

Chapter Three

Reconciling Science Fiction with Socialist Realism (1949–1960)

In the past, people paid more attention to famous singers, film stars, and sport greats. Then everything changed [...]. And the whole course of mechanization and civilization assumed a different path through the positive participation of people from all walks of life in the life and work of the scholars, engineers, and technicians. (Fahlberg, *Erde ohne Nacht* 266)

For us, the future is not utopia, but socialism, and we are in the lucky position to be able to learn from our own future, namely the Soviet Union, ‘where tomorrow is already history.’ (Hauswald, “Propheten” 8).

With the founding of the GDR in 1949, the Central Committee of the SED officially aligned East Germany with the Soviet Union. It hoped to insure a quick revolution and rapid transition to communism, and adapted Stalinist socialism as a model for its cultural policies and organizational structure. Accordingly, the SED established a cultural infrastructure made up of several institutions designed to regulate cultural production and discourse in East Germany. The Academy of Arts (*Akademie der Künste*), which had done much to support democracy in the Weimar Republic, was reestablished in 1950 to serve the cultural policies of the SED. The German Writers’ Union (*Deutscher Schriftstellerverband*, DSV) originated on June 4, 1950 as a part of the Kulturbund. In 1952, it became a separate entity and reported directly to the Cultural Section of the SED’s Central Committee (Emmerich 44–45). In August 1951, the Office of Literature and Publishing (*Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen*) began to centrally manage the publishing industry and facilitated the appearance of those texts commensurable with cultural policy. All books published in the GDR had to be approved by this office.

At the same time, the SED began to formulate its national cultural policy. At issue were the same two theoretical questions that had

dominated similar discussions in the Weimar Republic. One was the question of cultural heritage. In the wake of World War II, which German literary traditions were appropriate to the newly proclaimed communist state? Second, what was the best way to create a “literature of the proletariat” within communism? What resulted was a politically motivated, public campaign against cosmopolitanism (*Kosmopolitismus*) and formalism (*Formalismus*) that was designed to aid in East Germany’s process of nation building.

The so-called Formalism debates originated at the Third Party Congress in July 1950 when the SED announced its first Five-Year Plan. Cultural policy remained subordinate to economic interests. It was to help increase worker productivity and continue reeducation efforts. Concerned solely with the ideological content of cultural production, Walter Ulbricht instructed artists to create cheerful and self-sacrificing protagonists, whose only purpose was the construction of socialism (Jäger 34). Ulbricht maintained,

We need neither pictures of *moonscapes* nor of fowl fish and the like [...]. The gray on gray art of painting [...] stands in stark opposition to the new life in the German Democratic Republic (Schubbe 214, my emphasis).

Essentially, the SED expected GDR artists to mirror its policies and portray the “reality” it envisioned. Ulbricht’s pronouncement sheds light on the plan-mentality behind the formulation of socialist realism as the SED’s official literary form.

The Formalism debates from 1951 to 1952 took the shape of similar debates held in the Soviet Union and underscored the inexorable link between politics and aesthetics (Staritz 71–72). They proved to be the crux of a number of key issues in emerging cultural policy and contributed to the construction of a national identity and to the legitimization of the existence of the GDR as the self-defined, only true German alternative in the Cold War context. Central to the debate was the manner in which the Socialist Unity Party adopted Soviet socialist realism and adapted it to German context. Up to the end of the Weimar Republic, a variety of socialist styles had existed in Germany, most notably that of Bertolt Brecht. The definition of socialist realism that resulted from the debates on Formalism was

intended to silence alternative paths to socialism and communism present in the GDR immediately after the end of World War II, and to consolidate the power of the Socialist Unity Party.

In their interpretation of Soviet socialist realism, SED cultural officials drew heavily on the writings of Hungarian literary critic György Lukács. His concept of realism replaced that of Brecht's estrangement method (*Verfremdungstechnik*), which they now labeled formalist. In *The Destruction of Reason* (1952), Lukács bases his definition of socialist realism theoretically on Hegel and aesthetically on the German Classical period and on 19th-century bourgeois realism. Through the use of mimeticism, literature functions as an educative tool. Its ideal socialist reality sets an example for the reader. Lukács argues that art and literature should represent the "totality of life" in a manner that presents the reader with a totality of meaning. This premise stands in stark contrast to the Brechtian theory of alienation, which had relied on gaps in meaning that force the audience to reflect critically upon reality. Conversely, Lukács believed literature should reflect the commonality, the essence, and the legal legitimacy of a socialist reality in an organic and closed form that left no room for questioning (Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte* 120). In many ways, Lukács socialist realism resembled the classic utopia in its presentation of socialism as an ideal yet closed system.

At its fifth conference in March 1951, the Central Committee of the SED reiterated its support of Lukács' concept of socialist realism. In applying his aesthetic theory to the post-war context, Lukács bifurcates the interpretation of cultural and political history into the categories of Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment. He holds the former to be rational and progressive and the latter irrational and destructive. The SED leadership adopted this rationale and equated charges of "formalism" or "kitsch" with "regressive" Romantic influences, which it believed had led to fascism and continued to dominate western culture. It announced that a literary form other than socialist realism contradicts "objective reality" and does not transmit an awareness of that reality. Such art endangered the foundation of a new German national culture and supporting the "cosmopolitanism" and the "war-like policies of American imperialism" (*Dokumente* 431).

The SED's support of socialist realism had powerful literary and political implications. Its implementation as state cultural policy established an institutional link between an objective, totalizing representation of existence and the socioeconomic policies of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). In many cases, socialist realism became a propaganda mechanism with which to convince the populace to aid in the centrally orchestrated reconstruction and reorganization of East Germany. SED officials also accused West Germany of failing to implement effective denazification procedures. The party maintained that it had eradicated fascist influences from East German literature, by eliminating all texts that fell outside of its restrictive boundaries.

Its broad understanding of fascism targeted all formal innovation after 19th-century realism, including the utopian socialist and avant garde movements of the Weimar Republic. Those authors who chose to comply with socialist realism helped to reinforce its legitimacy. Writers who incorporated unwelcome narrative forms came to be known as decadent followers of bourgeois formalism (Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte* 118–123). Literary genres which did not comply with the total, typical, organic and closed nature of socialist realism became politically undesirable and threatening. Such literature included forms of the fantastic (e.g. the fairy tale, the parable, the myth and science fiction) as well as other types of prose that contained an open or fragmented structure.

In his book *The Powers of Speech*, David Bathrick emphasizes that

literary dissidence in the GDR often began *not* as a philosophical or political challenge to the ideological principles of Marxism–Leninism, but as a sometimes unintended fall into 'polysemic' modes of address and that, by virtue of their multiplicity of meaning, were perforce understood and evaluated as negative, that is, as subversive of the official, 'monosemic' mode of discourse. (16)

Similarly, fantastic literary forms were inherently subversive due to the polysemic nature of their fractured narratives. They contained the potential to challenge the unified presentation of SED policy as the historically inevitable, rational, enlightened path to a socialist future

based on sound, scientific method and rapid technological advancement.

In the case of science fiction, not only did its use of the fantastic conflict with socialist realism, its incorporation of utopian or dystopian narrative did too. Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopia as a narrative that through its presentation of an ideal, implicitly criticizes the present (3). The presentation of a future other than the vision outlined by the SED challenged the party's authority. Therefore, even if the author subscribed to Marxism–Leninism, the potential for deviation from the party line lay in the act of extrapolation into the future. Indeed the very articulation of a future vision created an open structure with many potential paths leading to that future, instead of the one presented by the SED.

