody can live in relative material abundance, which will allow people to contribute voluntarily to the common good according to their capabilities, as well as to take from the common proceeds according their needs (1962c, I). Unless such relative economic bliss can be achieved, claims Marx, the whole “old shit”

27. The strict regimentation of the freedom to move has been an integral part to all Soviet style socialist systems. East Germany struggled in its efforts to control population movements with the open border among the four sectors of Berlin (it literally took little more than a commuter rail ticket to get from one side of the supposedly iron curtain to the other), and the fact that East German citizens were automatically regarded citizens of West Germany (the FRG maintained the, in this regard, effective fiction of a single German citizenship).

(1958a, 35) of class antagonism, suppression, and exploitation would inevitably start all over again. The question that posed itself, then, was, *how* would socialism gain a productivity edge over capitalism? In search for a clue to an answer to this all-important question, Lenin (1967e) took his departure from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1962c). There, Marx suggests that the productive forces of society will rise with the "well-rounded development of individuals . . .," "after labor has become not only a means to life, but life's prime want." Marx thus expects productivity gains from a transformation of humans into beings with a different profile of needs and skills. The quality of labor undertaken in the interest of personal fulfillment is the clue to the riddle.

Lenin (1967e, 340) proceeds from here to reason that the expropriation of the means of production will effect such a transformation:

This expropriation will make it possible for the productive forces to develop to a tremendous extent. And when we see how incredibly capitalism is already retarding this development, when we see how much progress could be achieved on the basis of the level of technique already attained, we are entitled to say with the fullest confidence that the expropriation of the capitalists will inevitably result in an enormous development of the productive forces of human society. But how rapidly this development will proceed, how soon it will reach the point of breaking away from the division of labor, of doing away with the antithesis between mental and physical labor, of transforming labor into "life's prime want"—we do not and cannot know.

Why a mere structural transition of ownership should have any effect on productivity remains opaque until after the revolution. What now reveals itself as a "new form" of social life (in the same way that the Paris Commune had revealed a new form of political organization) is, according to Lenin's "Great Beginning" (1967b), a "heroism of labor" manifest in a specific "socialist discipline" that is in contrast to capitalism's "discipline of hunger" and feudalism's "discipline of the stick," "free and conscious" (212). With the proletariat's new understanding of what work is about and how it ought to be conducted, enormous increases in the intensity, quality, and duration of work are possible. Lenin argues his case with reference to reports about "subotniks" (voluntary shifts in socialized enterprises), above all a legendary one at the Moscow-Kazan Railway.²⁸ In addition to the

28. These early examples of labor heroism set the tone and provided the rationale for never-ending campaigns to improve labor productivity by motivational example, that is, by transforming the mindset of the worker. Perhaps the most famous Soviet labor hero has become Alexey Stakhanov, whose marvelous feat of overfulfilling the plan by a factor of thirteen even landed

organization, skill, and motivation of labor, Lenin also expected productivity gains from other sources (1967b), in particular from economies of scale as well as science and technology. He was in particular fascinated by the possibilities of power machines and electricity, which led him to declare famously “communism—that is, Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country” (1967g, 512). Yet, the possibilities of economies of scale are by no means specific to socialism, and neither are science and technology, except in as far as they are organized, conducted, and pursued differently, that is, to the degree that scientists and engineers themselves show “socialist discipline,” that is, work with a different set of understandings. In the end, then, it is the quality of labor that makes the difference. And that is seen as an outgrowth of a particularly socialist consciousness.

These lessons of the classics of Marxism-Leninism were well studied. Almost forty years after Lenin’s discoveries, the SED’s first secretary, Walter Ulbricht, still argued in the very same vein at the Vth party congress²⁹ (ZK 1959, 149): “The Marxist insight that changes in the social conditions entail changes in consciousness [documented in the previous paragraph of his speech by reference to the *Communist Manifesto*], is confirmed completely by developments in the German Democratic Republic.” Ulbricht illustrates this change, emulating Lenin’s *Great Beginning* in argument and style, by referring among other examples to the self-account of a worker, “comrade Christoph from the spring works Zittau (city in Saxony),” who shifted his attitude to work from what Christoph describes as “tricking your foreman” to limit output to “giving your all” corresponding to the movement from a privately owned company to a socialized one. Here was proof, Ulbricht claimed, that structural change, even if mandated, was capable of transforming consciousness, which increased the efficiency of production. This, in turn, demonstrated why socialism must be more efficient in the long run than capitalism, ultimately out-competing it. For Ulbricht, comrade Christoph, allegorizing the transformation experience of the GDR, corroborated his belief in the Marxian base-superstructure model.

him on the title page of *Time* magazine (September 16, 1935). His East German equivalent had to be—in literal emulation—a miner too. His name was Adolf Hennecke, and he worked his record-breaking, organized workers’ movement to initiate a shift in 1948 (Gries and Satjukow 2002). While Lenin reports on what seems to have been spontaneous actions, he also suggested that such actions be widely used propagandistically for the reasons just mentioned. Stakhanov’s and Hennecke’s shifts were well prepared and part of a well-planned propagandistic effort.

29. I have selected the Vth party congress as a point of departure because it marks at the same time a certain point of completion in the development of the GDR, while it was setting the pace for the entire post-Stalinist era, in simultaneously acknowledging and overlooking the XXth party congress of the CPSU in 1956.

Yet, Ulbricht goes on to say: “But the socialization of property alone does not guarantee that new relationships between working people will develop completely. To accomplish this, education-work is necessary to trigger a political, spiritual and moral maturation of all those working not just during work time but throughout their entire common life” (111). In full agreement with Marx and Lenin, Ulbricht and his successor argue (ZK 1959, 161), “it is the productivity of labor, which is in the last instance the determinant of the victory of socialism over capitalism.” Significant economic growth led by productivity gains is declared here and in all following party congresses and any number of public speeches as *the* “main task” (*Hauptaufgabe*), and it thus becomes explicitly the corroborating condition for socialism’s claim to superiority (e.g., BL Suhl 1976, 15). In this spirit, Walter Ulbricht harbored in 1958 the exuberant hope to materially overtake the West during the next five-year-plan period. Corroborating signs that this was about to happen were seen by Ulbricht not only in the Sputnik but also in the other technological achievements of the Soviet Union. He extensively cites the commentary of Western observers who worried whether the West had not already lost the race for good as a recognition of his own interpretation. Propaganda brochures (e.g., BL Karl-Marx-Stadt 1961) distributed in the late 1950s and early 1960s argue for the economic superiority of socialism by comparing the historical growth rates of the Soviet Union with those of the United States, which, so the logic went, must inevitably lead to the Soviet Union’s overtaking of the United States since the latter’s growth rates were depicted as consistently higher.³⁰

The linear causality inherent in such thought lends itself to a translation into variable-speak. Consciousness is presented here if not as the sole “independent variable” to trigger socialist transformation then certainly as the key “intervening variable” or perhaps even more as a co-determinant of successful socialist transformation. Or, to put it in terms of syllogisms: if the restructuring of the economy under socialist principles is the necessary condition, only consciousness provides the sufficient condition for a successful permanent transition to socialism (Mittag 1969, esp. 294–301). Accordingly, Ulbricht, again following Lenin’s (1967b) example, was eager not only to ask party members to engage in active proselytization for socialism but also to mobilize writers and other artists to participate actively in the transformation of GDR society by helping to shape the consciousness of the people.

30. In addition, they try to demonstrate the moral superiority of socialism by arguing that the socialist countries, unlike capitalist ones, do not produce an internal interest in arms manufacturing by showing divergent crime statistics and a higher social service provision (time of retirement, number of physicians per head, etc.).

In 1959 the party organized to this purpose a joint conference with artists and writers significantly lodged in Bitterfeld, the hub of East Germany's chemical industry. Here Ulbricht said: "By representing artistically the novelty of socialist society, the writer can inspire individuals to accomplish great tasks. He raises the new [i.e., socialist forms] to their consciousness and thus contributes to higher achievements and simultaneously to the acceleration of the development" (Schubbe 1972, 553). To illustrate his point, Ulbricht holds up a number of Soviet authors as glowing examples for having contributed appreciably to the development of socialism in their country.³¹ What Ulbricht was offering the artistic intelligentsia of the GDR was a compact: state support and influence through the opening of publication venues in exchange for the committed support by the artists for the party's goals to stimulate socialist behavior—again with the intention to accelerate qualitative economic growth. Thus, in effect he demanded a socialist literature, deeply steeped in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism that should do its bit in the overall propaganda efforts of the party to create the new socialist human being. It is precisely the focus on consciousness that made, on the one hand, artists look like useful allies and, on the other hand, as will become clear later, as potentially dangerous adversaries who needed to be kept under tight control. Much of the oscillation between so-called thaw and freeze periods in the cultural policies of socialist countries can be explained by the love-hate relationship of the socialist leaders with writers and artists, which is based on the understanding that what and how human beings think and feel is of the greatest political relevance.

