

## Chapter Six

### An East German New Wave (1971–1980)

Johanna Braun: Sometimes the censors noticed something. And works that the censor understood, as Karl Kraus meant, were banned justly.

Günter Braun: I'm of a different opinion. Sometimes it depended on whether the censor should understand something. And something must shine through from time to time. ("De Mortuis" 33).

The solid increase in the growth and variety of science fiction in the seventies was largely due to Erich Honecker's major political, economic and cultural policy changes. It is customary to mark 1971 as a pivotal year in East German literary history. In this year, Honecker took over Walter Ulbricht's position as First Secretary of the Central Committee. At the Eighth Party Congress of 1971, he declared the end of the initial period of reconstruction following World War II and proclaimed a new stage in the transition from a socialist to a communist society.

Rather than focus on the preparation of society for communism through Ulbricht's support of heavy industry, Honecker declared a "socialist rationalization" of the economy. This new approach planned to increase the energy supply in part through nuclear power and to incorporate newly mechanized technology in order to increase production. Increased economic efficiency, so Honecker envisioned, would ensure the continued development of personal welfare and of the socialist society. He emphasized the availability of quality consumer goods in order to increase worker satisfaction with the belief that this would lead to increased productivity (Staritz 276–279). In contrast with Ulbricht's abstract promise of future prosperity, Honecker spoke of a "real existing" socialism of higher wages, cheaper prices, and more quality products that was designed to reach everyone despite budgetary concerns.

New efforts were undertaken to improve the quality and variety of all forms of socialist popular culture to try to combat the ever-growing influence of the West, particularly through television. More and more East Germans owned television sets that gave them access to western programming. The one great exception was in the *Tal der Ahnungslosen* (valley of the oblivious) in the southeastern portion of Saxony and on the Baltic island of Rügen that were both out of range of West German signals. Although illegal, East Germans viewed West German programming through makeshift antennae. The ideal images of wealth and success in syndicated television series such as *Falcon Crest* and *Dallas* increasingly formed their vision of the western world. Furthermore, a number of western science fiction programs aired in the Federal Republic. These included *Star Trek* (Gene Roddenberry, 1966–1969), Great Britain's *The Avengers* (Jonathan Alwyn and Robert Asher, 1961–1969), and the German production *Raumpatrouille. Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffes ORION* (Michael Braun and Theo Mezger, Spaceship Orion, 1966) (Nagl, *Science Fiction in Deutschland* 204). Often portrayed in terms of the hegemonic ideology associated with a free market system, western programming provided access to a variety of discourses either not addressed in the East or discussed in its media in Marxist–Leninist codes.<sup>1</sup>

Designed to combat western influence, Honecker's new cultural policy included a line of resolutions and measures intended to secure a socialist position among viewers and readers. Conceding that access could not be controlled, the government believed it could shape reception. Efforts to this end are visible in newspaper and magazine articles, which addressed western programming by presenting the Marxist–Leninist position the next day.<sup>2</sup> The directive is also apparent

- 1 Plans for a science fiction television series in the eighties to be written by Carlos Rasch never materialized. Rasch wrote several episodes with a working title of “Die Raumlotsen.” To my knowledge, this was the only attempt at a science fiction television series in the GDR.
- 2 See, for instance, “Denken für die Welt von Morgen” where the newspaper *Sonntag* printed the transcript for a program in western television (BRD) in order to then present the official SED position to the same topic.

in the Kulturbund's reorganization of the Stanislaw Lem Club, which I will discuss later on in the chapter.

Access to western programming also exacerbated the growing split between Ulbricht's "human community" style optimism and the existing material conditions in East Germany. Already discussed above in the context of literature, this economic circumstance also led Honecker to acknowledge the possibility of social conflict in his new "societal view." As his "main goal," his social policy intended to address and solve these conflicts through an improvement in the general quality of life. This plan included a broader understanding of culture designed to support not only the arts, but also activities at work and in free time. It provided for a greater array of socialist mass culture designed to create an alternative to western television and radio (Schröder, "Zur Geschichte" 40).

In 1972, Honecker outlined a new cultural policy. At the Fourth Plenary of the Central Committee of the SED, he declared: "If one begins with a solid socialist position, there can be no taboos in the area of art and literature in my opinion." ("Zu aktuellen Fragen" 5). Kurt Hager, the Minister of Culture, later reaffirmed Honecker's vague and surprising declaration that "no taboos" should exist within socialist realism. He complemented Honecker's pronouncement and emphasized the necessity of "greater wealth, greater variety and differentiation" in the new literature of "real existing" socialism ("Der IX Parteitag" 245; "entwickelte" 1212). In a position clarification a year later, Hager repeated that "contradictions are no hinderance to societal development, they are the motor of every society's advancement. This is also true of socialism." (*Zu Fragen* 40). The official tolerance of contradiction in socialist realism led to a period of limited liberalization and to a wave of publications not possible under Ulbricht (Emmerich 246–247).

The pronouncements made by Honecker and Hager began what proved to be a five-year period of "openness" to greater literary experimentation. David Bathrick observes that, during this time, many *avant-garde* authors turned away from objective realism to the subjective, the individual, the private and the idiosyncratic. This paralleled an increased toleration of fantastic literature in the GDR (Powers 187). A constitutive change in cultural policy occurred in the

reassessment and recognition of German Romanticism no longer as “irrational” and “dangerous” but as a tradition of respected authors whose writings resonated with contemporary issues. Both authors and critics alike endeavored to interpret works by Bettina von Arnim, Gunderode, Hölderlin, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist and Jean Paul. Literary intellectuals experimented with the fantastic, absurd, uncanny, grotesque and other narrative techniques of the Romantics in order to reevaluate the status of the Enlightenment and classical Humanism as the basis of Marxist historiography and as elemental to the national narrative of the GDR.

The reevaluation of German literary heritage touched upon issues of technology as well. Once the Enlightenment was linked to forms of social oppression, so were other aspects of the East German national myth, including the scientific-technological revolution (Bathrick, *Powers* 188–189). As Peter Hohendahl has argued, the affinity of the “Romantic consciousness” (subjectivity, alienation, etc.) with the contemporary experience of East Germany can be attributed to a similar response to varying degrees of social and technical modernization (“Theorie” 31). Increasingly, East German authors noted not only the positive effects of scientific progress, but also its many negative side effects.

## Ambiguous Utopia in the Seventies

In his revised edition of the *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Wolfgang Emmerich places science fiction among the new experimental forms of the seventies (279). Where previous science fiction writers had some type of background in the natural sciences, the pool of authors broadened during this period to include those more proficient in the humanities. Well-known authors, Günther Kunert, Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf, and, later, Franz Fühmann, published several science fiction stories and thus granted the genre added credibility. Looking for forms of expression beyond the existing socialist realist

aesthetic these authors turned to science fiction as a way of gaining new narrative freedom.

Besides Kunert, Anna Seghers was one of the first prominent authors to embrace science fiction. As the so-called *Erbedebatte* broke out in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which questioned Lukács' focus on objective reality, Seghers felt the need to make a statement. Rather than write an essay or give a speech, she wrote the collection of short stories *Sonderbare Begegnungen* (Strange Encounters, 1973) as a sample of the new form of socialist realist writing she had in mind.

