Chapter One
Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 signaled the political and geographical demise of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This collapse became official with the reunification of the two Germanies on October 3, 1990. Germans on both sides euphorically tore down the wall that had separated them since 1961. Although it has been more than fifteen years since the removal of this physical obstruction, mental barriers between eastern and western Germans, formulated during the Cold War, have proven more difficult to dismantle. The various social, cultural and political discourses that shaped the identities and experiences of East and West Germans persist. They are reinforced by new prejudices and assumptions that often lead to misunderstanding and resentment.

Despite reunification, the persistent mentality of division in Germany demonstrates that 1990 can by no means be termed a "Stunde Null" or zero hour from which Germany started anew. To consign GDR culture to the past would leave intact an interpretation shaped by the Cold War and limited by inadequate access to extensive documentation. Moreover, many of today's Germans experienced and participated in the GDR's challenges, successes, and offenses. Although the everyday reality of political oppression is central to an understanding of life in East Germany, this multifaceted society constantly changed and transformed in response to a variety of international and domestic influences. The continued study of East Germany, therefore, contributes to a more comprehensive depiction of the country and its inhabitants. If Germany is to overcome the deep divisions that contribute to today's political, economic and cultural instability, each side must attempt to understand the "other."

The study of the country's science fiction is one way in which to access the "alien" world of East Germany. Anita Mallinckrodt observes that popular literature holds "many keys to understanding

another people" (9). In her study of East German dime novels, she describes the necessity to look beyond "dissident" writing to gain a view of life there from diverse sources. Frederic Jameson has expressed a similar belief regarding East German science fiction, more specifically. He writes, "[A]part from the literary merits of individual texts – [it] has great value as a cultural symptom, as one privileged way of taking the temperature of a social system at a particular historical moment" ("Science Fiction and the GDR" 199). A literature concerned with contemporary events, science fiction is integrally related to its historical context and, therefore, provides a unique view into East German cultural practices. An analysis of this science fiction literally constructs a path, which leads to alternative socialist worlds and times. At the same time, through an examination of the texts and their reception, we begin to see how the contributors to this discourse understood their surroundings and themselves.

GDR science fiction is of special interest, since it developed in relative isolation from the discursive conventions in and about Anglo-American science fiction. It took its cue from Jules Verne and selected German, Polish, Czech, and Soviet science fiction publications. In addition, GDR science fiction contributed a great deal to the satirical tradition started by Polish author Stanislaw Lem in the mid-1960s. Banned under the National Socialists, limited Anglo-American texts first became available in the GDR in the late 1970s and 1980s. A predominance of translated, Anglo-American science fiction excluded any notable parallel development in West Germany.

The popularity of science fiction in East Germany also makes it worthy of greater scholarly attention. The GDR possessed a significant science fiction tradition, more so than that of the BRD due to the fact that it was artificially shielded from competition with the Anglo-American translations.[1] Like detective and adventure novels, all East German science fiction titles consistently sold out (Kruschel, "Zwischen" 155, Klotz and Matzer 106). By 1990, some 151 novels appeared, which was by far the dominant form of science fiction in the GDR. Furthermore, over six science fiction anthologies, twelve

---

1   Some science fiction writers were able to live for one year from the proceeds
     from one book (Klotz and Matzer 107).

14

children's books, fifty-four dime novels, fifty-six short story collections, and countless other short stories in magazines and journals appeared as well.[2] Additionally, the East German film studio, *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA), produced six, feature science fiction films.[3] Furthermore, unlike those interested in detective and adventure novels, science fiction readers in the East formed a number of clubs in which to discuss and swap books. These clubs are but one facet of what was to become a self-selected, science fiction "niche" or "ghetto" in western terms.

While the publications of East Germany's literary avant-garde are well documented in the United States, little is known of the popular literature that prospered behind the wall. The availability of GDR popular literature restricted its study in both the United States and in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Writing by more distinguished East German authors often appeared in West German editions and was discussed, not only by academics, but also in prominent newspapers and magazines. In contrast, the occasional detective or science fiction novel that did appear in the West attracted much less critical interest.

This book sets out to identify several historical, methodological, and literary gaps in the study of GDR science fiction. First, it introduces the English-speaking reader to this tradition, and, in doing so, locates it both aesthetically and historically. As some might not be familiar with East Germany, I include details with which the expert is already familiar. To this end, my project analyzes cultural policy

2   The dime novel series "BASAR" from Verlag Neues Leben and "SF-Utopie" from Verlag Das Neue Berlin both regularly appeared in circulation rates of 50,000 copies and "Das Neue Abenteuer" from Verlag Neues Leben appeared in a rate of 100,000 copies per publication. Most novels in the series "Spannend erzählt" from Verlag Neues Leben, for instance, started with 20,000 and were often brought out in subsequent editions (Steinmüller, *Vorgriff* 10, 12 and Neumann, *Bibliographie* 888–930).

3   These include: *Besuch bei Van Gogh* (Dir. Horst Seemann, 1985), *Eolomea* (Dir. Hermann Zschoche, 1972), *Im Staub der Sterne* (Dir. Gottfried Kolldtiz, 1976), *Der Schweigende Stern* (Dir. Kurt Maetzig, 1959), *Signale* (Dir. Gottfried Kolldtiz, 1970) and *Der Mann mit dem Objektiv* (Dir. Frank Vogel, 1961). In addition, a made-for-television film *Abenteuer mit Blasius* (Dir. Egon Schlegel) also appeared in 1975.

pertaining to science fiction and provides an overview of major thematic developments in the genre in the GDR. In the process, it concentrates on the novel in an effort to provide a broad, yet focused, look into the development of GDR popular literature over the course of the country's forty-year existence. The book's chronological organization is not designed to construct a linear narrative of a national genre. It provides a unique view of major events in GDR history and conveys particular German practices in the writing of science fiction.