In the course of GDR history, the role attributed to consciousness as a direct, and perhaps the most important, instrument of socialist politics was increasing. There are especially two reasons for this. In spite of the fact that major components of the socialist restructuring program, the socialization of land as well as of large- and medium-sized companies, were in place by the early 1960s, the expected economic gains in productivity increases and growth did not materialize. Far from overtaking the West, the socialist

31. Students of socialism will find here some of the favorite motivational novels of the Soviet literature that were widely translated and distributed in Eastern Europe. Gladkov's *Cement*, Granin's *The Searchers*, as well as Nobel Prize-winner Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* (his second, two-volume oeuvre on the Don and its people after his world best seller *And Quiet Flows the Don*). In this respect it is also interesting to note how Wilhelm Pieck, the GDR's first (and only) president, has described Johannes Becher, the recognized poet, writer of the text for the GDR anthem (the melody is Hanns Eisler's) and the GDR's first minister of cultural affairs: "Stalin, the great leader of the camp of the peace loving peoples said 'writers are engineers of the human soul.' Johannes R. Becher is through his poems, songs and speeches an 'engineer of the human soul' in Stalin's sense" (quoted in Janka 1989, 9).

economies continued to lag behind. Worse, at the beginning of the 1960s the GDR entered a phase of sharply declining growth rates, accelerating—in conjunction with the socialization wave of 1959—the movement of refugees. An economic reform packet designed to increase the flexibility of the economic system was abandoned quickly after some initial gains. To the end of the GDR, there were no more major attempts to reform the mode of operation of the GDR economy. Given seemingly unalterable structures, all that could be done was an attempt to improve productivity by improving the quality of labor—its mode of conduct, skill level, motivation. In other words, the consciousness of the workforce at all levels seemed to be the key to instituting socialism. A politics of education, that is training, and propaganda seemed to be the way to bring it into the world.

The second reason for the increasing emphasis on consciousness as the key to social transformation lies in the beginning *détente* between both Germans in the early 1970s. The eased travel restrictions enabling unprecedented levels of contact between East and West disquieted the leadership of the SED. The reason is simple. Along with the fast-growing penetration of Western television, more personal contacts between both countries created many more opportunities to immediately compare the economic well-being of people in both parts of Germany, thereby furnishing ordinary people with the means to validate key ideological claims. Among the leadership of the GDR the fear arose that the kind of economic development that had taken place in the GDR, a development placing a high emphasis on investment in the productive infrastructure at the expense of consumer goods production, made people discontent and perhaps less open to the world of socialism. The solution to this problem was seen in a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand the GDR economy was redirected toward the production and distribution of consumer goods. This included the use of debt-financed foreign currency to import some of the most desirable Western goods.³² The other strategy, however, lay in renewed efforts to raise the socialist consciousness of the citizenship of the GDR. Erich Honecker, after toppling the aging Walter Ulbricht in spring 1971, said at the VIIIth party congress (ZK 1971, 111):

In contradistinction to all former social formations, socialism is *created* and developed by *the conscious, planned* action of the people. As we all know, this is also the core of true liberty. However, only those can act for socialism who *own a socialist consciousness*, that is, one equipped with a Marxist-Leninist worldview. (My emphasis)

32. Shortly before Christmas 1978, the GDR even imported 1 million pairs of Levi's jeans (Menzel 2004).

Werner Lamberz, one of the younger hopefuls in the politburo,³³ narrated in an important central committee conference on agitation and propaganda the success of socialism in the GDR as a process of consciousness transformation directly affected by the party. He describes the point of departure for this transformation process in the following words (ZK 1972, 22):

[The party] cruelly decimated by the fascists, robbed of tens of thousands of its best combatants, had to face the spiritual and moral ruins left over from fascism: human beings who were incredibly contaminated, brutalized and cut off from the truth, irate to the degree of voluntary self-sacrifice against anything communist, Soviet or socialist. . . . From this difficult point of departure, our party could arrive where we stand today because it has always considered *ideological work as the core piece of its overall leadership*, and because it has enabled its members to become active bearers of our worldview, who fight passionately and persistently to convert the word of the party into deeds. (My emphasis)

Both Honecker and Lamberz make repeatedly clear that productivity driven economic growth, “the main task” (*die Hauptaufgabe*) proclaimed at every party congress of the SED, is, in effect, a function of consciousness and by implication of propaganda. In the opening words to the same conference Honecker remarks (11): “And as we all know, the higher the consciousness, the higher the effort which will lead to economic results still in 1972 [the conference took place in mid-November 72!], and certainly in 1973.” And Lamberz states a little later (36): “One is justified to say that the main task was [thanks to effective propaganda work] heartily welcomed and accepted fast by the vast majority of our people . . . the record of economic success since the VIIIth party congress is vivid testimony to this.”

It is not the case that by the early 1970s the thought of a structural determination of consciousness had entirely waned. It was still celebrated as a theoretical core tenet of Marxism-Leninism. Practically, however, structural determination had given way to the notion that the workplace was indeed the most effective place of propaganda, because “there it affects the entire human being, his thinking and feeling, his insights and beliefs, his attitudes and his character” (ZK 1972, 42). What is reflected here is on the one hand

33. Until his untimely death in 1978 in a helicopter crash in Libya he was considered widely to be Honecker’s heir apparent. In the mode of personalization typical for expected changes and/or failures in socialism (more on this below), hopes for reforms in the GDR were often projected onto Lamberz, and after his death many more reform-minded party members felt that events might have taken a different course had he been around.

the very Marxian idea that human beings are above all *Homo faber*. On the other hand this passage indexes the notion that “the free development of human beings and the satisfaction of their interests and needs is only possible in and with the community and therefore, based on the fundamental agreement between individual and collective interests aims at the voluntary integration of the individual into society” (Schütz et al. 1978, 411). The socialist collective is thus seen as a quasi-natural network of authority, the ideal location for the transformation of consciousness.³⁴

Determining the Content of Consciousness

Following a historical thrust from Marx over Lenin to Stalin, Ulbricht, and Honecker, I have demonstrated that the party in the GDR increasingly worked with a consciousness-driven model of social transformation. So now the question is: consciousness of what? The answer in its widest possible sense is Marxism-Leninism. The reason is stated (for example) by the central committee document on propaganda (ZK 1972, 69):

Marxism-Leninism is the reliable compass of our party. All revolutionary changes proceed under its influence. Proven in life and in the fire of action, the Marxist-Leninist theory is a guarantee for future victories of our just cause. It alone enables human beings to find their way in the often complicated processes of world history, to engage themselves on behalf of the interests of the labor class and all working people and to give their life deep meaning and a rich content.

Its wide-ranging and emphatic claims notwithstanding, this is one of the more modest claims about the truth-value of Marxism-Leninism. Other equally widespread statements go further, affording absolute truth to Marxism-Leninism in the sense of some sort of correspondence with the world. “According to the words of Friedrich Engels [there is no direct reference in the original] the dialectical-materialist worldview conveys the only correct idea [*Vorstellung*] of the outside world [*Umwelt*], reflecting it just as it is without any distortion” (Wischnjakow et al. 1974, 10).³⁵ Or, most emphatically, revealing the expected redemptive force socialism is credited with by none

34. The ideas and practices emphasizing the central role of the work collective are, needless to say, of Soviet origin. They hark back to traditional Russian notions of the village community, but they were worked out theoretically and experimentally by the Soviet educator A. Makarenko (see Kharkhordin 1999, esp. chap. 3).

35. Or another formulation in the standard textbook of Marxism-Leninism (Kuusinen 1960, 17): “The unshakable foundation of Marxism-Leninism is its philosophy: historical and dialectical materialism. This philosophy takes the world as it really is.”

less than Lenin (1967h, 41) himself: “The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true.”

