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Aporias of Producing Right Consciousness

The sovereignty of the working people realized on the basis of democratic centralism is the constitutive principle of the state's structure.

CONSTITUTION OF THE GDR, ARTICLE 48.2

It was one thing to know in theory that a monolithic intentionality, the unity and the purity of the party (and ideally of the whole population), was the best way to move socialism forward on its inevitable path to communism. It was quite another to actually make it happen. Seen from the perspective of the sociology of understanding, the party needed to control as much of the play of validation as possible to help actualize those understandings it saw as favorable to socialism and to extinguish those it saw as a hindrance. What was needed first of all, therefore, was a form of organization that would allow the party to centrally control as much of the institutional fabric of GDR society as possible. This, after all, was what it deemed “the leading role of the party” to mean: the creation of a political organization efficient in devising and projectively articulating its politics. Accordingly, the first major section of this chapter is dedicated to a brief description of the organizational principles understood by the party as assuring central control, the principles of democratic centralism and central planning. Socialist consciousness, the Marxist-Leninist way of differentiating and integrating the world, also needed to be produced substantively. As briefly outlined in the second major section of this chapter, the vast propaganda apparatus of the party conducted a politics of education. Since the party assumed that the class enemy would aim at interfering with this task, the smooth operation of the propaganda apparatus needed to be safeguarded against “sabotage” and the “soddening” influence of the class-enemies’ attempts to interfere in the party’s project. To this purpose the party state employed a politics of disablement and disarticulation, trying to prevent the GDR’s populations from having access to certain ideas or people. More, propaganda could not be expected to do its work among “hardened enemies of socialism.” The

security apparatus of the GDR, with the Stasi as its central agency, was supposed to take care of this problem. Thus, the final section of this chapter is dedicated to the Stasi and the ways in which it figured into the party's project of creating a monolithic intentionality.

ORGANIZING CENTRAL CONTROL

The two organizational principles that were supposed to guarantee the party's central control were the principle of democratic centralism and the principle of comprehensive central planning. Closely connected to both was the personnel policy of the party (*Kaderpolitik*), of which the so-called nomenclatural system was a central piece.

Democratic Centralism

Following the lead of the CPSU, the SED was organized according to the principle of democratic centralism:

This principle means that all bodies of the party are elected bottom up . . . [and] that all decisions of the higher party bodies are binding for the lower ones, that tight party discipline is enforced and that minorities and individuals have to submit to the majority in a disciplined fashion. (Benser and Naumann 1986, 184)

In effect, democratic centralism allowed higher bodies to replenish their ranks according to their own liking by proposing candidates for elections to the lower bodies without alternatives. Although the lower bodies nominally had the right to nominate candidates and to have a discussion about the merits of alternative candidates, competition was never the rule, and was virtually unheard of by the end. This was even the case for the central committee, which, as the electoral body of the politburo, nominally maintained quite some power. Democratic centralism thus fostered a peculiar socialist form of institutionalized clientelism in which those higher up actively groomed younger hopefuls for active careers. These were formally assembled in "cadre reserves," which in the case of the central committee and the politburo were also called "candidates."

Elections were in this regard barely different from the practice of staffing the nomenclature, that is, lists of positions that could only be filled with the direct approval of a particular level of party (cf. Eyal 2003; Voslensky 1984; Djilas 1983). Elections were therefore an integral part of socialist "cadre work," which placed the utmost importance on placing persons loyal to the leadership in responsible positions. Cadre politics was clearly understood as a linchpin of realizing monolithic intentionality. The direct

link between objectives of the party and personnel can be gleaned from the introduction to a textbook on cadre work (Herber and Jung 1968, 9):

The VIIth party congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany posed the task. . . . Under these conditions the exact scientific steering of all social processes, especially those of the economic and scientific-technological development become ever more significant; what is more, such steering becomes an unavoidable necessity in the realization of the objective laws of socialism. A main ingredient of the scientific guidance of society is the *planned development of cadres*. The success of every work depends on the right choice, the right technical and political-ideological education . . . of the cadres. (My emphasis)

There are a number of rather noteworthy elements in this passage. In keeping with the main argument of part I of the book, it states bluntly that the “objective laws of socialism” need to be realized as consciousness-driven processes. One is almost tempted to believe that the tension inherent in this formulation was at least subliminally available to the authors as they took recourse to another revealing pleonastic hyperbole, this time built from the synonymous conjunction of the adjective *unavoidable* (*unumgänglich*) and the noun *necessity*. Monolithic intentionality is reflected in the desire to steer “all” social processes under the guidance of the latest pronouncements of the party, here the VIIth party congress, and in proclaiming the particular topic of the book, cadre work, to be an essential element in its realization.¹

The idea of central control also dominated the administrative restructuring of the GDR. Through the 1952 “law for the further democratization of the structures and procedures of state institutions,” which was a direct response to the declaration of the “construction of socialism” earlier the same year, the more traditional *Länder* (states) were effectively replaced by fifteen administrative districts. With the exception of East Berlin, their boundaries were drawn with the exigencies of rational planning in mind. Consequently, they mapped only poorly onto older cultural, linguistic, religious, and political divisions of GDR territory. This effect was, if not intended, then certainly not unwelcome. It signified a fresh, socialist beginning seemingly unencumbered by custom and history. The districts were further subdivided into 227 counties, which in turn were made up of more than 7,000 communities.² In principle, the autonomy of the lower levels was severely curtailed, and

1. The title (*Personnel Administration in the System of Socialist Control Operations*) and language of the book also cannot help but betray its origin in the late Ulbricht years, when systems theory swept through the GDR.
2. The main administrative subdivisions of East Berlin, also called districts, were administratively treated like counties in the rest of the country.

they had to follow the directives of the higher ones (Hoeck 2003). The large state bureaucracies (including the Stasi) followed these segmentary subdivisions into territorial jurisdictions. They typically maintained national ministries as well as district county offices.

The organization of the party mirrored this structure. This was true not only for the segmentary organization of territory, but the party's internal organization into departments also roughly shadowed state administrative offices. The organizational structures of the ministries, for example, found their counterpart in the structure of the central committee, and so in principle on all subsequent levels. It is justified, therefore, to speak of a system of parallel structures (hence "party state"), if one bears in mind that there was also a clear hierarchy in operation that subordinated state administration to party bureaucracy. This hierarchy was further emphasized by the fact that all higher-ranking state officials were party members and thus subject to party discipline. The origins of this parallel structure lie undoubtedly in the understanding of revolution as a process of seizing the state as well as in the need, particularly in the years immediately following the introduction of communist rule (in the GDR as much as in the Soviet Union), to rely on the expertise of nonparty members. At the beginning this was simply done by strategically placing party representatives into administrative units. In the Western lore about socialism this became notorious as the "commissar system" of the Red Army, where every commander was shadowed by a political officer. Interestingly, the parallel structure was never abandoned, even when the seizure of the state was for all practical purposes completed in the sense that all central state positions were finally staffed by the party. And this was so in spite of the all too apparent inefficiencies of this system and the conflicts and ambiguities of responsibility it created. One cannot even say that the rationale was continuing control, as the important decision-making powers had effectively been transferred to the party bureaucracy that continued to control the state, but itself remained without external control. Consequently, the party became *fons et origo* of the system. This exalted status is underlined by the fact that even for the Stasi, investigating the party apparatus was taboo.

This said, the Stasi itself was a notable exception to this parallel system too. Even though the central committee apparatus had an office nominally responsible for the Stasi, the direct interference of the party bureaucracy into Stasi affairs was virtually unknown in the late GDR. The reason for this exception was probably that the party's first secretaries found in Erich Mielke a loyal Stasi chief who under Honecker did not only advance to become a politburo member, but also became one of his two closest confidants. The Stasi, like the party, controlled itself, for the party apparatus within the Stasi was ultimately responsible to the minister. This structure might have allowed

the Stasi to become a state within the state. This did not happen, however, not least because Stasi officers, the minister included, were for the most part committed party members thriving in their work to realize and being held internally accountable for self-objectification vis-à-vis the party line.

Central Planning

The crux of central planning is the coordination of production and consumption across all interconnected sectors. This does not only involve the flow of goods or the provision of particular kinds of services, however. It must also involve the provisioning of personnel, its education, investments, and research. Because of the considerable duration of many projects, such as carrying out a research program, bringing an investment to fruition, or educating a workforce, planning cannot limit itself to a short-term temporal horizon. It must proceed within a time frame extended enough to calculate through the maturity horizons of at least the most important inputs. This is an exceedingly complex task not only because there are as many loose ends as there are producers, consumers, products, inputs and services, which need to be tied together into a knot that holds. It is complex because imponderables may exert pressures that threaten to untie the knot through ripple effects, straining several strings at once (Kornai 1992, ch. 7, 8).³ More, the difficulty multiplies with the increasing differentiation of an economy because every new product requires a multiplicity of relations that need to be managed.

János Kornai (1980) has beautifully shown that precisely because of its complexities, because of its cascading levels of interdependencies, this system is only poorly understood as a *command economy*, the term that was often used as a synonym for *planned economy* in the Western comparative systems literature (see also Burawoy and Lukács 1992). The point is that requiring the cooperation of the next lower level, plans need to be negotiated. And within this process of cascading negotiation, every player has an incentive to ask more than she needs and to promise less than she could give. The rationale behind this institutionalized hoarding is not so much greed or ill will, but insurance against an uncertain future. At the end of the year, performance will be measured against the plan targets and recognition is granted for the fulfillment or overfulfillment of targets. More, since as I pointed out in the last chapter, socialism operated under the spell of the continuous positive, managers had to make sure that they could deliver on its terms, which means every year a little more. Small but steady increases

3. This threat of contingencies was nicely expressed by a proverbial joke: Socialism has four enemies: spring, summer, fall, and winter!

were better for career development than a whooping success, which, by raising expectations for more, could only be followed by disappointment. The general problem of hoarding resources was aggravated by what Kornai calls “soft budget constraints,” that is, the fact that by and large production units could not go bankrupt. Again this had much to do with the fact that higher levels needed the collaboration of lower levels to appear successful (cf. Burawoy and Lukács 1992). The result of all of this is, as Kornai has convincingly argued, an “economy of shortage” in which especially more complex, more difficult to produce goods are constantly in short supply (cf. Verdery 1996).

Knowing about the precariousness of central planning is not only important because propaganda and secret police work was planned on the basis of the same principles as the economy, leading to the same hoarding of resources, the same demands for ever more people. The issue is much rather that, as I pointed out in the last chapter, socialism staked itself out on its economic success. In other words, the meta-understandings cultivated through the ideology of Marxism-Leninism were such that a well-functioning economy would have provided corroborating evidence for the viability and long-term success of the socialist project. Conversely, supply problems notoriously reflected back on the party and its project of creating a monolithic intentionality. Of course, the party was well aware of this. And so it tried very hard to market the socialist economy as a success story, emphasizing continuing full employment, the low prices of basic necessities such as bread, and the provision of low-rent apartments. With the succession of Erich Honecker to Walter Ulbricht as general secretary, the party also embarked on major efforts to improve the supply of highly desired consumer goods, such as jeans or television sets, to provide more tangible corroborations of economic prowess (e.g., Steiner 2004, 187ff.).