Second, my study raises key theoretical issues that affect the broader field of GDR literature. It questions the notion of the "subversive," which has driven studies of East Germany through the Cold War and beyond. In doing so, it interrogates assumptions surrounding categories of "high" and "low" literature as well as center and periphery by contextualizing their application. Drawing upon a variety of original sources, I assume a gradation of participation within the system and demonstrate how a number of science fiction authors and editors were able to influence policy to their own ends. In the process, I present a model of interactive relations between elements of GDR state and society.

Finally, this project defines GDR science fiction as a literature of both affirmation and subversion. It looks at the ways in which authors employed the genre's qualities of estrangement, both in terms of utopian literature and as a literature of the fantastic, to strengthen and criticize GDR socialism. To do so, my study takes an in-depth look at novels by three authors, whose writing resonated with a large number of GDR science fiction enthusiasts. These publications are: Eberhardt Del Antonio's *Heimkehr der Vorfahren* (Return of the Forefathers, 1966), Johanna and Günter Braun's *Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega XI* (Uncanny Manifestations on Omega XI, 1974), and Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller's *Der Traummeister* (The Dream Master, 1990).

16

Scholarship on East German Popular Literature

While studies in science fiction flourished in both Great Britain and in the United States during the seventies and eighties, primary literature in the German language has garnered sporadic attention.[4] West German literary scholars have shown interest in the critical study of science fiction only recently. This lack of interest can be attributed to a general mistrust of popular literature, an attitude, which can be traced back to the Enlightenment.[5] In the sixties, seventies and eighties, many West German sociologists concentrated on the potential for escapism and conformism among readers of popular genres.[6] Nevertheless, several calls for a critical study of the aesthetics of this literature in both Germanies surfaced in the West.[7] In 1970, Hans

4 Much science fiction discourse of the twentieth century in the West has centered on the Anglo–American tradition. Foreign publications remain isolated to their country of origin. The majority of foreign/non-western science fiction stays untranslated or unavailable, as in the case of many authors from the former East Bloc. Publications in English on East German science fiction include Frederic Jameson "Science Fiction and the German Democratic Republic," Werner Förster "Time Travelling into the Present: Science Fiction Literature in the GDR," Barbara Mabee "Astronauts, Angels, and Time Machines: The Fantastic in Recent German Democratic Republic Literature," J.H. Reid "En route to Utopia. Some Visions of the Future in East German Literature," William Walker "Contemporary GDR Science Fiction: The Example of Johanna and Günter Braun," as well as Darko Suvin's article on Johanna and Günter Braun "Playful Cognizing" and anthology of Eastern European science fiction *Other Worlds, Other Seas*. Förster's article is the only one by an East German to appear in English.

5 See Schulte-Sasse, Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung.

6 See Michael Pehlke and Norbert Lingfeld's Roboter und Gartenlaube: Ideologie und Unterhaltung in der Science-Fiction-Literatur and Walter Nutz Der Trivialroman.

7 See Jörg Hienger *Unterhaltungsliteratur. Zu ihrer Theorie und Verteidigung*, Richard Albrecht *Das Bedürfnis nach echten Geschichten,* and the useful bibliography by Ludwig Fischer, Dietger Pforte, Kristina Zerges and Hella Dunger, eds. *Zur Archäologie der Popularkultur*. See also Barbara Gentikow "'Spannungs- und Unterhaltungsliteratur' der DDR" and Manfred Nagl "Neu in der DDR." Austrian Franz Rottensteiner made significant contributions to the

Friedrich Foltin lamented a widespread presumption that this type of literature fails to contribute to the broader understanding of the human condition or push aesthetic boundaries (3).

East German science fiction remained doubly marginalized. In the West, "German science fiction" referred to publications from the Federal Republic only. Very few works on the subject acknowledged the GDR's tradition or granted it more than an ancillary role.[8] Many assumed GDR science fiction to be an instrument of the Socialist Unity Party (SED).[9] One notable exception is Anita Mallinckrodt's sociological study of East German dime novels that includes a well-researched history of GDR popular literature with reference to science fiction. In addition, Horst Heidtmann completed a structuralist analysis of East German science fiction in 1982.

A considerable amount of documentation existed on the eastern side of the wall. Academics and literary critics initially saw popular literature as a bourgeois tool of class warfare. Many remained opposed to the creation of a "socialist alternative" to compete with the West.[10] Consequently, they left the theorization of early GDR science fiction to the authors, editors, and party functionaries directly concerned.[11] In the seventies, East German pedagogues conducted an

study of German science fiction in his science fiction journal *Polaris* and his article "Die 'wissenschaftliche Phantastik' der DDR."

8   See Manfred Nagl *Science Fiction in Deutschland* and Hans-Joachim Schulz *Science Fiction*.

9   See Sven-Aage Jorgensen's "Valium des Volks? Die utopische Science-Fiction in der DDR." Gerd Henning equates GDR mass culture with propaganda in "'Mass Cultural Activity' in the GDR. See also Reinhold Krämer's *Die gekaufte "Zukunft."*

10   See Fritz Lange "Schund und Schmutz – ein Teil imperialistische psychologischer Kriegsführung" and Arno Hochmuth and Hinnerk Einhorn "Geschäft mit der Zukunftsangst."