The potential for utopian subversion did not remain an idle threat in the eyes of the SED leadership. At this time, the influence of Ernst Bloch, who had revised Marxist theory to include the utopian as a creative impulse towards the future, cannot be underestimated. In his successive volumes of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope), published in 1954, 1956, and 1958, Bloch outlines his “Principle of Hope.” This idea refers to the revolutionary power of hope for a better tomorrow as a decisive factor in future progress. Also central is his concept of utopia, which Bloch does not limit to the usual classic definition of a political or literary form. Instead his utopian future is determined by tendencies, which are born of and shaped by hope in the present. Bloch finds these tendencies in many places, including in all kinds of art, popular and “high” literature. He believes they can function as a type of “social daydream” and provide an important direction in the future, creative development of society. According to Bloch, the author or artist demonstrates a latent tendency towards the future in her work, which he identifies as the not-yet-conscious. This element can manifest itself in the future, if the time and place are right for its recognition and utilization. Using the methodologies of Marx, Engels and Lenin, Bloch finds his principle of hope in Marxism, believing it to be “the unity of hope and a process of cognition” (*Freiheit* 180). Where the classical utopia presents an ideal yet timeless

future without showing the clear path to it, Bloch interprets Marxism as the “concrete anticipation” where utopia became accessible.¹

Returning to the University of Leipzig in 1948, Bloch remained a controversial figure up through his decision to remain in the West after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Despite the great importance of his utopian conception in artistic and literary circles of the time, his work came under open attack in the GDR. The increasing tensions of the Cold War and adoption of the Soviet model for the reconstruction of the GDR, made the presentation of alternative or multiple futures unwanted. Bloch’s ideas resonated with many intellectuals of the day. In 1955, the SED declared him to be an “ideological enemy.” In the later 1950s, he increasingly found his freedom curtailed and his work attacked by party hard liners as unorthodox. Participants of the 1957 “Conference on the Question of Blochian Philosophy” in Leipzig labeled Bloch a revisionist (*Ernst Blochs Revision 7*). The conference attacked Bloch from a pragmatic perspective, arguing that his “principle of hope” distracted attention from current everyday problems, by appealing to abstract ideals, wishes and desires.

Horst Heidtmann searches unsuccessfully for a direct connection between Ernst Bloch’s principle of hope and the development of GDR science fiction. He provides a convincing connection through one or

- 1 “To have as the focus of philosophical deliberations speculation about the most distant future is unfruitful and distracts from life and the active participation in the formation of our present and the next future.” See Schultz 61. In addition, they called him “unscientific,” arguing that daydreams and utopian hopes belonged to the irrational, unscientific world of fascism, and not to the rational reality of scientific socialism. Horst Heidtmann remarks that this last point stems from a philosophical contradiction between the Socialist Unity Party’s hard-line interpretation of Marx and Bloch’s interpretation, in which Bloch believed that the material basis of the future should be created by the hope and wishes of the people in the present. In the eyes of the dominant SED party, any democratic-socialist hopes or other future visions already had been channeled into their pragmatic solutions to the current political situation. Only when the struggle of the everyday was completed could attention be paid to the more abstract goal of a communist future and the freedom of humanity. For a succinct and clear description of Bloch’s reception in the GDR, see Heidtmann, *Utopische* 138–144.

two references, which lie “in-between the lines” (*Utopische* 138–144). As will become evident in the pages to come, there seem to be a number of indirect references to Bloch. Indeed, there is a sense of hope in the projections into the future in numerous GDR science fiction works. Its authors often described their works in terms of dreaming towards the future, a phrase that is not unlike Bloch’s emphasis on the act of “dreaming ahead.” In addition, future hope and creative projection into the future are common qualities of science fiction as a genre. While it is likely that his philosophy had an influence on GDR science fiction, it is certain that its concepts of “hope” and “dreaming” are a continuation of the phenomena described by Bloch.

Recently, science fiction author Karlheinz Steinmüller referred to the quandary utopian literature created for East German cultural officials. According to Steinmüller, socialist-leaning utopias (More and Bellamy) represented a respectable humanistic tradition, which was acknowledged by the Soviet Union. However, as these works criticized their own contemporary societies, further developments in the genre represented the potential for continued resistance and critique (“Ende” 166). In light of Steinmüller’s comments, it would seem that the utopian elements inherent to science fiction and socialist realism would remain irreconcilable on a political level as played out in the discourse on the literary form.

Trivilliteratur or Socialist Entertainment Literature?

The discourse surrounding popular literature in the early 1950s paralleled the discussion on formalism and kitsch. Both Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler represented one socialist tradition, along with Ernst Bloch, a number of expressionists, dadaists and others on the Left during the Weimar period. These artists and philosophers favored the fantastic mode and popular art forms as a means of accessing dynamic, generative forces necessary to the continued historical dialectic. As David Bathrick writes, they focused on artistic experimen-

tation as the building block of a new socialist culture, and rejected the Enlightenment and German classicism as the only legitimate sources from which to draw material for the establishment of a progressive social society. This approach brought them into continual conflict with Marxist-Leninist historical materialism (Powers 183). In 1948, Bertolt Brecht outlined a model for the development of a socialist popular literature in his *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (Little Organon for the Theater). Herein, he stresses the positive effects it could have in the development of a society based on humanism and in the formation of a “scientifically” educated reader.

However, it was the adoption of Lukács’ socialist realism by SED cultural officials that originally determined and shaped official policy on popular literature. Lukács’ coupling of “völkisch” with irrationalism and the Third Reich led to efforts to rid popular culture’s “folk character” of its “fascist” heritage and instill in it the classical-progressive traditions with “anti-fascist” morals. This position did leave room for the establishment of a socialist popular literature as a legitimate alternative to western forms.

Open support for popular literature continued through 1950. In that year, academic Erich Sielaff called for an end to the value distinction between the literary novel and the entertainment novel (*Unterhaltungsroman*) (464). Its negative influence in Wilhemian Germany and under National Socialism, he argued, does not imply that popular literature must take the form of “trivial” literature (*Trivialliteratur*). Sielaff reasoned that the “entertainment novel” should play as important a role in the GDR precisely due to its previous sociological importance. “‘Entertainment’ via the novel becomes ‘education’” (462). Sielaff’s use of the less pejorative “entertainment novel” signals its designation as socialist popular literature.

In the *Bibliothekar*, Ursula Goetz lamented the reader who was attracted solely by suspense in a science fiction novel. She emphasized, in any case, that the science fiction reader is not predisposed to escapism. More precisely, science fiction prepared this person for confronting the day-to-day challenges of life in the GDR. Goetz also stressed science fiction’s ability to engender a sense of wonder and excitement in its readers about the future (261). Due to hard-line

cultural functionaries in the early fifties, articles in support of science fiction disappeared until 1957.

It is important to note, too, that the Formalism debates did not completely halt the publication of science fiction. It continued to appear, despite uncertainty as to its ideological legitimacy. The first GDR titles included Arthur Bagemühl's novel *Das Weltraumschiff* (The Spaceship, 1952) and Klaus Kunkel *Heißes Metall* (Hot Metal, 1952). The Verlag Neues Leben (New Life Publishers) published science fiction in its dime novel series *Das neue Abenteuer* (New Adventure) as early as 1953. In the same year, short stories began to appear in the magazines *Jugend und Technik* (Youth and Technology), *Junge Welt* (Young World), *Fröhlich sein und singen* (Be Happy and Sing, or *Frösi*) and in *Die Schulpost* (The School Post).² Many stories combined adventure narratives with a heavy emphasis on popular science. They were designed to interest children and young adults in science and technology, so that they might choose careers in related fields. Although most of the stories were written for young boys, several science fiction stories appeared a few years later for girls in *Die Zaubertruhe. Almanac für junge Mädchen* (The Magic Chest. An Almanach for Young Girls, 1955), and *Unsere Welt. Jahrbuch für Mädchen und Jungen* (Our World. A Yearbook for Girls and Boys, 1955).³ Unfortunately, little documentation remains of this science fiction, besides the stories themselves.⁴

2 See Hans-Joachim Hartung, who wrote a number of short stories, including "Letzter Start von EZ-14" and "280 km/h im Blauen Blitz," and authors Siegfried Dietrich, Rudi Paschke, and Bernhard Schuster. All short stories are listed in Neumann *Die grosse illustrierte Bibliographie der DDR Science Fiction*.

3 Stories include Majoll Büttner's "Hille reist ins Jahr 2000," Heinz Mielke's "Gefährliches Ziel," and Gerhard Hardel's "Kindergericht in Blumenthal im Jahre 2455." See Neumann.