Trying to address some of the notorious problems of central planning⁴ in the aftermath of the growth crisis of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the GDR began to work on an economic reform program known as the New Economic System of Planning and Steering (NÖSPL) (Mittag 1963). Its implementation began in 1964. The idea of the program was to improve the overall efficiency and to enhance the innovative capacity of the economic system by shifting to profits (rather than output) as the target variable, by cutting subventions, by giving greater planning authority to subordinate levels to increase their flexibility. To make this possible, the price-setting mechanisms had to become more flexible (Brus 2003, chap. 3). During the first years of

4. One example frequently cited was the so-called tonnage ideology, the fact that output was measured by weight rather than the quality of goods. Thus a perverse incentive was set to produce weight rather than a particular set of qualities, in particular, quantitative proportions.

the program, growth accelerated markedly. Nevertheless, Ulbricht began to withdraw the NÖSPL almost as fast as it was introduced. The reasons cited were: remaining difficulties in managing a disparate, maladjusted system (certain suppliers began to exploit their monopoly situation and the price flexibility to drive considerable profit margins); trade interdependencies with the other centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe, and especially the Soviet Union; as well as beginning signs of social dissatisfaction due to rising inequalities on the shop floor and potential price hikes in basic necessities (Steiner 1999; 2004). NÖSPL was already cut back in 1965, and scrapped for good in 1971. Critique came also from the perspective of what socialism was supposed to accomplish. With its more marketlike elements, the system felt like a step backward, that is, it felt too much like the Soviet Union's infamous NEP, like a retreat from the real goal of establishing a genuine socialist economy. Moreover, with the augmentation of decentralized decision making, the new system deprived the party of the possibilities to intervene directly, which was perceived as a marked decrease of its power and thus ultimately of its ability to play the "leading role" it assumed it needed to carry the "fruits of the revolution" forward on the path of a more developed socialism, not a socialism patched up with structural elements borrowed from capitalism (Steiner 2004, 132).

In this inability to carry through a reform of the underperforming economic system comes to the fore one of the ironies of intentionality of which socialism was so rich precisely because it was such a thoroughly intentional program of transformation. Perhaps one could even speak of an outright *aporia* of politics here. In order to avoid confusions, a clarifying remark about what I mean with the term *aporia* seems in place. If what I said in the introduction about processes of institution formation as concatenated flows of repeated action-reaction effects is correct, then politics as an intentional effort to form institutions is always in danger to become aporetic. This is so because institutions cannot simply be willed or intended; they need the active participation of others, and that might have to be negotiated rather than decreed. Therefore, wherever the goals or the means of politics are in dispute among those whose participation is important, less focused intentionally may indeed offer political advantages. Yet, this success comes at the price of becoming less fixated on the attainment of any *particular* goal. In other words, the understanding of history as an inevitably open process helps to decrease the likelihood of aporetic situations. With different self-understandings of politicians at play in various institutional settings, therefore, politics may be more or less aporetic. With changing institutional contexts, *aporias* can take different forms at different times and places.

The central planning induced process dynamics that entailed economies

of shortage in conjunction with the party's understanding that its vanguard role necessitated extensive central planning caught the party in an aporia of politics, the *aporia of central planning*. The "steadfast" insistence on socialism as a set of definite (rather than flexible) principles has ultimately contributed to its weakening by depriving it of possible corroboration in action. Thus, the desire for control, the insistence on doing something in a preconceived particular way, has led to a distraction from the very goal that was supposed to be accomplished by that "steadfast" insistence: the enduring institutionalization of socialism. But again, and this was the source of the anxiety: in order to have socialism it might have had to be different. The catch was precisely that socialism could not be conceived as something that can take a wider variety of forms and therefore might also be an object of negotiation. Of course, the very idea of socialist principles as result of science renders the suggestion to open them to negotiation mute.⁵

I have so far based my reasons why central planning proved to be aporetic in GDR socialism on Kornai's conceptualization of economies of shortage. However, Kornai's model is ultimately based on the logic of a utilitarian calculus that is underpinning most of liberal economics. That assumption sidesteps the very question of how this calculus has taken root in practice by insisting that it is not based on historically contingent ways of ordering the world but on transhistorical, hardwired brain processes. Of course, if I believed that this were true, I would not have written this book. The question that poses itself, therefore, is why socialist managers, most of which were (the cynics apart) dedicated to the socialist project, were driven institutionally to follow through on what they very well understood as perverse incentives, acting as if they were utilitarians.⁶ Put differently, why could these managers not simply have pointed to the madness of the system in which they found themselves, leading to analysis, discussion, and perhaps a successively improving reform? Or put in Hirschman's famous (1970) "exit, voice or loyalty" triad, which has been made much use of in analyzing the fate of socialism, the question is why did the managers opt for "loyalty" in the sense of playing within the stricture of the institutional framework provided rather than for "voice," that is, protest. One could also ask, why did the managers opt for a

5. In due time, when the archives of the Communist Party of China will be opened, it will be one of the most fascinating questions to ask: how it managed to get out of the aporia of planning. Clearly this was a gradual process. Did it learn to give up power in order to maintain it? Or did it fool itself about the possibilities of control? Or was the market never as negatively cathected as it was for the Europeans?

6. Martha Lampland (1995) has followed up on a related puzzle in Hungary, namely, the question how, ironically, through the interventions of socialism, the rural population developed an individualistic, indeed utilitarian mentality.

withdrawal from a politics of reform and for the exercise of a politics maintaining existing institutions. What we need to understand, then, is how they were led into a de facto fetishization of these institutions.⁷

In the last chapter I provided important ingredients for an answer to why insights were hard to develop into veritable reform proposals and why reforms were difficult to enact, that is, why in the end there was an *aporia* of central planning. These elements all had to do with the party's self-understanding, its vanguard role in pursuit of an absolute good, backed by a presumably true science, requiring the production of a monolithic intentionality that in turn went hand in hand with an ethics of absolute finality according to which managers had to self-objectify in accordance with the party line (or "paint socialism" as Burawoy and Lukács [1992, chap. 5] say). I will contribute further elements to an answer in the remainder of this chapter by revealing other components of a more comprehensive answer by pointing to two other political aporias, the *aporia of proselytization* and the *aporia of prohibition*. Further important contributions are the three ways in which the dialectical formation of understandings can degenerate into circularity, thus decoupling knowledge and world in the conclusions to chapter 4. I will show all of this in action in the third part of chapter 6, where I will analyze the discursive culture of the Stasi, which I take to be rather characteristic for the GDR as a whole, after extensive readings about work in other GDR organizational settings from the ZK to the planning bureaucracy to county-level party administrations.

PROPAGANDA

The party tried to use every contact as a potential vehicle to convince people of the truth and worth of its mission. Within the logic of monolithic intentionality, failing to engage in this politics of education would not only have undercut the potential of socialism, but it would also have been unethical. In a rather direct sense, then, the party, the state, the entire educational sector (from day care centers to the academy of sciences), all forms of mass communication (from print news media and book publishing to radio and

7. On a more theoretical level this means if we want to explain systems failure, it is not enough to point to incentive structures producing destructive unintended consequences. What has to be explained is why people within the system either cannot form an adequate understanding about it that might enable them to intervene, or where these understandings exist in at least rudimentary form, why they cannot be further developed and enacted in attempts at reform. Speaking of political aporias must imply an attempt to account for why a particular institutional arrangement looked from within as if it could not be altered in a more desirable direction, which is tantamount to asking why a program of reformist politics seemed unlikely.

television), and all events staged under the auspices of the party, its mass organizations, or the state were used as propaganda channels. These were monopolized by the state in an effort to enable its politics of education through a politics of articulation. Given that the party tried with significant success to control as tightly as possible all forms of human organization beyond the immediate family and the two legalized churches, this means that there was almost no environment in the GDR that was not penetrated by—and with the exception of intimate private spaces and the churches—in many cases even saturated with propaganda.

Propaganda reached citizens in the GDR through three main channels: as formal instruction in Marxism-Leninism, in the context of propaganda events, or through the mass media. Since formal instruction and the mass media were in an important sense subsidiary to major propaganda events, I will begin with a very brief overview over logic and types of propaganda events. Taken together, they provided the basic beat of the socialist calendar, lending temporal structure to public life in the GDR. All propaganda events can be analyzed as entwining two dimensions: discourse and participation. With socialism's characteristic emphasis on the former, participation was designed to support the messages with a social, emotively saturated context of reception. These contexts were hoped to validate the message through multiple, mutually amplifying recognition. Accordingly, propaganda handbooks (e.g., Wischnjakow et al. 1974) make much out of the importance of proper, meaning above all *social* reception. A brochure instructing party officers in the art of propaganda (BL Suhl 1976, 19) states for example: "The collective discussion and analysis of all resolutions is absolutely necessary to prevent subjectivist interpretations." Social reception was, therefore, hoped to facilitate self-objectification, the self-alignment with monolithic intentionality. The reception of the party's main messages within a community was also meant to help with another problem. The directives of the party were by necessity somewhat abstract. It was, for example, not immediately clear what the "fulfillment of the main task" (*Erfüllung der Hauptaufgabe*), propagated at the latest party congress, should mean concretely for the work of high school teachers, machine tool factory workers, or secret police officers. More, the propaganda training literature emphasized that the concrete realization of what has been abstractly put in the dry pedagogical style of party language would come alive in concrete application, thus furthering motivation, memory, and acceptance.

There was yet another reason why participation was thought to be very important. It was hoped that it would, in addition to the pathos of speech, help to undergird the acquisition of discursive understandings with strong emotive ones. Says the "Little Political Dictionary" (*Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch*) (Schütz et al. 1978):

The unity of thought and feeling is of great importance for the development and consolidation of socialist consciousness. Socialist formation and education is not just about the transmission of knowledge and convictions, but it is necessary as well to form and educate feelings consciously, to bring the world of feelings in congruence with thought and to provide an emotional base for theoretical knowledge.

In practice, therefore, discourse and participation were mixed, albeit in various proportions. This created on the one end of a spectrum events emphasizing complex messages with references to the classics, to party documents, to history, statistics, and world politics, which could only be effectively recognized within relatively restricted immediate participation. Since the decoding of text in these events demanded much more stringent attention, the audiences selected for participation in such events were typically constituted by particularly engaged party members; it was discourse by believers in the center of power for believers living further out toward the periphery. The news about such events was the entextualized discourse that acquired authority if not sanctity through its performance in particular party contexts and by deploying references to other sacred texts of socialism. On the other end of the spectrum were events aiming at mass participation either by directly including a very large number of people or by using still large numbers of category representatives. In this spirit, delegates of the Free German Youth (FDJ) were taken for example *pari passu* as “the youth of the GDR.”⁸ Mass participation was facilitated by less stringent demands on attention by reducing discourse to simple slogans dedicating the participants to a general identification with state, party, or socialism (e.g., “everything for our socialist fatherland”) or to the pursuit of some goal proclaimed as that of the party (e.g., “in closed ranks for world peace”). Participatory events aimed at bandwagon effects in normalizing desired identifications, ideally triggering veritable Durkheimian effervescence with lasting motivational effects. The newsworthiness of participatory events was always just that: participation counted and/or enumerated, taken as identification with the party state and its goals. Since participation and performance were closely choreographed, they were taken to confirm what they were supposed to produce: identification and policy approval (more on this in the conclusions).

8. The proportion of any cohort organized in the two age-differentiated communist youth movements, the Pioneers (from 6 to 14) and the Free German Youth (FDJ) (from 14 to 25), was very high. In 1981–82, 86.6 percent of all relevant cohort members were Pioneers and 77.2 percent were members of the FDJ (Herbst, Ranke, and Winkler 1994, I:293).

Discursive Events

The foundational rhythm of life in the GDR was created by the party congresses of the SED, which took place every four (later every five) years. They were the discourse event par excellence, bringing together in Berlin elected party delegates, the party leadership, and guest delegations from the worldwide fraternity of socialist parties. Their highlight was the report of the central committee (ZK) to the assembly. These were read by the general secretary from a carefully prepared manuscript that usually took the better part of a day to deliver. In print these reports could swell to over 200 book pages. These reports served a Janus-headed purpose. First, stock was taken of and credit taken for the accomplishments of the previous five years. Palpable successes were attributed to the foresight and hard labor of the party and its members since the previous gathering. Then the horizon for the next five years was mapped out to motivate and direct members to participate actively in the making of history.⁹

In spite of the restricted audience, and in spite of their dry manner, the reports of the central committee were very widely disseminated. They were the constitutional document for the next half-decade. Radio and television covered them live; *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany), the party's flagship newspaper, published them the next day. They were commemorated as the primary reference points not only for all subsequent party documents, speeches, and resolutions, but also for any bureaucratic dossiers (such as planning documents), newspaper articles, and even university theses. In keeping with the logic of monolithic intentionality, the reference to the party congresses ranked above the reference to the classics or to the state's laws and regulations as the most important vehicle of authorization in the political life of the GDR.