11   See for instance Erich Sielaff "Zur Frage des Unterhaltungromans," Eberhardt del Antonio "Für oder wider utopische Literatur" as well as a policy brief of the HR Jugend- und Kinderbuch "Hinweise für die Diskussion der Themenpläne 1956 und der Perspektivepläne bis 1960 auf der Planungsgemeinschaft Kinder und Jugendbuch Ende November 1954."

18

historical survey of East German popular literature.[12] The first comprehensive, Marxist–Leninist theory of science fiction in East Germany appeared in 1977.[13] A series of dissertations in the eighties analyzed specific themes, for example, as the portrayal of women and of the alien, as well as elements of utopia and dystopia.[14]

Over the past fifteen years, a new generation of German and American literary scholars has begun to address the significant number of romance, science fiction, detective, adventure, and war novels that appeared in the GDR. Recent approaches to GDR popular literature outline ways in which it, while limited in scope by censorship, nevertheless provided the reader with entertainment, excitement, relaxation, education, and, in some cases, criticism of an authoritarian regime. In the area of GDR science fiction, Thomas Kramer provides an in-depth look at the influences of Karl May and Hans Dominik on the comic book *Mosaik* in *Micky, Marx and Manitu*. Michael Grisko, Detlef Kannapin, Stefan Soldvieri, and Gerhard Wiechmann all have published on GDR science fiction film.[15]

12 See Schröder, Gustav ed. *Potsdamer Forschungen. Untersuchungen zur sozialistischen Unterhaltungsliteratur.*

13 See Adolf Sckerl "Wissenschaftliche-phantastische Literatur. Überlegungen zu einem literarischen Genre und Anmerkungen zu seiner Entwicklung in der DDR."

14 See Mikaela Blume *Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Frau in der Science-Fiction Literatur der DDR seit 1970*, Annette Breitenfeld *Die Begegnungen mit außerirdischen Formen. Untersuchungen zur Science-fiction-Literatur der DDR.* and Karsten Kruschel *Spielwelten zwischen Wunschbild und Warnbild.* See also Werner Förster "Realität und Entwurf. Zu einigen Aspekten des Genres Phantastik in der DDR-Literatur der siebziger Jahre," Thomas Hartung *Die Science-fiction Literatur der DDR von 1980–90* and Sabine Vollprecht *Science-Fiction für Kinder in der DDR*. These dissertations were written in the GDR and published in the years immediately following unification.

15 See also Brigitte Kehrberg *Der Kriminalroman in der DDR 1970–1990*, Dorothea Germer *Von Genossen und Gangstern*, Reinhard Hillich and Wolfgang Mittmann *Die Kriminalliteratur der DDR*, Catrin Gersdorf "The Digedags Go West" and Thomas Beutelschmidt and Henning Wrage on literary adaptation in GDR television. More general reassessments of German popular literature include: Walter Nutz' more recent publication *Trivialliteratur and Populärkultur* and Helmut Schmiedt *Ringo in Weimar. Begegnungen zwischen*

Authors, editors and fans from the former East Germany have also made a substantial contribution to the study of East German science fiction. Udo Klotz, Michael Matzer, Karsten Kruschel, Erik Simon, Olaf Spittel, Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller, and others published reflective articles on East German science fiction after reunification. In 1995, Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller examined the social and political context of GDR science fiction through the late 1960s, in a perceptive, inside commentary on writing during this time period. More recently, a detailed account of the East's science fiction fandom appeared. Entitled *Geschichten aus der Parallelwelt* (Stories from a Parallel World, 1998), it was written and edited by former fan club members Wolfgang Both, Hans-Peter Neumann, and Klaus Scheffler. Their account provides a valuable view into the structure and activities of one popular cultural niche.[16]

Science Fiction as Popular Literature

The notion of popular or mass culture has long been equated with forms of "low" societal value. Horkheimer and Adorno reinforced this assumption through their influential definition of this literature's "manipulative capacities" when produced by the culture industry (148). David Bathrick, however, has described a shift in Western thought away from Horkheimer and Adorno's definition. This new approach focuses on the potential for political activism in mass culture through a Brechtian revolutionary aesthetic in a bourgeois socio-economic structure that is full of gaps and fissures, rife with contradiction and the potential for change (Bathrick, "Reading" 246). Indeed, theories from alternative Marxists such as Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Stuart Hall, Richard Hebdige, and Richard Hoggart of

*Hochliteratur und Populärkultur.*See also my article "Auf dem Weg zur Venus. Die Entdeckung ostdeutscher Populärkultur: *Der schweigende Stern*."

16   Both Neumann and Scheffler recently came out with a bibliography of East German fanzines.

20

the Birmingham school provided the methodological foundation for many of the recent cultural studies of reader agency in popular culture.[17] Feminist scholars, including Janice Radway, Tania Modleski, and Constance Penley, unearthed emancipatory uses of so-called "low" literature.

Former understandings of high and low literature still shape studies of GDR literature and must be re-examined to correctly describe their function in that context. Marxist–Leninist theory held items mass-produced under capitalism to be a type of commodity fetishism, similar to the Horkheimer–Adornian interpretation of products of the culture industry. However, this definition of mass culture and the definition of mass culture in East Germany differed in the SED's embracing of technology. Horkheimer and Adorno could not find emancipatory power in the mass-produced item as it lost what Benjamin termed the artwork's "aura" (152). Leading East German cultural officials perceived mass literature to be a revolutionary tool for the greater emancipation of the proletariat in the hands of the appropriate producers. Furthermore, mass production increased the availability of culture through greater distribution and lower prices. More importantly, it was not a bourgeois mass literature but a proletarian one that could bring about the "German cultural renewal" called for by cultural official Anton Akermann at the end of World War II. However, orthodox party members felt "genre" literature had no place amongst the new "high" literature of the working class. This view influenced policy on popular literature throughout the GDR's existence.