Her only science fiction story "Sagen von Unirdischen" (Saga of the Aliens) appeared in *Sonderbare Begegnungen*. Seghers first wrote the story in 1970 and published it in *Sinn und Form* in 1972. It addressed the function and practical use of art in society. Just as the Romantics turned to art as the tool to educate their readers, so did Seghers. She wished to reintroduce an earlier focus on individual-centered reception aesthetics and contrast it with the objective reality of socialist realism based on the writings of Lukács. Seghers believed socialist realism had forgotten the need for subjective expression and experience that the citizens of the GDR required in order to understand their own personal reality within the community. In the story, the visiting alien, Michael does not understand art and indeed questions the need for it in the classical, practical, horizontal, modern world of his planet. Michael then comes to understand the function of art through love and adventure in a setting reminiscent of the Thirty Years War on Earth.

To the best of my knowledge, Seghers did not make any direct statements concerning science fiction. However, she did support broader use of the fantastic in literature to reintroduce the subjective and self-reflexive into socialist realism. Although she was not willing to stray from socialist realist doctrine, Seghers still attempted to expand the boundaries of its definition in order to include new techniques of expression, which would address a wider variety of readers and have a greater effect upon them. In a newspaper article from 1969, Seghers described the usefulness of fantasy and dreams in literature, which she called "fantastic realism."

In many of my books there are fairy-tale-like stories with strange transformations. [...] At heart, my novels, most of the things I have written, describe a type of metamorphosis. (Batt 1294)

Seghers demonstrated that this transformation occurs in reality as well as in literary fantasy in her opening address to the Seventh German Writers' Congress in the GDR in 1973.

A dream, a fantastic invention that develops out of a piece of reality, returns again to reality, if it thrilled the reader. The writer should follow his fantasy. He will certainly not portray only dreams, solely excite his readers with fantastic material his whole life. Some readers partake of his need, other become curious. It raises their spirits. ("Eröffnungsrede" 19)

Rather than lead to escapism, fantasy draws upon reality and enhances the understanding and engagement of the reader in reality. By incorporating the fantastic into literature, the writer is able to find new and effective ways in which to aid the East German populace in a "life that is continually developing" (20).

Like Seghers, Christa Wolf also looked to fantastic narrative forms. Where she most often adapted myth (*Kassandra* and *Medea*), she also employed science fiction as a means with which to access a voice of "subjective authenticity" (Wolf). Her short story "Selbstversuch" (Self-Experiment, 1973) investigates the phenomenon of gender reversal.<sup>3</sup> This story was part of a larger project that resulted in Edith Anderson's collection *Blitz aus heiterem Himmel* (Lightning from a Clear Sky, 1975).

Given the premise of a sex change from woman to man, Wolf wrote a science fiction story that revealed her vision of the inner differences between men and women and their incompatible socialization. A young, female scientist takes the experimental drug *Petersein masculinum 199*, which physically transforms her into a man named Anders. The story takes the form of a supplementary protocol written by the experiment's subject and is not included in the official documentation. The experiment ultimately fails when Anders cannot reconcile his female memories with his new male life experience. He

3 "Selbstversuch" first appeared in the journal *Sinn and Form* in 1973.

relates the impossibility of coming to terms with the existence of both male and female in the same physical and emotional body. The result is gender confusion and self-alienation.

Furthermore, Anders, who had been in love with the experiment's head researcher as a woman, now discovers and even identifies with a male inability to love. In the story's one private encounter between the two, the professor asks Anders: "How do you feel?" Anders answers: "Like at the movies" to which the professor replies: "You too?" (99). In this exchange, Wolf identifies the individual estrangement that stems from what she believes to be a "Deficit of feeling, particularly among men" in modern GDR society ("Leben oder gelebt werden" 112). In the end, Anders takes *Petersein minus masculinum 199* to reverse the sex change.

Established writers such as Seghers and Wolf played with new narrative possibilities that science fiction offered them. Although remarkable, the science fiction by Seghers and Wolf proved to be isolated experiments. Others published in the form of ambiguous utopia more consistently. Johanna and Günter Braun were the most prominent. This author pair time after time published science fiction that was highly critical of the SED regime. In the sixties, the Brauns wrote fairy tales and other fantastic stories for young people. Their first book of science fiction, *Der Irrtum des Großen Zauberers* (The Great Magician's Error, 1972), displaced a parody of authoritarianism in a children's story on another planet. A satire of the SED's interpretation of the Enlightenment, *Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega VI* (Uncanny Manifestations on Omega XI, 1974) involves a rescue mission from Earth to the planet Omega VI. Their two anthologies *Die Nase des Neandertalers* (The Neanderthal's Nose, 1969) and *Der Fehlfaktor* (The Mistake Factor, 1975) as well as the novel *Conviva Ludibundus* (1978) further develop the Braun's theory of play in literature.

Klaus Möckel, a writer of detective novels and editor at Verlag Volk and Welt, published a number of short stories. His collection *Die gläserne Stadt* (The City of Glass, 1979) concentrate on the growing differences between the country and the city, as well as the autocrats and their subjects (Simon and Spittel 207). In direct dialog with Stanislaw Lem, Bernd Ulbrich wrote playful, satirical

collections of stories such as *Der verhexte Kater* (The Bewitched Cat, 1975) and *Der unsichtbare Kreis* (The Invisible Circle, 1978). The seventies also saw the debut of Gert Prokop's detective science fiction. In 1977, he published *Wer stiehlt schon Unterschenkel?* (Who is Stealing Lower Legs Already?), followed by *Der Samenbankraub* (The Sperm Bank Robbery) in 1983. Set in a futuristic United States, Prokop's books describe the humorous adventures of detective Timothy Truckle, an undercover communist agent. Living off of his wealthy, industrialist clients, he solves mysteries benefiting the disadvantaged in the capitalist system. The American setting gave Prokop greater narrative leeway, as he could more freely criticize capitalism as well as interest his reader through a portrayal of the exotic, ideological other.

Heiner Rank's *The Invincible are Helpless* (The Invincible) was one of the most popular science fiction novels in the GDR.<sup>4</sup> His only such publication resembles a detective novel in that its hero, Asmo, searches for the truth behind the civilization on the planet Astilot. He awakens to the luxurious society of the Dafotil where all needs and wants are serviced through robots and other mechanized forms. The occupants of this utopia are genetically incapable of violence; a hostile act would violate the society's basic laws – the KAPINOM. Still, Asmo views this society in a dystopian manner due to the Dafotil's decadence and egotism. Simon and Spittel call attention to the Huxleyesque manner in which Asmo intends to get to the bottom of this "brave new world" (219). Eventually, he discovers a second alien race in suspended animation that created the conditions for the Dafotil's "perfect" society. They had enslaved the Dafotil, who are

4 Rank co-wrote some twenty detective novels in the fifties and sixties under the pseudonyms Heiner Heindorff and A.G. Petermann. In 1989, Rank's book ranked as the third most popular GDR science fiction among Andymon club members, see Hohlfeld and Braunstein. Although numerous fans of the Andymon club and also former fans from the Stanislaw Lem club referred to this book as "something different," this was not true of everyone. Ekkehard Redlin remembered an exchange in ca. 1973 with Rolf Krohn, the president of the Stanislaw Lem Club. In the conversation, Krohn criticized the future presented in the book and called it "irresponsible." See Both, Neumann and Scheffler 50.

revealed as distant relations of humanity. When the Astilot decided to transcend their material existence on their planet, they left behind the structure of their vision of a utopian society for the Dafotil. In the end, Asmo's efforts bring "this paradisiacal stagnation" to an end through a relatively peaceful revolution (*Ohnmacht* 296).