Another important discourse event rhythm was struck by the semi-annual meetings of the central committee. It addressed more specialized

9. Imagine the scene. A large hall, one used for sporting events first (*Werner Seelenbinder Halle*), then one used otherwise mostly for concerts (the great hall of the *Palace of the Republic*). On the audience side of this hall: a few thousand delegates from all over the country as well as foreign guest delegations. On the stage side: the political leadership and in its midst the general secretary, as well as guests of honor. Long, standing ovations as the general secretary appears at the podium. He then delivers the report, a full seven, eight hours long, read from a finely balanced manuscript. Only a lunch break interrupts the speech. Neither Walter Ulbricht nor Erich Honecker were known as captivating orators or, for that matter, as good readers, or in any other way as charismatic performers. The language in which they spoke was thoroughly suffused with party jargon and would not have moved anyone who was not already a committed socialist. At the end there were again long minutes of standing ovations, and a sense among the delegates from far and near that they have witnessed the making of history.

topics than the party congress and provided interim reports or nuanced corrections of the party line.¹⁰ These ZK reports also took center stage in the everyday life of the party, where they were the objects of stringently organized discussions in party groups. To these meetings members had to appear with a copy of the document clipped from *Neues Deutschland* that visibly bore the marks of their loving labor and attention (underlinings, margin comments, etc.). The party officers orchestrating these discussions were supplied with study material and argumentative aids to steer the acquisition of the text into the desired direction. Later, relevant sections of these ZK reports were regurgitated, for example, during the mandatory “party study circles” (*Parteilehrjahr*) or any kind of formal training in which the subject of Marxism-Leninism was an integral part.¹¹

The shortest beat was supplied by the weekly politburo meetings (every Tuesday morning). Although its resolutions were of central importance for the governance of the country, they were typically too technical and too specialized to be of any direct value as texts for propaganda purposes. However, on certain occasions the politburo issued such documents. Speeches of the general secretary on any possible occasion, but most notably those held at his annual meetings with the district and county secretaries, were distributed and referenced widely. Finally, there were conferences of party delegates at the district and county levels; their first secretaries also delivered reports and speeches that were regionally covered and discussed. The same is true for the mass organizations of the country. In sum there was a veritable cascade of discourse events, rolling down the slopes of time, issuing from one principle source, the report of the general secretary to the most recent party congress.

Participatory Events

The most significant participatory events tried to mobilize the entire population of the GDR. On a four-year cycle these were the national and the nation-

10. Compare here, for example, the initiation of a “freeze period” in cultural policy by the notorious 11th plenum (compare chapter 1, p. 93).

11. For example, the high-level study circle of the FDJ addressing party members, and students with “philosophical questions,” held in 1986–87 (FDJ 1986), was dedicated to the regurgitation of the results of the party congress, organizing the acquisition of the material under six themes. The first one was: “Marxism-Leninism—reliable compass in the class battles of our time,” which was then organized into “key areas” (*Schwerpunkte*); the first one was: “Every generation has to acquire Marxism-Leninism under new concrete-historical circumstances.” Underneath these headings the study guide is organized like an extended catechism, asking questions and giving answers. For example: “What characterizes the new stage in social development?” is then followed by a list of “arguments” with references to the report of the ZK and cross-references to the classics.

ally synchronized communal elections. Participation was quasi-mandatory and monitored. Party members fanned out in the afternoon to motivate those who had not yet cast their vote. On an annual cycle these were the May Day parades and the celebrations on the occasion of the Day of the Republic (October 7). Although less strictly enforceable, there, too, participation was quasi-mandatory and monitored through the mass organizations or the employers who typically participated in closed formation.¹² The national meetings of the mass organizations, were most notably the Pentecost meetings of the communist youth organization, FDJ, and the congresses of the Free German Trade Union (FDGB), both of which took place every five years.¹³ In addition, larger socialist organizations (state bureaucracies, combines, even mass organizations, etc.) celebrated the day of their statutory “foundation” as a “birthday.” On this occasion they were officially honored by others through visiting delegations of the party, while members were involved in special events in which some were given awards, the contributions to the goals of the party were celebrated, and so forth. Stasi’s “birthday” was on February 8, 1950, when the Division for the Protection of the Economy was taken out of the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior to form the new Ministry for State Security. Finally, the socialist calendar was studded with days functioning like the beads of a rosary to commemorate particular historical events (e.g., October Revolution, Luxemburg-Liebkecht murder, liberation from Nazi-rule), people (e.g., the birthdays of Marx or Lenin), or categories of people (e.g., women, teachers). They did not give rise to mass participation events but they were referenced in the news, school instruction, and the like.

General Education

Propaganda was also part and parcel of any kind of formal education. In the higher grades of high school, Marxism-Leninism was a regular school subject under the name of “civic education” (Staatsbürgerkunde). At the university “M-L” was a discipline in its own right that supplied the party with its theoreticians, the elite of which was lodged at the Institute for Marxism-Leninism affiliated with the ZK and the Academy of Sciences.

12. Individuals had to decide with which organization they would march: their employer or one of the socialist mass organizations arranging their leisure activities, for example, the Society for Sports and Technology or the Society for German-Soviet Friendship.

13. These meetings of the mass organizations combined the characteristics of discourse and participation events in more equal terms. Their heads typically held speeches that became reference points for these organizations’ internal propaganda. Yet they also provided ample space for torchlight processions and friendly get-togethers.

Lesser practitioners not only became teachers within the system of part- and full-time party schools that functionaries had to attend as they were advancing through the ranks, but they also supplied the country as a whole with certified interpreters of current party documents and classic texts. Demand for such teachers was high since Marxism-Leninism was in one form or another part and parcel of any formal training in the GDR, mandatory for police officers as much as for doctors, for engineers as much as for lab assistants.¹⁴ Training in M-L had particular significance for teachers of anything, since no matter what they taught, they were considered propagandists who were asked to consider carefully how their work could contribute to the fulfillment of the *Hauptaufgabe*. Thus, they designed problem sets with socialist content: the rule of three was practiced on Pioneer budget problems or on some military example, and such. In the GDR as anywhere else in the world, the current mode of governance was normalized with the help of the school curriculum. What was different is that in the GDR, this was done with a high degree of self-consciousness, highly centrally organized and with a specific goal in mind, and with an enormous attention to detail.¹⁵

FIGHTING THE WRONG KIND OF CONSCIOUSNESS

By its very own understandings of the world, socialism had to begin under threat and with conflict. Wherever it wanted to be, there was something else before, against which it had to develop itself and which it needed to overcome through revolutionary transformation. The proponents of the old order were expected to resist change with all possible means. Moreover, wherever socialism established itself, it had to face a vast majority of people who had grown up and lived in a different social system that had presumably shaped their consciousness. Against this old consciousness the party had to deploy its proselytizing efforts. It could not be assumed that the transformation was painless. Thus, Ulbricht said at the Vth party congress (ZK 1959, 1:150):

14. Nonmembers and members who were tiring of the relentless regurgitation of the same messages in these training sessions dubbed them “red light therapy” after a treatment method that is common all over Germany as a cure for the common cold, sinus and ear infections, etc.

15. It would be immensely useful to have figures about the relative development of propaganda expenses in the course of East Germany’s history. Unfortunately, there are no such figures. The problem for such an undertaking is that propaganda was so all-pervasive that it is hard to compile reliable figures, for example, on the basis of published government budgets. It would be hard to tease out that segment of the budget for schools, the mass media, or socialist mass organizations that was used exclusively for propaganda as opposed to other purposes. The circumstantial evidence provided by the party’s agitprop officers I interviewed suggests that propaganda expenses increased steadily.

However, among the various parts of the population the development of socialist consciousness does not proceed in a balanced and conflict free way. Instead, [it can succeed] only by participation in building socialism and in the conscious working through of the passé ideas and understandings of the capitalist past.

In terms of the consciousness-driven model of social transformation, the persistence of old ways of thinking and doing, even if it pertained only to certain parts of the population, posed a threat to progress:

The leftovers of the old in consciousness are not as innocuous as they may seem at first. Those who are still endowed with it typically do not show the right kind of attitude to work as well as to their duty to work for the greater benefit of society. . . . These leftovers as well as religious ideology and morals disturb our efforts to create a healthy way of life and a healthy mentality. (Wischnjakow et al. 1974)

In terms of the theoretical model I sketched in the introduction this means that resonance is seen as a problem that needed to be addressed aggressively. Since the reconstruction of consciousness through structural changes and propaganda would take time and was expected to proceed unequally, a particular problem emerged: what to do with those whose development did not keep pace, or those who even refused themselves?

Critique and Self-Critique

Ideological “weaknesses” were by no means seen as limited to the general population. To the contrary, as I have shown in the last chapter, “uncertain,” “wavering,” “defeatist” or “left-radical” ideological orientations were assumed to emerge in the lap of the party. The right course needed to be defined in opposition to these internal ideological problems. To deal with such problems the party’s first line of defense was the instrument of “critique and self-critique.”¹⁶ Over the course of time the forms this ritual

16. Theoretically, the roots of this practice lie in Marx’s acquisition of Kant’s notion of philosophy as critique, that is, as a self-reflexive practice. Moreover, Engels praised Marx in his foreword to the second volume of *Capital* as ruthlessly self-critical. So self-critique came to be celebrated as a virtue of socialism in party programs, party statues, and other propaganda instruments. This said, however, the institutional origins of the *ritual* of critique and self-critique remain in the dark. Yet, the memoirs of the most famous Marxist renegades are filled with harrowing accounts of being subjected to this ritual. In fact, Leonhard (1955, 270–282, 294–301) traces the development of his own critical understanding of Stalinist practices to his first encounter with this practice. Kharkhordin (1999) makes an effort to trace it back to Russian Or-

took changed. It could come in more informal varieties in the GDR called *Aussprachen* (discussions) or in the form of party trials (*Parteiverfahren*). Yet, there is a guiding principle central to all of these forms, and it follows directly from the ethics of absolute finality that I described in the last chapter. Critique and self-critique's central idea was to demonstrate to some accused person that he or she failed the socialist duty of self-objectification. Typically, the accuser argued that some concrete behavior of the accused was purely subjectively motivated and devoid of consideration for the objective needs of the socialist project, which was shown to have suffered through the objectionable behavior. If the ritual went according to plan, the defendant's response was a self-analysis agreeing to his or her lacking partisanship. Ideally the accused felt ashamed, because he or she had thoroughly internalized self-objectification as part of his or her ego-ideal. The accusation could then build on the lingering self-doubt of the defendant to have lapsed in the one way or the other, if not necessarily as the accusation depicted it. In the more organized versions of the ritual, isolation was kinesthetically enacted in the seating arrangements confronting a sole individual with a whole phalanx of members and officials in an often-elevated position. The soiling subjectivity of the individual was thus symbolically juxtaposed to the objectified purity of the collective. For minor offenses, the credible performance of rueful self-objectification in which the accusations are accepted by the accused usually opened the path for more or less direct reintegration. Heavier offenses could lead to temporary dismissal and a trial period in some lower task, the so-called *Bewährung in der Produktion* (trial in production). Heaviest offenses could be performed in front of a court of law, which took in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s the form of show trials with the possibility of long prison terms and even execution. Interestingly, a prison term did not necessarily preclude later reintegration in some (typically lower) function, provided the person offered the required *mea culpa* or was later, after some change of the party line, found to have been unjustly tried.¹⁷

thodox monastic confession practices. Indeed, the cultural resonances are certainly plausible, and yet, it would actually be useful to trace its institutionalization among the Bolsheviks.