4 It is often difficult to find early titles. Many are available in private collections. In addition to these new German publications, several foreign science fiction writers also appeared at this time. See Ivan Efremov *Der Tod in der Wüste* (Rasskazi, GDR 1953), Vladimir Obrutchev *Plutonien* (Plootoiviya, GDR 1953) and *Das Sannikovland* (Zemlya Sannikova, GDR 1953), Karel Čapek *War with the Newts* (GDR 1954) and Stanislaw Lem *The Astronauts* (GDR 1954).

While science fiction appeared in the early fifties, hard-liners called strongly for its demise. Alfred Kurella, one of the earliest staunch proponents of a strict interpretation of socialist realism, argued that the need for entertainment literature disappears in a socialist society. Kurella shared the orthodox socialist viewpoint that all “trivial” literature was in reality a propaganda tool of the ruling classes used to provide an outlet for working class frustration with poor living conditions. In a classless society, he maintained, the workers’ needs are fully satisfied. Their desire to escape from the real world disappears.⁵ Kurella rejected the foundation of a socialist “entertainment” literature, defining it as a form of bourgeois kitsch.

However, historical events soon forced a change to this strict interpretation. Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953 led the Soviets to ease their severe treatment of Germany. In June 1953, they called upon the GDR to loosen its restrictions (Jäger 71). As a result of the Workers’ Revolt one week later on June 17, 1953, the SED reassessed its cultural policy in the *Neuer Kurs* (New Course). In 1954, Johannes Becher became the head of the new Ministry of Culture and consolidated the various cultural institutions by placing them under his control. He thus subdued a number of polemical and hitherto influential art and literary scholars (Staritz 137).

The change in leadership impacted science fiction as popular literature by opening up a theoretical space for its existence in Marxist–Leninist ideology in the GDR. Similar to his activities in the Weimar Republic, Becher now pressed for the creation of alternative forms of socialist popular literature. His approach was pragmatic and argued along lines similar to Lukács that entertainment literature should be used in much the same way as it was in the West, as a political tool. Rather than dismiss the need for entertainment, Becher

5 See Schubbe 471. This statement echoes a wide-spread prejudice against popular literature, which betrays a gulf between high and low culture that was to cause further problems in the future of GDR politics. In his 1964 article “Überblick über die französischen Utopien von Cyrano de Bergerac bis zu Etienne Cabet” Werner Krauss predicts the imminent end of the utopia as well, as it had lost “its actual dimension” in a socialist society. See Krauss, *Reise* 16. Krauss also comments that the existing form of GDR science fiction is an “unfavorable” prognosis that does not differentiate itself from the utopia.

acknowledged reader demand for popular literature and reiterated his opinion expressed in 1931:

Of course, if we do not satisfy this need, the masses will find another outlet and obtain reading material from the other side. We cannot combat this reading material from the other side with criticism, with education, etc., [...] we must set our own literature against it – for women, young adults, and children (quoted in Schubbe 223).

Becher's statement reflects a shifting of policy in the upper echelons of the SED. The party elite now considered East Germany to be in a transitional period from socialism to communism, which was a revision of its previous declaration of a communist GDR in 1949. Ideologically, in a transitional state, it was still possible for the "worker" to desire forms of entertainment that existed prior to 1945.

Becher, ironically, draws upon traditional bourgeois associations between entertainment, femininity and childishness from the nineteenth century. Where the working class was then often feminized in this manner, Becher implies a gendered division in the new classless society of the GDR. Popular literature remained trivial, a form not considered to be rational, adult and masculine as is high culture, but rather irrational, naive and feminine. The new socialist literature continued to exist as a second-class or low cultural form of dubious literary value.⁶

One step in creating an official policy on socialist popular literature was the identification of its negative counterpart embodied in the creation of a campaign to rid the GDR of the influences of so-called *Schund und Schmutz* literature. Similar to KPD policy in the Weimar Republic, the SED now denounced all forms of *Trivial-*

6 In the GDR, science fiction was read primarily by males, often of high-school or college age, but also by older technical intellectuals as demonstrated by a survey conducted in 1969 by the magazine *Jugend und Technik* entitled "Zur Feder gegriffen." In my research, which focused on the genre of science fiction, this was one of only two sources that specifically referred to GDR popular literature as something designed for women, young adults, and children. It would be interesting to follow this up and see if there are other similar allusions.

literatur as instruments of bourgeois, anti-communist propaganda. This term became synonymous with *Schund und Schmutz* literature. Even the word “genre” took on the negative connotation of a western categorization no longer needed in socialist realist literary criticism.⁷ When genre was used, it specified the various types of *Schund* literature to be eliminated: “Detective, war, and romance novels, westerns, and science fiction [*Zukunftsabenteuerhefte*]” (Seeliger 152).

In the founding stages of the GDR, officials were especially sensitive to the inexpensive paperbacks being produced in the West. Many of these contained a negative portrayal of the Eastern Bloc, particularly as the Cold War intensified.⁸ Horst Heidtmann comments that West German government advertisements in dime novels, which condemned the “disgraceful regime” of the East, were not directed at western readers, but at eastern ones. Dime novels were cheaper in West Berlin than in the rest of West Germany, leading one to believe that they were priced for the smaller budget of the East German (*Utopische* 219). The sheer numbers of dime novels that were smuggled into East Germany, as well as the intense debate on this issue, attest to a large reader demand for this literature.⁹

The *Schund und Schmutz* campaign made little distinction between the various genres and focused rather on their alleged collective danger to the reader. This accusation was leveled, particularly, but not only, at those that came from the West. Such allegations often targeted the adverse affects, particularly on children, of a continued exposure to the violence in such novels as well as the false expectations and false class-consciousness reinforced by escapism into unreal, unbelievable adventures (“Kampf gegen die Schund- und Schmutzliteratur” 409–410).

7 See “Kampf” 405–411. In addition, this occurred as late as 1973 at a meeting devoted to “science fiction” and its role in the GDR, at which both representatives of the Kulturbund and the German Writers Union participated. An otherwise unidentified Dr. Voigt apologized for the use of the word “genre” correcting himself quickly with the word “literature.” See “Stenografische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 73.

8 For more information on West German dime novels, see Gaida.

9 Up to the 1960s, train carloads of dime novels were confiscated and many were found in packages sent from West Germany. See Heidtmann, *Utopische* 219.

SED efforts to restrict access to western literature were not entirely successful. Consequently, it attempted to influence reading practices by mediating the relations between the text and the reader. Numerous newspaper articles as well as studies appealed on a moral level to readers, claiming that *Schund und Schmutz* literature led to youth violence and criminality in the West and could have the same effect in the East.¹⁰ To avoid this threat, the campaign urged readers to give up *Trivilliteratur*. For instance, schools organized programs to exchange “undesirable” literature from home with socialist realist texts. The “Committee on the Fight Against the Poisoning of Our Youth Through Smut and Trash.” began in 1955. As part of this program, schools and libraries organized book exchange programs. These efforts were not completely effective, as popular literature remained in some private libraries (Heidtmann, *Utopische* 33).

The campaign included forceful confiscation measures and also led to the arrests of several science fiction fans for possession of western science fiction. On March 18, 1959, six fans founded the first GDR science fiction club, the *Science Fiction Interessengemeinschaft* (Science Fiction Community of Interest, *SFIG*) *SATURN* in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz). The members created the club in order to circumvent the limited book supply in the East, gathering what they could to put together a small club library. The club also established contacts with western fan clubs, including K.H. Sheer’s *Stellaris Club*, and appeared on the membership list of the International Science Fiction Society (ISFS). These contacts published news about East German fans in their fanzines, and sent book donations for the club library. In May of the same year, the *SFIG SATURN* welcomed two visitors, Ehrenfried Lenz from the Wuppertal *Freundeskreis für Raumfahrt* (Friends of Space Travel) and long-time science fiction fan Hubert Häußler from Reichenbach/Vogtland, and discussed the activities of an East German fan club. Two months later officials

10 There were a number of articles published in East Germany on youth criminality, see Gewerkschaft; Feix; and Fritz Lange. There was a similar movement in the West on a smaller scale at the same time. It was directed primarily at translations of American comic books and adventure books. The GDR expanded this definition to include most western popular literature.

confiscated one of the western packages addressed to Werner Thost. In November, he and Stefan Michalz were charged with the dissemination of *Schund und Schmutz* literature. Michalz was sentenced to five months in prison, 2 years probation and fined 100 Marks. Werner Thost was fined 75 Marks. Not too long after, the first GDR science fiction fan, Kurt Hertwig, who appeared on the membership list of the Science Fiction Club of Germany (SFCD) as number 43 “from the Eastern zone” in 1955, was also sentenced to four months in prison for the possession of illegal, Western science fiction. It would be some fifteen years before fan clubs existed again in the GDR (Both, Neumann and Scheffler 7 and 23–24).

