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# ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

## Utopian Thought in Times of Political Rupture

Edited by Paul Lerner and Joes Segal



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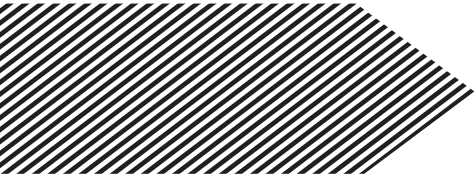
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# Bulletin of the German Historical Institute

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## Alternative Realities: Utopian Thought in Times of Political Rupture

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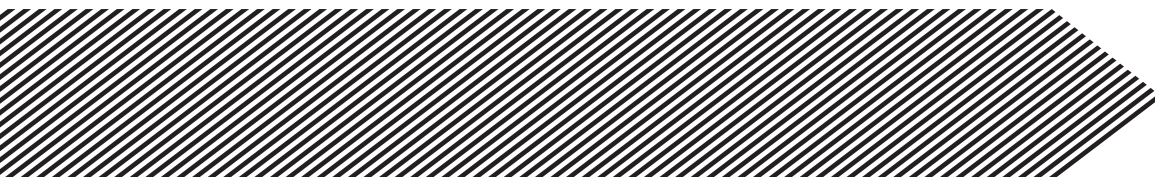
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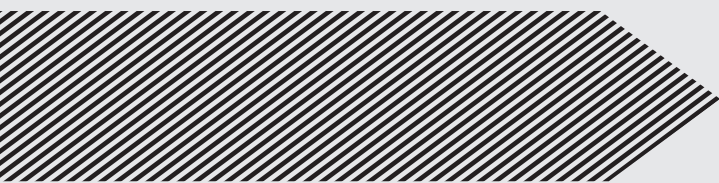


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Paul Lerner & Joes Segal, editors





# Introduction





## UTOPIA AND CRISIS: AN INTRODUCTION TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

**Joel Segal and Paul Lerner**

Over the past five centuries, *Homo sapiens* has increasingly become aware of its place in the bigger picture. Copernicus showed us that we are not the center of the universe, and Charles Darwin proved that we are evolutionarily connected to everything that lives on earth. We also learned that nothing is ever static or final, as we are part of an ongoing cosmic story from Big Bang to infinite extension or ultimate implosion.

Nevertheless, many people like certainty and structure, and they often display a strong penchant for transcendent ideas and solutions. When myths and religions lost some of their explanatory power, these solutions were increasingly sought and found in human constructions and projections. Since the Scientific Revolution and the era of Enlightenment, people have increasingly endeavored to understand their world empirically and to use this knowledge to improve their living conditions to create more just, rational, and efficient institutions and to predict and even steer the direction of human history. Some of them came up with definitive answers.

A recent example, representing the revival of this tradition, is the idea of the end of history.<sup>1</sup> The political scientist and former US policy advisor Francis Fukuyama considered world history to be a process of trial and error, an ideological contest, moving toward the best possible form of social and political organization. In his view, the twentieth century left us with three remaining ideologies. In 1945, fascism and National Socialism were defeated and discredited; in 1989, the same thing happened to communism. What remained, capitalist liberal democracy, represented the ultimate answer, the solution to several centuries of political and ideological confrontation — at least until the onset of collective boredom could start the historical process all over again. Probably not coincidentally, Fukuyama's vision coincided with the rise of neoliberalism with the ascent of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

Fukuyama inspired, or was part of, a broader movement in the late-twentieth century that projected ideas towards their logical end point. The end of art, art history, and art theory were announced in a number of learned studies,<sup>2</sup> and many other things were brought to

1 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, 1992).

2 Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge and New York, 2004); Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (London, 2001); Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago, 1996); Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel* (Stanford, 2006); Arthur C. Danto, *after the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, 1995).

their academically supported termination.<sup>3</sup> Envisioning a final design for human life is very much part of the utopian tradition. The book that gave this tradition its name, *Utopia* by Thomas More (1516) was arguably more of an originally conceived criticism of his own time, because his ideal society was full of contradictions and humorous touches, such as the name of Utopia's capital city, Air Castle. But in the seventeenth century, humor and irony made room for blueprints of an ideal future, such as Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602, published 1623) and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), both claiming to provide definitive answers to questions of human happiness and destiny. The nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries witnessed a number of attempts to translate such ideas into practice, such as Charles Fourier's *Phalanstère* idea of small harmonious communities, the *Arts and Crafts* movement initiated by William Morris, the *Garden City* concept as developed by Ebenezer Howard, and, more aggressively, Le Corbusier's plans for the complete make-over of the city center of Paris.<sup>4</sup> Marxism, perhaps the nineteenth century's most enduring intellectual and political system, angrily decried utopian thinking, rooting itself, by contrast, in empirical historical and economic observation, yet its twentieth-century legacy was intertwined with the utopian longings of artists, visionaries, and revolutionaries across the globe.