17. Perhaps the most chilling description of a critique and self-critique-like performance is Arthur Koestler's (*Darkness at Noon*, 1941) fictional account of "Rubashov's" (inspired by Bukharin and Radek) confession in a show trial. Even though he knows that the concrete accusations of him are fabricated, he suffers from the fact that he has subjectivist inclinations. His confession is a final act of self-objectification to help the party, which turns out to be a self-sacrifice entailing his execution. That this is by no means just fiction is well born out by what we know, for example, about Noel Field who, as an American spying for the NKVD while also helping many communists to survive in Nazi-occupied southern France, was later accused in Hungary of being an American spy. His letters from the prison show an amazing degree of self-objectification. Once released, he applied for asylum in Hungary.

Exercises in critique and self-critique were after truth. Yet it was decidedly not the truth of the story itself; it was about the truth that everybody was prone to subjectivism and that subjectivism needed to be transcended if people were to be successful agents of the party. They were a ritual reminder that self-objectification was a moving target, thus performatively foregrounding another truth: that belonging was contingent on the continuing performance of self-objectification. I should mention at this place as well that publicly performed critique and self-critique was a feared ritual, precisely because of the shaming and isolating component. Slang terms used among Stasi officers were “to go into the laundry” (*In die Wäsche gehen*) or “self-laundry” (*Selbst-Wäsche*). With its unmistakable allusions to the trope of washing dirty linen (*schmutzige Wäsche waschen*), this idiom nicely and accurately captures the fact that subjectivity was indeed perceived as polluting while underscoring the shame aspect of the procedure.¹⁸

Critique and self-critique might have had the potential to reconcile the often acutely perceived gap between the ego-ideal of the party celebrated in the cult of socialist heroes on the one hand and a more trite reality on the other. The *aporia of socialist identity* produced through the tension between the ardent desire to belong and the simultaneous threat to belonging might have been overcome by it. This did not happen however. The reason is simply that failures to self-objectify became a convenient tool in power struggles on every level. I will describe in chapters 5 and 6 more or less formal cases of critique and self-critique to which Stasi officers were subjected. In chapter 7 I will describe a case of a pupil subjected to a procedure that followed the logic of the ritual in detail even though it would not formally fall under the rubric. This case is particularly interesting because the pupil in question—Ulrike Poppe—sees in it a momentous experience on her path into dissidence. A comparison of these cases will show what a precarious means of addressing wavering consciousness by techniques of shaming could be in pursuit of the party’s goal of creating a monolithic intentionality among its citizenry.

18. Excellent and easily accessible examples for this are the critique and self-critique of the deputy minister of culture, Günter Witt, at the 11th plenum of the ZK in 1965 that initiated a freeze period (*Frostperiode*) in cultural policy (Schubbe 1972, 1088–92). The casus belli was Witt’s agreement to the production of the film *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (The rabbit—that’s me), which depicts a cold, career-minded party functionary against whom the hero, a woman, develops her own character. The film was never released for circulation simply because the party insisted it exuded “negativism” in being critical without really crediting the transformation of the GDR for what had been achieved and without pointing to positive resolutions of conflict conforming to the party’s intentions. A contribution to the plenum heaping scorn on Witt was titled “A firm [class] standpoint—good results” (Schubbe 1972, 1095ff.).

Policing Contact with People and Ideas

The party state engaged in a panoply of prohibitive interventions to influence the formation of its citizens' understandings. These measures can be analyzed and classified with the help of the validation forms I discussed in the introductory chapter. In this sense, the party state can be said to have aimed at managing the recognitions the citizens of the GDR received. It did so not only through propaganda but also by limiting contact with people and by restricting access to objectified understandings in the form of newspapers, books, movies, performances, architecture, art, music, and so on. Through the very same means the party state also engaged in a very active politics of memory by which it can be said to have hoped to influence the occurrences of particular resonances. Finally, the party state tried to manage the kinds of experiences people could have and thus the possibility for the occurrence of certain corroborations, for example, by tightly managing the use of public spaces as well as by monopolizing the right of social organization. In what follows I will provide a brief general overview of such measures. A detailed understanding of the interactional dynamics entailed by these policies will become apparent throughout all of the substantive chapters of this book.

The GDR party state went to extraordinary lengths in managing the contact between people with “right” and “wrong” consciousness. Since all citizens were supposed to be or become bearers of right consciousness, this meant that it tried to manage the contact between its citizens and those of other countries that were deemed to wield “negative influence.” This pertains in particular to Westerners, West Germans and West Berliners, but it also pertained in the 1980s to Eastern European countries that were increasingly perceived as wrestling with infestations of damaging consciousness. It is useful to differentiate between two different levels of contact management. There is on the one hand personal contact enabled by travel, phone, or mail. On the other hand, there is the access to mass media in both print and electronic form. Let me address the former first. The freedom of movement between East and West Germany was influenced by a number of policy choices, not all of which were made with contact management in mind. During the time of Allied occupation Germans needed permits to travel or move between occupational zones. However, people moving from the Soviet occupational zone to the western zones or vice versa, were accepted as refugees. Obviously, the introduction of different currencies in both parts of Germany in 1948 made interactions between easterners and westerners more difficult. The foundation of two German states in 1949 created an entirely new situation. In 1952 the GDR began to fortify its boundary with the FRG. The actual border area was cleared of vegetation and settlements, a complex system of border control was installed including watchtowers,

barbed-wire fences, minefields, and later also automatic gunning ranges. A 5-km-wide “border zone” extending inland from the actual borderline was established to make the policing tasks more effective. For this purpose several thousand inhabitants of this control zone were evacuated.¹⁹ From then on the only hole in the Iron Curtain was the boundary between East and West Berlin. In this time the police regularly screened the trains from the GDR provinces to the capital as well as the commuter rail trains from East to West Berlin to pick out people who looked as if they harbored the intention to flee. The intention alone was deemed illegal.²⁰ That hole in the Iron Curtain was closed with the erection of the Berlin Wall. The border area was policed by a special force which was first organized under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and later under the Ministry of Defense.

The near-complete control of the physical border went hand in hand with a strict examination process for visa applications to leave the country. In the course of time relatively free travel in the socialist world became possible. Vacations in Hungary’s Balaton Lake area or at the Black Sea resorts of Romania and Bulgaria came within reach of many GDR citizens, as did hiking trips into the Polish or Czechoslovakian Tatras. However, visa requirements were reimposed on a general level or on an individual basis wherever there seemed to be a danger for the proper socialist consciousness of GDR citizens. The general visa-free travel with Poland was abandoned after the dramatic rise of the independent workers union *Solidarność* in 1981. The visa-free travel arrangements with Hungary were rescinded after it opened its borders with Austria in the summer 1989, hastening the refugee crisis of the late summer and early fall of that year. By administrative procedure (no court order was needed), citizens of the GDR could be excluded on an individual basis, without a requirement to name reasons, from visa-free travel to any country (see chapter 8, pp. 452–53).

Personal travel into countries with “nonsocialist currencies” (i.e., with freely convertible currency) was heavily restricted. After the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and for most GDR citizens below retirement age, it became virtually impossible.²¹ Since 1964 pensioners could travel to visit relatives in West Germany. Funds for travel had to come from abroad how-

19. For a fascinating ethnographic account about the life within this borderland before and after the fall of the GDR, see Berdahl 1999.

20. With the promulgation of the new penal code for the GDR in 1968, one article (213) was reserved for border violations and cases of “flight from the republic” (*Republikflucht*), which was punishable in severe cases (e.g., “in collaboration with others” or “with the help of a hide-out”), with prison up to eight years.

21. The term *nonsocialist currency territory* (*nichtsozialistisches Währungsgebiet*, known also simply as NSW) played on the official reasoning provided by the party state that travel to the capitalist West was so heavily restricted because of currency convertibility issues.

ever.²² With Brandt's *détente* in the 1970s and the conclusion of the "Basic Treaty" between the GDR and the FRG in 1972, younger people still working could apply for permission to visit Western relatives for baptisms, weddings, funerals, or even "round" birthdays. In every single case a risk assessment was undertaken gauging the likelihood that the petitioner would return to the GDR. Thus, travelers typically had to leave their close kin behind to make sure they would come back. Nevertheless, the number of journeys undertaken were increasing rapidly toward the end of the GDR. From 1986, when 1.7 million GDR citizens (among which 1.5 million were retirees) visited the FRG, the numbers exploded in the subsequent year (when Honecker finally paid his long-planned visit to West Germany) to 5 million (3.8 million retirees).

To better manage foreign travel, the GDR created the category of "traveling-officials" (*Reisekader*). This much-coveted designation marked the privilege of some employees of GDR companies and members of some organizations (such as scientists, sportsmen and women) who had regular professional business in Western countries to travel with considerably less bureaucratic hassle. They all had to undergo a thorough investigation by the Stasi evaluating their loyalty to the GDR according to a catalog of criteria that included their "reasons to stay" (*Bleibegründe*). I have already mentioned some of these, such as familial ties or a professional environment that could not easily be replicated elsewhere. In the eyes of the authorities, another reason to stay was commitment to the socialist project. The point of the Stasi's screening was to permit only those people to travel who had a near-perfect likelihood of returning.

Access to non-conforming understandings was not only managed through contact restrictions. All print products, newspapers, magazines, or books had to be licensed in the GDR. Except for minor publishing rights granted to the two recognized Christian churches, all publishing houses and printing presses were controlled by the party state. The print news media was owned and run by the party or any of its affiliated organizations, including the parties associated with the SED in the National Front. The flagship paper *Neues Deutschland* (ND) exercised an ideological signaling function for other media. The reason is not difficult to understand. In addition to the party's chief propagandist, politburo member Joachim Herrmann, Honecker took the

22. GDR citizens were allowed to export M 70.- (GDR Marks) only. To help East German travelers, in 1970 the FRG introduced the instrument of "welcome money" (*Begrüßungsgeld*). Simply by showing their GDR travel documents, visitors from the GDR, who were, juridically speaking for West German authorities, German citizens (a separate East German citizenship was never recognized by West Germany), received DM 30.-, since 1988, DM 100.-. After the fall of the Wall, the welcome money provided the funds for millions of GDR citizens to get a taste (and not just a look) of the consumption possibilities in capitalism.

trouble to censor content and layout at least the front page for each following day (Boyer 2005, 130). In general, interventions in editorial decisions were commonplace (Schabowski 1991b). Since this was generally known, *ND* could become the benchmark for the current interpretation of the party line for the whole country. Accordingly, any even subtle changes in the paper's tone were interpreted as policy shifts.

News reports were all centrally provided by the party's wire service, ADN (Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtenagentur). New book manuscripts had to pass censorial control, which could increasingly rely on decentralized self-censorship in the sense that, for example, editors at publishing houses or at periodicals decided themselves that a particular manuscript or article needed to be rejected (Boyer 2003).²³ In addition to censorship, writers, even those favored by the party, were frequently subjected to secret police surveillance (Walther 1999). Older material of questionable political orientation was largely expunged from the public libraries in the late 1940s and 1950s (e.g., Bruyn 1996, 25ff.). In research libraries they were moved to special collections, popularly known as "poison cabinets," to which access was only granted with special permission. The importation of unlicensed print material was illegal and could, depending on the exact circumstances, be punished with prison terms (see chapter 8). Censorship extended also to performances of any kind (e.g., Klier 1989) and to art exhibitions and public events more generally (see also chapter 7, p. 386).