On one level, Rank's novel presents the typical East German critique of a consumerist society that transforms into a socialist one. In his review of *The Invincible* for publication, Gerhard Branstner praises this very aspect: "In this manuscript Heiner Rank intends with notable consequence to portray the emptiness and the droning of a society of pure consumption [...]" (Rev. of *Die Ohnmacht* 1). Branstner emphasizes the elements of this novel that are critical of capitalism. Redlin too, points to the novel's criticism of the "post-industrial" society of the West in own editorial review. "The *Dafotil* have been cut off from their own means of production. Their productive capabilities have shriveled." (Rev. of *Die Ohnmacht*, 2). To dispel any skepticism by the censor regarding the validity of Rank's setting in a capitalist society, Redlin cites a number of other precedents for this in the East Bloc, including Lem's *Return From the Stars* (Powrot s gwiazd, 1961) and Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's *The Final Circle of Paradise* (Khyshchnye veshchy veka, 1965; GDR 1983).<sup>5</sup>

However, there is another side to the story, which goes unmentioned in both Branstner's and Redlin's reviews. Where these reviews certainly emphasize the manner in which Rank's story demonstrates the superiority of socialism, they do not mention the story's numerous allusions to GDR socialism. The Dafotil's violence-free existence is enforced by the KAPINOM, societal ground rules established by a now transcendent alien society. The KAPINOM is not subject to discussion or reform; it is unchangeable. Consequently, the Dafotil paradise has stagnated in the same way many believed the GDR had. *The Invincible* makes clear reference to a SED Central Committee that refuses any meaningful reform and is out of touch with the society it regulates.

The novel also argues for the importance of discord. Once Asmo convinces his immediate circle of Dafotil friends of the possibility for

5 See Rev. of *Die Ohnmacht*, 2.

change, various philosophical discussions ensue among them. They consider questions of violence, progress, humanity, gender, and the nature of freedom. Although the majority of the discussions favor a socialist solution, the variety of viewpoints presented cannot be reduced to a single ideological doctrine.

Where the reviews for publication presented the novel's socialist narrative to the censor, *The Invincible*'s ambiguity hides potential, alternate readings beyond that of the socialist realist point of view. Karsten Kruschel notes that certain editors purposely ignored similar critique in order to improve the quality of science fiction on the market. He writes, "intellektuelle Subversion" belonged to the job description of a GDR editor, as much as "the reworking of a crummy book or the elimination of unwanted thoughts" ("Zwischen" 159). Editor Michael Szameit confirmed this practice (Personal interview, 1999). Whether this was one of those occasions is uncertain.

Finally, in the latter half of the novel, the Dafotil invade the compound of the Cephaloids, the artificial brains that still run the planet Astilot. As the KAPINOM is dismantled, the Dafotil are simultaneously freed of consumerism and of authoritarianism. Although Aubedo, the Cephaloid leader, is the hostile administrator of the Dafotil society, he utters perhaps the most important words of the novel. Aubedo too had been bound to enforce the KAPINOM by the now transcendent Astilot. As he attests, he also began to doubt the validity of these rules. "Then I discovered that doubt is the beginning of freedom" (Rank 327). That this equation with skepticism and freedom comes from the mouth of the oppressor makes its validity uncertain. In the context of the novel, Aubedo was also a prisoner of his own power. Yet, as the statement appears in axiom form, its meaning transcends the direct context of the planet Astilot. For the knowing reader, Aubedo's statement is an encouragement to question existing power structures in the GDR.

## Further Trends in Domestic and International Science Fiction

Utopian realist science fiction remained popular in the seventies as well. Authors such as Alexander Kröger and Karl-Heinz Tuschel continued to write adventure stories reminiscent of the sixties. Titles such as Tuschel's *Die Insel der Roboter* (Robot Island, 1973) and *Das Rätsel Sigma* (The Sigma Puzzle, 1974) as well as Wolf Weitbrecht's *Oracle der Delphine* (The Dolphin Oracle, 1972) mark the advent of a stable science fiction production based on an established, popular formula. In such science fiction, Heidtmann observes the return of elements from Johnathan Swift's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jules Verne ("Utopische" 81–82). At the same time, this vein of science fiction also expanded and developed. Simon and Spittel remark that what they designate as "Vernian" science fiction reached a new level of quality by the end of the decade. This development was due to its experimentation with new technologies and the later inclusion of acknowledged challenges in GDR society (72)

The broad selection of utopian realist science fiction available in the seventies also marked the growing access to an array of eastern and western science fiction through its variety of style and plot. For instance, aliens and robots began to appear more often. These characters were no longer cast in the categories of class conflict, but more as a non-human, sometimes threatening other. In Klaus Frühauf's *Mutanten auf Andromeda* (Mutants on Andromeda, 1974) humans come into conflict with a hostile alien race, which has become mutated through exposure to radiation. Frühauf does not code the mutants of planet Koarna by class, although their corruption becomes apparent when the non-mutated survivors intervene. In addition, Heidtmann points out that such alien encounters normally complied with the obligatory notion of "freedom from conflict." They resulted from misunderstandings or drew on Lem's theme of a human failure to understand the other that inhibits friendship or "international solidarity" (*Utopische* 81). Socialist protagonists were no longer perfect.

Due to the increasing influence of international science fiction, critic Werner Förster notes that authors at this time began to incorporate contemporary ethical and social problems of the world's scientific-technological revolution. They included topics such as robotics, genetics, computers, ecology, and cybernetics ("Time Travelling" 74–5). These subjects became tenable when Honecker's newly formulated "Freiraum" in cultural politics placed more responsibility on the author's shoulders instead of on the censors to "to always bring oneself in line" (Brauns, "Zu dem berühmten Werk" 53).

Many topics remained taboo, including bureaucracy, generational conflict, a negative portrayal of the Soviet Union, money in communism, and excessive blood.<sup>6</sup> Yet, other direct references to western science fiction bypassed the censors with no difficulty. In *Robot Island*, Tuschel plays with Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics from *I, Robot* (1963). Demonstrating a mix of western influence and classical text, Frankensteinian themes easily fit with anxieties surrounding genetics as evident in Peter Lorenz' *Homunkuli* (1978) or the mad scientist in Rainer Fuhrmann's "Golem" (1983). Rainer Fuhrmann's *Homo Sapiens 10<sup>-2</sup>* (1977) deals with the appropriation of gigantic and miniature insects and animals for political gain. Horst Heidtmann maintains that this novel borrows a good deal of its content from the American science fiction film *Doctor Cyclops* (*Utopische* 84). Of course these "hidden" references to science fiction generally unavailable in the GDR only increased readership. With few exceptions, East German science fiction was publishable in the seventies as long as it retained the "optimistic picture of history" in direct relationship to GDR society and *its* scientific-technological revolution.

During this decade, science fiction authors increasingly had access to a more complete spectrum of science fiction due to various personal or professional connections. In addition to Soviet and other Eastern Bloc traditions, western stories brought in new ideas and material, thus enriching the quality of and the discourse on GDR science fiction. Membership in the German Writers' Union often

6 Comments from editor Helmut Fickelscherer to Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller. See *Vorgriff* 168.

granted broader library privileges. More and more care packages with western material made it through customs to fans or authors. Karlheinz Steinmüller's list from 1984 of his favorite books and general opinions of various science fiction authors includes the following names none of which appeared in the GDR: Brian Aldiss, Philip Dick, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert and Walter Miller. Steinmüller wrote "one of my favorites" of Philip Dick and listed the Heyne and Suhrkamp editions of his top twelve books by western authors ("Über Science Fiction Literatur" 1, 4). Steinmüller also noted those he had heard of but not yet read. For instance, one line reads "Thomas M. Disch: probably good." (1).