Utopian ideas have the function of presenting an alternative to the world we are living in. They energize people not to accept the world as it is but to actively shape it according to their wishes and dreams. In the course of the twentieth century, however, the dark side of utopian thinking manifested itself in the trenches of the First World War, the Holocaust and other genocides, the threat of nuclear war, and the brutal politics of Soviet- and Chinese-style state socialism, entangling utopian yearnings and cold state repression in a bitter modern dialectic. Philosopher Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (published in 1945), identified a deeply rooted tradition in Western thinking, starting with Plato's ideal society and further developed by thinkers like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, which resulted in the nightmarishly repressive regimes of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> And six years later, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt drew connections between nineteenth-century anti-semitism and imperialism and the fascist and communist regimes of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> More recently, philosopher John Gray analyzed the totalitarian foundations of Christian apocalyptic thinking, Enlightenment extremism, and modern utopian projects.<sup>7</sup> How the organization of paradise on Earth could easily turn into its very

- 3 Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Growing the World's Wealth in an Age of Extremes* (New York, 2005); Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York, 2006); Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York, 1984); Russell Targ and J. J. Hurtak, *The End of Suffering: Fearless Living in Troubled Times - Or, How to Get Out of Hell for Free* (Charlottesville, 2006); Richard Heinberg, *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality* (Gabriola Island, 2011); Moises Naim, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be* (New York, 2013); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (London, 2006); Joel Fuhrman, *The End of Dieting: How to Live for Life* (New York, 2015), to mention just a small selection.
- 4 Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (Oxford, 2001); Richard Noble, ed., *Utopia* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); Gregory Claeys, *Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea* (London, 2011); Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *The Utopian Reader* (New York, 2017).
- 5 Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1945).
- 6 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).
- 7 John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London, 2007).

opposite is effectively described in famous novels by Yevgeny Zamyatin (*We*, 1920), Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*, 1932), George Orwell (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949), Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*, 1953), and many others<sup>8</sup>

The conference “Alternative Realities,” on which this volume is based, took place at the Wende Museum of the Cold War in Culver City, as well as at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles on April, 16-17 2018, and was co-organized by the Wende Museum, the Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies at the University of Southern California, and the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam. It was directly inspired by the current state of our political- and social-media-induced confusion about reality and fiction, or about facts and alternative facts, and by the recent reemergence of authoritarian politics and xenophobic movements worldwide. Now that the boundaries between reality and imagination have become opaque, it seems useful and necessary to revisit those products of the imagination, utopian or dystopian, that inspired us to critically assess the world around us without rejecting its very substance.

The conference had a special focus on Germany, the country that witnessed five regimes over the past one-hundred-plus years and experienced both the heights of national euphoria and the depths of physical and moral defeat and destruction in the twentieth century. During moments of rupture, cultural ideas and expressions take on new relevance in envisioning a new political order. This conference addressed the role of utopian visions, both artistic and intellectual, in transforming the world from the twentieth century to the present day. Indeed, major historical turning points were inspired by, and provoked, periods of profound cultural and political self-examination. These moments of fundamental reflection were often accompanied by fierce debates about historical lineages and legacies. Utopian movements alternately asserted a complete break from the past or claimed to represent the fulfilment of historical destinies. The recent growth and political success of populist anti-democratic forces all over the world and the apparent realignment of the political order suggest that we might be entering another period of profound political and historical rupture today.

In our call for papers, we asked the conference participants to address one or more of the following questions:

1. *Utopian concepts and political identities*: In what ways did utopian concepts influence the construction — or contestation — of

8 M. Keith Booker, ed., *Dystopia* (Ipswich, MA, 2013); Kate Brown, *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (Chicago, 2015); Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford, 2017).

political ideas? What alternative realities did they envision? What aspects of social, political, and cultural life were addressed by these utopian ideas? In what form or medium were they presented? Which utopian visions had the power to actually help shape political realities?