Of truth, substance, and mere letters

The reason why Marxism(-Leninism) is afforded such an exalted status is an almost naive mid-nineteenth-century belief in the powers of science, for that is what Marxism-Leninism was widely celebrated to be: the first and only true science of the social. In his famous summary of Marxian thought, Lenin (1967i, 8ff.) depicts Marx (in true Hegelian spirit) as the completion and sublimation of all the best European philosophical movements of thought. In Marx’s writing, thinking about society reaches, according to Lenin, an unprecedented level of sophistication that allows human beings for the first time to make valid causal explanations and to predict historical development. One of the most widespread textbooks of Marxism-Leninism has put this thought in language that I have heard often in my interviews: “Marxism has uncovered the fundamental laws of the development of society. Thus it elevated history to the status of a true science, which can exactly explain both, the character of any given social order as well as the development from one such order to another” (Kuusinen et al. 1960, 8–9). Accordingly, the socialist society was supposed to progress in a lawlike movement. These “laws,” for example the increasing productivity of labor was taken to be such a law, were frequent points of reference in political discourse.

At this point in particular, two questions emerge. The first is how workers could possibly acquire this true scientific and therefore class-appropriate consciousness. The second concerns the thorny issue of proper interpretation, of what particular texts in the Marxist-Leninist canon mean in general, and how to apply these teachings to particular situations. Lenin’s famous answer to the first question, clearly inspired by the *Manifesto*, was developed in his *What Is to Be Done?* Consciousness could not develop spontaneously but could only be “brought to the workers from without” (1967h, 122). A theoretically well-trained and centrally organized vanguard party was needed to organize and educate the proletariat. If anything, the course of the revolution persuaded Lenin even more that vanguardism was central to the Bolsheviks’ success (e.g., 1967b). In the aftermath of Lenin’s death, vanguardism came to be seen as the central tenet of Leninism (Stalin 1952a). The notorious *Short Course* of the history of the CPSU (CC 1939, 353), arguably the most important propaganda document of Soviet socialism ever,³⁶ has officially made

36. Virtually the entire East European political elite was trained with and in the spirit of this book, which was published at the end of the Great Purges when Stalin had become the undisputed supreme leader of the Soviet Union.

the vanguard party a linchpin of socialism tout court. Consequently, East Germany's SED understood itself as such a "party of the new type." Its statutes begin with the sentence (Benser and Naumann 1986, 170), "The Socialist Unity Party is the conscious and organized vanguard of the proletariat and the working people of the German Democratic Republic. . . . It leads the people on the way to socialism and communism, to the ascertainment of peace and democracy. It gives this struggle direction and goal."

It was one thing to claim abstractly that Marxism-Leninism was the only possible source of successful orientation available; it was quite another to derive from the canonized literature of Marxism-Leninism what do in any concrete situation. Thus, mediating interpretation was required to bridge that rather sizable gap. This gap was not only happily taken up by the party; its existence became the party's very *raison d'être*. The hermeneutic possibilities it opened were its very lifeblood, both in opening and restricting them.³⁷ The positivistic truth claims made on behalf of Marxism-Leninism notwithstanding, the same exigencies of revolutionary praxis that had prompted a revision of Marx's assessment of ideology led to an emphasis on the *historicity* of Marxist theory. Marx and Engels had already explicitly argued this point (e.g., Engels 1962, preface). In this context it is interesting how Stalin defined Leninism in what is in effect his (and practically the whole generation of communist leaders' trained under his aegis) *summa theoria Lenino* (Stalin 1952a):

Leninism is the Marxism in the epoch of imperialism and of the proletarian Revolution. More precisely: Leninism is the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general, the theory and the tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular. Marx and Engels were active in the pre-revolutionary period . . . when there still was no developed imperialism . . . in that period in which the proletarian revolution was no immediate necessity.

37. Needless to say that "Marxism-Leninism" was in practice not a static, as it may appear at first. The standard omnipresent Marx-Engels edition (*MEW*) comprises forty-five volumes, the standard Lenin edition (*CW*) also forty-five, which is to say nothing of the thirteen volumes (abandoned, still incomplete) of Stalin that had assumed the status of classics until they lost their place in the canon after the XXth party congress of the CPSU. Commenting on the XXth party congress of the Soviet Union and the secret speech of Nikita Khrushchev, Walter Ulbricht famously wrote in the SED paper *Neues Deutschland*: "One can not count Stalin among the classics of Marxism" (H. Weber 1986, 225). Of course, even the most dedicated party members, Stasi officers included, did not usually have full editions in their homes anyway, showcasing two- to three-volume collections on their living room shelves instead. What is more, however, people did not typically study from complete texts but from collections of citations that were compiled by the party for particular educational purposes. Thus, the party could select the texts it thought particularly pertinent for its current argument (cf. Bahro 1977).

In an important sense then, Stalin argues that Marx has been superseded by Lenin precisely because history has moved on and neither Marx nor Engels had the privilege to work into their theory the latest developments. The *Short Course* (CC 1939) later clarifies the relationship between these two classics by developing a set of principles. In the conclusions an important distinction is made between the “substance” and the “letter” of any classical text. What is meant by this is clearly worked out with regard to the historicity of texts:

What would have happened to the Party, to our revolution, to Marxism, if Lenin had been overawed by the letter of Marxism and had not had the courage of theoretical conviction to discard one of the old conclusions of Marxism [that proletarian revolutions can only happen in developed capitalist societies] and to replace it by a new conclusion affirming that the victory of socialism in one country, taken singly, was possible, a conclusion which corresponded to the new historical conditions? The Party[!] would have groped in the dark, the proletarian revolution would have been deprived of leadership, and the Marxist theory would have begun to decay. The proletariat would have lost, and the enemies of the proletariat would have won. (556–57)³⁸

The conclusion is that “mastering the Marxist-Leninist theory means assimilating the *substance* of this theory and learning to use it in the solution of the practical problems of the revolutionary movement under the varying conditions of the class struggle of the proletariat” (355). Since leadership in this struggle is, however, the task of the vanguard party (353), it follows that the party needs to determine what the substance of Marxism-Leninism is. The latest interpretation with regard to particular issues was commonly called “the party line.”

The SED as a Leninist vanguard party has always claimed for itself the right to determine what the substance of Marxism-Leninism is for any given period of historical development. The third paragraph of its statutes (Benser et al. 1986, 170) reads: “In agreement with the historical development of our epoch, it [the party] realizes in the German Democratic Republic the tasks

38. Stalin identifies here his own theory of “socialism in one country” with Lenin’s “April thesis,” which argued that Russia was ready for a proletarian revolution. Although Lenin’s explicit position about socialism in one country was opposed to Stalin’s, one could argue with the *Short Course* that substantively socialism in one country is a logical continuation of the April thesis. The difference between Lenin and Stalin does not lie in the idea or practice of a historically conditioned appropriation of classic texts, but in the degree of intellectual forthrightness with which this is done. Without mentioning it, Stalin simply obliterates Lenin’s explicit position, pretending there was no difference.

and goals of the labor class set out by Marx, Engels and Lenin.” The formulation “tasks and goals” aims precisely at the “substance” of Marxism-Leninism defined as its true core. Rather than limiting the power of the party this “hermeneutic power,” as Dominic Boyer fittingly calls it (2003; 2005, 129–32), vastly increased it; the texts of the classics, the mere “letter” in the terminology of the *Short Course*, could no longer be leveraged against the party. Worse, leveraging these texts in a way that contradicted the party automatically betrayed the immaturity of the interpreter according to the party’s prevalent epistemic feelings, ideologies, and practices. The fact that the texts were seen as true only “in substance” made the party their sole legitimate interpreter. It became the arbiter of substance that is the purveyor of absolute truth.³⁹ For that reason, the party’s main documents were treated as more sacred than the classics, because for this moment in time they came closer to the truth than the texts of the classics themselves. This interpretation of the relative import of current party texts in relationship to the Marxist-Leninist canon is substantiated, for example, by the rhetoric of authorization used by the authors of a broad variety of socialist texts from academic thesis to bureaucratic planning documents. Typically, citational preferences are given first to current party documents, then to the classics, and finally to laws, regulations, and such. It is also supported by the way boundaries between the criticizable and the sacrosanct were drawn in various kinds of verbal interactions. Before the party had formulated an explicit policy, a much wider range of questions could be asked, concerns could be voiced, or proposals made addressing a particular issue. Once the party had defined its “line,” however, challenging it in public was seen as tantamount to elevating self above the wisdom of the collectivity. For the time being, then, the current party documents were treated in practice like perfect understandings of the social world, and thus they became in effect the substance of Marxism-Leninism in its presently most adequate form. More, since Marxism-Leninism was the only possible science of the social that could

39. Socialism has often been compared to a salvation religion with Marx/Engels/Lenin as its prophets, the party as its church, false consciousness and exploitation as states of inauthenticity much like sin, and communism as paradise, as its imperfect image of the longed-for state of ultimate redemption. If fundamentalism is characterized above all by a form of scriptural literalism (cf. Riesebrodt 1993), then socialism’s stance is decidedly antifundamentalist, a move that is ultimately furthering the power of the church, which is thus allowed to appropriate the prophet for its own purposes. One of the critical insights of fundamentalism is the realization of how such moves of the churches can tempt it to engage in self-apotheosis, to which it seeks an alternative grounding in the sacrality of text. And needless to say that this fundamentalist impulse—which does not have to degenerate into full-blown fundamentalism—has always been a possibility for party-critical intellectuals. Many secret SED discussion circles in the 1980s practiced it.

correctly grasp the very nature of society, the current party documents were understood to present the truth about society as it currently existed.