In the United States, the study of popular literature often equates its production and reception with locations on the center and periphery of society, respectively. Due in part to Cold War tension, East German Studies in the United States has traditionally focused on acts of dissidence. While this is a valuable approach, the resultant assessment of East German literature is incomplete and restricted to a narrow set of

17   See for instance "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution" by Susan Buck-Morss, *Bond and Beyond* by Bennett and Woollacott and Fredric Jameson "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" among numerous others.

21

publications. Adele Marie Barker, in her study of Soviet popular culture, acknowledges that analytical distinctions often depend upon an observer's location within a society or without (20). The same is true for American and West German students of East German literature, who focused on the publications at the "margins of acceptability" and canonized those who were critical of the Party. On the outside, this process created a type of elite determined by the category of subversion. In the case of canonical authors, like Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, for instance, the distinction between margin and center becomes less clear. Despite their controversial stance, they still possessed economic, cultural, and social capital internally as international representatives of a new East German cultural tradition. Indeed, in the early 1990s, the field of East German Literary Studies experienced a crisis, when it was alleged that Wolf and Müller had been informants for the East German secret police.[18]

To approach GDR popular literature solely with the intent of identifying aspects of dissent inadequately describes East German conditions of culture. A focus merely on the subversion of this hegemonic ideology fails to recognize Bathrick's contention that few individuals in the GDR lived completely outside of the system. Rather, East German life was characterized by the negotiation of everyday life both inside and outside the Marxist-Leninist ideology that informed existence within the GDR (*Powers* 1–25). Furthermore, my study acknowledges various *degrees* of subversion in the GDR, and, in addition, sheds new light on the intricacies and complexities of state and societal relations within that country. In the words of Mary

18 The degree of Wolf and Müller's individual involvement with the East German secret police (the *Staatsicherheitsdienst*) differed. Müller was a registered "unofficial informant" (IM) under two separate code names and also admitted to speaking with the Stasi. However, no IM file has been found on Müller. Christa Wolf's IM file primarily contains records of conversations that took place between 1959 and 1962. At the time, she was a committed member of the SED and was moving swiftly up in the party ranks. Three years later, she broke with the party. By 1968, the Stasi had begun to observe her. Neither Wolf's nor Müller involvement with the Stasi compares to the allegations made against Prenzlauer Berg poets Sascha Anderson and Reiner Schedlinski. However, it threw assumptions regarding the role of the GDR public intellectual as dissident into question. See Bathrick *Powers*, 21–22, 221–225.

22

Fulbrook, it is important to rethink not the "'relations' between, but rather the '*inter*-relations' between, the overlapping and mutually informing elements of state and society" (Fulbrook's emphasis 289). This new method reveals a much more complex and interconnected process of production and reception.

Science Fiction Discourse in the GDR

Recent contributions to East German Studies have focused on language as a means to shed new light on subversive acts in culture and society. Based in part on Michel Foucault, these studies have sought to examine the manner in which "the production of discourse [was] at once distributed, selected, organized and redistributed" in East German society and the role in which such discourses shaped practices of exclusion and inclusion ("Order" 52). Yet, as David Bathrick points out, many semiotic and cultural studies of East German ideological constructs theorize them in terms of black and white (Powers 15–17).

Such studies describe an exclusionary system that operated according to a framework of binary opposites, through which all cultural and social norms were evaluated and encoded. Determining what was "right" and "wrong," "true" and "false", "progressive" or "reactionary," these values excluded or outlawed all those who did not operate within them. Designed to enforce a "singleness of meaning" in cultural understanding and interpretation, censorship then did not simply exist on a governmental level, but throughout all levels and facets of life in the public sphere. It created a total discursive system and determined the aesthetic norms implemented through official cultural policy. Those who chose to speak publicly, regardless of the form, had to demonstrate their *Parteilichkeit (*commitment to the Party). They not only complied with, but also internalized it in order to insure communicable meaning (Bathrick, *Powers* 15–17).

This model is on the whole very useful in understanding the discursive practices in East Germany. Still, the totality of this model is an ahistorical, theoretical construct, which becomes less accurate

23

when applied to a specific individual or societal context. Generational difference, shifts in political and ideological thought, combined with multiple levels of ideological compliance within state institutions, created degrees of totality and variation in meaning over time and space. Numerous discourses existed within this ostensibly total discursive system. Bathrick's own analysis of the complex political and cultural roles of GDR literary intellectuals demonstrates the manner in which these authors sometimes "rewrote the master code from within the code itself" (*Powers* 19). My study of GDR science fiction continues to question the existence and nature of this master code. In addition, it reveals the gaps and fissures that resulted from the overlapping of discourses on popular culture, literature and utopia that comprised official efforts to create and enforce that very master code.

Science fiction, itself, is a form of popular literature that blends the fields of science and technology with literature in an uneasy synthesis. This tension permeated the discourse on science fiction as it incorporated two foundational tenets of the SED's Marxist–Leninist ideology: technological determinism and reeducation through literature. The primary focus of this evolving discourse concentrated on the role of science fiction within socialism and the instrumentalization of the genre's utopian function. An analysis of this discursive focus makes up the core of this investigation. It makes visible the power relations present in the repeated redrawing of barriers around science fiction's location in an "openly interrogative space" (Armitt 81). Party functionaries continually tried to contain science fiction within a Marxist–Leninist discourse built upon ideologically defined scientific or literary forms.