2. *Utopian ideas, traditions, and contingency*: How did artists, writers, composers, filmmakers, intellectuals, and visionary politicians create political meaning by relating to existing cultural traditions? How did they adapt, appropriate, or change these traditions? How did they embed their proposals in a broader historical narrative? What was the impact of local traditions and circumstances on the creation of visionary ideas? To what extent are grand visions a product of their place and time?
3. *The utopian century in comparative perspective*: Are there overarching tendencies in the ways artists, writers, composers, filmmakers, intellectuals, and visionary politicians envisioned alternative realities throughout the history of the twentieth century? How did twentieth-century utopias differ from utopian visions and practices of the nineteenth century and earlier? Is the twentieth century a post-utopian era?
4. *Utopia present and future*: Is utopian thinking still relevant today? How can it escape the pitfalls of state repression? Does utopian thinking after “the end of history” still offer viable political alternatives? What is the role of art and culture in creating these alternatives? What role do utopian projections play in the success of or resistance to right-wing populism in the present day?

For this volume, we selected several of the most thought-provoking contributions which, taken together, highlight the major themes and perspectives that ran through the conference presentations and discussions, divided into sections on Countercultures, Ideologies and Practices, and Alternative Visions. In the opening essay of the Countercultures section, “The Body Politic: From Meyerhold to My Barbarian,” Farrah Karapetian traces broad lineages over a century of artistic and theatrical production and theorizing. She analyzes Russian theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold’s ideas about the corporeal aspects of theater, and their lasting impact on artistic utopian strategies. In 1940, Meyerhold was executed as an enemy of the people. Having spent his forty-year career in intellectual pursuit of making theater one of the cultural conquests of the Russian Revolution, he refused to conform to Socialist Realism as the exclusive route

toward identification with the masses. For him, art had a specific, vital function. He conceived of theater as a means of agitation, and his use of biomechanics, which made him famous, emerged out of a study of labor published just after the Russian Revolution. Meyerhold's ideas hold lasting currency because of their impact on his teacher and peer Konstantin Stanislavski, his student Sergei Eisenstein, and his foreign contemporaries Bertolt Brecht and Lee Strasberg. The combined legacy of these artists includes their commitment to stripping the theater of its stage, their experiments in splitting narrative into episodes, and their constant return to the body as the arbiter of authenticity. Using a range of different contemporary artists, Karapeitian examines the lasting influence on contemporary performance of Russian Revolutionary theatrical theory and its utopian commitment.

Erin Sullivan Maynes, in her paper "Currency and Community: Labor, Identity, and *Notgeld* in Inflation-era Thuringia," discusses the ways in which community currencies were used in Germany during the First World War and the Weimar Republic to imagine a utopian alternative to the disturbing political and economic realities of the time. Community currencies appeared in places with strong local identities. The function of these currencies was largely symbolic; they responded to vertiginous economic change and currency fluctuation, asserting local pride, supporting regional businesses, and implicitly rejecting global markets. *Notgeld*, the emergency money that had been appearing in Germany since 1914, was initially introduced as a stopgap solution to the war-induced shortage of coins and official *Reichsmarks*. But like other community currencies, it eventually took on more symbolic functions alongside its practical uses. Maynes considers the ways in which German communities used *Notgeld* as a means to re-imagine the economy at the local level and shape it in their own image at a moment of national economic crisis. In rural areas and small towns, it functioned as a decorative collector's object as much as a provisional currency and was used to project messages that were both idealized self-presentations and longed-for projections of local identity.

In "Beyond Historicism: Utopian Thought in the 'Conservative Revolution,'" Robbert-Jan Adriaansen claims that right-wing thinkers in Germany during the Weimar Republic were no less utopian in their ideas than their left-wing counterparts. The Conservative Revolutionary movement, a loose collection of historians and political theorists, has often been characterized as a reactionary movement that tried to escape the harsh realities of violence, military defeat, and economic

turbulence by turning to an imagined and glorified German past. Its embrace of modern technology has been interpreted as a paradoxical “reactionary modernism” that strove to embed technology in a Romantic irrationalism, which revolted against reason, liberalism, and Enlightenment thought. Adriaansen argues that the Conservative Revolution was neither paradoxical, nor reactionary, but rather utopian. Although it was not a coherent social or political movement, the theorists he discusses did have in common the aim to overcome the historicism of the nineteenth century. The utopian ideas that inhered in the Conservative Revolution experimented with new meanings and configurations of past, present, and future that often defied unilinear time. The past could serve as an ephemeral expression of eternal ideas, and, as such, it could testify to the attainable potential of a utopian *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community). Because these utopian ideals were more often rooted in metaphysics than based on notions of historical development, this essay challenges the thesis put forward by historian Reinhart Koselleck that modern utopias always rely on modern historical consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