Techniques of self-positioning

Given the distinction between letter and substance and the assertion of the party's right and ability to define the substance of Marxism-Leninism, the following questions arise: How, that is, through which methods did the party define the present moment? And, how did it use the classics as guides to its specific historical problematics? In other words, what were the party's central methods of self-orientation, or, in the terminology of the sociology of understanding, the meta-understandings at play in the generation of first-order political understandings? In the GDR (as elsewhere in the Soviet world), the most important document to set the general direction of the party, its "line," was the report of the central committee to the party congresses taking place about every four to five years. These reports were delivered as daylong speeches by the first secretary; they were widely disseminated via print and electronic mass media; and they subsequently played a central role in the party's life (more on this in the next chapter). The rhetoric of these texts can therefore serve as a good starting point for an analysis of the techniques of self-orientation. As we shall see, they were following meta-understandings that had already been well established by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Three ways of producing political understandings were particularly prominent. Together they aspired to generate a dialectical movement progressing through a twofold negation to a positive determination of the present as a distinct moment on the inevitable path of history.

In a first step, the development of the capitalist world was described and analyzed. Thus the character of contemporary capitalism was revealed through an analysis of its actions, especially its aggressions (in wars, coups, the suppression of rebellions), its handling of economic crises (unemployment, inflation), its actions against its own proletariat as a class, or its policies directed against socialist countries. Via the notion that all history is a history of class warfare the present moment in socialism was then in a second step defined precisely against the present character of capitalism. This maneuver became possible through the projection of class conflict onto geopolitical constellations. In the postrevolutionary Soviet world, the main interest of this analysis was to gauge the relative strength of capitalism, to assess its potential threats, and to understand its inherent weaknesses, which could potentially be exploited to strengthen the position of socialism in the ongoing class war. In principle, this method of self-positioning in opposition to the actions of the class-enemy responding to world-historical events dates, as we have already seen, all the way back to Marx himself. Lenin, too,

was following this Marxian paradigm, most famously perhaps with his “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism” (1967c), which vies with Marx’s analysis of *The Revolution in France* (1962a) and the *Brumaire* (1960) for first place among the genre-setting exemplars.

Unfortunately, none of the analysis of capitalism produced after the October Revolution matched the earlier works of Marx and Lenin in their brilliance of insight. The reasons for this decline may well be found in their mode of production. No longer was a relatively autonomous thinker or group of thinkers in charge of research and writing. Instead, the bureaucratic apparatus of a central committee was in charge while, ironically, remaining bound in its own proceedings by the very party line it aspired to set. Especially notable about this first step is the importance it affords to the development of capitalism. The October Revolution notwithstanding, it was assumed that the clock of history can still be read with more accuracy from the West. And herein lies, perhaps, one of the reasons for the cultivation of an almost obsessive westward gaze, which so characterizes the history of socialism, especially in the GDR.⁴⁰

The second step in the process of self-orientation was the differentiation of the straight path from the many possible errant ways. This was done by critiquing, and even more typically, by opposing or attacking other theorists’ writings within the socialist movement more generally and increasingly within one’s own party. Again, the roots of this procedure are thoroughly Marxian. From his earliest years on, Marx’s thinking thrived on an often polemic engagement with other thinkers, whom he studied in great detail beginning with Feuerbach and Bauer, then moving on to dissect and ridicule fellow socialist thinkers such as Proudhon and Bakunin, or labor leaders such as Lassalle and even Bebel. Substantial parts of Marx’s mature economic writings take shape in analysis of and opposition to the classical and contemporary contributions to bourgeois political economy that are collected in the three mighty tomes that together form his *Theories of Surplus Value*. One of the first and most successful textbooks of Marxism, reputedly much more widely read than *Capital*, was Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. It defines proper Marxism point by point against lengthy quotations from the racist, anti-Semitic, and positivistic philosopher Eugen Dühring’s writings, which were briefly fashionable in the 1870s.

Although Lenin has the same predilection for oppositional self-definition as Marx, he follows this strategy with a much narrower choice of opponents. In contradistinction to Marx, Lenin argues almost entirely against other

40. This westward gaze has a much longer history in Eastern Europe, with deep influences not only on socialism but also on the opposition against it (Kumar 1991), and it continues to be a political orientation in postsocialist Eastern Europe (Gal 1993; Böröcz 2006).

socialist writers. There is, in his oeuvre, no serious engagement with leading representatives of liberal or conservative thought.⁴¹ Before the revolution, Lenin's major targets were opponents within the labor movement who were not members of the Bolshevik party. He understood these opponents with the help of a left-right scheme. On the right hand he saw the "opportunists" of the second international, predominantly representatives of social democracy. For Lenin their fault consisted in banking increasingly on reform by means of electoral politics rather than on revolution. On the left hand he saw "left radicals," predominantly anarchists and others inspired by their ideas. For him their fault lay in their reluctance to settle for any policy that does not conform to the very letter of socialist principles. In other words, he saw them as unwilling to engage in tactical alliances. For statist Lenin, their other fatal flaw lay in their celebration of local autonomy, spontaneity, and bottom-up procedures. After the revolution, Lenin increasingly used this by-then-well-established left-right deviance scheme and applied it to critics within the Bolshevik party, while keeping a keen eye on international developments.

Stalin finally addressed almost exclusively opponents to his rule within the party, most notably his competitors among the revolutionary leaders of the first generation: Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev (e.g., 1952b). The *Short Course* published right after the Great Purge became infamous because it developed Stalin's penchant into party dogma by promoting the fight against inner-party deviants to the status of a constituent principle of self-orientation:

Unless the Party of the working class wages an uncompromising struggle against the opportunists within its own ranks, unless it smashes the capitulators in its own midst, it cannot preserve unity and discipline within its ranks, it cannot perform its role of organizer and leader of the proletarian revolution, nor its role as the builder of the new, Socialist society. (CC 1939, 359)

In view of the results of the XXth party congress of the CPSU it is perhaps not surprising that the post-Stalinist SED offers a formulation that moves away from an emphasis on inner-party enemies, instead vowing to fight more generally any kind of ideological difference or opposition (Benser et al. 1986, 171–72):

41. Besides a shift in the scope of interests, this has probably also something to do with changes in the very size of the socialist movement and the corresponding corpus of socialist writing, which in Lenin's time required much more specialized attention. It also has something to do with Lenin's much-deeper involvement in politics. He simply did not have as much time for his writing as did Marx. And yet the fact remains that the result was also a substantial intellectual narrowing, which is in part responsible for leading organized socialism to overlook major developments in the dynamics of capitalism.