GDR cultural policy was constantly evolving to meet the needs of the current economic and political situation. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming writes, "concepts such as 'socialist realism' and 'critical' changed over time, often in response to the kinds of texts that writers were submitting for publication." Consequently, "[n]egotiation constantly occurred as the borders of censorship were regularly redefined" (57). Certainly, the power to determine the ultimate course of cultural policy lay with the Central Committee of the SED. Many critical authors had their careers and personal freedom unjustly curtailed under the Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker regimes. Still,

24

the government's actions were not always systematic. Particularly in the first decade of the GDR, overarching policy remained vague with regard to science fiction. In a sense, the primary agents of science fiction policy were the genre's editors and authors who constantly navigated the boundaries of a programmatic literary policy. Their efforts point to the presence of diverse ideas concerning the nature and purpose of science fiction in East Germany.

For science fiction authors and publishers, the negotiation process was particularly complex, since GDR science fiction occupied a curious combination of discursive locations. It lay on: 1) the margins of literary policy and discourse; 2) the margins of institutional discourse on scientific and technological progress, but at the center of a popular fascination with this same subject; 3) the center of a pedagogical discourse on reeducation; and, in the latter half of the GDR; 4) the center of the discourse by authors and fans in the science fiction niche. These various discourses overlapped, conflicted with, and informed each other. Where the censor did determine the parameters of the discussion, individuals with an interest in improving the quality and diversity of science fiction in the GDR were able to work the codes of the GDR system to bring about small, yet significant changes. Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that the censor failed to take science fiction seriously and often overlooked critique that might have otherwise been targeted had it appeared in a manuscript of a more well-known, dissident writer (Kruschel, "Zwischen" 158–9).

My project analyzes the formulation of policy by the Socialist Unity Party (SED) on popular literature as it related to science fiction. Yet, it also compares and contrasts the arguments of prominent individual voices, which influenced the shape of this plan over time. The science fiction that resulted was not mere party propaganda. Of the over 150 science fiction novels published in East Germany, some aligned more than others with the doctrine of socialist realism. Many stories, however, also contained a subtext. For others, the mere act of imagining a socialist future pushed the boundaries of party policy that had not yet considered or proclaimed the exact nature of that future.

Chapters two, three, four, six and eight cover the role of East German science fiction in society. Chapter two focuses on German

science fiction before 1949 and has two primary goals in mind. One is to establish a pattern of both continuity and change prior to the creation of two Germanies. To this end, it provides a brief introduction to the three most influential German science fiction writers up to the end of World War II: Kurd Lasswitz, Hans Dominik and Thea von Harbou. Second, the chapter surveys the science fiction of the Left in the Weimar Republic. Third, although the Soviet presence ensured the dominance of a Stalinist model, German communists also made their own contributions to the discussion on popular literature in the Soviet Occupational Zone (SBZ). Only two original German science fiction novels appeared during this period: Ludwig Turek's *Der goldene Kugel* (The Golden Sphere, 1949) and Fritz Enskat's *Gefangen am Gipfel der Welt. Im Nordmeer verschollen* (Imprisoned at the Top of the World. Missing in the North Sea, 1949). An examination of the utopian aspects of these two books provides insight into German Marxist–Leninist science fiction in a period before the foundation of the GDR.

Chapter three examines the early formation of GDR science fiction during a pivotal period from the founding of East Germany in 1949 up through the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The first half outlines three important debates surrounding science fiction that were to influence its shape in the coming forty years. One concerns the genre's conflicting status as both popular culture and as literature. In the fifties, debate on science fiction took place within the broader dispute concerning socialist popular literature. The chapter scrutinizes the manner in which select authors, editors and party functionaries established a place for science fiction in two separate phases: 1949–1957 and 1957–1961.

Closely associated with the dichotomy of popular culture/literature is a second juxtaposition: the distinction between reality and fantasy. These two terms represent the core of the Socialist Unity Party's power as it reserved the right to determine truth and falsehood. In the fifties, the party required all publications conform to socialist realism, a politically driven construct. This literature was intended to educate the worker of the future where fantasy remained a dangerous fascist form of the past. An analysis of debates concerning the real and the

26

fantastic in early science fiction novels reveals how room was made for their publication from the beginning of the GDR.

The second part of chapter three introduces the term "utopian realism" to describe the narrative and formal tension present in early GDR science fiction. The "utopian" implies a critique of the existing system and a vision of a more perfect future, where the "real" refers not only to what is scientifically possible but also to the "real" communist future of Marxism-Leninism's scientific socialism. A closer look at two science fiction novels of the period, Heinz Vieweg's *Ultrasymet bleibt geheim (*Ultrasymet Remains Secret, 1955) and H.L. Fahlberg *Ein Stern verrät den Täter* (A Star Betrays the Culprit, 1955) further defines the term. The chapter then examines secondary material, including book reviews, applications for publication, editorial reviews, author letters, and official literary proclamations as well as information from personal interviews, to show that this tension existed on the level of both production and reception.

Two events shape the course of chapter four: 1) the imposition of cybernetic theory on science fiction policy in the early sixties and 2) early signs of a "new wave" in science fiction theory in the late sixties. This chapter describes how science fiction policy reflected Walter Ulbricht's renewed emphasis placed on industrialization at the German Writers' Union first conference on literature of the future in 1962. It then surveys a number of novels to show how their authors displaced "space age" adventures on a distant planet to gain greater narrative leeway. These publications soon gave way to a new kind of literature that further exploited estranged settings and times to correct East Germany's path towards communism: the ambiguous utopia. Influenced by German Romanticism and the satirical science fiction of Stanislaw Lem, it began in the late sixties and dominated the seventies and eighties. *Reise zum Stern der Beschwingten (*Trip to the Planet of the Exhilarated, 1968*)* by Gerhard Branstner and three poems by Günther Kunert are early examples of this science fiction that came about primarily through the efforts of editors at the Verlag Das Neue Berlin.