The Ideologies and Practices section begins with Aviva Halamish’s essay “Kibbutz and Utopia: Social Success and Political Failure.” In it, she sketches the history of the kibbutz movement in terms of its utopian aims and practical realities. The kibbutz is probably the best-known and longest-lasting experiment in building and maintaining a utopian society in the modern period. It succeeded in establishing and maintaining a community with utopian elements, but as a socialist wing of the Zionist movement it did not manage to constitute an avant-garde for creating a new Jewish society in Palestine or fostering a new socialist personality type in accordance with its utopian ideals. Halamish elaborates on the reasons for these developments and the kibbutz’s seemingly paradoxical conservatism, distinguishing between the first half of the twentieth century, when national struggle was intertwined with a call for social transformation, and the period after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Her essay foregrounds the tension between nurturing utopian ideals and adhering to revolutionary Marxism that has run through the kibbutz experience.

9 Reinhart Koselleck, “The Temporalization of Utopia,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, ed. idem, 84-89 (Stanford, 2002).

An East German science-based socialist utopian ideal is the subject of “Networks: On the Utopian Qualities of Technology, Cybernetics, and Participation in the GDR of the Late 1960s” by Oliver Sukrow. For their movie *Netzwerk* (Network) of 1969, director Ralf Kirsten and

screenwriter Eberhard Panitz sought a cinematic representation of the questions: “Where do I come from, who am I, who should I be tomorrow to meet the challenges of the future?” The movie problematizes the phenomenon of workers confronting progress in science and technology: How did different kinds of people react? What are the possibilities and limitations of automatization and modernization? What is the role of ideological concerns in an environment where science and technology seem more important than politics and class struggle? In 1969, the year *Netzwerk* was released, the German Democratic Republic opened an architectural complex on the outskirts of Berlin for the training of leading nomenklatura. At this “Academy of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory” (AMLO), leaders were to be prepared to face the same challenges *Netzwerk* had dramatized. To avoid the problems addressed by the movie, designers and architects developed a completely new type of exposition space in which the visitor was not just a passive viewer but actively interacted and engaged with the exhibited machines and computers. In this essay, Sukrow shows that both the movie and the exposition potentially carried the participatory elements of a short-lived utopian, scientific socialist modernity.

Anna Krylova’s “A History of the ‘Soviet’: From Bolshevik Utopia to Soviet Modernity Soviet Modernity” traces a crucial, but frequently overlooked, discursive shift in the USSR from *Bolshevik* to *Soviet* in the later 1930s. More than merely a semantic distinction, the move from *Bolshevik* to *Soviet* heralded a larger turn away from the utopianism of the revolution’s early years, its celebration of proletarian values and subsuming individualism into the collective, toward the more individualistic political culture of the later 1930s and beyond, which condoned ambition and the cultivation of individual talents. This latter cluster of values facilitated the Soviet Union’s navigation of the path toward industrial modernity in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, Krylova, like Sukrow, presents a distinct vision of socialist modernity, one that in this case eclipsed the utopianism and wild experimentation of the years immediately following the October Revolution.

The final section, Alternative Visions, begins with a turn to a later revolutionary moment. Maarten Doorman in “Revolution or Repetition: Woodstock’s Romanticism” discusses the Romantic roots of the revolution of 1968. The late 1960s have generally been considered the most revolutionary postwar years in Germany and the entire Western

world, and for good reason. If we take a closer look at the changes of that time, we can recognize how it revolved around several core cultural values. Doorman elucidates the provocative new ideas presented and criticized at the famous Woodstock Festival (1969), such as the primacy of youth, the idealization of free love, the so-called return to nature and the countryside, a leaning toward spirituality and mysticism, the importance of the imagination (the use of psychedelic drugs), and the prevalent role of music in this case study. Doorman's essay calls into question the revolutionary content of these changes, showing that they can be considered a reiteration of the program of the German (and English) Romantics of the early-nineteenth century; what at first glance seems to be a revolution consists chiefly in recycled Romantic motifs. Following the approach of Robert J. Richards, Doorman aims at a deeper insight into the character and origins of popular culture today.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, drawing on Isaiah Berlin's interpretation of Romanticism as "the greatest shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred," the deconstruction of revolutionary values may raise questions about the historiographical concepts of revolution and continuity in culture in general.<sup>11</sup>