Whether for political or literary reasons, science fiction writers and fans alike increasingly saw themselves as part of an international, socialist science fiction tradition. International not only referred to countries of the East Bloc, but also to science fiction deemed "class conscious" from the "non-socialist world." For instance, the president of the Stanislaw Lem fan club, Ralf Krämer, and fan club member, Erik Simon, argued in favor of select science fiction published in the West. In an article entitled "Auseinandersetzung mit der Science-Fiction-Literatur" from 1972, they sharply differentiated between three types of western science fiction: "decidedly trashy literature, anticommunist and overly technical products, and bourgeois humanist works" (qtd. in Boll, Neumann and Scheffler 42). While Krämer and Simon considered the first and second categories to be dangerous to the reader, they believed that the third category merited further study. Both noted that select western authors criticized the West's own problems of "mass manipulation, racism, militarism, a total consumer society" and supported peaceful coexistence. In their opinion, writers such as Ray Bradbury, Clifford D. Simak, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Sheckley, who up to this point had appeared in the Soviet Union but not East Germany, fell into the third category. According to Krämer and Simon, it was one of the goals of the Stanislaw Lem Club to discuss such books (42).

Calls for the greater availability of science fiction from the East and West also came from other places as well. In 1973, the Kulturbund and the German Writers' Union scheduled an emergency meeting on science fiction, the details of which I will discuss later on

in this chapter. At this meeting, Ekkehard Redlin spoke in support of some Anglo-American authors. Using the term “science fiction” to designate such publications from the West as opposed to the East German *wissenschaftliche-Phantastik*, he argued that the term science fiction is merely a class marker and not a marker of quality (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 42). Redlin mentioned the “humanistic” qualities of an author such as Ray Bradbury, whose book *Fahrenheit 451* subsequently appeared in Verlag Das Neue Berlin in 1974.<sup>7</sup>

The publication of western science fiction remained low, not only for ideological reasons, but also due to its high price. Publishers had to use their limited amount of hard currency to purchase the rights from the West. The review process cost editors like Redlin and, later Erik Simon, not only money, but also “pounds of nerves, powers of persuasion, and clever tactics,” in order to convince authorities of the value of “decadent, late bourgeois literature” (Kruschel, “Zwischen 155).

Due to their efforts, international science fiction did not remain wholly unavailable to the GDR reading public. Soviet science fiction had been published since the beginning. Names such as Efremov, Tolstoi and Sergei Snegov as well as Czech authors Karel Čapek and Josef Nesvadba were staples among those interested in science fiction. In the seventies, the Strugatskys continued to publish new titles, including *Hard to Be a God* (*Trudno byt' bogon* 1964; GDR 1975) and *Roadside Picknick* (*Piknik na obocine* 1972; GDR 1976). Lem came out with *The Futurological Congress* (*Kongres Futurologiczny* 1973; GDR 1975), the complete, uncensored edition of *Star Diaries* (*Dzienniki gwiazdowe*; GDR 1973) and *Imaginary Magnitude* (*Wielkość urojona* 1973; GDR 1976). A number of anthologies appeared, including Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and other Eastern European writers, as well as a broader array of Soviet authors. Titles include *Der Weg zur Amalthea* (*The Path to Amalthea*, 1979),

7 Science fiction expert, Adolf Scerl too praised Robert Heinlein’s science fiction at the same meeting for its ability to lead the reader to reflect upon its content (“Wissenschaftliche-phantastische Literatur” 120). Heinlein’s works never appeared in the GDR.

*Kontaktversuche* (Contact Attempts, 1978), *Galaxisspatzen* (Galactic Sparrows, 1975) and *Der Fotograf des Unsichtbaren* (The Photograph of the Invisible One, 1978) among others.

Over the next two decades a select American, English and West German authors were published in East Germany. These include the following: Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950; GDR 1982), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1969; GDR 1974), *The Illustrated Man* (1951; GDR 1977) and *The Martian Chronicles* (1950; GDR 1981), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932; GDR 1978), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969; GDR 1979) and *The Dispossessed* (1974; GDR 1987), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818; GDR 1978), and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1898; GDR 1975).<sup>8</sup> A collection of West German short stories called *Gedankenkontrolle* (Thought Controls, 1978) included established authors such as Wolfgang Jeschke and Herbert Franke. In addition, Edwin Orthmann of the Verlag Neues Leben edited the following collections containing western science fiction: *Der Diamantenmacher* (The Diamond Maker, 1972), *Die Ypsilon-Spirale* (The Ypsilon Spiral, 1973), *Das Zeitfahrrad* (The Time Bicycle, 1974), *Das Raumschiff* (The Spaceship, 1977).

In academia, Gustav Schröder's project on entertainment literature at the Pädagogische Hochschule "Karl Liebknecht" in Potsdam published a series of papers. Individual articles focused on subjects such as the detective novel (Norbert Dehmelt), the dime novel (Edith Gaida), and adventure literature (Erika Karsch). This cooperative study included an informative, relatively apolitical history of GDR science fiction by Schröder himself. In a separate dissertation from 1977, Adolf Sckerl conducted an international survey of science fiction and formulated a theory of its development in the GDR.

8 Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller write that "the censor" came to a publisher and requested that they publish Huxley's *Brave New World*. At the time, this book had not yet appeared in any country of the East Bloc (*Vorgriff* 163).

## Science Fiction Policy in the Seventies

Honecker's new economic and cultural policy had an immediate impact on science fiction for three reasons. First, as discussed above, the policy opened the door to irrational or fantastic narrative modes on an official level. Second, due to the connection between relaxation and productivity, party officials praised the role popular culture played in free time activities. By the early seventies, several GDR medical studies demonstrated the importance of relaxation and entertainment to the health and productivity of the worker. Taken seriously by economic planners, the results supported an increase in the variety of popular cultural activities, including popular literature. Editor Ekkehard Redlin also adopted this explanation as a reason to support the publication of science fiction in the Verlag Das Neue Berlin. In an article in *Sonntag* entitled "Ungewohnte Wirklichkeit," Redlin outlined the results of a medical study that examined the parts of the brain used during work hours and those during reading. This unnamed study concluded that reading is a necessary activity that relaxes those parts of the brain exhausted by work. Without reading, work productivity would decrease (2).

Third, the new economic and cultural policy led to increased funding and paper allocations as well as a programmatic expansion of offerings on the part of Verlag Das Neue Berlin and Verlag Neues Leben. Publication rates surged from only two GDR novels per year and one anthology in 1971 to seven novels per year and two anthologies in 1974 and 1975. Following singer Wolf Biermann's expulsion from East Germany in 1976, publication did not drop.<sup>9</sup> Two

9 The Biermann Affair marks a turning point in East German literary history. The incident involved Wolfgang Biermann, a popular, dissident folk singer, who was expelled from East Germany after an unapproved performance in Cologne, West Germany. This action prompted outrage from leading authors and intellectuals, a number of whom signed a letter of protest. Following Biermann's expatriation, cultural policy became more stringent and Honecker's political thaw began to freeze. See chapter seven in Manfred Jäger's *Kultur und Politik in der DDR*, pages 163–186. In my own research, I have found that it had little direct impact on science fiction. Only Johanna and Günter Braun refer to the

novels and six anthologies appeared in 1977. Production surged to eight novels and two anthologies in 1978 and dropped to three novels and two anthologies in 1979. Then in 1980 it returned five novels and six anthologies. (Neumann, *Grosse Illustrierte* 864–868). This count does not include the substantial number of short stories or the comparable increase in reprints and translations of foreign science fiction.<sup>10</sup>

During the seventies, instead of the average 20,000 copies, many science fiction books now began with 30,000–60,000 copies on their first run, depending on the book series and the publishers. This can be compared with much lower quotas for books of high literature (Steinmüllers, *Vorgriff* 12). In the seventies and eighties, circulation rates remained the same for the majority of science fiction novels (Kruschel, *Spielwelten* 7–8 and Hartung 123). Johanna and Günter Braun's *Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega XI* reached a total of 135,000 copies. Heiner Rank's *Die Ohnmacht der Allmächtigen* (The Invincible are Helpless, 1973) reached 196,000 copies. Günter Krupkat's *Nabou* (1968) had a circulation of 178,000 copies. By 1990, Alexander Kröger, one of the most prolific GDR science fiction writers, had some 1.6 million copies of twelve books published.<sup>11</sup> At this time, Eberhardt Del Antonio's *Titanus* and *Heimkehr der Vorfahren* had reached more than a half a million copies combined.