Electronic mass media were owned, run, and controlled by the government. Yet, thanks to the relatively central location of West Berlin in the middle of GDR territory, and owing to the multiply curved and folded border with West Germany, most of the GDR was in range of regular West German radio and television stations.²⁴ Attempts to regulate access to Western electronic media ranged from selling equipment (receivers, TV sets, antennae) with limited reception capabilities, to monitoring the positioning of antennae on roof tops, and the screening of conversations in school yards and at work places. Party members even had to endure surprise visits at home in which the contents of kitchen cabinets could be checked as much as the position of the dials on radio receivers and television sets. Yet, to no avail. The majority of the GDR population, many party members included, was

23. Some fascinating descriptions of working the censorship system can be gleaned from the memoirs of writers, both those who remained essentially loyal to party and state (e.g., Kuczynski 1994), those with mixed loyalties (e.g., Heym 2005), and those whose critical engagement finally led to their emigration (e.g., Kunert 1999; Loest 1999).

24. By regular I mean that the population of the GDR did not have to take recourse to listen to West German broadcasts on low-quality medium- or short-wave dials. The West German broadcasting companies had installed high-power transmitters on the tops of the medium-range mountains forming much of the boundary between the two countries.

not dissuaded from following the Western media through any of these measures. This does not mean in the least that they did not watch GDR television, even its newscast. But it does mean that they contrasted and compared two different, at times starkly contradictory, news sources.

In the interest of controlling the occurrence of resonances, the party tried to install its own memory culture. It did so in part through the management of access to people and ideas, but in part also through the construction and reconstruction of cityscapes and the selective celebration of events. This attempt at managing memories was less radical in avoiding contradictions with preexisting understandings than, let's say, radical French revolutionaries who went as far as changing the calendar, clothing, forms of address, and so on. Yet, socialism made decisive attempts to assimilate traditions it could weave into its own positive self-narrative or revolutionary transformations toward a communist society while trying to extinguish others that in terms of the Marxian philosophy of history appeared reactionary. In East Germany this included, for example, the appropriation of "early bourgeois" classics in music, literature, and philosophy. The revolutionary bourgeois was welcome as precursor of the revolutionary proletariat, not least because historically they did not immediately compete with each other. This contrasts sharply, for example, with the rejection of the "late" or "decadent" bourgeois, which was taken as a foil against which socialism could develop. Thus Luther, Grimmshausen, Schiller, and Goethe were celebrated through anniversary festivities, monuments, and/or museums; their works were published in handsome heritage editions that cash-strapped Westerners were eager to buy. Others, however, such as Rilke, Musil, or Mann were elided, referred to if at all in the negative. Kant, Herder, and Hegel were canonized, but not Nietzsche, Husserl, or Wittgenstein (to say nothing of Heidegger). Pöppelmann, Schinkel, and Semper were seen as exemplary architects but not Wagner, Behrens, or Mies van der Rohe. This attempt at the destruction and reconstruction of tradition is visible in the programs of GDR publishers, of opera houses and other performance venues, and last but not least in the reconstruction of the GDR's cityscapes, which are characterized by ruthless destruction as much as by pockets of careful preservation.

In an effort to manage locally produced recognitions, the party state did not tolerate the foundation of groups and organizations outside of the party's direct domain of control. Citizens were asked to participate, but they were asked to do so exclusively within the frameworks provided by the party. This prohibition to form independent groups extended to unions organized for the pursuit of some hobby (be it diving, soccer, or chess) as much as for any grouping that might in the end play a more narrowly defined political goal such as professional associations. For all of these social pursuits the SED and its affiliated parties entertained a wide array of organizations that

were supposed to cover the field of possibilities. The party state aimed to be civil society as well, claiming that the distinction between the two was mere bourgeois-liberal ideology. As far as its self-understandings were concerned, the party was *the* public sphere in the GDR. The only exceptions from this carefully guarded rule were the Protestant and the Catholic churches in the GDR, which enjoyed a semiautonomous status as societies within society, under the heading of “church in socialism” (see chapter 8, p. 401).

In the enforcement of all of these prohibitions the Stasi played a leading, if sometimes only, coordinating role. At the border it was responsible for passport control. Even though the police was responsible for issuing visas, it was the Stasi who ran the security (i.e., reliability) checks on the persons who had asked for a visa. This was even more the case for the evaluation of traveling officials. Stasi became involved if people became suspect of maintaining “illicit contacts” with the West or when state authorities got wind of the circulation of unlicensed print materials. As we shall see in part IV, it also tried to learn about the formation of any conceivable enduring groups, no matter whether they were punk bands or reading circles. The Stasi was the agency chiefly responsible for protecting the party’s agenda.

This massive barrage of policed prohibitions and exclusions was intended by the party to shelter its own propagandistic work from interference by the class enemy who, with its seductive tricks and corrupting promises, constantly threatened to lead the GDR’s citizen astray from the virtuous path into monolithic intentionality. In the lingo of the sociology of understanding, the party did not want any competition for its carefully planned and deployed recognitions, positive and negative. Yet the results of these measures were mixed at best, possibly substantially detrimental to its own project. For one, to many citizens of the GDR, the Stasi officers I spoke to included, these prohibitions were easily recognizable as merely defensive gestures. They bared the party state’s own inferiority complex, its own implicit recognition that it could at some level not compete with the capitalist West. They also revealed that at a fundamental level the state was not ready to trust its own citizens with their desires, their choices, their judgments. These prohibitions made particularly obvious the state’s presumption of a tutelary role based on supposedly higher insight. Yet among GDR citizens the meaning of these prohibitions were disputed and thus, the consequences drawn from them were very different. Some people learned to accept these prohibitions as necessary to defend the socialist David from the capitalist Goliath, while others deemed them simply presumptuous.

The eroticization of the forbidden seems inevitable with so many prohibitions at play. As long as the traces of the forbidden remain decipherable and the negative recognition of the prohibiting agency visible, an intense curiosity for it may emerge. How strong this curiosity is depends not only

on the imagined effect of access, but also to a considerable degree on the authority of the blocking agency. Trust in its judgment will recognize the understanding advanced by the prohibition that there is nothing to be curious about, only potential harm. In the GDR the forbidden did, as we shall see, by no means beckon all. I will introduce in chapters 5 and 6 Stasi officers who felt no desire for most of what was officially forbidden by the party state. They neither craved to see Western countries, nor did they long to read Western papers, novels, poems, or plays. This was so, precisely as long as they trusted the party's judgment unhesitatingly. Yet, the dynamics of prohibition play out very differently when the authority of the prohibiting agency appears questionable. Then every irritation or conflict with it may feed the curiosity for the prohibited. Under these circumstances, the negative recognition of the questionable authority operates as enticement to have at least a closer look at what has been removed from access.²⁵ This was certainly the case for the majority of the GDR population whose cravings for travel to Western countries, for Western consumer goods, for indexed literature, philosophy, and art were nourished by Western electronic mass media while they were amplified if not exoticized by the party-state's panoply of prohibitions. The first years after unification were testimony to the degree to which these cravings bordered on the fantastical, which in due time had to explode in disillusionment. Finally, yet others, seasoned dissidents among them, struggled hard to extract themselves from the Manichaeic logic of the party. They aimed to make the prohibition of the party as irrelevant as possible for their own evaluation, which they shared in alternative networks of authority.

In spite of the fact that the efforts of the party to construct a monolithic intentionality through prohibitions met a variety of responses, I still think it is justified to speak here of a second *aporia* of socialist politics, the *aporia of prohibition*. The party state thought that it could not do without these prohibitions in order to achieve its goal. And yet, by the very fact that it felt compelled to enact them it implicitly revealed its own weakness. More, simply because it never managed to attain the status of the exalted authority it craved to have in the eyes of the majority of the population, the prohibitions also helped to eroticize precisely that which it tried so painstakingly to prevent.

The Stasi and the Ideological Enemy

The problem of uncertain consciousness was, in the eyes of the party, amplified by the fear that people without a firm partisan viewpoint embedded in a healthy socialist collective might become easy prey for the conniving

25. Such dynamics will be explored in detail in chapter 4. For the case at hand compare the discussion of the dialectics of recognition (p. 221 ff.).

machinations of the class enemy who never relented in his efforts at “political-ideological sabotage” (*politisch-ideologische Diversion*). Because this is a key term of socialist reasoning about its own security, I will provide the definition of the term used by the Stasi, the agency that had the primary responsibility in combating it (Suckut 1996, 303):

With political ideological sabotage, the enemy tries to accomplish subversive goals. . . . These consist in the decomposition of socialist consciousness, or the impediment or stunting of its development, in the weakening of the trust of large groups of citizens in the policies of communist parties and of socialist states, in the inspiration of antisocialist behaviors including political crimes, in the mobilization of inimical-negative forces in socialist countries . . .

As the party saw its own propaganda efforts as a “struggle for the minds and the hearts of the people,” the enemy’s efforts were described in popular propaganda jargon as attempts to “sadden the minds and the hearts of the people.” These formulations reveal that the enemy was assumed to work chiefly through means of consciousness deformation. Just as agitation and propaganda assumed increasing relevance as a means of policy within socialism, class warfare was increasingly understood as ideological warfare. The historical development of the Cold War from actual armed conflict through violent partisan tactics to the balance of horror of nuclear deterrence corroborated this understanding of the historical trajectory of class warfare. This is reflected again in the Stasi’s definition of an enemy (document in Suckut 1996, 121):

Persons who, either in groups or individually, intentionally develop political-ideological attitudes and perspectives that are alien to socialism and who in realizing these attitudes and perspectives engage in practical behavior provoking events or conditions that endanger the socialist orders of state and society in general or in any of its aspects.

Accordingly, socialism perceived itself as always under threat and thus in urgent need of protection through a determined security apparatus. In effect, security and propaganda were seen as the two flip sides of the consciousness-driven model of social transformation in historical times of Manichaeian duality. Both were integral components of the production of monolithic intentionality.

The peacetime protection of socialism from its enemies had at least three different components. First, it was necessary to make sure that propaganda, the positive instrument of proselytization, was working as effectively as possible. Since propaganda was seen as the key to socialism’s success, the enemy was assumed to attack propaganda events and channels. Second, security

meant as well to develop a realistic picture of the true state of consciousness of the citizens of the GDR. Since there were almost no ethnographies or opinion surveys taking stock of the habits and thoughts of the GDR population, this task fell mainly into the lap of the bureaucratic information-gathering activities of party and state, with Stasi playing an increasingly pivotal role.²⁶ Third, security meant to incapacitate already existing enemies and to prevent the emergence of new enemies in the future. In all three cases, security work implied discovering “who is who?” as this was expressed in the language of the secret police; in other words, socialism needed to differentiate friend and foe to find means to react adequately (SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/2.039, 58–59):

In our Chekist²⁷ work we have had the experience that many sympathizers and fellow travelers of oppositional groups are people who have for various reasons temporarily come under the spell of internal and external enemies. . . . With the help of prudent ideological influence and in collaboration with state and social organizations we have to make every effort to bring them back to positions which are in accordance with society or at least loyal. . . . As far as the fanatic enemies are concerned . . . we advance against them with the full force of the law. The decision whether or not to indict is in particular with respect to inimical forces a deeply political one, which has to be made depending on the overall political situation, the concrete situation of class warfare and in accordance with the overall interests of the state.

The differentiation between friend and foe, and the development of adequate means to deal with propaganda failure, were seen as central goals of the GDR security apparatus. The agency entrusted chiefly with this task was the Ministry of State Security with its fifteen district and 227 county offices.²⁸

The Stasi’s central position in the GDR’s security apparatus was not so much the result of a direct organizational subordination of the other “security organs,” after all the Ministry of the Interior presiding over the People’s Police (and with it the prison system) and the Ministry of National De-

26. Empirical social science research that would have systematically investigated how people in the GDR thought and felt about socialism and the party was almost nonexistent. For the fate of opinion research in the GDR, see the conclusions to chapter 4.