With western popular literature firmly established as *Schund und Schmutz* literature, efforts now turned to the creation of a socialist alternative. The publisher, *Handreichungen Jugend- und Kinderbuch* (Helping Hands in Youth and Children’s Literature), emphasized adventure literature in its thematic plan for the years 1956 through 1960. In particular, the plan stressed that “the attentiveness to future themes” must move beyond popular science and become more “imaginative” and “artistic” (2). In addition, Karl Wloch called upon all publishers to increase their production of adventure literature in 1956 (1). Wloch was the head of the *Abteilung Literatur und Buchwesen, Sektor Schöne Literatur* (Department of Literature and Publishing, Section on Fine Literature), the first censoring body above the level of the publisher.

In 1956, author Wolfgang Joho included science fiction among the acceptable forms of GDR popular literature.¹¹ In his article, he emphasizes the importance of reading as a leisure activity. Rather than the solely negative assessment as *Schund und Schmutz*, Joho argues for popular literature’s legitimacy within socialism. He emphasizes its pedagogical possibilities, but also the necessity for entertainment and relaxation of the reader. Along these lines, he demonstrates the growing support for a socialist alternative to popular literature by

11 Joho was himself an author of the “Frauenroman” *Jeanne Peyrouton* as well as the fantasy *Die Verwandlungen des Doktor Brad* (The Transformations of Doctor Brad, 1938). He would later become the editor-in-chief of *Neue Deutsche Literatur*.

recognizing the demand for entertainment literature as a real need for rejuvenation rather than as a submission to escapism. This new type of popular literature would include:

exciting content with educational intentions, easy readability combined with an attempt to shape of political ideas in order to replace the light and trashy “literature” that still is in circulation. (“Blick auf Unterhaltungsliteratur” 142).

From his point of view, popular literature should not merely entertain, but also educate and assign meaning to events according to the ideology of GDR-style socialism.

Joho’s review of H.L. Fahlberg’s GDR science fiction novel, *Ein Stern verrät den Täter* (A Star Betrays the Culprit, 1955), classifies it as an utopian/detective novel. Although it contains many elements of the bourgeois detective novel, he believes Fahlberg has taken a step in the direction of the new style of socialist entertainment literature. Joho praises the novel for its clear presentation of the societal struggle between those, who he believes wished to misuse science for “murderous goals” and those who wished to use it for peaceful means (144).

In 1957, critic Gerd Hauswald presented a definition of East German science fiction in an article in *Sonntag*, the cultural voice of the SED. He comments that the dangers of “intoxication, [...] illusion and suggestion” and losing yourself in literature are indeed great. However, addressing existing GDR science fiction, he suggests that the genre is more effective when set in the near future.

The novel of the future from 2057, in which progress has progressed more, but the human rarely has become more human, can only provide relaxation for a few hours. But the novel of the future from 1962 that has not yet been written could give us the confidence and trust and, last but not least, the strength for the present! (“Propheten” 8)

Hauswald thus limits any extrapolation to the “known” future, which could be proven possible scientifically as well as ideologically. This inherently utopian vision was, therefore, not escapist, but presented the concrete reality of socialist development in several years

time.¹² He stresses the importance of this restricted type of utopia as a revolutionary tool, pointing out the pedagogical potential of science fiction to illustrate the tangible successes of contemporary reconstruction efforts. Hauswald also emphasizes the political importance of its speculative qualities. He is one of the first to believe that science fiction possesses special ability to anticipate possible external dangers to socialism, particularly that of nuclear war.

The difficulty of writing science fiction in accordance with this kind of enforced realism became apparent early on. In the *Bibliothekar* in 1957, literary critic Walter Schierlich addressed the difficulties concerning the imagined qualities of the genre's narrative form. He maintains that a science fiction, which loses its ability to extrapolate relatively freely and is limited to the vision and time span of the current five-year plan, becomes more of a type of "novel of the present" (*Gegenwartsroman*) or societal planning strategy. Schierlich cites the importance of the "Gedankenspiel" or "thought game" to the effectiveness of science fiction's ability to capture reader interest. He uses the thought game to refer to science fiction's playfulness with future possibilities, which entertain and educate. On a theoretical level, Schierlich reconciles the conflict between socialist realism and the open interrogative space of science fiction by stressing the importance of the presentation of several futures to the continued development of socialism. He envisions science fiction as a type of materialist, prognostic text.

Importantly, Schierlich believed that the science fiction novel had suffered in the GDR, since it was impossible to write a story of the future that could be corroborated in the present. He bases his argument on a quote from Stanislaw Lem.

It is not yet possible today, to sketch a perfectly detailed, finished, valid picture of the future. [...] Specific theses of historical materialism and certain, long-term forecasts regarding the developmental tendencies in technology and the natural sciences do allow, when we want to grasp it in its concrete details, only one possibility to be portrayed." (quoted in Schierlich 925).

12 A dystopian setting in East Germany was not possible at this time, as the future of the GDR could only be portrayed in a positive manner.

Lem's growing fame inside and outside socialist science fiction circles enabled Schierlich to suggest a broadened definition of the "real" in socialist realism. Science fiction's place within the GDR discourse on utopia received further support through the popular success of a translation of Stanislaw Lem's first book *The Astronauts* in 1954. The achievements of this Polish writer demonstrated the capabilities of socialist science fiction, particularly its ability to appeal to a diverse audience.

As Lem demonstrated, the future cannot be portrayed in an exact manner. Although an author can use contemporary, scientific knowledge and the doctrine of Marxism–Leninism as a guide, room still remains for uncertainty. To remedy this problem, Schierlich argues for a new type of socialist science fiction that would serve as a prognostic form of literature. It would focus on the future possibilities of socialism in the GDR as understood and directed by the Socialist Unity Party. Yet at the same time it would retain the ability to play with the future in order to create an effective and engaging presentation.

Schierlich recognized the importance of the fantastic to science fiction's effectiveness. In so doing, he attempted to harness this power for an ideological purpose. Schierlich allowed room for several future visions as long as they corresponded to socialist realism. However, since socialist realism demanded the submission of the narrative to SED policy, the creation of science fiction in the fifties continued to remain a challenge.

Utopian Realism

Despite the paradoxes inherent to writing science fiction in the GDR, it did exist. Through the sixties, all GDR science fiction was implicitly utopian due to its compliance with socialist realism. Dystopian elements were possible only if they reinforced the socialist utopian project. Therefore, the few novels that did appear in the fifties emerged as a formal compromise between utopian literature and

socialist realism or “utopian realism.” Science fiction scholars generally agree that science fiction distinguishes itself from fantasy due to the manner in which the genre explains the irrational element scientifically, thus rendering the irrational rational (Suvin, *Metamorphosis* 7 and 13 and Parrinder 10). It is this generic quality that enabled the reconciliation between science fiction and socialist realism in East Germany.

Marxist–Leninist philosophy in the GDR held that scientific and technological advancement went hand in hand with the establishment of a communist society. The two worked in a dialectical and historical symbiosis based on the unification of science and production (Lindenberg 38). This link provided a theoretical space within socialist–realist discourse for the fantastic, as long as it was explained in terms of ideological progress and science and technology. In the early fifties, the required setting in the near future also limited the scope of potential fictional innovation to the scientific knowledge of the time.