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany contributes to the enrichment of Marxism-Leninism. It leads an uncompromising battle against all phenomena of bourgeois ideology, against anti-communism and anti-Sovietism, against nationalism and racism and against any revanchist disfigurement of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Yet, the SED, too, has continuously urged its members to maintain the unity and purity of the party and to be on the guard against “left and right deviations” (*Links- und Rechtsabweichungen*). How much this was a constant theme in party life may be glimpsed from an anecdote. Wilhelm Danziger, one of my interview partners among the Stasi officers, told me and a former Stasi colleague over a glass of wine how one fellow member of the leadership of the party organization at Halle University once made sense of the matter of left and right deviations. He reported that said colleague drew (while Danziger redrew in front of our eyes) a straight arrow up on a piece of paper adding a second arrow undulating forth and back across the first. He then pointed to one of the right-hand turning points of the undulating arrow and said, “here we were fighting the left-deviation,” while touching the straight arrow in the middle with his index finger; then he moved to one of the left-hand turning points and said: “and here we were fighting against the right-deviation,” tipping at the center arrow again. At this point the other officer broke out into resounding laughter of recognition. The implication is clear: rather than fighting against left (Trotskyite or anarchist “tendencies”) and right (“opportunist” or “capitulating behavior”) to maintain a steady course, the party flip-flopped itself, always fighting against some steady center.

The final move of self-orientation consisted in the use of these two exercises in militant dialectics in combination with a number of positive indicators to define the present stage on the movement from capitalism to communism as a particular step in the progression of socialism.⁴² Among these indicators were first and foremost achievements of economic development during the past plan period. Increases in the absolute or relative volume of the production in raw materials and capital goods were as celebrated as those in the supply of apartments, durable consumer goods, and agricultural produce. Improvements in the levels of social services were taken as much as a sign of progress as increases in the satisfaction of “cultural needs” (number of theater performances, books printed, etc.). Other important indicators were signs of support of the general population for the party and its project. These were taken to speak in particular to the class structure and class rela-

42. Following Marx’s differentiation between at least two stages of communism (1962c), Lenin (1967e) conceived of socialism as a transitory stage toward communism. This terminology was maintained until the end of socialism.

tions within the country. In this regard election results were important, as was the participation especially of nonparty members in propaganda events ranging from subotniks, to May Day parades, and national holiday celebrations. Such indicators were taken to corroborate understandings to the effect that internal class conflict was weakening. As a result of this process, the historically adequate interpretation of Marxism-Leninism was typically captured in slogans serving as general orientational mottos for the next five years. I already mentioned that Ulbricht announced the “construction of socialism” (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*) at the second party conference in 1952. At the VIIth party congress in 1967 he announced the “continuing construction of socialism” while describing the GDR as a “socialist community of human beings” (*sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft*). Honecker declared the GDR to be a “developed socialist society” (*entwickelte sozialistische Gesellschaft*) at the VIIIth party congress in 1971 and proclaimed the “unity of economic and social policy” (*Einheit der Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik*) at the IXth party congress in 1976 (ZK 1978). This painstaking attention to the definition of stages and their appropriate labeling is testimony to the continuing hold that Marx’s philosophy of history exercised over official socialist efforts to understand themselves in a wider world.

The ultimate reason why a proper understanding of the current stage of development was so important was to yield insight into the question of what ought to be done politically. And since politics was imagined to succeed or fail with mass participation, a link was needed to connect the proper interpretation of the current stage with everyday life. This is where socialist understandings of ethics become all important.

Socialist ethics

Self-orientation in terms of militant dialectics went hand in hand with Manichaeic understandings of the world. The dualism of class conflict led to a staunch us-against-them logic, with a clear, logically unquestionable *tertium non datur!* It affected notions of belonging because either somebody was a friend or she was an enemy. It ultimately produced a zero-sum game imaginary of social life because every action, every move was seen to benefit either the one, or the other of the two contending classes. This belligerent understanding of the dialectics of world history resonated deeply with the biographies of older socialist leaders in Germany, many of whom had first-hand experiences with an enemy who tried to exterminate them during the years of Nazi rule (Epstein 2003).

What was needed, in the estimation of the party, to win this battle with the class enemy was unity. The statutes of the SED claim (Benser et al. 1986, 171): “Power and invincibility of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany lie in the

ideological and organizational unity and unanimity (*Einheit und Geschlossenheit*) of its ranks, in voluntary and conscious discipline, and the active and selfless work of all communists.” Accordingly, the list of the duties of the party members was topped by the exhortation to (173) “always preserve and protect in any way the unity and purity of the party as the most important precondition for its power and force.” Such breathless strings of pleonastic hyperboles created through the conjunction of synonymous (“unity and unanimity”) or closely related (“voluntary and conscious”) terms are not only a notable element of socialist propaganda style in general, but they are a good indicator of the perceived urgency of the virtues exhorted. They are also a sign of tasks still not completed simply because that which is emphatically demanded can obviously not simply be assumed as an already well-established commonplace. This impression is amplified by the sheer redundancy of the exhortation to unity itself that appeared as a veritable basso continuo of public speeches in the GDR. Finally, unity was nothing that was demanded for thought alone. After having been asked to thoroughly internalize current interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, party members were requested to “realize actively the resolutions of the party, to strengthen in every respect the German Democratic Republic, to work for a fast development of socialist production, for scientific and technological progress and for the growth of the productivity of labor.” Note again the overarching goal: qualitative economic growth.

This constant appeal to unity did not only engulf the entire party but it was in the true spirit of vanguardism directed to the population as a whole. The list of duties for party members cited above continues by demanding that members must “strengthen the connection to the masses incessantly, they must educate them about the meaning of the policies and resolutions of the party; they must convince the masses that these policies and resolutions are correct and must persuade the masses to realize them; party members must learn from the masses” (Benser et al. 1986, 174). The potential audience for the members’ propagandistic efforts knew no limits (ZK 1972, 76): “Our agitation and propaganda should be comprehensible for everyone and reach everyone.”

It was not assumed that appropriate consciousness automatically translated into appropriate practice. Quite to the contrary, much emphasis was placed on “socialist ethics” as an important intermediary between correct knowledge and correct practice. Socialist ethics built on the postulation of an absolute good that was most frequently stated in reference to a paragraph in Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1962c):

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces

have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs (*jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen*)! (Marx/Engels, 1978)⁴³

The key elements of this passage found their way into the program of the SED, which closes its enumeration of what communism is with the last line of this paragraph. Every schoolchild in the GDR could recite it as the definitional slogan of what communism was supposed to achieve. Given this understanding of socialism's serene goal, that is communism, Ulbricht could argue in his famous outline of socialist morals at the Vth party congress of the SED (ZK 1959, 160): "Only those act morally and in a truly humane fashion who actively commit to pursue socialism's victory, that is the end of the exploitation of human beings by human beings."⁴⁴

Among the standard forms of moral philosophy, socialist ethics therefore belongs with utilitarianism in the class of consequentialist ethics deriving goodness from the effect of actions rather than from the quality of actions themselves (as, for example, in Kant's deontological ethics) or from notions of what it means to lead a good life (as, for example, in Aristotle's ethics of virtue). Yet the measuring rod for the goodness of an action's consequence was not Mill's question of whether it contributed to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but the question of whether the action helped to propel society forward in the direction of communism *as adjudicated by the party*. In this sense socialist ethics offer a more sophisticated variant of consequentialism than utilitarianism by virtue of its theoretization of hap-

43. Propaganda efforts have frequently maintained that socialism is not too far off and that every little deed in accordance with the decrees of the party contributes to its emergence. Thus, one of the most widely available textbooks of Marxism-Leninism (Kuusinen et al. 1960) states: "The birth of this new, highest social order will take place not too far away in the future. Thus the question: 'What is communism?' is of the utmost practical interest for millions of working people. They want to know and have to know what kind of society will emerge due to their efforts, due to their daily deeds big and small, heroic and mundane" (805).

44. Interestingly, the constitution of the GDR (politically a much less important document than the party program or the party statutes, as one can tell both from its relative citational relevance and its late promulgation) states in Article 2.3: "The exploitation of human beings by human beings is permanently eliminated. What is produced by people's hands is people's property. The socialist principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his *contribution*' is being realized." Note how the transformation from Marx's "communism" to the constitution's "socialism" corresponds to a change from Marx's formulation "given according to needs," to the constitution's "contributions" thus emphasizing achievement.

pininess as shaped by particular social constellations. And Marxism-Leninism in the interpretation of the ruling parties of Soviet Eastern Europe claimed to have positive knowledge about what happiness-producing social arrangements were. Since the party knew best what was to be done to move history faster into the inevitable *and* desired direction, everything that contributed to the realization of the party's latest decrees was deemed moral; everything hindering the realization of the party's intentions was deemed immoral. I will call this henceforth the *ethics of absolute finality*.