Several literary, social, and economic developments, discussed in chapter six, fundamentally reshaped science fiction in the seventies. Officially incorporated by the Writers' Union in 1973, the genre became an established method with which to anticipate false paths

on the way to communism and dream of solutions. As a result of Honecker's new cultural policies, the availability and diversity of science fiction steadily increased. Even internationally known writers such as Günther Kunert, Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf and Franz Fühmann turned to science fiction to experiment with new narrative techniques. Stories by Seghers, Wolf, Johanna and Günter Braun, Klaus Möckel, Gerd Prokop, Heiner Rank, and Bernd Ulbrich all represent examples of ambiguous utopia.

The second half of this chapter focuses on the emergence of a science fiction niche in East Germany. It examines the function of this niche and identifies some of its members, which included prominent science fiction authors as well as devoted fans. Similar to the science fiction "ghetto," this niche provided its members with a greater degree of trust and privacy, and contact with others interested in similar issues, as well as broader access to international science fiction. While not an overtly subversive set of communities, the niche nevertheless became the object of intense political scrutiny, since its participants easily strayed from the SED's narrow ideological parameters. In the early seventies, the Kulturbund and the German Writers' Union attempted to contain science fiction and supervise the activities of the niche.

Chapter eight demonstrates that the center of meaningful discourse on science fiction gradually shifted from the Kulturbund and the German Writers' Union to publications that were associated with the niche discussed in chapter six. In the eighties, science fiction authors Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller, as well as the critic and editor Hartmut Mechtel, formulated literary theories of science fiction. Both stressed that the fantastic provided a more legitimate way to access the "real" in socialism. One author who purposely distanced himself from the science fiction niche was Franz Fühmann, who published his satire *Saiäns-Fiktschen* in 1981. Much science fiction in the eighties satirized the reality of the GDR and continued to explore notions of individual identity within the community. Science fantasy produced by the Steinmüllers and Michael Szameit, along with dystopias by Reinhard Kriese and Peter Lorenz, betrayed the further influence of international science fiction.

28

What is Science Fiction?

Western literary criticism traces the roots of science fiction to works by authors as diverse as Plato, Thomas More, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allen Poe, and E.T.A. Hoffmann. The genre is said to contain elements of the fairy tale, myth, utopia, adventure story, and the science experiment.[19] Initially a literature of the modern period, the genre's first authors included Jules Verne, Kurd Lasswitz and H.G. Wells, whose stories were not so much driven by science, but more precisely governed by the search for truth and the real, a basic assumption of the scientific method.

The science fiction story itself takes the form of a scientific experiment. It often combines some form of utopian (or dystopian) narrative with technological innovation in a rationally explained setting and time. The author recreates a world for the most part similar to our own on another planet or in another space and time. Then, she isolates an experimental factor by introducing it in a new or strange form, and, in doing so, places the universality of this factor in our world into question. As many an author, critic, or fan has expressed, science fiction is a literature that poses the question: "What if?"

In East Germany, the term science fiction originally indicated what was considered to be western trivial literature, where *wissenschaftliche-phantastische Literatur* (scientific fantastic literature) came to designate the socialist tradition. This second term was based theoretically on the Soviet tradition of *nautia-fantastica*. In literary and publishing discourse, science fiction and scientific fantastic literature coexisted with other generic labels in East Germany, including "technical literature," "utopian literature," "scientific utopian literature," and others.

In order to gain distance from the ideological term "scientific fantastic literature," I use "science fiction" to refer to the East German tradition. This designation allows for greater analytical leeway, when discussing the specific connotations of various terminologies in con-

---

19   See Scholes and Rabkin 113–162, 165–174; Janice Antczak, Steven Kagle 225, and James 12–27.

29

text. Due to the widespread reintroduction of the "science fiction" label by East German fans, authors, and editors in the 1980s, this convention is a valid one. Where some eastern fans and authors still use "science fiction" to refer solely to the Anglo–American form, others did and do understand science fiction to have a broader meaning.

Science fiction and Utopia

Science fiction has much in common with its close relative and predecessor the utopian novel. The classic literary utopia is characterized by the discovery of an ideal society, which remains closed off and unknown to the outside world. Often appearing in discursive form, the narrator acts as discoverer, explaining and evaluating the advanced society for the benefit of a contemporary reader. Through this evaluation, Thomas Moylan writes, "utopia negates the contradictions in a social system by forging visions of what is not yet realized either in theory or practice. In generating such figures of hope, utopia contributes to the open space of opposition" (*Demand* 1–2). Philosophical-political projections of a perfect society appeared as early as Plato's *Republic* and included More's *Utopia* and Gilman's *Herland* to name a few. These writings reflected upon the present in a corrective manner and suggested means for improvement in the quality of society.

The formal elements of the fantastic in science fiction enhance the critical function of any utopian narrative. Stucturalist Tzvetan Todorov incorporated science fiction in his landmark study of the fantastic in the category of the scientific wonderful. In this category, he presents the fantastic as an irrational element that is then logically explained. Todorov describes its ability to rupture perceived limits of the real: "The fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it" (158). As a result, the progression from irrational to real creates a dialectic between the "moment of uncertainty" of the fantastic and the resulting "reality," which destabilizes an implied reader's notion of the real (33). It is this dialectic between the fantastic and the "real" that allows for a more

30

precise analysis of science fiction's inherent potential to trangress existing notions of reality. In a societal context, Todorov extrapolates the potential subversive function of the fantastic as "a means of combat against […] censorship" (159) whatever form this censor might take.