Arthur Bagemühl’s children’s book *Das Weltraumschiff* (The Spaceship) was one of two science fiction novels to be published in 1952. In many ways, it combines the exotic adventure of Jules Verne, Hans Dominik, or Karl May with the skills of a young boy detective.¹³ However, this story incorporates a socialist realist narrative. Its protagonist, Heinz Habermann, is a Young Pioneer (the East German version of a Boy or Girl Scout), who helps to expose an American plot to steal or destroy an atomic spaceship destined for Saturn. During his adventure, the boy experiences the cooperation of nomads in Iran, and learns that supporters of the English Labor party can be trusted. A combination of exotic lands, Cold War espionage and implicit international solidarity with non-industrialized peoples was common to children’s literature of the time. The story is also not unusual in that its female protagonist is “emancipated” in name only. It introduces the Iranian girl, Fatima, as the proletarian “sister” and not as the “slave” (98). Yet she still performs all of the duties of a slave girl.

The Spaceship establishes a clear distinction between “productive” and “non-productive” fantasy to explain its use of technological

13 See, for instance, Dominik’s first novel *Die Macht der Drei* (1922) and *Die Spur des Schingis-Khan* (1923).

innovation. The former foretells the future on the basis of concrete scientific probability. Heinz' father explains to his son that "peaceful" (i.e. socialist) space travel is probable due to contemporary advances in atomic power and rocket technology.¹⁴ Correspondingly, "non-productive" fantasy, such as travel beyond light speed, is an "impossibility" that "people include in ghost stories to dumb down their reader and distract them" from solving "life-threatening problems" (10). The novel also makes use of time travel, but then reveals the innovation to be a dream and, hence, unreal.

In the mid-fifties, a number of novels appeared containing elements common to what Horst Heidtmann terms "utopian production and construction novels" (*Utopische* 51). He refers to a broader category of fiction commonly known as *Produktionromane* and *Aufbauromane* that dealt specifically with East Germany's reconstruction efforts. The term "utopia" separates this type of novel from the broader category due to its futuristic elements. The very first publications combined the spy or detective novel with science fiction.

As I have already demonstrated in my analysis of Enskat's *Imprisoned at the Top of the World. Lost in the North Sea* from 1949, Hans Dominik served as a primary model for early GDR science fiction. Erik Simon and Olaf Spittel, both experts on the genre, consider Dominik's influence to be pivotal during the 1950s. They attest that many of the first East German science fiction authors read and enjoyed Dominik as teenagers. As these authors turned to write themselves, there was a clear desire to create something of the quality of Dominik but from a socialist point of view (Simon and Spittel 20). A further example is Hannes Hegen, the creator of the most successful GDR comic series, *Mosaik*. In his recent publication *Micky, Marx und Manitu*, Thomas Krämer examines Dominik's impact on the series of science fiction adventures in this magazine.¹⁵

To provide a more thorough understanding of utopian realism, I want to look closely at two other novels of the time. One is Heinz Vieweg's *Ultrasymet bleibt geheim* (*Ultrasymet Remains Secret*,

14 The Soviets launched Sputnik five years later.

15 This series is known as the "Neoserie" and makes up issues 25–28 of *Mosaik*.

1955).¹⁶ In the book, a scientist from a united Germany discovers a new element in Algeria, which he names *ultrasymet*. It is stronger than steel and of great importance to a socialist country short on natural resources and struggling to survive sustained interference by foreign capitalist powers. Out of international solidarity, the two countries work together to produce the new material despite several attempts by the North European Steel Trust to sabotage their new competitor. In the end, the socialist forces are able to discover a new application of *ultrasymet* and produce an ultrasonic ray, which peacefully neutralizes the opponents' weapons.¹⁷

This brings us to the existence of the new material *ultrasymet*. *Ultrasymet* represents a fantastic element in the story. Because it does not exist, it has not yet been incorporated into the socialist realist "structure of meaning" (Stuart Hall). It lies outside of this system and therefore is potentially subversive. In the GDR, the extensive production apparatus detected and either censored or integrated these elements into this "code" system.

Stuart Hall describes the "*determinate* moments" of "encoding" and "decoding" in his analysis of production and reception in a free market economy ("Encoding/decoding" 129). The process of encoding entails transforming the various "meaning structures" present in production into a "'meaningful' discourse" determined by the "rules of language" in that society (130). Inevitably, Hall states, the rules or codes(s) of the "dominant cultural order" becomes the standard discourse as it communicates most effectively with the broadest array of consumers. It is the dominant code or "preferred meaning" that "makes sense" to the reader who occupies the "dominant hegemonic position" in society (136). In East Germany, socialist realism was not a societal code that seemed "natural" (Hall) to many of its citizens, but

16 Others include Klaus Kunkel *Heißes Metall* (1952), Vieweg's *Feuer im Labor I* (Fire in Laboratory I, 1956) and Del Antonio's *Gigantum* (1957) and *Projekt Sahara* (1962). Vieweg wrote science fiction and other fiction for children and young adults. See chapter four for more information on Del Antonio.

17 This early book was extremely successful. It reached a circulation of 160,000 copies in Verlag Neues Leben by 1967. See Lewerenz and Orthmann (Head editor and editor at Verlag Neues Leben) 3. This was part of a longer discussion in this magazine from 1966 through January of 1968.

was enforced by the SED. The author “encoded” his science fiction to a greater or lesser degree through the process of “self-censorship.”¹⁸

The manner in which the novel portrays *ultrasymet* greatly reduces the fantastic potential of what Darko Suvin terms the “novum” (*Metamorphoses* 6). First of all, where possible, the novel presents its technological innovations with an extensive scientific explanation. For instance, *ultrasymet* is not delivered by aliens, but exists in the ground much like many other natural resources. The novel also describes its mining and potential uses based on known technology and scientific theory.

When a technological explanation is not possible, the fictional innovation is encoded ideologically. For instance, the presence of an ultra-sound ray gun in the novel is politically problematic, in that it is not an instrument of peace. Although new developments in war technology were not uncommon, particularly in the context of World War II and the Cold War, the ray gun was associated with western science fiction. It took center stage in “space operas” such as Buck Rogers, Perry Rhodan and Flash Gordon, series highly criticized in East Germany. Yet in this story, the Germans do not use it for destructive purposes like the West, but rather for “peaceful” means to destroy threats to a morally superior communist movement (Lewerenz and Orthmann 3). In this manner, the ray gun likens the Soviet development of the bomb in the early fifties. Through this metaphor the novel provides one explanation for Soviet advancement in weapons technology for readers who knew of these developments.

In accordance with socialist realism, the novel also clearly defines the forces of ideological good and evil. While *Ultrasymet* is in many ways a socialist version of Hans Dominik in its portrayal of technological progress set in the near future, its protagonists are quite different.¹⁹ Rather than Dominik’s Darwinian individualists in the service of the *Volk*, Vieweg’s socialists are peaceful, well-meaning people who function as a team. They are not out for personal gain, like the capitalists in *Ultrasymet*, but rather act in the name of techno-

18 Here I use the masculine pronoun, as GDR science fiction authors were, at this point, exclusively male.

19 See Dominik’s *Wettflug der Nationen* (1933) and *Himmelskraft* (1937).

logical progress and socialism internationally. The western capitalists on the other hand are devious, competitive individualists willing to use any methods necessary to gain control of *ultrasymet* and are bent on using it for criminal and destructive purposes. They are imperialists as well and exploit less developed countries for their own gain. Throughout the novel there are casualties on both sides: the self-sacrifice of socialists and what is described as the self-destruction of the capitalists. However, like Dominik, fate plays a central role. Just as his superscientists were destined to succeed, so are Vieweg's intellectual socialist personalities.

Destiny also plays a role in the united socialist Germany presented in the narrative and common to science fiction of this period. This fantasy of national reunification represents a revision of the revanchist *Großdeutschland* versus *Kleindeutschland* question prior to 1945. The fictitious Germany also takes part in the international movement towards communism, and thus supplants ideas of nationalism with pride in Germany's participation in the communist international movement. In this way, Vieweg's novel subverts remnants of National Socialist ideology and replaces them with a socialist reinterpretation.