Honecker's cultural policy was not the only reason for this rapid growth. Author Carlos Rasch attributes a near tripling in the genre's

impact Biermann's expulsion had on their professional lives. Certainly, repercussions from the Biermann Affair had a general impact on science fiction. See Steinmüller, *Vorgriff* 10–11.

- 10 Anita Mallinckrodt mentions that science fiction did not appear in dime novel form between 1970 and 1980 due to the cancellation of the *KAP*-series (*Krimi, Abenteuer, Phantastik*) [44]. Neumann's bibliography contradicts this assertion. It lists science fiction stories in the dime novel series *Das Neue Abenteuer* (Verlag Neues Leben) and *Meridian* (Deutscher Militärverlag) and *Roman Zeitung* (Verlag Volk und Welt) during the seventies (884–887).
- 11 In an interview with Alexander Kröger, he mentioned that his publishers sometimes sold books to the west on a 1:1 basis rather than on a 1:10 exchange rate. He never saw hard currency from these sales, although his contract specified a certain percentage of all sales (Personal interview, 1999).

publication rate as early as 1968 to the efforts of a new generation of interested writers (“Fantastik” 3). In addition, there is evidence that a significant demand among GDR readers also needed to be met. From his many book signings, talks and other contact with fans, Krupkat met a wide variety of science fiction readers. They were not only young men and boys, but ranged in ages from “fourteen to seventy” (“Stenografische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 89). Author Günter Görlich commented on reader demand for science fiction at a conference on the subject in 1973: “Everyone of us can verify that we are asked more and more often at readings whether we write science fiction [utopische Romane]” (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 206).

Despite increased availability, the demand for science fiction remained so high that all books sold out immediately. Over the years, a culture of barter and lending among friends and clubs had developed in the East German “Mangelgesellschaft” (society of shortage). This practice supports an assertion oft repeated in interviews with authors and fans that more than one person read each science fiction book. In libraries, some science fiction books remained in great demand and were difficult to get, as select titles were checked out frequently.<sup>12</sup> Authors Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller estimate that, in the seventies and eighties, a single title reached a potential ten percent among students aged fifteen to twenty five (*Vorgriff* 12–13). Author Alexander Kröger estimates as many as ten readers per book (“Hundert Zeilen” 7).

A survey conducted in 1981 by Olaf Göhler found that thirty-one percent of college-bound high school students rated science fiction as their most favorite genre. Thirty-three percent of journeymen, twenty-seven percent of office workers and twenty-four percent of the working class rated it as their second most favorite. Nineteen percent of college students and seventeen percent of the intelligentsia listed it as their third most favorite genre (quoted by Hartung 123.)

12 Information provided in personal interviews with Andymon fan club members Hardy Kettlitz (1999), Hans-Peter Neumann (1998), Ingolf Vonau (1999), Siegfried Breuer (1999), and editor, author, and former fan, Erik Simon (1997). Kettlitz is also an editor at the Shayol Verlag.

## The Science Fiction Fan Club

The East German reader functioned as the consumer, who official cultural policy originally intended as the target audience of its “ideological product” (Barker 27). Adele Marie Barker’s terminology implies a more active role on the part of the reader subject, rather than the quantification of the purchasers of science fiction as anonymous masses. In the GDR, consumer agency was evident in the organized activities of science fiction fans.

Initial popular support for science fiction expressed in the magazine *Jugend und Technik* prompted author Carlos Rasch to contact respondents. He suggested they form science fiction clubs as a means to provide further support for its existence in the GDR. The best-known science fiction fan club was the Stanislaw Lem Club (SLC) of Dresden named after the popular Polish author and founded by Ralf Krämer (Personal interview, 1999). The SLC operated, according to the model outlined by Bathrick – both inside and outside of the SED’s “discursive system.” Made up of a group of physics students from the Technical University in Dresden, the club was officially founded on June 5, 1969 as the *Interessengemeinschaft Wissenschaftlich-phantastische Literatur* part of the *Hochschulgruppe Dresden* of the Kulturbund. Membership in the Kulturbund became necessary after repeated meetings in Krämer’s dorm room aroused suspicion, drawing the attention of the *Stasi*.<sup>13</sup>

SLC members shared ideas and assembled a library to facilitate greater access to texts. They swapped books in order to work around the restrictive GDR publishing system. Some made typewriter copies of rare science fiction works, including the occasional western author. Member Erik Simon translated new Soviet science fiction titles into

- 13 Interestingly, the Kulturbund saw the formation of what it termed “Freundeskreise” as a new way of increasing contact between author and reader. In a manner such groups were to continue the work of the Bitterfeld Path. A 1969 report from the Kulturbund outlined this goal as well as the importance of reading clubs to the ideological and aesthetic education the GDR citizen and actively encourage the support of such groups. See “Die Aufgaben unserer Zentralen Kommission Literatur” 17–25.

German, making an alternate science fictional discourse accessible as well. Fans published newsletters, created slides-shows, organized author readings, and sought cautious contact with other GDR science fiction fan clubs through letters and the rare inter-club meeting.<sup>14</sup> By 1972, the SLC counted some 120 members. Many of the next generation of science fiction authors stemmed from these clubs.

Fan members maintained an active interest in international science fiction as well. When possible, they established and maintained contacts with foreign authors and fans. This practice granted them access to discourses on science fiction that ran counter to those in East Germany. There were even a few meetings between not only West and East German science fiction fans and authors but also Polish, Russian, British, and American ones.<sup>15</sup>

In the fall of 1972, the SLC became the victim of denunciation in the Physics Department at the Technical University (TU) in Dresden. It began when the party secretary of the Physics department demanded the exmatriculation of club member Rolf Krohn, perhaps due to his habit of asking too many “uncomfortable” questions (Simon, “Blütezeit” 46). This accusation, however, led to the further investigation of Krohn’s activities, which included his science fiction stories and his activities as a member of the SLC. At the time, an inner circle of club members possessed some western science fiction works in the

14 The fan club regularly put on public presentations. In an interview, member Erik Simon mentioned that one slide show on the Terraces of Baalbek, by science fiction author Günther Krupkat in the early seventies, packed the room. Another presentation on topics surrounding Erik van Daniken’s books drew over two hundred people (Simon, personal interview 1997 and Both, Neumann, Scheffler 45).