In a manner similar to Todorov, Brecht scholar and science fiction expert Darko Suvin developed a Marxist definition of science fiction in the early seventies based on estrangement theory. By transporting the reader into another time and place, he believed that science fiction does not predict the future, but rather addresses the present. Suvin described science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (*Metamorphosis* 8). He drew upon the concept of estrangement, which was originally developed by the Russian Formalists and adopted by Bertolt Brecht in his *Kleines Organon für das grosse Theater*. Here, Brecht defines the effect of estrangement (*Verfremdungeffekt*) as "one which allows us to recognize its subjects, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (quoted in Suvin 6). In this respect, Suvin's theory likens theoretical developments in the GDR regarding science fiction. Engaged editors and authors perceived science fiction first as a way to rejuvenate the communist revolution in the late sixties and seventies, and then later as a method in which to unmask the "real."

Suvin also incorporates the theories of Ernst Bloch, another figure important to East German utopian discourse, into his own thinking. Bloch's writings aptly describe the hope and aspects of revolutionary utopia present throughout the East German science fiction tradition. He postulates that the estranged aspect of the science fiction narrative can be attributed to the presence of the *novum*, a term which Bloch defines as a "totalizing cognitive innovation" that deviates from "the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (quoted in Suvin 64).

According to Suvin's definition of science fiction, the effect of estrangement, set into motion by the presence of a novum, leads to and interacts with what Bloch conceived to be the process of cognition on the part of the reader. In this way, the implied reader "reflect[s] on

reality" in a rational manner and sees the present in a different light. Resulting observations are perceived to be more real or true and contain an innately progressive element. According to Suvin, the act of reading science fiction simultaneously distances the reader from her empirical environment, and invites comparisons between an alternative world and the real world (6). For clarification, Suvin insists on a rational scientific process of estrangement for science fiction that he juxtaposes with the less "rational" world of fantasy literature.

Where Suvin's definition was influential in the establishment of science fiction as a literary genre within the academy, it fails to adequately articulate the genre's estranged location within a particular society. The sizable amount of feminist science fiction written over the past thirty years in the United States and Great Britain provides one example. Taking advantage of science fiction's fantastic qualities, authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Johanna Russ, Marge Piercy, and Octavia Butler have used the genre to explore the alternative realities of gender and racial difference. They thematize what Lucie Armitt describes as science fiction's general preoccupation with "the precariousness of apparently fixed structures, their transgression and the problem of the small-scale individual who finds herself amid large-scale circumstances beyond her control" (72). According to Armitt, science fiction is an ideal medium with which to subvert hegemonic systems and values, while simultaneously contributing to the articulation of a voice specific to that difference. Figures such as Donna Haraway's cyborg and Sigourney Weaver's Ripley have come to symbolize the feminist struggle for, and possibility of redefining reality from both inside and outside the existing social matrix.

Based in feminist and postmodern theories, Lucie Armitt writes of science fiction's dynamic position on the "frontier" between high and low culture in her book *Theorizing the Fantastic* (72). Blurring the boundaries between both, science fiction thus functions as an ideal site from which to gain a better understanding of these categories in the East German context. GDR science fiction occupied not only frontiers between high and low, but also those gaps between state institutions with inconsistent mandates and policies. In this way, science fiction remained, as David Bathrick has described, simultaneously in-

32

side and outside of the system.[20] As discussed in the following chapters, a number of its authors wrote both in affirmation and dissent of the existing regime. For that reason, the study of science fiction complicates the common academic perception of GDR literature as either hegemonic or subversive.

Similarly, Armitt discusses science fiction's predisposal to transgress the generic frontiers, to mix with other forms, and create "mongrel or heteroglot texts" in which "the repressed or excluded meanings of popular culture become most intelligible" (72). The use of text in this manner refers not only to inner-textual tension and rupture, but also extra-textual transgression of societal generic codes and discourses defined by the hegemonic ideology of East Germany. By examining these codes and discourses in East German science fiction more closely, I define the genre and also reveal the everyday transgressions and repressions present in one subsection of GDR society. As will be shown, the fantastic elements of science fiction, the displacement of its setting in another time and space, and the utopianism of that more perfect time and space inherently contained the potential to provide a vision of a socialist future, which was either at odds with, or beyond, that of the SED.

The prevalent literary historical narrative of GDR literature characterizes it as an initial return to an older style of realism of the 19th century that then progressed to a late development of modernism in the seventies and eighties. In her study of the post-fascist familial narrative, Julia Hell challenges this portrayal and asserts that some early East German literature was modern (15–16). I am inclined to agree with Hell and point to the early works of science fiction covered in this book as an example. Science fiction was, in its first stages, a modern literary form. The genre first developed in the late 19th century and came into its own at the beginning of the 20th century as the pace of technological development continued to progress at lightening speed. The same faith in technological progress existed in

---

20   See *Powers* 13. Foucault also observed that, in instances of discursive control, effective formation of competing discourses can occur "within the limits of this control, or outside them, or more often on both sides of the boundary at once." See "Order" 73.

East Germany from the beginning, redirected from its fascist version to a communist one. Furthermore, science fiction allowed East Germans to respond to anxieties concerning the new and different in their own time.