This ethics motivated the constant exhortations to be "partisan" (*parteilich*) or to show a "firm class standpoint" that together operated as two logically equivalent formulations of what might be called the socialist categorical imperative.⁴⁵ It "requires to approach all questions of social life from the perspective of the interests of the working class and its struggle for the introduction and strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the introduction of socialism and communism and the irreconcilable fight against the ideology and practice of imperialism" (Schütz et al. 1978, 679). In view of socialism's Manichaeic dualism, applying the perspective of "class standpoint" or "partisanship" was frequently recommended as test whether the socialist project would benefit from a particular action. Here is an example from a speech that the party secretary of the basic party organization in the department XX of the Ministry of State Security gave in April 1985:

To apply the right means, implies in our view always to ask the question: "What serves our socialist revolution, our state and our party?" Hasty and subjective evaluations which are detached from our policy will lead by necessity to mistakes and wrong decisions.

What the party therefore tried to accomplish is to persuade every citizen of the GDR, party members as much as nonmembers, to learn Marxism-Leninism and to draw from it the conclusion that a vanguard party was needed to guide them into the future of the exploitation-free and therefore just human society, an absolutely worthy good. It aspired to convince everyone that this implied that most everybody needed to learn how to realize the party's latest decrees, which alone vouched for a correct application of Marxism-Leninism to the current historical context. All citizens were asked to make the intentionality of the party their own in a movement clearly understood as a form of self-objectification, as an attunement of every single person to the absolute truth of the objective laws of history.

45. About the grounding of partisanship in the conception of a universal human reason, see below. In the next chapter I will show how the performance of partisanship was central to the party's self-cleansing ritual of "critique and self-critique."

Self-objectification was thought to lead to a transubstantiation of sorts: the making of the new human being. Persons who had achieved such alignment were approvingly known as *bewußt* (conscious), the state of their mind as one of *Bewußtheit* (Schütz et al. 1978, 122).⁴⁶ In effect, the party aspired to turn GDR society into a monolithic organism of social transformation built onto a monolithic intentionality devised by the party. If everybody was thus aligned, then socialism would successfully self-realize, and the movement to communism was as fast as it possibly could be.

The belief of the party in the absolute truth of Marxism-Leninism, if not in its letter than in its substance, goes a long way to explain why the party assumed that such an undertaking would eventually succeed. However, the truth of the theory itself is only the necessary condition for this to happen. What needed to be assumed as well is that every human being is endowed with a universal rationality that is able to recognize this truth once confronted with it. The Central Committee resolution on agitation and propaganda states, for example: “To the degree that human beings develop a comprehensive understanding of Marxism-Leninism, the more thoroughly they study the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Illitsch Lenin, the more firmly they will believe in the law of the decline of capitalism and the victory of socialism on a global scale.”

Thus, Marxism-Leninism as an objective truth was thought to resonate naturally with all working people because it spontaneously reconciled their individual and social interests. Freed from domination they would naturally come to know what was the objectively correct way to understand their situation (just as Kant’s human beings endowed with universal reason were compelled naturally to discover the truth of the categorical imperative in their own inner depths).

From the insight into its truth comes a particular understanding of freedom as nothing but the human capacity first to discover and then to submit voluntarily to the inevitable: the historical laws of the movement of history (Kuusinen et al. 1960, 130). True freedom is, as Honecker stated in the quotation above, the enthusiastic endorsement of necessity. The choice was to

46. There was a famous song in the GDR, promoted in the Stalin years with the title “The Party Is Always Right.” Here is my translation of some of its lyrics: “She [the party] has given us everything. / Sun and wind. And she never was stingy. / Wherever she was, was life. / Whatever we are, we are through her. / . . . / The party, / The party is always right! / . . . / And comrades that remains true; / . . . / Who defends humankind, / Is always right. / . . . / The party—the party—the party.” This song was sung in a wide variety of registers: ironically, sarcastically, and, romantically. The very point, however, is its existence as an officially promoted piece of propaganda. The song’s refrain kept being quoted again and again, approvingly, exasperatedly, disparagingly . . .

go rationally and morally with necessity (i.e., history) or to go foolishly and immorally against it. Consequently, people living up to their own rationality, to their own humanity, were assumed to adopt the ethics of absolute finality naturally. In this way, the bifurcation of reason since Aristotle into a capacity to distinguish between true and false as well as one to differentiate between right and wrong was thought to be overcome in socialism. Consequently, socialist epistemology and socialist ethics are but two sides of the same coin.

Creativity and critique

Within the interpretation of freedom as the reasonable choice of necessity, socialist ideology placed a very high emphasis on creativity and critique. Thus the statutes (Benser et al. 1986, 172) claim that “[the party] develops the activity and the creative initiative of all members and promotes universal critique and self-critique.” Clearly, coming up with the historically correct interpretation of Marxism-Leninism is a creative act, and so is the interpretation of the resolutions of the last party congress in view of very concrete problems of individual professions. What was demanded of participants in the socialist project was expressed in a handy, universally used formula as “creative application” (*schöpferische Anwendung*). Party members and citizens were thus likened to engineers using the general laws of science to make concrete machines and to solve concrete problems; they were seen as social engineers applying the general laws of social development to particular social circumstances. In this hierarchical arrangement, the ingenuity of the lower levels was subsidiary to that of higher levels; it could only pertain to things not yet decided or devised. What Marx did with regard to the objective laws of history, the party did in assessing their general applicability to a concrete historical problem, which in turn mirrors what every individual was supposed to do to the mundane problems of the everyday. Living under the auspices of monolithic intentionality was far from imagined as mindless order taking, but as a process of making ever more concrete choices resonating positively with more general determinations.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, given the modern cult of the genius, self-objectification was a necessary part in the arrangement. Dominic Boyer (2005, 118–59) portrays this engineering mentality in discussing the official professional norms for GDR journalists. He cites the GDR media theorist Hermann Budzislawski with the words: “The socialist journalist does not, as the bourgeois literatus does, consider

47. This is a nice example for the (quasi-)Hegelian character of the state socialist project. The imagination is that of a stepwise self-alienation of spirit, its becoming flesh in the decent from the abstract to the ever-more concrete.

it a degradation or an unbearable sacrifice of originality to follow the party line and to fulfill his especially complicated and singular functions as a ‘cog and screw’ of the unified party mechanism” (122).⁴⁸

Standing squarely in but also moving beyond the Kantian tradition, critique for Marx (1978, 143ff. and 147ff.) was a heroic movement from insight to action that has at least two parts. First, analysis needs to transcend a mere reflection of the facticity of the present into a thorough investigation of the conditions of its possibility. This is the very path Kant describes as thinking through the phenomena to the principles of their constitution. What is new for Marx is that genuine critique must then contain the seeds to conceive the world in different terms providing guidance for actions to alter the status quo in the direction of a better world. In socialist self-understandings, this fundamental critique was achieved by Marxism-Leninism, and it was embodied in the dialectical opposition of real-existing socialism to capitalism. Thus the critical job to be done was much more modest, both for the party as a whole and for the individual. The party still needed to reflect on the appropriate general means to realize the substance, the goals of Marxism-Leninism; for the individual members this could only be the critique of the specific means to support the general means devised by the party. The creative and critical labors of the individual stood in the same relation to those of the party, as those of the party as a whole to the historical truth of Marxism-Leninism. Anything moving beyond a critique of the means that oneself had the powers to devise, to best realize the goals designated at a higher level smacked of subjectivism and was heavily censored. In effect, then, everybody within this system, the very leadership of the party included, was imagined as a bureaucratic engineering subcontractor of history.

Linguistically, this found its expression in the universal use of a form I have elsewhere (2004, 260) called the “continuous positive.” The party, for example, undertook “ever greater efforts” in anything it did; people were asked to attain “an ever greater awareness” of Marxism-Leninism; positive target numbers “grew ever more,” negative ones became “ever lower.” Everybody in socialism needed the continuous positive in order to demonstrate that they were on target, that things progressed as planned. But what if things went wrong?

48. Alexei Yurchak describes this process for the Soviet Union with attention to voice: “This normalizing process followed the general principle of presenting all knowledge as knowledge that was already established. As a result, the temporality of authoritative discourse shifted into the past, conveying new facts in terms of preexisting facts. The author’s voice converted into the voice of a mediator of preexisting discourse rather than the creator of new discourse” (2006, 284).