27. Cheka, originally Vecheka, was the first postrevolutionary secret police, founded within weeks after the Russian revolution. It was headed by Feliks Dzierzynski, the official role model of all Soviet-style communist secret police agents. In honor of the Cheka and its first chief, Stasi employees, much like their brethren elsewhere in Eastern Europe, referred to themselves as “chekists” to highlight their discipline, morale, and commitment to the success of party and revolution.

28. Mampel (1996) has talked in this context quite fittingly about the Stasi as an “ideology police.”

fense were completely independent bureaucracies. Instead, the dovetailing of several practices enabled the Stasi to play this central role. First, the Stasi was responsible for the security of the other agencies, including performing security checks on their personnel. By contrast, the Stasi controlled its own people. Second, the Stasi was allowed to take on the cases deemed of more immediate security relevance for party and state. This included high-profile criminal cases. And last but not least, the Minister of State Security was the only chief of a major security agency who became a member of the politburo, and who in addition ultimately belonged with Günter Mittag (economy) and perhaps Joachim Herrmann (propaganda) to Erich Honecker's innermost leadership circle (e.g., Eberlein 2000, 457ff.). In the public imagination the Stasi was *the* security apparatus, owing in part to the mystery in which it shrouded itself. Its buildings were unmarked, although most people knew where the main Stasi offices in their neighborhoods were located. Stasi officers were known in their families and in the circle of their friends to work for the Stasi, which some people also called mockingly "the firm" (*die Firma*), or "people-owned company listen and look" (*VEB Horch und Guck*). Yet nobody, spouses included, knew what exact unit they worked for, or even less, what kind of cases they worked on. Thus, shrouded in secrecy, the Stasi was, in some people's imagination, transmogrified into a mythical helper who could rectify situations an otherwise intransigent state or party bureaucracy could not or would not address; in others it could become the loathed object par excellence, standing for everything that was wrong with the GDR; and in yet others it was the butt of any number of jokes, which may in the end have actively supported its mystification (Brie 2004).

The Stasi operated as a large, bureaucratically organized secret police organization. In 1989 it counted roughly 91,000 employees on its payroll. Following in the footsteps of Lenin's Cheka, the Stasi understood itself as the effective guardian of the achievements of the revolution, that is, as "the sword and shield of the party." It was officially founded with the status of a national ministry in 1950 through a legal act that did not further specify either its duties or its rights or procedures. After being temporarily regrouped as a mere division in the Ministry of the Interior owing to Stasi's failure to effectively foresee and counteract the uprisings around June 17, 1953, it was officially reinstated as a ministry in 1955. Since 1957, Erich Mielke stood at its helm. He stayed in this position until the beginning of the velvet revolution in the fall of 1989 when, in a vain effort to preserve the party's hold on power through a rejuvenation of its leadership, he was ousted from the politburo (only weeks after he had helped to topple the general secretary) and retired as minister of state security. It was one of the last grand applications of the socialist theodicy, the personalization of blame to save the system.

Due to its legendary success in undermining West Germany's secret services, the most famous division of Stasi was arguably its *Aufklärung*, its foreign espionage division. However, the far larger part of the Stasi was concentrated on issues of internal security, which was known as *Abwehr*, or "counterespionage."²⁹ Internal security was organized around "object" responsibilities. Every official organization in the GDR, including all government bureaucracies, with the sole exception of the party (and arguably the Stasi itself), was assigned to a Stasi unit responsible for its security. By and large, county-level branches of larger organizations were assigned to the county offices of the Stasi, district branches were assigned to the district offices, and national headquarters were assigned directly to the ministry in Berlin.³⁰ Privately formed (and therefore unofficial) groups—which, given the party state's (near) monopoly over organizing people, should not even have existed—were dealt with in the official organizational context in which they emerged. Oppositional scientists, for example, were investigated in the context of the institutions in which they worked; neo-Nazi tendencies among army soldiers were handled by the division responsible for the National People's Army and so on.

Stasi units looked after the security of objects assigned to them in both public and secret ways. Stasi officers maintained open contact with their

29. Only about 3,800 (1989) employees belonged to the HVA, the foreign espionage service. For a distribution of employees over various departments, see BStU 1996; for employee statistics over time, see Gieseke 2000. It is difficult to estimate how many Stasi officers were directly involved in efforts to control oppositional political thought. Responsibility and support for this task was not lodged in any single department simply because oppositional activity could happen in a wider variety of "objects," i.e., organizational contexts covered by different branches of the Stasi. Nevertheless, with the "directive 2/85" (Engelmann and Joestel 2004, 432–455), the ministry's Division XX was appointed as coordinator of all such efforts, not least because, carrying responsibility for the church and the cultural sector it had accrued most of it anyway.

30. This form of organization is mirrored in the structure of the ministry: Division I was chiefly responsible for the National People's Army, Division VII for People's Police and Customs, Division XVIII for the economy, Division XIX for postal services and transportation, and most famously Division XX for youth, mass media, education, arts, religious communities, and finally the political opposition. In addition to this structure there were specialized service departments providing telephone surveillance (Department 26), mail surveillance (Department M), physical observation and bugging services (Division VIII), forensic investigations, and a so-called division of investigation (IX), which ran the interrogation of prisoners in Stasi's own jail system and also checked the legal merits of a particular case. The Stasi also provided bodyguards for the political elite, an honor guard regiment in Berlin (used in receptions of foreign guests of state), special construction services (again, mostly for the political elite), and passport control services. An excellent quick overview of the administrative structure and organization of tasks of Stasi is provided by Wiedmann 1995. The most comprehensive overview is provided in a handbook series edited by the federal agency for Stasi documents (Suckut et al. 1993–).

object, serving as official point persons for object leaders, who were supposed to report any “unusual occurrences.” Officers also recruited a network of secret informants who participated in the organization. Informants and officers met regularly in safe houses (typically apartments made temporarily available by individual lessees). Originally, the idea was that every object, as an integral part of the socialist party state, was vulnerable to enemies who might place spies or saboteurs in the object to disrupt the favorable development of socialism. Thus, activities deemed detrimental to the aims of the party state were supposed to be discovered *in statu nascendi* and effectively thwarted before they could cause damage. Stasi’s efforts were in this sense geared toward preventive intervention.

As “sword and shield of the party” the Stasi set itself the task to identify all enemies of party and state. The archetypes of the enemy were the spies who supplied capitalist secret service agencies with crucial information and the saboteurs who, on these agencies’ behest, intended to destroy goods or impede processes that were considered essential to the development of socialism. In keeping with the centrality afforded to monolithic intentionality, the good most vulnerable to tampering was the “unity between party and people,” and in the course of time the image of the saboteur changed from someone derailing trains or setting factories ablaze to someone who committed ideological sabotage by spreading negative judgments about the party, socialism, or the GDR.

Leads for finding such enemies were mostly supplied by secret informants, either during the direct investigation of unusual occurrences (accidents, graffiti, the appearance of flyers, a case of flight, unusual voting behavior), or during routine meetings. For this reason, secret informants were the very backbone of Stasi operations, and countless Stasi documents, including the major guidelines governing the work of Stasi with secret informants (documents in Müller-Enbergs 1996), call them “the main weapon in its struggle with the enemy.” At the end, Stasi had about 108,000 registered secret informants of various kinds. Work with these informants was supported by 33,000 people who were willing to supply their apartments as safe houses or to work as couriers, and by another 33,000 informants with whom the Stasi maintained a less-structured relationship (Müller-Enbergs 1996, 59). These numbers are impressive in the sense that at the end of the GDR’s history almost 2 percent of the adult population was directly involved with it. If one takes retirement rates both among full-time members and informants into consideration, 3–5 percent (depending on the assumptions) of the adult population had at one point in their life been on active duty for the Stasi. Of course, these numbers are much less surprising if one also takes into consideration that before members were abandoning the SED in droves in the fall of 1989, about 19 percent (Schroeder 1998, 393) of the adult

population were party members. Moreover, these numbers, especially the statistics on secret informants, have to be taken with a grain of salt not only because they stand for very different kinds and degrees of involvement but also because the Stasi was, after all, a socialist production unit, which recruited and registered informants according to plan. In other words, to meet targets officers recruited informants with little value for the organization. The much bemoaned “tonnage-ideology” characteristic of socialist central planning even applied to the secret police.

The Complementarity of Secret Police and Propaganda Work

The Stasi’s efforts to do whatever was politically feasible³¹ to “secure” the efficacy of propaganda demonstrates that its work was merely the “dark underside” of the party’s project of creating a monolithic intentionality, unifying the GDR population en route to a communist society. This work involved actions aiming to ensure that the party’s monopoly over sources of information was maintained to the largest possible extent. After all efforts failed, for example, to prevent the GDR citizenry from receiving Western electronic mass media, Stasi directed its efforts to help secure party control over print media. This meant first that it had to suppress publicly accessible written utterances, from graffiti and “misused wall newspapers” to any sort of unlicensed publications such as flyers. As far as officially published materials are concerned, the Stasi’s attention was directed to “mistakes,” which, following the logic of the socialist theodicy, could just as well have been acts of sabotage. Such seeming mistakes could be articles that came to be published, although in the estimation of the party should not have, as much as typos that added a funny or critical twist to otherwise sober socialist print. The Stasi also paid much attention to the educational sector that, as a major stage of proselytization, was thought to be vulnerable to the ideological attacks of the enemy. Thus, the Stasi routinely investigated incidents (*Vorfälle*) in which students or teachers at educational institutions of all levels made statements or were involved in activities that could be understood as antisocialist once these reached a certain magnitude or sensitivity.

The “undisturbed course” of mass events was afforded great importance in Stasi work. This is reflected in the annual planning documents of the Stasi,

31. As the Mielke quote on page 146 makes clear, what was politically feasible is not identical with what Stasi could or would have done if allowed free reign. For example, in curtailing samizdat publications the international political context had to be taken into consideration. Thus, Stasi tried to deal a devastating blow to the important samizdat paper *Grenzfall*, which was edited and produced by members of the “Initiative for Peace and Human Rights,” only after Honecker had come back from his state visit to West Germany (see chapter 8).

which, for purposes of resource management and motivation, centered on “social highlights” (i.e., gatherings of socialist mass organizations, commemorative festivities, etc.) of national, regional, and local significance. It is also reflected in the room given to mass events in the biannual security briefings of the minister, which shed an interesting light on the reasons why the Stasi engaged in such work. Mielke’s argument about the particular vulnerability and need for protection of mass events took the following path (SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/2.039, 49–50):

The powerful pleas of allegiance of our young generation to the party of the working class and its socialist State on the occasion of the communal elections, the national youth festival, and the 35th anniversary of the GDR . . . are impressive proof that we can rely on the youth of the GDR. This has to remain that way. In the face of the growing attacks on parts of the youth this implies a growing responsibility of all party organizations, the state and social organizations to increase all efforts to continue to thwart the enemy’s attempts to interfere in the relationship between party and youth.

Since mass events were taken to corroborate the overwhelming unity between party and people, which in itself was seen as corroboration of the enormous vitality of socialism, they were also thought to attract the wrath of the class enemy, who would with all means like to disturb these events. Such disturbances were thought to come in two distinct forms: as classical sabotage, for example, the misdirection or delaying of trains transporting performers scheduled to appear at the event, the poisoning of food for participants, viscerally spoiling the fun for the participants, and so on; and as ideological sabotage, which might entail chanting, unfolding banners, or distributing pamphlets containing party-critical slogans that suggested the unity between party and people was not as tight as media reporting on these events proclaimed.