15 West German fans attending the Berlin Convention of the Science Fiction Club Deutschlands (SFCD) in 1967 crossed to East Berlin to meet with fans and several authors. Members established contact with a number of East German authors, including Gerhard Branstner and Karl-Heinz Tuschel, as well as Polish author Stanislaw Lem and Russian authors Ivan Efremov and Boris and Arkady Strugatsky among others. A group of fans and authors traveled spontaneously, without a visa, to the 1973 Eurocon III in Poznan, Poland, where English science fiction author Brian Aldiss and American Mark Brandis spoke. At this conference, one fan met with West German author Herbert Franke as well as some West German fans (Both, Neumann, and Scheffler, *Berichte* 110).

club library available only to trusted members. Interestingly, at first, this activity was not the basis for further charges. Rather, the TU discovered cause in Krohn's writings, finding "anti-socialist tendencies" in them. Erik Simon today asserts that none of the stories intended to criticize socialism, "not even its strange manifestation in the GDR." (46). University officials described Krohn's behavior as a "destructive, politically-provocative, and hostile occurrence and action in numerous instances" (49). In 1973, the university expelled Krohn and barred him from study at any institution of higher education in East Germany, greatly limiting his employment chances. Due to the possession of western science fiction, the club's founding member, Ralf Krämer, was said to have led its members to serious political-ideological mistakes (Both, Neumann and Scheffler, *Berichte* 48). Consequently, he was expelled from the TU only.

The so-called Lem Club Affair led the Kulturbund's Central Committee on Literature to call a meeting in Berlin in 1973. It invited acknowledged GDR science fiction experts and relevant authorities.<sup>16</sup> At issue was the viability of science fiction as a form of socialist literature, its pedagogical function as entertainment literature and the nature of its reception. The fact that two central members of the premier science fiction fan club had been "led astray" by an interest in this very genre merited investigation. A decision had to be made as to how the Kulturbund should proceed with other science fiction fan clubs in the future.

Discussion focused on the formulation of a unified national policy on East German science fiction in order to prevent future

16 Participants included Adolf Sckerl, a reviewer, who was working on a dissertation on GDR science fiction at the Humboldt University. Also in attendance were Ekkehard Redlin of the Verlag Das Neue Berlin and member of the Committee on Utopian Literature, and science fiction author Günter Krupkat, who was head of the newly founded Committee on Utopian Literature in the German Writers' Union. According to the protocol, author Eberhardt del'Antonio had not yet arrived, but was supposedly coming. Also listed are Helmut Fickelscherer, an editor at Verlag Neues Leben and the publisher Dr. Koppen. Mrs. Zschocke came as a representative from the Ministry of Culture who was responsible for "this area of literature" ("Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs" 2).

confusion as to generic definition, purpose and label. As the Kulturbund was not a literary institution, but rather orchestrated cultural assemblies and other group activities, its greatest concern remained the “ideological and moral” health of the club members. Although the participants raised the question of realism in science fiction, the meeting primarily addressed the pedagogical use of science fiction and its reception.

Fan Bernd Hutschenreuther remembered the meeting:

Contemporary social science viewed science fiction as a competitor, as a reactionary bourgeois theory about the future, and, consequently, fought it. That culminated in the pronouncement that all utopias since Marx and Engels were reactionary. In the end, utopia finally exhibited practical influence. (“Das Leben” 55).

The term “science fiction” in this context specified western texts. However, GDR science fiction still represented a threat as a type of utopian literature to hard-liners, who held to a strict interpretation of Engels’ prohibition of utopia. Several participants, who remained unnamed in the protocol, still considered science fiction to be *Trivial-literatur*.

Of primary importance was the meeting’s distinction between socialist science fiction as a broadly understood generic category ideologically opposed to what Ekkehard Redlin and Adolf Sckerl termed “imperialistic SF-mass literature.” Rather than recap its literary or prognostic qualities, they now presented a policy designed to influence reader reception. Both praised the ability of socialist science fiction as a literary form to lead the reader to reflect upon its playful future suggestions. In this manner, the act of reading science fiction stimulated thought processes.

In the meeting protocol, Redlin refers again to the term *Gedankenspiel*, a term, which was commonly used among fans as well.<sup>17</sup> He praises the productive qualities of this cognitive form of play as a type of relaxation. Western *Trivialliteratur*, on the contrary, contained only

17 In several discussions with Andymon fan club members while conducting research in Berlin in 1998 and 1999, the quality of a puzzle or thought game posed in science fiction was mentioned as part of the enjoyment of reading.

dangerous “mesmerizing and escapist” qualities. Redlin’s definition secured the position of science fiction within the Kulturbund as a legitimate form of socialist literature and art. It was one, which must be taken seriously and incorporated into its “literary propaganda.” (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 104a).

Redlin’s comments reflect the general resolution of the meeting and science fiction’s subsequent consideration as socialist literature. As not only members of the Kulturbund were present at this meeting, but also representatives of the Ministry of Culture and the German Writers’ Union, the results affected policy regarding the genre nationwide. Under Honecker’s new plan, science fiction had finally become an official part of the new socialist literature rather than merely a prognostic tool of science.

The immediate impact of this change in cultural policy is visible in the Kulturbund’s restructuring of its science fiction fan clubs. New consumerist policies stressed the creation of a greater variety of literary offerings, while focusing on educative control at the level of consumption. In spite of past prejudices against science fiction, the genre did not receive the blame for the events of the Lem Club Affair. Conference participants held the Kulturbund responsible for Krohn’s and Krämer’s actions on account of insufficient supervision and instruction of the groups under its jurisdiction. At the meeting, Adolf Sckerl believed that, because “the development in Dresden had a highly negative effect on consumption,” the other clubs must become “more diligent” (“Stenographische Niederschrift eines Gesprächs” 65). He emphasized that it was not the literature itself that posed a threat, but the subjective manner in which it was read. Sckerl placed responsibility on the individual reader (120). This interpretation opened the door to expanded publication opportunities for the genre with ideological control placed at the level of reader reception.

The Kulturbund actively incorporated socialist science fiction into its literary propaganda. Kulturbund representatives gleaned club libraries of any illegal western science fiction. A Kulturbund adviser played a greater role in club participation and instruction. Newly reorganized fan clubs read and discussed selected western novels in order to counteract any “incorrect” interpretations of such novels that might have occurred in the past. The Kulturbund’s eventual goal was

to transform the SLC into a socialist club of “Gegenwartsliteratur” or literature of the present. Science fiction would be only one of the genres read, thus mediating any adverse effects of one genre on the reader (Simon, “Blütezeit” 51). The Kulturbund’s efforts at club reorganization led to the subsequent voluntary dissolution of most of them.

In 1978, the Kulturbund held a *Konferenz zur Unterhaltungskunst* (Conference on Entertainment Art). This meeting reiterated earlier observations that literature played an important role in the development and health of the GDR citizen. It substantiated Honecker’s goal of improving the availability and variety of cultural activities in the GDR that had been successful and called for further support and expansion (Hanke 19).