Ein Stern verrät den Täter (A Star Betrays the Culprit, 1955) presents a more interesting example of "utopische Produktion und Aufbauromane." Its author, H.L. Fahlberg (pseudonym of the mathematician Hans Werner Fricke), relied heavily on fantastic technological innovations and Cold War conflict to create plot tension.²⁰ This science fiction/detective novel tells of a professor who has created a device that recaptures light rays which the Earth emitted into space hundreds of years ago. As a result, he "sees" a fallen South American civilization and travels to its location in hopes of unearthing the gold hidden there. In the process, the professor disappears. Having traveled to South America in search of his lost father, the professor's son invents a mind-reading device and subsequently accuses his father's assistant of murder. The assistant turns out to be a secret agent for a U.S. trust, who had orders to steal the professor's light ray machine or destroy it along with him. The agent dies due to his own error, and the professor is found, saved at the last minute. Through his adventure,

20 Fricke left for West Germany in 1961. See Simon and Spittel 126.

the professor loses his interest in the riches of the lost civilization, exclaiming: “Let’s leave the gold! [...] We have science, we want to serve it.”²¹ Although certainly encoded to be socialist, here science is more important than wealth.

Fahlberg’s use of the fantastic is essential to his Vernian plot. The adventure itself could not begin without the professor’s ability to see the past through recaptured light rays. Nor would the story have come to its conclusion without the son’s mind-reading device. The novel itself attempts to explain each of these innovations scientifically. As seen in the analysis of *Ultrasymet*, the socialist advancement in science and technology did not necessarily lie in the act of discovery but rather in the manner in which such a discovery was applied. The same is true in Fahlberg’s novel, but in a way that brings fiction and non-fiction together.

Since Galileo, scientists have suspected that, when an astronomer looks into her telescope, she looks into the past. For instance, the age of a star from Earth can be calculated according to the time that it takes for light from that star to reach Earth.²² In much the same way, the professor’s adaptation of such technology allows him to see the South American civilization in the not too distant Earth past. Thus, in its form, the irrational element present in the novel is rendered rational through a scientific explanation. Through such instruction the East German reader often learned of recent discoveries and possibilities in science and technology. These innovations could be new to young readers or were not always available to the general public due to censorship laws.

The presence of Fahlberg’s postscript “Utopie und Möglichkeit” (Utopia and Possibility) to his story signals that the narrative did not fully comply with cultural policy. Similar to the postscript in Turek’s *The Golden Sphere*, Fahlberg attempts to restrict the reader’s decoding of the text to the mandatory cultural code. His explanations exist to

- 21 See Fahlberg 245. Also of note, Franz Fühmann used this same light ray technology in his story “Das Duell” in his 1981 book *Saiäns Fiktischen* to critique the GDR version of history and also parody science fiction.
- 22 I would like to thank Narendra Jaggi, Professor of Physics at Illinois Wesleyan for his consultation on this point.

preclude a reading commensurate with an “oppositional code” or a “negotiated code,” which contains a “mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements” (Hall 136–137). For instance, despite efforts to explain the son’s mind-reading device scientifically and to justify its use ideologically, Fahlberg addresses this point in his postscript. While he notes the actual existence of the encephalograph, he writes: “One can neither read thoughts with this device nor with the American so-called lie detector” (252). Furthermore, Fahlberg explains that, while Einstein’s Theory of Relativity does hold the universe to be limited, any light rays that bounce back to Earth would be too weak to capture and view (251). This point of the novel is therefore “utopian” and even disproved by recent research, at which point Fahlberg cites an article from 1952 by the East German physicist Viktor Stern (251). The light ray device, therefore, remains irreconcilable with socialist realist code. Still, Fahlberg’s clarification cleared the way for the novel’s publication.

In the 1950s, publishers and authors often resolved conflict between science fiction narrative and the socialist realist path with a postscript. Those fantastic elements that could not be worked out through the review process or editorial collaboration were ostensibly neutralized through this technique. Due to the great demand for popular literature at the time, competition with West Germany, and the low supply and often low entertainment value of socialist forms, publishers overlooked some fantastic elements not only because of the few manuscripts available, but also for the sake of retaining reader interest. Ekkehard Redlin, an editor at the Verlag Das Neue Berlin from the fifties through seventies, stated that extremely few science fiction novels were rejected through the 1960s. Rather they were reworked and rewritten in collaboration with the editor, who knew what would “pass” the censors.²³ Certainly, many elements remained taboo at this point (e.g. suicide, bureaucracy, the censor, and extra-

23 To the best of my knowledge only one science fiction book was prohibited during this period. Redlin remembers one, which was rejected due to a premise of “free love” that it extolled to West Germans as an advantage to living in the East. “We rejected that. That was not possible.” From an unpublished interview with Ekkehard Redlin, quoted in Steinmüllers, *Vorgriff* 160.

terrestrials). Yet, Eberhardt Del Antonio actually rewrote *Projekt Sahara* (1962) to shorten the length of “overly propagandistic passages” (Steinmüllers, *Vorgriff* 160).

Where the technological fantastic generally defined science fiction in the fifties, a social innovation appeared in two novels in 1957. Both Fahlberg’s *Erde ohne Nacht* (Earth Without Night, 1956) and Del Antonio’s *Gigantum* contain early incarnations of the communist female superscientist. Where Fahlberg’s *A Star Betrays the Culprit* was openly misogynistic, *Earth Without Night* and *Gigantum* deal with issues of male anxiety surrounding the women of equal scientific training and intelligence in fictional research labs. Although it would take another decade before a few women attained this level of training in the GDR, more and more women were entering non-traditional professions in the GDR in order to cover a shortage of male employees (Frink 23). Both novels portray their female protagonists on equal footing with their male colleagues. More telling is the male reaction to their presence in the workplace, which ranges from outright sexism to the father figure or the colleague husband. They are not yet the communist superwomen of Carlos Rasch and Alexander Kröger’s early novels in the sixties, who functioned as carbon copies of their male counterparts.

Publishing Science Fiction

Despite the official inclusion of popular literature in cultural policy after 1954, controls on publication greatly restricted the amount of new novels. In the early 1950s, the SED reorganized the GDR’s publishing industry. In order to halt competition, it placed the majority of publishers in state hands. The GDR also continued to suffer from a severe paper shortage. Through regulation, the SED greatly limited the number of books on the market, forcing editors to be much more selective and conservative in their publication schedules. In the case of science fiction, the limited paper supply reduced the average first

editions to 20,000 copies in the 1950s and 1960s. One to two East German science fiction novels appeared each year.²⁴

The restriction on publication had several implications. First, the continual under supply of books altered the law of supply and demand, which plays such a central role in the sale of science fiction in a free market system. Throughout the GDR's existence, the science fiction books sold out immediately, sometimes even before the books were put on the shelves. Friends of the store's proprietor regularly reserved them ahead of time. While some novels appeared again in subsequent editions, others became prized collectors items. (Kruschel, "Zwischen" 155).

In some ways, this success worked against science fiction. Official efforts to create a socialist popular literature initially concentrated on detective, adventure and children's stories, demonstrated by the cash prizes and other awards handed out by the state and publishers to authors of these genres (Heidtmann, *Utopische* 220). According to Günther Ebert, the German Writers' Union saw little need to discuss science fiction. "Because literary criticism is seen as a form of advertising and novels of the future sell themselves, it is believed that a review is not necessary." ("Wie müssen" 10). The book shortage also distorted publisher attempts to determine reader preference and demand, as all types of science fiction sold out, not just favorite authors.²⁵

Through paper rationing, the SED kept a controllable number of books on the market, in effect limiting the impact of unexpected or "undesirable" readings of any one publication. However, this policy also limited the politically positive effects of a text. In a letter to "Colleague" Baum of the *Hauptabteilung Schöne Literatur* (Section on Fine Literature), science fiction author Eberhardt Del Antonio

24 See Steinmüllers, *Vorgriff* 10. This can be contrasted with the amount of detective novels that appeared at the same time. During the 1960s five to ten detective novels came out every year. See Dehmelt 61. See also Heidtmann, *Utopische* 36.

25 Although not always conducted by publishers directly, see the series of response letters in "Zur Feder Gegriffen" in the magazine *Jugend und Technik* as well as the reader survey conducted by Herta Hein and Karin Ludwig.

bemoaned the fact that approximately seven percent of bookstore orders for his novel, *Gigantum*, had been filled.