Personalizing and externalizing failure: The socialist theodicy

Closely associated to ethics are issues of accounting for failure. Socialism has developed a highly characteristic form of explaining mishaps small and large, be it the allusive misspelling of a name in a newspaper, a botched operation in the secret police, or a major explosion in a factory. The central characteristics of socialist failure accounting are these: It brackets the very possibility of asking whether the failure was caused by the interplay of institutional arrangements if such a question would have touched anything that was considered central to socialist principles. It sheltered the system as a whole and its supposed institutional anchor and guarantor—the party—from any blame for failure. In the last instance, therefore, blame was placed either on the failure of a person or on enemy interference. De facto, these two operated as the default options in concrete failure investigations. The notion of “technical failure,” although used, was considered with suspicion, because it could be used to hide personal incompetence or to mask enemy interference. The category of “accident,” the “concatenation of unhappy circumstances,” was seen as residual.

Given that this form of failure accounting involves the defense of an absolute, it is properly addressed as a form of *theodicy*. It follows logically from a set of assumptions setting the general framework for socialism’s epistemic ideology. I have already explored them in their historical context. However it is worth summarizing them here, because taken together, they constitute socialism’s rationalistic core. They are: (1) The absolute truth of the *substance* of Marxism-Leninism as the only possible true social science corroborated by the movement of history in conjunction with the idea that as a science it allows for useful predictions of the future. (2) Central to this true theory of society is the insight that world history is an incessant history of warfare between a ruling class and a suppressed class, playing itself out now as the conflict between a western government and capitalist-led bourgeoisie and a global proletariat led by the CPSU and its brother parties. (3) The necessity of an internally unified vanguard party to reveal what the substance meant for the present historical circumstances, taking it upon itself to educate the masses about it. (4) The endowment of every human being with a universal rationality that would, if properly unshackled by the party, necessarily recognize the validity of the aforementioned assumptions. The party is the central linchpin in this setup. How central it is can be gleaned by what were considered to be the cardinal sins of socialist life. The list is clearly topped by what is called in German *die Machtfrage stellen*, or “posing the question of power.” Indeed! Said Erich Mielke (BArch, Dy 30/IV 2/2.039, leaf 4):

The question of power was, is and will remain the decisive question of a socialist revolution and of its perspectives in the GDR. The most important condition for the guarantee of state security is and will remain leadership through the party of the working class, is the unitary and closed action of all communists in a trusting relationship with the working people. Without our Marxist-Leninist party, without its prudent, scientifically justified and mass-related politics the security of the state is unthinkable.

With party and system thus placed beyond blame, failures needed to be attributed to other sources. The prevailing strategy was personalization. It could take two principle forms. The more benevolent version imagined failures to issue from personal incompetence, which could ultimately only be seen as failure to hear or properly understand the party line, thus allowing for local perversions of the party's good intentions. In this case the culprit merely needed to be (re-)educated. This was rarely seen as an issue of mere technical knowledge. Had the person in question exhibited a clear class standpoint, then he or she would have obtained the technical education needed. What was therefore often found wanting was "resolve." Accordingly, remedies included the possibility that the culprit needed to be placed into a social situation, a work collective, that would facilitate the proper understanding of the party's intentions. Thus, when people were "sent into production" for failures, this was not just the use of a cynical euphemism covering a sense of punishment through demotion, but it was meant as a pedagogical device based on the notion of a work collective as a network of authority naturally conveying the right kind of socialist mores. People thus reformed were typically reintegrated into higher-level work.

If, however, errant persons proved impervious to reeducation it was assumed that they were possessed by a consciousness inimical to socialism. Then, these persons were enemies who needed to be fought according to the logic of militant dialectics. Thus, the human ontology of GDR socialism dealt in three fundamental categories of people, distributing them over a continuum of orientations toward the socialist project as manifested in adherence to the current party line: believers (of varying degrees of perfection in self-objectification; also called "positive people"), people temporarily in limbo (those who might be swayed either way; also called "uncertain people"), and enemies (of different degrees of opposition; very often also referred to as "negative people"). Properly understood, therefore, ideological work consisted of two complementary enterprises: positive proselytization, this is what the GDR's vast propaganda machinery was made for, and the control of adversarial, thus inimical intentionality, and this is what a significant part of the comparatively speaking equally vast secret police apparatus

was designed to achieve. *No matter, however, whether failure was blamed on incomplete propaganda or the machinations of the enemy, it was almost always personalized and thus deflected from the system.* And anybody working within the system knew and feared this tendency to personalize blame. So one of the most important survival skills in this “vast post office” that was the GDR was to act like a good bureaucrat at all times, that is, to anticipate blame and act in such a way that one appeared blameless. For, of course, failures were as everywhere rampant.

An aporia of socialist identity

Taken together, the ethics of absolute finality and the socialist theodicy created a certain conundrum that can fruitfully be seen as an aporia of socialist identity.⁴⁹ On the one hand, socialism provided a powerful set of orientations. It furnished the means for human beings to endow their lives with a meaning that transcended the ups and downs of the everyday. The party promised a strong “we” that did not only present itself as a true collective subject with the ability to act politically in a major way, but it also presented that “we” as one dialogically constituted as a community of comrades bound together in a network of solidarity. Yet, the identification with the goal and the institution promising to pursue it also demanded of its members a saintly heroism in self-objectification that in cases of conflict could be tantamount to self-denial. The party placed demands on its members that were hard, if not impossible, to fulfill. In principle, all party members lapsed in light of the heroic ideal. Yet, the party was depicted as a fraternity of saints. Nevertheless, the identification with a sublime goal and membership in an equally sublime organization in pursuit of it, that also assures self-recognition as “not good enough” is not yet an aporia. What must come in addition is a further set of understandings or institutional arrangements making it hard to find a way out of this tension (e.g., by offering the institutional means to relax it through rituals of irony or atonement). Two understandings blocking the escape routes from this contradiction were important for dedicated communists (those who joined the party primarily for career reasons would not have experienced the contradiction in the first place). First, the party was successful in presenting itself as without alternatives; only *it* could achieve

49. This aporia is predicated entirely on a historically specific set of institutions especially on negatively resonating understandings and their ongoing validation. It is therefore not a property of socialism as an abstract idea, but of the institutional fabric that was East German and, more generally, actually existing socialism formed on the basis of the Soviet model. Only in this historical institutional sense is it meaningful to speak in this chapter and the following about aporias.

the desired goal. Besides the very concept of a unitary vanguard party, Germany's particular history was important. The failure of a split Weimar labor movement to prevent the establishment of a fascist dictatorship weighed heavily in support of any injunctions against a split and critiques that could be construed as divisive.⁵⁰ Second, self-objectification was never an achieved state, but an open process. Membership was contingent on it and thus in principle continuously subject to review. This became serious to the degree that others were willing to use apparent lapses in self-objectification as an asset in power struggles (including promotions). Therefore, committed party members felt the threat of exclusion acutely in cases where they found it difficult to support the party line without hesitation. After all, the stories of exclusion for error or deviation were a central component of party lore. So everybody knew that the promised dialogic "I"- "you" relationship among members could quickly become a monologic "they"- "I."

With no way out, committed members needed defenses against their aporetic identity. Four ideal-typical responses are relatively easily discernible in my interviews. The first consisted in "going into overdrive," as it were, by performing allegiance wherever one could in a rather ostentatious way, demanding the same of others. This way one appeared unforgiving with oneself while proving to be unforgiving with regard to the lapses of others. This response was allegorized in the figure of the "onehundredfiftypercent-er." As a trope it was not only part and parcel of the efforts of ordinary men and women to make sense of the extreme and often repulsive behavior of others, but also the defense of overdrive found widespread symbolic expression in the personality cult surrounding socialist leaders. Each and every single one of them needed to be depicted as a saintly socialist hero of self-objectification. After all, in terms of the ideology, the basis of their authority, the legitimacy of their rule lay in self-objectification. No wonder, then, did the party grandees doctor their biographies to match expectations; no wonder that people who knew the truth about what had happened were perceived as dangers to the carefully cultivated image.⁵¹ The more people cared about or were dependent on their *belonging* to the party (rather than just the pursuit of socialist goals), and the more they had to worry that their belonging might become endangered, the more they were probably drawn into ostentatious hyperperformance of self-objectification, including the possibility to tell on the lapses of others.

A second, also rather common, strategy was cynicism, often also referred

50. For the older generation this Weimar dilemma was still lived experience. For the younger ones, it was kept alive through continuous renarration.