In that same year, a number of individuals assembled with the intent of creating a working group dedicated to science fiction under the auspices of the Kulturbund.<sup>18</sup> In the protocol of this meeting, Sckerl outlined the importance of rethinking existing policy. In his opinion, current literary and cultural debates failed to address the rapid expansion in science fiction offerings. “More often science fiction (*Wissenschaftliche Phantastik*) was discussed to a large extent in the private sphere and was also written and exchanged by enthusiasts” (Haines 2). Consequently, the discussants concluded that science fiction possesses a unique ability to bring readers together to discuss contemporary issues and problems. It was up to the Kulturbund to guide these conversations by recommending socialist reading strategies. Since it was increasingly difficult to dam up the seepage of illegal, international science fiction into East Germany, the reader needed to be educated as to the nature and variety of the expanded product selection. It was decided that neither the clubs should be disbanded nor should socialist science fiction be banned, as both forms represented a valuable means of contacting and influencing young

18 Attendees included literary scholars and party officials. Representatives from the field of science fiction included Adolf Sckerl, then a member of the Kulturbund’s Central Committee on Literature, Erik Simon, writer and editor, and Wolfgang Both. The latter individual was a former member of the Illmenau club Phantopia that had been organized in connection with the Free German Youth.

readers. Representatives were to redouble their efforts to lead science fiction reception in a Marxist–Leninist direction and noted that western literature should be read with increased “political diligence” (Haines 3). In reality, no new science fiction clubs formed until the mid-eighties.

While the Kulturbund revised its policy concerning science fiction, space was also made for the genre in the German Writers’ Union. In 1973, the *Arbeitskreis Utopische Literatur* (Committee on Utopian Literature) came into being. Günter Krupkat headed this subsection, which was to develop and support socialist science fiction. In Krupkat’s opinion, the formation of this circle was necessary not only due to the new interest that established writers of other genres were taking in science fiction, but also to mentor a new generation of science fiction writers.

It is the task of the Workgroup on ‘Utopian Literature’ in the GDR Writers’ Union to remove prejudice and to cultivate action. [...] And literary science begins to deal more seriously with this genre. Authors, who were active only in other areas – also natural scientists – are now turning to the topics of science fiction (wissenschaftlich-phantastischen). (“Beitrag” 205)

Indeed the presence of this subsection within the Writers’ Union signaled that science fiction was to be taken more seriously as a form of literature. On behalf of the Writers’ Union, Adolf Sckerl and Heinz Entner wrote the following justification for the change in policy:

The creative vigor of the spirit is excited by the game of literary fantasy in new ways through the invention of bizarrely colorful and surprisingly alien pictures and artistic worlds. [...] In the process, science fiction lifts itself above other types of entertainment literature. (“Zu Entwicklungsstand” 20).

In the end, the discourse present in this organization was greatly limited to the specific benefit of science fiction to the furthering of socialism in Marxist–Leninist terms. The continual focus on this topic precluded the inclusion of other activities or methods. Constant disagreement among participating authors led to a stagnation of group discussion. Authors Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller comment that the biannual meetings of the *Arbeitskreis Utopische Literatur* often

became quite heated due to growing conflict between “ideological constraints” and “a growing self awareness among authors” (*Vorgriff* 165). Although science fiction authors requested the formation of the circle in order to gain official recognition for the genre, Alexander Kröger characterized its function more as a bureaucratic structure necessary for the approval of travel visas to international science fiction conventions. He also found that the meetings of this committee had little effect on the development of science fiction as a whole.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the presentations and discussions that took place in this circle were accessible only to its members. Therefore, in broader science fiction circles, particularly among a growing and highly engaged fandom, this group had a limited effect (Simon and Spittel, “Science Fiction” 25). In fact, many science fiction writers did not fully embrace this official forum and preferred to remain in their more private science fiction niche.

## Science Fiction as Niche

As Habermas points out in his study of the public sphere, Marx intended to expose and end the “false consciousness” of the classed civil society through the politicization of that society. This was to be accomplished through the collapsing of the different categories of mental and manual labor, of public and private life and the implementation of a direct mono-organizational democracy (Habermas 128–129). The increased politicization of the public and of the private in East Germany, particularly through the efforts of Mielke and his infamous *Stasi*, led to a schizoid effect in the interaction between

19 Alexander Kröger mentioned this reason in an interview in Cottbus in 1999. Kröger also stated that there was no connection between the creation of this group and the Lem Club case. See also Arbeitsgemeinschaft Utopische Literatur “Aufgaben und Möglichkeiten” 2: “This work group tries, inspite of many vehement quarrels, to preserve international contacts (Teilnahme am V. Eurocon in Brussels, World-SF u.a.)”

individuals since all private action necessarily carried greater public implications. The subsequent formation of “niches” counteracted the state’s efforts to this end, creating a trusted sub-community of private individuals organized around a particular interest. What became known as the *Niche-Gesellschaft* was also supported officially beginning in the seventies as a way to dispel some of the growing dissent among the various sections of the population.

Many science fiction fans and writers belonged to a niche determined in part by cultural and political prejudice. While such niches also existed in the West, they had greater social-political connotations in East Germany. This is apparent in a recent description of the advantages of belonging to the science fiction niche by authors Johanna and Günter Braun. In their article “De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bene,” the Brauns emphasize that the term “science fiction ghetto” had a very different meaning in the East. They stress that those authors, who chose to stop writing more mainstream literature and join the science fiction community, did so because they could write more freely inside that circle than outside. According to the Brauns, such authors regarded the label *Trivialliteratur* with humor and irony due to the greater narrative freedom it gave them (26). This emphasis on the greater room for maneuver within the science fiction niche echoes statements made by Ekkehard Redlin and Erik Simon, former editors at the *Verlag das Neue Berlin*. They maintained that cultural policy-makers paid less attention to science fiction in general due to its status as entertainment literature (Personal interviews, 1999).

In the 1970s and 1980s, many authors of the science fiction niche gained a much broader readership than those of their devoted fans. To East Germans, who lived in a *Literaturstaat*, literature played not only a cultural but also a political role. The highly regulated media establishment was incapable of discussing topics, which dissident East German authors could address indirectly through metaphor, or subtle allusion. Both authors and readers functioned as “culturally activated subjects,” writing and reading texts, which were “culturally activated subjects” as well (Bennett and Woollacott 64).

However, the give and take between country and citizen, which is characteristic of a civil society, was not present in the GDR. The implementation of a totalizing discourse based on Marxism–Leninism

treated the culturally activated subject as the object of cultural policy. Consequently, East Germans developed what Danielle Dahn has termed methods of “interior dissent” (*Westwärts* 201). Such practices also appeared in the science fiction texts in the form of established codes, which the “cultural knowing reader” of the fan club could easily interpret. The “average reader” could also derive the “pleasure of culture and knowledge” by recognizing references, particularly to forbidden topics (Bennett and Wollacott 79). Erik Simon, a former science fiction fan club member who remains active in the scene today, attests that censorship only led to a “sharpening of the senses” on the part of the reader. Finding themselves on the same “plane of understanding,” the reader and author of science fiction developed an atypically close relationship, which often took place between the lines (Simon, *Grenzfälle* 13). At readings, East German science fiction authors could expect a large part of their audience to be familiar with most of their works (Klotz and Matzer, 106 and Steinmüller, *Vorgriff* 11).

Where the science fiction niche had enabled writers early on to encode a message for the knowing reader or fan to expect and discover, this practice now spilled over into the mainstream. Author Günter Braun attributed the popularity of science fiction in the seventies and eighties precisely to the practice of “reading between the lines.”

People, who never had touched a science fiction book before, much less opened one, did not care about ghetto walls. They bought short stories and novels, which ostensibly took place on distant worlds, as narratives about the immediate GDR present. The restricted portrayal of the truth led the SF-ghetto to become a place with almost boundless freedom. (“De Mortuis” 33)

My discussions with the science fiction fans of the Andymon club of Berlin substantiate these observations. Several members remembered that part of the fun of reading science fiction during this period, was in playing detective to discover all of the references to East German society.