The technical utopian novel loses its real purpose, if it is not able to achieve a broad influence. How should it lead employees to the technical problems of our and future times? How should it prepare a coming epoch and help to speed up technological development? How should it have a stimulating effect in the area of technology (and that is its purpose after all), if it does not find its way to the reader?²⁶

Due to the low book supply, however, friends often passed books onto other friends. This practice was widespread in the GDR, particularly in later years (Klotz and Matzer 109). Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain how many people read each copy.

Up to this point, I have spoken primarily of “SED policy.” When using this terminology, I refer to an authoritarian hierarchy dominated by the party’s Central Committee, yet made up of a myriad of interests and voices that interpreted and implemented the directives of this committee. It is essential to dismantle the reified concept of the “state” or “party” in order to better analyze the growth of science fiction throughout the course of East Germany. On a macro level, the Central Committee of the SED, particularly its cultural subcommittee, determined cultural policy. The next level consisted of the German Writers’ Union and the Kulturbund from which the Ministry of Culture had emerged as a separate entity in 1954. The Office of Publishing and Book Sales, which oversaw all GDR publications reported to the Minister of Culture. All publishers submitted an application for publication to this office for approval.

Each publisher had a unique mission and reported directly to the Office of Publishing and Book Sales. Many followed the specific interests of their owner. For instance, the *Militärverlag* was the arm of the People’s Army, the East German army. The *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth, FDJ) owned the Verlag Neues Leben, one of the primary science fiction publishers. Books appearing with

26 Independent authors were not dependent upon book royalties but rather received a normal salary from the publisher, freeing them up to spend more time on each book. See Del Antonio, “Letter to Regierung der DDR” 55.

the Verlag Neues Leben targeted young readers ten to twenty-five years of age. The other main producer of science fiction, *Verlag Das Neue Berlin* (New Berlin Publishers) was charged with creating a profile for the new capital city. According to one of its editors Ekkehard Redlin, this publisher possessed a greater degree of autonomy. Its somewhat ambiguous assignment could be interpreted in a number of ways, here to include socialist realist utopia. Its interests were not subordinate to a sponsoring organization as was the case with Verlag Neues Leben (Personal interview, 1999).²⁷ In the fifties, science fiction books and dime novels also appeared with the *Altberliner Verlag Lucie Groszer* (Old Berlin Publisher Lucie Groszer), the *Verlag Volk und Welt* (People and World Publishers), the *Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt* (Culture and Progress Publishers), the *Mitteldeutscher Verlag* (Middle German Publishers), and the *Kinderbuchverlag* (Children's Literature Publishers)

The Application for Publication

The Formalism debates and efforts to purge *Schund und Schmutz* literature from the GDR defined what science fiction could not be. However, this negative definition provided little guidance to publishers. They looked to internal communications for guidance as well as party recommendations concerning the desired nature of popular literature, popular science, science fiction, and definitions of socialist realism. Where these failed, they relied on their own insight and experience as editors.

Carol Anne Costabile-Heming uses *Rezensur* to describe the processes of censorship and editorial review, which made up the "strict licensing and permission procedure" that each writer navigated

27 In addition, what one publisher rejected, might be successful with another one. For instance, if the Verlag Das neue Berlin turned down a manuscript, its author might have more luck with the Militärverlag (Redlin, Personal interview, 2004). See also Kruschel "Zwischen" 159.

to successfully publish in the GDR (55). An elaborate application procedure submitted for approval to the Office of Publishing and Book Sales played a large role in the process of encoding each manuscript. Each application for publication (*Druckgenehmigung*) normally consisted of several external reviews of the proposed manuscript, as well as a review written by the sponsoring editor. When revision was necessary, often a supplemental review was included with a re-submitted application. In the case of science fiction, each application included a testament of technical realism by a scientist, as well as an ideological certification by a literary critic.

The application process was an important censorship tool. In a recent article, author Carlos Rasch commented on the early publishing expectations:

Already in 1961, an editor in Verlag ‘Neues Leben’ made it clear to me that we did not need red flags and party secretaries in science fiction [*SF-Literatur*]. At the same time, it was expected that, in the message, a specific point of view, a humanistic position, would be found between the lines. (“DDR-SF” 123).

Here, Rasch refers not only to this second level of censorship, but also to the first level, that of self-censorship practiced by the East German science fiction authors. With experience, the author came to know what was publishable and wrote to comply with these guidelines.

It is also important to remember that authors of early East German science fiction on the whole restricted themselves to the proscribed emphasis on the socialist real in the near future. Most accepted their central function in the “literary society” (*Literaturgesellschaft*) as cultural representatives of the SED by demonstrating the necessary “loyalty to the party” (*Parteilichkeit*) and “closeness to the people” (*Volksverbundenheit*) in their works. Required membership in the German Writer’s Union committed each writer to the “creative work of an active co-designer of the developing socialist society schöpferische” (quoted in Emmerich 43–44). As many subscribed to the GDR foundational narrative as antifascist alternative, they believed in the importance of literature as a necessary pedagogical tool. To this day, Alexander Kröger makes clear that “the

omnipresent future optimism [...] cannot be explained solely through the rationale of the state, it is also my basic position today, for example.” (“100 Zeile” 120).

Despite the harsh limitations placed on creativity, some authors profited from editorial review. Carlos Rasch testified to this in a radio interview in 1967:

One must at least be up-to-date on international developments in science and technology. When I have writer’s block with a manuscript and need advice, I can approach a scientist with the help of the publisher and get information. A lot of utopian flair gets trashed with these reviews though. (quoted in Heidtmann, *Utopische* 237).

Along with needed advice came objections to story elements that either did not fit the ideological standard or were not scientifically possible at that time. A closer look at the application process sheds light on the continual negotiation of limitations of the ideological or scientific real with science fiction’s fantastic elements.

For instance, an analysis of the application for Del Antonio’s *Gigantum* (1957) provides insight into common objections to that era’s science fiction. *Gigantum* belonged to the category of utopian production novel, characterized by the emphasis on the development of heavy industry and technology (Heidtmann, *Utopische* 53). It is to some extent also a cold war spy novel in the tradition of Dominik, in which thugs hired by an industrialist try repeatedly to steal a new energy secret from a Munich laboratory in a united, socialist Germany. Del Antonio portrays a collective camaraderie between both male and female research scientists and the security guards at the secret state facility. All characters emulate the socialist personality.

The application for publication included three reviews: an internal review (*Verlagsgutachten*) from Verlag Das Neue Berlin, an external review (*Außengutachten*) by sociologist W. Bästel, and an expert review (*Fachgutachten*) by scientist Gerhard Eichler. In such reviews, fundamental questions regarding the nature of utopia, realism, and science in socialism came to the fore, functioning as influential precedents and contributions to science fictional discourse within state institutions.

The sponsoring editor justified the text's suitability within socialist realism manner, as the text was his or her selection for that year's quota (Redlin, Personal interview, 1999 and Szameit, Personal interview, 1999). This review praises Del Antonio's efforts to address existing bourgeois assumptions in the reader. In confronting the "multiple petitbourgeois views of the present," Del Antonio successfully portrays

the average person of tomorrow as an assertive, conscientious, and well-educated type, who is far from biased, and is productive as a result of a polytechnic education in several areas ("Verlagsgutachten" 60).

A similar description of the scientifically educated protagonist, who devotes his (in this book also her) life to the progress of the socialist revolution, comes to the fore in review after review in the 1950s and 1960s. The review praises Del Antonio's book for a well-rounded view of socialist future life, stating that many science fiction novels unfortunately focused more on apolitical technology and adventure rather than their projection of a socialist future.

One reviewer places special emphasis on the novel's "peek into everyday life, career and social services, living situations and family affairs" (Redlin, Rev. of *Gigantum* 60). This quality includes such aspects as friendly competition and the illustration of a work ethic, which extends to the untiring creative use of free time. According to this reviewer, the novel addresses the important balance of the physical and the mental in work and play. Bästel's review also praises its focus on the "relationship brigade – management, the difference between industrial and agrarian work, the roll of youth organizations, the class structure of the future society, [and], above all, the intelligentsia" (79). The novel easily fit the ideological requirements of its reviewers.