51. In chapter 6, I will say more about the doctored biographies of late GDR leader Erich Honecker and Stasi chief Erich Mielke.

to as “careerism.” Its logic could be phrased in the following way: Since the project is bedeviled with contradictions and nobody tries to fix them in earnest it is obviously not designed to be taken seriously. The best one could do is to turn it into a game of advancement, playing with the crazy rules to one’s own benefit.⁵²

A third response consisted in fleeing into the relative security afforded by the association with powerful superiors, who could offer protection in cases where self-objectification was found wanting by others. In a manner typical of patron-client relations the price was a higher degree of commitment. Clearly, superiors too needed to create their own safety blanket by associating themselves with subordinates giving their best to get the job done well. This last strategy was in many ways the emotional basis for the particular form of socialist patronage that became institutionalized as “socialist cadre politics,” of which the nomenclatura-system was the corner piece.

Theoretically, at least, there was a fourth option: politics, that is, a concerted attempt to change the institutional fabric that created the aporia in the first place. That however, unless launched by a stably installed party leader, would have immediately incurred charges of factionalism and subjectivism, thus effectively undermining the effort. The alternative to that was the foundation of some clandestine circle in preparation for politics. And that was a route taken not infrequently, as especially Thomas Klein, Wilfriede Otto, and Peter Grieder have shown (1997).

Needless to say, none of these responses had to be pursued in an either/or fashion. They could be deployed strategically or enacted more or less unwittingly by one and the same person in different kinds of contexts. They could also occur simultaneously, or people could cycle through them. What is particularly interesting about these four characteristic responses to the socialist aporia of identity is that they describe a situation in which particular discursive understandings entail powerful emotive understandings that together in their interaction become constitutive for an institutional order.

CONCLUSIONS

I began this chapter with something of a paradox. While Marx’s theories have some, but in the end not much, room for a constructive consideration of ideology as a central component of processes of institution formation,

52. Intellectual critics of socialism have often written about socialism as if cynicism was the only possible response to it, often universalizing it to a characterization of the whole population. I cannot speak for other socialist countries, but for the GDR this is certainly a misleading perspective. Perhaps it would have become more prevalent if the fall of 1989 would have led to a reinstitution of orthodoxy.

the actually existing socialisms of Eastern Europe saw the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism as a policy instrument of ever-greater importance. I tried to show, by following the development of socialist thinking among the Bolsheviki and the SED, how socialism could plausibly be conceived as an intentional project. The warrant for this intentionality was seen in the scientific nature of Marxism-Leninism as the only true theory of human society in its historical development. The success of the movement, or better perhaps the very way in which it was celebrated internally in rituals and sacred texts, seemed to corroborate its guiding ideology. No doubt, for Marx this science was historical and in constant need of adjustment—and this is how Lenin's thrust for a revolution in feudal Russia and the revaluation of ideology could be justified. And yet, in the practice of actually existing socialisms, the historicity of that science was also understood as becoming determinate in the formulation of unquestionably true laws both for history in general and for a particular epoch: by Marx and Engels for theirs, by Lenin for his, and by the party for all subsequent times. In the pathos of science there was real continuity from Marx to the end of Soviet socialism in Eastern Europe. Notably, the imaginary underlying this science as a practice is not that of a Mertonian decentralized, self-correcting, internally competitive, and hierarchy-free undertaking (Merton 1979). Instead, it centered on the cult of a genial thinker whose charisma moved on to a genial party organizer and revolutionary, to become finally (through the supposed aberration of an arrogating dictator the conditions for whose possibility were never really explored) the trust of a party as a centrally organized bureaucracy. And it is precisely the pathos of truth connected to a highest good (the just society) as something clearly and unambiguously located in a center from where it could radiate for the greater benefit of all, it is the role of the party as the warden of this truth and its agent of dissemination that gave institutionalized socialism its religious whiff.

A more nominal similarity with Marx lies in the way in which the party came to know its current historical situation. Marx's two-pronged strategy of analyzing current events and discussing the oeuvres of his opponents became institutionalized in socialism as a self-differentiation from the enemy: the class enemy without and the defeatist or antirealist within the party. Yet, these techniques became ever more ritualistic and hollow. On the one hand, the class enemy was no longer really taken seriously as somebody with whose ideas one really had to engage. On the other hand, those party members engaging in the task of distilling the substance of Marxism-Leninism for the present were members after all, and therefore subject to party discipline and in need to perform self-objectification. Thus, people working on setting the *démarches* for adjustments of the party line had to adhere to the party line in the first place lest they endanger their own authority as interlocutors. The

result was that the originally militant dialectics of self-positioning became both less militant but also ever less dialectical.

Another continuity from Marx to the end of state socialism is the focus on production, as that which enables a better society, as that which holds the key to redemption from exploitation and alienation. Qualitative economic growth became the *Hauptaufgabe*, the main task from party congress to party congress. What was needed, then, were productivity gains, expected from (hard) science and laborer's motivation. The latter was supposed to make a quantum leap with the socialization of agriculture and industry. Now that workers knew they were toiling for themselves and for the community as whole, they were supposed to abstain from slowdowns and other techniques of manipulating the workflow on the shop floor. They were supposed to work better and harder. Yet, these expected gains did not materialize, at least not to the extent hoped for. An economic reform package introduced in the 1960s aiming at greater decentralized decision making and thus more flexibility and better performance incentives ran afoul of political resistance in Berlin and Moscow. Science, the other presumed source of productivity gains, had to wrestle with all the same problems that general production had to wrestle with: the flight of highly specialized personnel, an acute shortage of funds for necessary investments, supply difficulties, and the bureaucratic stalemate created by central party control. This science stood no chance in outcompeting capitalist science in raising productivity.

In the end, therefore, nothing came of the grand ambitions to overtake capitalist economies in terms of economic growth. In consequence, the corroboration of socialism's claim to superior economic prowess that would have ensued from such overtaking did not materialize. What remained under these circumstances as a means of politics was education. In this regard, the party's considerable experience with mass mobilization looked promising. It seemed to have worked once before in propelling feudal Russia into the industrial age, producing technology in select areas that could compete with the best capitalism produced.

In sum, then, for the GDR leadership, the struggle for socialism, the way to make it happen, was first and foremost a struggle for the intellectual and emotional identification of the people with the party and its project. The core of a successful politics was framed as a "struggle for the hearts and the minds of people." Precisely because it was built on a body of understandings taken to be validated scientifically, and precisely because that scientific body of understandings assumed a definite shape in the form of a party line through the good offices of a vanguard party enmeshed in a mortal battle, socialism's politics of education was from the very beginning staunchly monologic. Education became a didactic effort at proselytization. No matter how friendly or personally inspiring the interaction with rel-

evant party members could be, the basic mode of interaction between the party as an institution on the one hand and its individual members and the general population on the other juxtaposed an objectified party as a world-historical agent of history to individuals urged to self-objectify. In terms of the extended Bakhtin-Buberian concepts I have introduced in the last chapter (p. 35), this can be characterized as an objectifying they-me relationship. In the long run this had considerable consequences for the ways in which the general population perceived the party and even for the very morale of the party itself. As we shall see in chapter 7, the shame and anger that can be associated with monolocicity often planted the seed for paths into dissidence.

All of this does not mean that other forms of politics did not play a role. Under the name of “socialist competition” there was a politics of induction trying to tease the citizenry with incentives into the right kind of behavior. Yet material incentivization was always looked at with suspicion; it was not properly socialist—the privilege system for cadres notwithstanding—mushrooming out of control during the GDR’s last decade. Considering the fact that the party pursued an encompassing project of institutional transformation requiring the participation of wide strata of the population, it maneuvered into an aporetic situation with regard to the means of its politics. For some ideological reasons, its politics of induction by material incentives had to remain limited; for other ideological reasons, its politics of education was caught up in a monolocicity whose demotivating consequences the party leadership had to wrestle with but could not understand given Marxist-Leninist doctrine about the nature of human beings.

For the failures of this struggle for the hearts and minds of the people, the party had to have a security apparatus able to neutralize inimical interference in what appeared to the committed participants as the grandest project humankind had ever undertaken. Here, then, was a role for a politics of disablement and projective disarticulation. But that too was considered an unfortunate aspect of class warfare, not the center of what real socialist politics was about. How the socialist state tried to create a monolithic intentionality in the interaction between a positive proselytization and negative politics of disarticulation and disablement is the topic of the next chapter.