To prevent what it considered sabotage, the Stasi undertook an enormous range of measures. All performers in mass events had to be announced to the Stasi beforehand by the organizers so security checks could be run on each and every one of them. Anyone considered a potential risk—for example, because they were known to harbor party-critical attitudes, or because they maintained relations with such people—had to stay home. The network of secret informants was used to find out whether independent groups had plans to stage actions at events. Even if no actions were planned, it frequently happened that persons with ties to independent groups were kept under control during mass events, which meant their employers were prompted to keep them busy; in addition, key figures were put under surveillance and were, if deemed necessary, placed under house arrest or were temporarily detained on other pretexts (chapters 7 and 8 will provide concrete examples

of this). Moreover, the Stasi, with the help of its network of informants, inspected the technical condition of locomotives, railroad cars, and buses used to transport participants, as well as technical equipment used during the event. Kurt Bogner, an officer involved in coordinating the security efforts for mass events, commented: “just imagine, Honecker would have grabbed the microphone and—silence!” Stasi also double-checked railroad schedules, secured key intersections in the traffic flow to and from events, and inspected the food and lodging of participants. The officers in charge of participating groups typically accompanied them, using secret informants throughout the event to learn of unusual occurrences as fast as possible. Other officers were strategically positioned throughout the audience.

In keeping with the increasing importance of “ideological work” during GDR history it may not come as a surprise that the efforts the Stasi engaged in to secure propaganda increased as well. Here are the recollections of Karl Maier, comparing the security efforts for the same event spaced almost two decades apart:

You have to imagine, I was then, in 1961 . . . the only officer, a third lieutenant . . . who was there. That was the Pioneer meeting in Erfurt. [At] the last Pioneer meeting [1988] there was a group from the ministry consisting of 50 people. The head of the Division XX, Lieutenant General Kienberg managed the mission, not third Lieutenant Maier.

In the same context, he also comments on the logic of the Stasi’s efforts to secure propaganda events:

Let’s say the publicity effect, or the danger to society, as we said, was [seen as very high] when the whole thing happened in front of running cameras or if the political intention of such large events could be damaged. If such a large event proceeded without major occurrences, then this was always counted as a large success of the MfS [Stasi]. . . . This means of course that in such times the measures of surveillance and control over people who were regarded as inimical or negative were propped up.

Maier’s recollections reveal the powerful impact of certain background assumptions, most notably that of incessant and increasing class warfare. The acceptance of the argument that peaceful events demonstrated the work of the Stasi presupposes that without its protection, propaganda events would have been massively disturbed by enemy interference. Even if part of this may be discounted as the self-centric perspective of a particular bureaucracy eager to depict itself as indispensable, the very fact that such enormous security measures were deemed necessary betrays the overall feeling of threat under which the party leadership saw socialism.

Interestingly, this threat perception was not based on corroboration. Although all mishaps were systematically investigated according to whether they could be attributed to the machinations of the enemy, no such interference was, according to Kurt Bogner, proven for large public events in the 1970s and 1980s. Asked whether he had ever encountered any form of sabotage, Bogner answers: “not really.” There once was poisoned food, which had been stored incorrectly, but it could not be proven that someone had done it on purpose; another time, buses were misdirected and the participants did not show up in time, and again no conclusive evidence for sabotage was detected. The bombardment of buses with water bottles or the firing of an air rifle at the audience from a nearby apartment could be traced to disgruntled youths with no ulterior political motives. The lack of corroboration becomes all the more curious if it is considered that the enormous increase in effort takes place precisely at the time in which even the overall incidences of both espionage and sabotage in the GDR decreased drastically, owing at least in part to the closure of the Berlin Wall and the much higher risk of being caught for any of them.³²

Since elections were, as I argued above, major participatory propaganda events aiming at the hyperbolic recognition of identifications with state, party, and socialism, Stasi was involved in their preparation, conduct, and, later, analysis. As the Stasi would have investigated any disturbance of other propaganda events endangering their “political intention,” inevitably a convincing performance of the unity between party and citizenry, so it did with elections. Critical utterances made public during the election campaign or the election itself, such as the distribution of flyers, or the production of graffiti, as well as instances of nonvoting, no-voting, or ballot invalidation, were considered such disturbances simply because they were thought to weaken the propaganda effect of the elections. Discussing the preceding communal elections, Erich Mielke (1984b) opened his May 1984 security briefing with regional and division heads of Stasi (a group roughly coextensive with Stasi generals) with a celebration of the success of the party. He took the usual near-perfect approval rate not only to indicate the overwhelming trust of the population in the party and its leadership but also as a token of patriotic love for the GDR:

The high participation rate in the election and its result [the usual 99.x approval rate] are an expression of the deep trust of the citizens . . . and they reflect pride in the GDR and her accomplishments.

32. Unfortunately I cannot offer any numbers here. However, the trend depicted rests on consensus among the officers I have interviewed.

Mielke then showed himself greatly aggrieved by the occurrence of critical public statements in the context of the elections:

In this context I would like to point to inimical-negative actions, incidents and phenomena, especially to the production and distribution of inflammatory leaflets (*Hetzblätter*) and inflammatory graffiti (*Hetzlosungen*). These actions directed against the communal elections were typically characterized by a massive slander against the state and social order, and contained in part a direct appeal not to participate in the communal elections. Territorial centers are: the districts of Leipzig with 5 incidences, Dresden with 3 incidences, and the capital Berlin with 3 incidences. The large majority of them could already be resolved. The perpetrators could be identified and arrested.

Mielke typically spoke in the tiring monotone characteristic of so many socialist leaders. But at this point in the tape his voice betrays a mixture of worry and anger. An extraordinary window onto the mindset of GDR leaders is opened by what appears in hindsight as a stark contrast between the build-up of towering (pleonastic) (“actions, incidents, and phenomena”) and other hyperboles (“massive slander,” “inflammatory graffiti”) and the startlingly low number of actual occurrences, with a total of about fifteen to twenty cases in a country of 17 million inhabitants. If one further considers to whom Mielke is saying this, the absolute top brass of the Stasi, all party members of long standing, the aspiration level of what monolithic intentionality ought to accomplish becomes crystal clear.

How serious the Stasi took all of these instances of protest can be gauged from Mielke’s exhortations to his men to learn as much as they possibly could about every single one of them through their network of secret informants. And he encouraged them to triangulate what they learned that way with information gathered about enemies of the state in other contexts and through other means. There was always the presupposition that there was an organizing hand behind all such occurrences, an inimical outside force that tried to find a hold within GDR society. Election analysis, much like the analysis of all other participatory propaganda events, was, for the Stasi, an integral part of their “who-is-who?” reconnaissance that is part of their efforts to differentiate between the friends and enemies of socialism.

The Abyss of Other Minds

The GDR leadership’s anxieties about active rejection through parts of the population have not been fully captured so far. Mielke continued:

We may not overlook the fact that much like in previous elections, a not so insignificant number of enemies tried to camouflage themselves through progressive demeanor and behavior as well as through a public approval of the candidates. To discover such persons remains a preeminent political-operative task.

Here the consciousness-driven approach to social transformation begins to descend into the abyss of infinite semiosis: signs have lost their power to reference anything but other signs; recognition could be taken as such, but maybe it was not meant in that way. The hoped-for positive signals of successful propaganda reception may be faked, nothing but reflections functioning as deflections. In other words, the socialist leadership is lost in what philosophers have called the problem of other minds. How could the party state be sure to know what the people in the GDR really thought?

At this point it may be productive to recapitulate the argument thus far. Considering the appropriate consciousness as the key to success, the party engaged in massive propaganda efforts geared at teaching its citizenry new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Since, however, socialists had to begin with an “old” consciousness that was assumed to be hostile to the “new,” and since the class enemy was expected to interfere with the proselytization effort wherever she could, and, finally, since the actual message of propaganda needed to be constantly adjusted to changing historical circumstances, the party needed some kind of measure of how successfully people had internalized monolithic intentionality. Such measures of success become all the more desirable as the expected rate of economic progress did not materialize. Since this contradicted the theory, the question was, why. Given the theodic character of socialist failure accounting, there were really only two possibilities: the enemy or a perhaps still not sophisticated and/or comprehensive enough propaganda effort. The party also needed other kinds of success measures, especially ones that could testify that the increasing attention to propaganda did indeed pay off.

Since self-objectification remained a moving target, the party asked everybody to supply tokens of allegiance *continuously*. In reference to Marx praxeology in the *Thesis on Feuerbach*, a widely disseminated slogan was “practice is the criterion of truth” (Kuusinen et al. 1960, 124; cf. Wischnjakow et al. 1974, 106ff.), that is, conduct was seen as the best indicator for that state of consciousness that was also known as *Bewußtheit*, that is, his or her moral maturity in terms of the ethics of absolute finality. An honest, simple, modest, moderate, monogamous, heterosexual, that is, a “socialist lifestyle” (*sozialistische Lebensweise*), was evidence for it; and so was speaking publicly on all occasions with “ideological clarity”; the donation of time to volunteer actions and of money to socialist causes were taken to index its existence;

membership, active participation, and taking over a functional role in the socialist mass organizations, or better, even the party itself, was seen as proof of it. In addition, the party used its own participatory propaganda events as touchstones of allegiance. These could be the recurrent calendrical events mentioned above, where active participation was demanded and noticed. But the party also created special events designed for that very purpose. Signature collection campaigns eliciting support for a particular policy of the party are a good example (for instance, after the GDR's involvement in crushing the Prague Spring). More even than in the regular participatory events, the party clearly communicated, in the context of these policy affirmations, how much the objective circumstances of the moment required self-objectification, in this particular instance, turning them into high-stakes affairs. Refusals to offer the required token were noted with considerable vexation, not least because the publicized measure of allegiance was meant to feed back onto the hyperbolic recognition of Marxism-Leninism and the party's leading role. Consequently, failure to produce the required token created the suspicion that the refusing party harbored "inimical attitudes" (*feindliche Einstellungen*). It could be used as a piece of evidence to justify Stasi surveillance.

There was a catch, however, in the party's eager collection of behavioral signs of allegiance. Since the party so clearly signaled what it wanted, it was all the easier to fake the token it expected. Yet the situation seems, if anything, worse. Since organizations (including workplaces) were asked to show up as a collective to some such events (e.g., May Day parades), and since their leaders were held responsible for the mobilization of their members/workers, they felt compelled toward the end of the GDR to provide extra incentives for participation, such as joint festivities with free beer and such, after the event. This means that the tokens effectively collected during such events were to some unknown degree rather worthless (and party members sensed this acutely). What is true for participatory propaganda events is just as true for discursive encounters in party meetings, in the office, and the like. Here the committed use and defense of the party line was the token of allegiance signaling to others and especially to superiors that the person in question was actively objectifying himself or herself. And yet again, the mere fact that somebody had understood what was expected could not be taken for an authentic articulation of thought.

The issue emerging here is one of proper corroboration, that is, the question under which circumstances the results yielded by a particular test should have corroborating power. In modern scientific meta-understandings the validating effect of an event occurs only if it is in a crucial sense contingent, that is, beyond the particular agentic powers of the person or institution who stages it (see chapter 3, p. 200). In other words, events fail to validate

understandings if one has to have reasonable suspicion that the outcome is engineered. What can happen when such doubts occur is perhaps best told by an episode in which one of my interview partners was involved. To make sure propaganda events proceeded as planned they were rehearsed. For the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the GDR, the communist youth movement was supposed to hold a torchlight procession that marched by a tribune of dignitaries, including not only the general secretary of the SED but that of the CPSU as well. For the dress rehearsal Stasi officers stood at the tribune in their stead, accepting the youths' tribute to party and country. Jürgen Buchholz remembers:

We stood on the tribune when they practiced saying their piece. If you ask me whether I have ever had butterflies in my stomach: then and there [is the answer]. This whole situation was so confusing for me that I still get sick to my stomach if I think of it. It was clear to me: *I am standing on stage, not the general secretary.* Therefore the whole thing was mummery. I became aware of the whole artifice involved in the matter—but then I put the whole matter behind me.

For Buchholz, the general propagandistic claim that such demonstrations corroborated the party government for an instant flew apart like a house of cards, dragging him down into an intense state of nausea, which he surmounted in the subsequent days through the friendly reassurances of his colleagues.