Gerhard Eichler's scientific expert opinion finds that most of Del Antonio's technological creations did not come into conflict with known natural laws. He testifies that the author avoids topics, "on which no definite statement is yet possible, and avoids greater detail" (Eichler 62). What was not derived from known scientific theory, however, did not comply with cultural policy guidelines for realism

and needed to be changed. As a scientist, Eichler himself recognized that “utopian problems and ‘discoveries’ remain decisive for the plot. Das is allowed in a utopian novel” (61). Most importantly, Eichler believed Del Antonio’s book to be characterized by rational and realistic “optimism.” Despite this praise, he recommends that a postscript be included to explain to the reader that not all technological details in the book were real.²⁸

The Sputnik Euphoria

The late fifties saw the emergence of two events, which greatly impacted science fiction in East Germany: the launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 and the Fifth Party Congress in 1958. In 1958, the Fifth Party Congress of the SED outlined a cultural program of the masses. This program was part of an effort to reintroduce the “subjective factor” to the East German socialist revolution, which had suffered under policies devoted primarily to the reconstruction of industries damaged in World War II. New cultural programs emphasized Ulbricht’s utopian *Gemeinschaftsmentalität* (communal mentality) and were designed to instruct participants to work socialistically, learn socialistically, and live socialistically. In this way, they were to attain the “humanistic ideal of the universally and harmoniously, physically and intellectually developed personality” (Hennig 43). East Germans were urged to attend cultural events or the “book of the month” club. This program aimed to re-involve ordinary East Germans in the SED’s vision of the future in order to improve productivity and morale.

28 Once approved, applications often contained a number of further ideological suggestions. One instance concerning Del Antonio’s *Titanus* (1959) contained the following advice: “Instead of ‘fleeing to a safe distance’ better: ‘retreating to a safe distance,’ because no one needs to flee a rocket launching in a socialist country” (Elsholz 93). In this case, a reviewer named Eisholz from the Office of Publishing and Book Sales, Section on Fine Literature, asks for a further change before publication.

A new emphasis on the production of science fiction combined with the Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957 greatly increased official backing for all things scientific in popular literature circles. An internal memo of the popular science magazine *Jugend und Technik* from 1958 illustrates the ideological reduction of literature to a function of the greater economic plan to rebuild East Germany. The magazine's head editor disapproved of current publications:

The technical and utopian stories do not meet the requirements that must be made of the newspaper. A change will only be possible via rapid expansion of the employee pool. In the process, well-known fiction authors should be approached to write such contributions. From now on it is necessary to create a far-reaching preliminary plan regarding subject matter and to distribute the topic of this plan to all colleagues. Only in this manner can we move beyond the 'hand to mouth' lifestyle that dominates at end of the year. (Kroczeck 98).

The memo alludes to the importance of advances in science and technology not only as a means of rebuilding East Germany, but also in maintaining a competitive edge during the Cold War.

In many ways similar to respective policies in the United States, the Free German Youth publisher Neues Leben hoped to take advantage of the enormous popular interest in space exploration. Its publications encouraged readers to identify with the recent Soviet success and dedicate themselves to the socialist cause, by pursuing studies in science and technology. Karl Böhm and Rolf Dörge stopped their work on the *Jugendweihe* book *Weltall. Erde. Mensch.* (Space. Earth. Humanity.) They commenced with *Auf dem Weg zu fernen Welten* (On the Way to Distant Worlds, 1958), a book on the history and future of space flight in a socialist world.²⁹ Due to this "plan mentality," colorful illustrations of future cities with complex

29 *Weltall. Erde. Mensch.* opens with a quote from Konstantin Ziolkowski, the father of Soviet rocket technology, and from Lenin. The *Jugendweihe* was a substitute coming-of-age ceremony in the GDR, intended to replace confirmation in Catholic areas. In order to attend a GDR institution of higher education, a student had to go through this ceremony at which they were given a copy of *Weltall. Erde. Mensch.* to instruct them in the views of the socialist state. This book came out in successive updated editions and was replaced by *Sozialismus deiner Welt* (Socialism in Your World) in the mid-seventies.

transportation networks, rocket ships and promises of socialist pre-eminence in technological development characterized numerous comparable publications of the time.

Other publications included the colorful characters “Dig” and “Dag” from the popular comic book *Mosaik*.³⁰ They suddenly found themselves in the middle of a space adventure centered on the planet Neos and hence called the Neo Series (December 1958–December 1962). A flurry of short stories appeared in various children’s and popular science magazines, including *Fröhlich sein und singen*, *Neues Leben* (Be Happy and Sing. New Life), *Wissen und Leben* (Knowledge and Life), *Jugend und Technik* (Youth and Technology) and, beginning in 1963, *Technikus*. The last two titles were popular science magazines and would consistently publish science fiction through 1989.³¹ Still, the increase in publications by Verlag Neues Leben and other publishers failed to bring out enough books to satisfy demand. Average circulations rates hovered between 20,000 and 24,000 copies per novel (Hein and Ludwig 31).

Besides the programmatic influence on space exploration, intense interest in science fiction in the Soviet Union also had impact on its growth in the GDR. In 1958, The Soviet Union sponsored a prize competition, in order to encourage authors to write more science fiction. According to Herta Hein and Karin Ludwig, this competition also led to increased interest in the genre in East Germany (31).

The various publications that dealt with the space race characterize initial attempts by the SED to assign meaning to the Sputnik event. Despite the series of political and economic crises in East Germany through 1961, the party now worked to establish the Sputnik success as validation for the socialist path to communism. It was a Russian, after all, who had invented the rocket ship. Numerous references to Ziolkovsky, who was interested in space flight in the

30 Interestingly, Stefan Heym visited the Soviet Union and returned home to write an account of his travels entitled *Das kosmische Zeitalter* (The Cosmic Age, 1959), in which he proclaimed that the border between fantasy and reality had become blurred with the success of Soviet space flight (“Introduction” 2).

31 See Kroczeck 98 for a review of publications in *Jugend und Technik*, which demonstrated the “plan economy” mentality reaching to literary and cultural institutions in the areas of science and technology.

1890s, appear in GDR popular science and science fiction publications of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the Soviets continued to demonstrate their technological expertise by sending the dog Laika up in Sputnik II in 1957, the Lunik I to the moon in 1959, the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, in April 1961, and the first woman in space, Valentina Tereshkova, in 1963 (Clute 69; Kaiser and Welck 394). In this context, a number of cultural functionaries came to view science fiction as a genre based on popular science, which could successfully interest and educate its readers in science and its social and economic applications.

In this regard, it is important to note the distinction between popular science and literature outlined at the Fifth Party Conference. The new plan stressed the development of a “high literature” of the proletariat. A related project, the Bitterfeld Path (1959), urged workers to write their own stories under the motto “Take up your pen, comrade, the socialist national culture needs you!” (Jäger 87–89). Their publications were to make up a new generation of “worker literature” (*Arbeiterliteratur*) on the model of Ludwig Turek’s *A Proletarian Narrates*. In addition, the program brought established authors into the factory and industrial work place, in an attempt to present an authentic picture of the ideal “worker” experience under socialism. Participating writers were to learn about life at the foundations of socialism and portray this life idealistically in their novels. In this way, the GDR would create, in Ulbricht’s words, “its own culture of entertainment and merry muse” (quoted in Malinckrodt 30).

Still, few authors choose to delve into the world of science fiction. In his article “Kind von Kunst und Technik,” author Del Antonio bemoaned the fact that science fiction authors were seen by “a portion of his writing colleagues as an embarrassing literary outsider” (11). Ekkehard Redlin, an editor at Verlag Das Neue Berlin, commented that publishers tried to get established literary intellectuals to write science fiction, but to no avail (Personal interview, 1999).

In the sixties, science fiction continued to be a controversial literature. The simultaneous reluctance of literary critics to recognize it as anything but *Trivilliteratur*, and the positive perception of it by other party loyalists as an effective propaganda tool, placed the genre

both on the margins and at the center of the institutions designed to create a mass-produced socialist literature. It was this unresolved status that would gain its authors and editors limited ability to determine their own science fiction policy in years to come.