Chapters five, seven, and nine each cover one of three novels. Chapter five looks at Del Antonio's *Heimkehr der Vorfahren (*Return of the Forefathers, 1966) as utopian realism. This particular work provides a comprehensive vision of a communist future, which was not isolated or unreachable, but was believed to be instructive in demonstrating the dialectical path to such a possibility. Through his science fiction, Del Antonio strove to recreate and redefine a German national pride based on technological superiority. Influenced by Soviet science fiction author Ivan Efremov and classic German science fiction author Hans Dominik, Del Antonio's fourth book outlines a vision of future communist society. The novel contains far-reaching extrapolations of both the social and scientific applications of cybernetics on Earth. Del Antonio affirms official cultural policy in this manner. Yet the utopian quality of his Earth setting also transgressed the boundaries of defined ideological reality. What sets this text apart from others was its female protagonist, Vena Rendhoff, and a discourse on the "other" set in an imperfect communist society. Although officially emancipated by Marxism–Leninism, women experienced a different reality from that of men in East Germany of the 1960s. Del Antonio not only problematized the inadequate extension of economic rights under both the "capitalist" and "communist" umbrellas in the area of gender, he also examined the category of difference through the reintegration of a 300-year old crew to a more advanced Earth.

Chapter seven examines Johanna and Günter Brauns' *Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega XI* (Uncanny Manifestations on Omega XI, 1974) as ambivalent utopia. This particular novel contains a cautionary, often satirical, social commentary with corrective systemic suggestions modeled in the story itself. The feature helps to retain an encouraging, yet tempered outlook. The title betrays the Brauns' literary background. Influenced by E.T.A. Hoffmann, they incorporated romantic elements of the uncanny, the grotesque, and a critique of the Enlightenment to comment on the development of East

34

German society. Their second science fiction novel, the book under-scores the importance of the genre as *Gedankenspiel* (critical thought game). The Brauns' employed the notion of play and of the game, a theme found throughout much of their writing, as a way of revealing the "real," in order to address pressing problems of society at large. In this manner, their narrative transcended the East German paradigm and warned of false steps in both the East and West from within the moral framework of Marxism–Leninism.[21]

Chapter nine analyzes Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüllers' *Der Traummeister* (The Dreammaster, 1990), treating it as socialist apoca-lypse. The novel represents a critical rejection of what I term collec-tive, static utopia, with hope placed in a future society based on dyna-mic utopia(s) made up of individual dreams. The first-person narrative follows the maturation of its teenage protagonist Glauke Arnya, who through her estranged position as a woman, is able to progress from the notion of "we" to "I." She learns to dream on her own by the end of the novel. Completed in 1988, this *Wendetext* combines the genres of science fiction and fantasy to highlight the uncertainty of the "real" in both western and eastern political systems. Although largely allegorical, the ambiguity of the text is maintained throughout. In this manner, the Steinmüllers not only bypassed the censors successfully, but they also underscored the importance of both the rational and the irrational in an ever-present struggle to perceive the "real."

Methodological Challenges

There are a number of methodological challenges present in this study. In my analysis, I present various readings of science fiction in East Germany. For the most part, I focus on material from the public sphere, primarily on articles in various journals and magazines as well

---

21   The concept of voice and the co-mingling of voices of different gender in team writing presents an interesting theoretical conundrum. In my present analysis, I do not try to separate one author's voice from the other, as it would prove almost impossible even for the authors themselves.

as meeting protocols and documentation from numerous applications for publication submitted by the publisher for each book. When analyzing such literature, it is important to recognize the ground rules for the publication of an article in the GDR, namely that it had to correspond to the orthodox interpretation of the Marxist–Leninist worldview by the Socialist Unity Party. However, the degree and manner of ideological interpretation proved highly unpredictable. It varied with each political shift and, to a varied extent, with each individual. Many policies were shaped by personal conviction, as well as institutional affiliation and degree of power within that institution. Consequently, it is useful to look closely at the way in which the GDR media read science fiction and influenced reception.

In addition, I have conducted a number of author and editor interviews, but refrained from holding interviews with readers on a broad scale. My discussions with authors and editors aided greatly in ascertaining how writers perceived their work and how the publisher received it. Ascertaining actual reader reception was more difficult for several reasons. To begin with, the limited number of first-person reader accounts from the 1950s and 1960s proved unreliable. Although readers' accounts appeared in a series of letters to the editor in the journal *Jugend und Technik* in the late 1960s, there is no way to verify the legitimacy of these opinions. In addition, any reader interviews conducted after 1989 are necessarily compromised by the reactions to the events since then. How a reader remembers their reading today might differ greatly from the reactions they had when East Germany still existed. For the time being, such readings are the material for a future study.

I do not give a detailed thematic overview of GDR science fiction, since Horst Heidtmann and Thomas Hartung have done this already. Their approach is useful in that it grants an overall understanding of what was possible in a socialist society under censorship. Conversely, I choose to deal with three science fiction novels in depth. It is important to recognize these science fiction novels as individual texts that each had their own particular commentary and future vision. At the same time, each serves as an example of the major developments within the respective decades.

36

For this reason, I have chosen to analyze texts by authors, which were either recommended to me as outstanding in my extensive contact with both active and non-active fan club members in Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden, or were among the favorite science fiction authors documented in reader surveys taken in 1967 and 1989. Of course, this does not mean that other authors and novels were neither well liked nor well written. However, large numbers of readers responded to works by Del Antonio, the Brauns and the Steinmüllers. I am not able to demonstrate how East German fans and others read these texts at the time of the original publication. At the same time, my reading accesses what Raymond Williams believed science fiction could demonstrate, namely that "contemporary structure of feeling" which reverberates among its readers and strikes a common chord.[22]

22   See Williams, "Science Fiction" 356. In *Problems* 22–23, Williams defined a
      "structure of feeling" as that "organizing principle by which a particular view of
      the world, and from that the coherence of the social group which maintains it,
      really operates in consciousness."