Heightened reader interest in science fiction can also be attributed to the high visibility of Soviet space exploration in the GDR in the

seventies and eighties. At the height of detente in 1975, the docking of the American Apollo space capsule by John Glenn with its Soviet counterpart Soyuz attracted mass interest. SED officials interpreted it as the continued efforts of the Soviet Bloc to work for peace not only in space, but also on Earth (Kaiser and Welck 404). By far one of the most important events for East Germany was the joint USSR–GDR mission Soyuz 31 in August 1978 when Sigmund Jähn became the first East German in space.<sup>20</sup> While East Germany experienced increasing economic hardship, officials attempted to create a new sense of national pride through the participation of an East German cosmonaut in a Soviet space mission. Sigmund Jähn’s trip into space was greatly advertised and popularized in children’s literature and programming as well as in the regular media. The well-known children’s TV program “Das Sandmännchen” created its own cartoon space dock before cutting to a live shot of Sigmund Jähn on Soyuz 31. There, he symbolically introduced a stuffed *Sandmann* to his Soviet counterpart, a tiny, female bear named Misha.<sup>21</sup>

Because science fiction boomed in the 1970s and 1980s the genre remained ideologically suspect and its authors and devoted readers politically and culturally marginalized. Furthermore, when several authors of “high” literature turned to writing science fiction in the early 1970s, they did not necessarily embrace the science fiction community. For instance, the publication of Christa Wolf’s “Selbstversuch” (“Self-experiment” 1975) and Franz Fühmann’s *Saiäns-Fiktschen* (1985) did not establish these authors as science fiction writers. Rather, the status of “Self-experiment” as science fiction is only cursorily referred to in the critical reception of this short story in both East and West. While Wolf herself does refer to the story’s characters as “if one desires – fantastic or futuristic,” its generic form represents solely a means to accomplish her exploration of gender

20 This fascination continues today on the level of popular culture. In the film *Goodbye Lenin* (2003), the character of Sigmund Jähn plays a small but pivotal role. The song “Wer ist Sigmund Jähn” by Die Prinzen in 1999 also attests to Sigmund Jähn’s status as a figure of *Ostalgie*.

21 I would like to thank Ingolf Vonau for pointing out this reference to me.

(“Leben oder gelebt werden” 101). To my knowledge she has not written on the subject of science fiction.

Fühmann similarly declared that he never wanted to write science fiction, but was intrigued by the genre’s narrative possibilities after reading Johanna and Günther Braun’s *Conviva Ludibundus* (1980). He praised the genre’s ability to allow him “[...] to overcome an existential paralysis” where he “found, in that unreal world and manner, a way like no other to formulate what tormented him into words” (book jacket). Still, Fühmann took great pains to avoid the science fiction label, of which the phonetic spelling of the title *Saiäns-Fiktschen* is but one indication (5).<sup>22</sup> In my opinion, Fühmann’s short story collection certainly falls under the rubric of science fiction, yet to be labeled in this manner at the time threatened Fühmann with the undesirable label of an author of *Trivialliteratur*.<sup>23</sup>

Certainly the genre found support in Honecker’s pledge to increase the availability of consumer items and to educate GDR citizens in areas of science and technology. Nevertheless, the presence of the *Staatssicherheitsdienst* (German Secret Police or *Stasi*) or their unofficial informants (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, or IMs) at most fan club meetings coupled with the surveillance of several science fiction authors attests to the state’s distrust of a suspect genre that had grown so popular.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, as attention turned towards reader reception and away from strict censorship of science fiction texts, the *Stasi* surveillance of the genre’s authors and fans grew. Through 1990, in-

22 Here, it could be argued that Fühmann meant western science fiction when referring to “science fiction.” However, by the 1980s it was not uncommon for the term science fiction, which officially designated the bourgeois form of the genre, to refer to East German publications as well.

23 It is interesting to note that Franz Fühmann’s short story collection *Saiäns-Fiktschen* is listed at number fifty-seven on a rating of the top of the Andymon fan club’s list of East German science fiction stories of all time. Christa Wolf did not make either list.

24 The *Stasi* created a file not only for every author who published in the GDR, but also for every book published there (Kruschel “Zwischen” 157). See also “Stasi Akten? – phantastische Literatur?” by Johanna and Günter Braun. In addition, several science fiction authors spied on other science fiction authors. This information was provided me in an interview with Johanna and Günter Braun, as well as in a letter from Siegfried Breuer.

formants were among the members of various fan clubs, including the Andymon fan club in Berlin.<sup>25</sup>

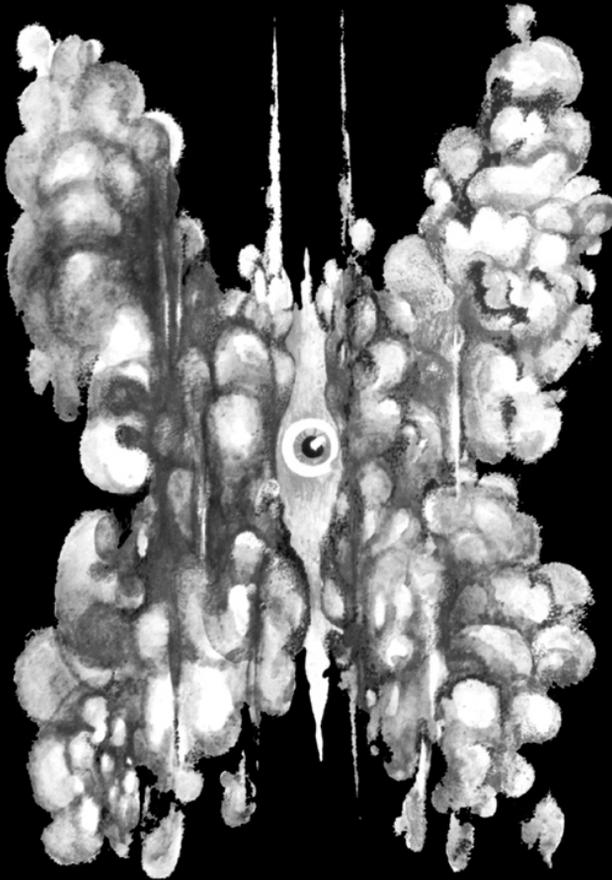
The Stasi also watched several science fiction authors closely. Due to his knowledge of the location and quantity of East Germany's natural gas reserves in coordination with his primary profession both Alexander Kröger and his wife, Susanna Routschek, came under Stasi scrutiny. Their contacts in West Germany and his science fiction publications provided further reason for this surveillance.<sup>26</sup> The Stasi targeted Johanna and Günter Braun, particularly after 1980, when their banned work began appearing in the West without a GDR publishing license. This intrusive observation functioned as a form of intimidation, in the hopes of halting the Brauns from smuggling their manuscripts to the West (Johanna and Günter Braun, Personal interview 1999). The next chapter takes an in-depth look at their novel *Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega XI* (Uncanny Manifestations on Omega XI).

25 A former Stasi informant and member of the GDR science fiction community affirmed that a number of fan clubs, including Andymon, had members, who were also Stasi informants. This information was provided to me in an interview with the former IM, whose name I choose not to reveal as this knowledge would add nothing to subject at hand.

26 Kröger has published his rather lengthy Stasi file as a book, which offers a unique look into the life of the most prolific GDR science fiction writer (*Sudelfass* 89).

Johanna Braun Günter Braun

*Unheimliche  
Erscheinungsformen  
auf Omega XI*



Utopischer Roman

Book cover from Johanna and Günter Braun's  
*Unheimliche Erscheinungsformen auf Omega XI*  
(Uncanny Manifestations on Omega XI, 1974)