The uncanny sense that there was something amiss with propaganda events as a reliable measure of allegiance nourished a search for alternatives. To get a more valid understanding of the state of consciousness of a particular person the party, therefore, needed a way to check elicited and predictably positive public performances against other supposedly less-controlled behavioral expressions. Only consistency across the full diversity of contexts was taken to be a good enough guide to judge whether the person was sufficiently self-objectifying. As Herbert Eisner, a former Stasi officer, put it so poignantly: “If the majority of the people no longer follow the directives of the party, if they no longer believe that it is worth the while to work for their realization, then we’ll drown. . . . Therefore it is important that the state security really knows what and how they think.” The first tool to do so was the so-called security check (*Sicherheitsüberprüfung*) (document reprinted in Gill and Schröter 1991, 295–321). It was performed on people who were *prima facie* supportive of the party’s project, but who needed further security clearance to be promoted into positions considered to be security sensitive, such as positions in infrastructure maintenance (railroad, telecommunications, postal services). Stasi checked every potential employee and every secret informant. Security checks were also carried out for people

performing in public, such as actors, TV and radio employees, or athletes. Finally, checks were performed on anyone who might officially come in contact with Westerners, no matter whether they were scientists or diplomats. Depending on the sensitivity of the position in question, the check could vary in depth ranging from a simple check of whether there was anything on file against a particular person, to elaborate investigations of the person in their respective social environments, that is, at work, in the neighborhood, and within any leisure contexts. Such investigations could be carried out entirely with help of informants, through full-time members, and with the support of the neighborhood beat patrol officer (*Abschnittsbevollmächtigter*) of the regular People's Police (*Volkspolizei*). Security checks were a routine matter for operative units and were typically performed by the Stasi office that had the object responsibility.

How, then, was trustworthiness adjudicated? I have emphasized so far that consistent self-objectification played the major role. Consequently, a first approach to assess the trustworthiness of a particular person was to check whether and to which degree a particular person displayed tokens of allegiance. Probing a person's adherence to the socialist lifestyle offered further criteria. Failing to show a firm class standpoint in discussions, having no arguments to defend party and GDR, a state known as "ideological uncertainty" (*ideologische Unklarheit*), was seen as a weakness because it was expected to open the doors for the ideological influence of the class enemy. Profligacy, especially a strong desire for Western consumer goods, sexual deviance, or addictions, were thought to make people vulnerable to blackmail, and thus untrustworthy.³³ If it was the Stasi's task to investigate, in face of the fakability of tokens of allegiance, that there was a consistent expression of a "positive" orientation across domains, it is also important to note that consistency does not necessarily mean seamlessness. Properly regretted lapses that were suitably atoned for did not necessarily harm socialist careers; instead, they could add a certain credibility to the efforts of self-objectification. The successful overcoming of a lapse makes explicit the labor involved in self-objectification (much as saints' initial sinfulness render them more credible or as slight blemishes ["beauty spots"] render faces "naturally" beautiful).

A further tool of person reconnaissance was the "operative person check" (*operative Personenkontrolle*) (document reprinted in Gill and Schröter 1991,

33. In general there was little awareness of the fact that the existence of the norms for a socialist lifestyle were the conditions for the possibility of blackmail. Karl Maier has reported to me how there was a reconsideration of the Stasi's attitude toward homosexuals starting in the mid-1980s, as it became clear that their marginalization in GDR society made them open to form alliances with the peace and budding civil rights movements.

323–34), which was used to investigate people who, due to concrete actions or contacts, came under suspicion of harboring “inimical-negative intentions.” “The operative person check has to contribute to the timely discovery and effective control of inimical-negative actions, even where such actions are below the level of relevance in the sense of the penal code.” The strategy the Stasi pursued here was decisively preemptive: rather than finding the enemy after he had struck, he or she was supposed to be incapacitated before he could really become dangerous. The ideal of preemption permeated Stasi’s efforts to control party-critical actions since the mid-1970s. Critics of Stasi work after unification have noted that this orientation is precisely what makes it incompatible with a formal-rational state bureaucracy operating on the principles of legality and due process. This is undoubtedly true, but it also misses the logic according to which the socialist party state was constructed and the specific role the law played within it. The revolutionary self-understanding of the party state with its drive toward a monolithic intentionality and an ethics of absolute finality entails a substantive form of rationality, that is, one that was much more interested in the correct outcome than in the right process to get there. Bureaucratically speaking, secret police work as prevention was furthermore a consequence of the socialist theodicy and its tendency to personalize problems. In other words, if it was the Stasi’s task to control party-critical expressions in public, their actual occurrence was an occasion to blame the Stasi for not having done its work properly (cf. chapter 9, p. 524). The attempt to discover a proclivity for party-critical thinking to preempt its appearance in public is fully comprehensible from within the party’s understandings about itself and the world.

The conjunction of a firm belief in the necessity of a monolithic intentionality and the awareness of the uncanny infathomability of other minds had deeply corrosive effects on the institutions of socialism. For truth now came to be seen as something that will not reveal itself unless it is pursued through the clandestine methods of the secret police. The meta-understandings about other people’s understandings move here from a surface phenomenology connected to a felicitous affirmation of the positive to a peculiar variety of what is known in reference to Ricoeur (1970, 32ff.) as “hermeneutics of suspicion.” With some justification one could say, then, that the secret police become something of an arbiter of truth for a party that had lost itself in a semiotic hall of mirrors that relentless positive proselytization had created. Monolithic intentionality was leading straight into a *secret police model of truth*. Truth cannot be seen directly, it must be spied out. The result is what I called *state paranoia* elsewhere (Glaeser 2004, 244).

One could also say that the secret police was needed as a way out of another aporia of politics, which might be called the *aporia of proselytization*. In a polity in which the actualization of a particular set of understandings is

seen as the central means to success, it is not surprising that policy aims to control it. Yet the more emphasis is placed on producing it, the more people will feel the necessity to merely perform it no matter whether they believe it or not, especially if noncompliance is connected to sanctions. As we shall see in parts III and IV, different parts of the GDR population answered to this aporetic situation in distinctly different ways. Fully dedicated officials were caught in a quandary. They were irresolvably caught between two kinds of loyalty: The assertion of party allegiance and the articulation of critiques where they saw the urgent need. Since the party leadership so clearly communicated what it preferred, they typically acquiesced, refraining from developing their insights into full-fledged understandings of the shortcomings of socialist institutions. The consequences were disastrous, as the downfall of socialism in the fall of 1989 demonstrated.

Most ordinary people lived in a kind of limbo, arranging their lives in various degrees of proximity and distance from the party's project. Since people could typically not avoid participating in the official rituals of the party state, they were, as Alexei Yurchak (2006) has described, inside and outside at the same time. Yet the degrees and the ways in which they were inside and outside varied both with personal circumstances and the particular historical and political context. These different arrangements, shifting in the course of time, gave rise to a gamut of socialist subjectivities. For the GDR of the 1970s, Günter Gaus (1983, 156–233) has described a degree of disengagement, a flight into “private niches,” meaning a life split between official participation and weekends in the much-cherished garden plot. Gail Kligman (1998, 13ff.) has described the Romanian context in stronger terms as “duplicity,” echoing a popular Romanian term. On the one hand, she follows Havel (1990b) in arguing that this was less a move of clever resistance as more a systems maintaining action. On the other hand, she points to the effects this had on the formation of social networks that could indeed undermine the party's intention to form a monolithic intentionality. This is precisely what happened to people who began to form peace, environment, or civil rights groups during the 1980s. Across all of these different groups within GDR society, the party's intense, single-minded pursuit of its goal ultimately undermined its attainment.

CONCLUSIONS

Eastern European socialisms constitute arguably the most comprehensive attempt ever undertaken by humankind to produce top-down, designed social change secured by overwhelming military power. By comparison, Russia's revolution was a lot more spontaneous and improvised because it had to work its way against massive internal opposition and civil war with con-

siderable foreign military intervention, while the goal toward this change was undertaken was anything but clear. Since Marx and Engels had, in full accordance with the logic of their own self-unfolding model of history, not left behind any blueprints about the organization of socialist society on the fast track to communism, such forms had to be invented in situ by Russia's revolutionaries. Eastern European socialist leaders, however, could work from complete institutional blueprints developed in the Soviet Union, and what is perhaps even more important, sanctified by the Soviet Union. Not only was this process conscious, but also after the initial structural changes, such as the ownership in the means of industrial and agricultural production, failed to transform the understandings of local citizens as hoped for, a proselytizing politics of education became the central means to achieve social transformation. Thus an understanding of socialism emerged treating it more and more like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more people believed, the more the party managed to institute monolithic intentionality, the more it would realize itself as a truly socialist order on the way to communism.

The process of proselytization was designed as a massive mirror hall of redundant validations leading to what Yurchak (2006) has called "hypernormalization."³⁴ The party's truth, the party's goals, the party's claims were spread into the remotest corners of society through every conceivable channel of communication the party could seize, flooding GDR citizens from many different sides at the same time with the same message. What they saw on television was supposed to match what they read in the newspapers; what they heard during leisure time in their garden colony was supposed to match what they heard in their work-collective. And more, what they heard about the world in which they lived was supposed to match their experiences. Propaganda, so the belief went, would slowly propel socialist societies into that blissful state in which language is unproblematically referential because it has created the reality to which it refers. Communism was arrived at when the ontological gap between word and object disappeared, when the substance of Marxism-Leninism had realized itself—practically through the power of its very *idea*. If, philosophically speaking, the method of socialism was in practice rationalistic, its ideal was thoroughly positivistic.

The economic overtaking of the West, later more simply mere qualitative economic growth, was advertised throughout the GDR years as *the* corroborating condition of socialism's superiority and vitality. Socialist leaders were initially so sure about having chosen the right path that they could invite everybody to corroborate the truth of what they were saying by the material

34. Yurchak also shows how this hypernormalization gave rise to a particular form of humor which could rely entirely on the repetition of that which was already everywhere. For an application to a contemporary American context see Boyer and Yurchak 2010.

circumstances of their lives. As I will show in the conclusions, this strategy backfired significantly in the 1980s when a fast-widening gap emerged between the experiential corroboration of the economy and its recognition in propaganda began to assume increasingly absurd proportions. Political world events, too, were systematically employed to corroborate propaganda claims. On the one hand, the evil intentions of the enemy were, for example, found to be corroborated by the aggressive anticommunist rhetoric and military actions of Margaret Thatcher (the Falkland's war) and Ronald Reagan (above all the military support for the Contras in Nicaragua), who, contrary to their stated intentions, did much to lend credibility to socialist propaganda claims. On the other hand, socialism was declared to be corroborated in a positive way by every decolonized territory joining the socialist block as a freshly minted nation.

If one does not believe in Marxist philosophy of history as a true account of the world, then GDR-socialism's increasing emphasis on a consciousness-driven model of social transformation in word and deed suggests itself as an attempt to perform a self-fulfilling prophecy.³⁵ So why did it fail? Did the prophecy not self-fulfill because its attempts to create a perfect mirror hall of recognitions were undercut by West German media and West German visitors who came to the GDR in massive numbers since the early 1970s? Did it fail because socialism never overcame its negative resonances, the prejudices against the Soviets originating in a century-old class struggle amplified by it? Or did it fail to produce *uptake*—to use Austin's (1962) term—because socialist everyday life led to experiences that could not corroborate its own claims? I have begun in this chapter to provide elements for answers to these questions with the help of three aporias of socialist politics, the aporia of central planning, the aporia of proselytization, and the aporia of prohibition. Each of these aporias describes something of an institutional Gordian knot for which the party—caught up in its own understandings of the world—found no sword. Before I can get to a more satisfying answer for why the search for a sword was futile, I need to expand the theoretical tool kit I have developed in the introduction.

35. Even though this concept has found its way into everyday language, it is actually of Robert Merton's coinage (1968, 475–92). Merton says he was inspired to develop it by the Thomas theorem, which I have cited in the preface (p. xxx).