In her essay "Utopian (Tele)visions," Anikó Imre takes as her subject television programming in late Eastern Bloc socialism. Imre builds on the assumption that studying television cultures under socialism thoroughly muddles the Cold War framework of two opposing, radically different world systems. Rather, the historical experiment of socialism is rooted in the history of modernity to the extent that socialism and liberal capitalism cannot be disentangled. Imre shows a transition in socialist television programs and program types from the stodgy didacticism of the early period to a more open, often playful, and at times even critical style of entertainment with surprising similarities to Western television. Not unlike the discursive shift that Krylova chronicles, Imre points to the appearance of a new set of values in 1970s and 1980s television programming by which competitive and extraordinary individuals were presented as role models in increasingly popular game shows that flouted earlier notions of collective, proletarian identity.

The final essay, by Friend & Colleague, a platform for editions, fiction, and special projects, founded by siblings Katya and Alexei Tylevich, presents a contemporary take on utopian thinking. It poetically and humorously addresses aspects of the other conference contributions in text and image, based on the video the Tyleviches organized, directed, and produced for the conference.

10 Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, 2002).

11 Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, 1999), 1.



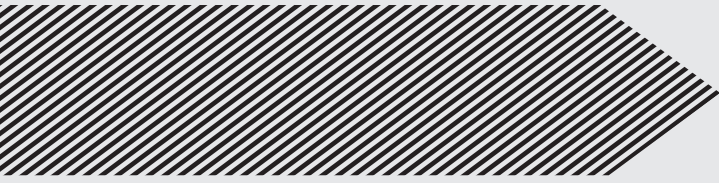
Taken together, these essays shed new light on the history of utopian thought and on the experience and representation of major twentieth-century turning points. They disrupt simplistic dichotomies between revolutionary and conservative movements, revealing the utopian impulses behind conservative ideas as well as the nostalgia and conservatism at the heart of some of the century's most forward-looking and progressive moments and movements. Similarly, they break down barriers between East and West, revealing the operation of similar tendencies and patterns on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as capitalist and communist regimes marched toward alternative, but ultimately parallel, visions of modernity. They chart the petering out of the twentieth century's boldest and most ambitious projects — of creating new men, new women, new people — and yet show the reemergence of utopian longings in the retreat to the familiar, the local, and the traditional. Twentieth-century Europe's darkest moments saw the stirrings of new utopian aspirations, and we suspect that this dialectic will continue to characterize the twenty-first-century world, which, by all indications, suggests that history is anything but over.

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**Joel Segal** is Chief Curator and Director of Programming at the Wende Museum of the Cold War in Culver City. Before moving to Los Angeles in 2014, he was a professor of Cultural History at Utrecht University (Netherlands). Segal has been the recipient of a Fulbright Senior Research grant and taught as guest professor at UCLA and Claremont Graduate University. Among his publications are *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012, edited volume) and *Art and Politics: Between Purity and Propaganda* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016). With his exhibitions, Segal aims to present new perspectives on Cold War history and to explore surprising connections between past and present.

**Paul Lerner** is Professor of History at the University of Southern California where he directs the Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies. He has written two books, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Cornell, 2003); and *The Consuming Temple: Jews, Department Stores, and the Consumer Revolution in Germany, 1880-1940* (Cornell, 2015), and co-edited volumes on trauma, psychiatry and history, Jewish masculinities, and Los Angeles as a site of German emigration. He has co-edited forthcoming volumes on Jewish consumer cultures and on Lion Feuchtwanger and Judaism. With the aid of a research grant from the Botstiber Institute of Austrian-American Studies, Lerner is currently working on a book project on Central European émigrés, American consumer culture, and democracy in the period of the Cold War.





# Countercultures



## THE BODY POLITIC: FROM MEYERHOLD TO MY BARBARIAN

**Farrah Karapetian**

### Introduction

A period of political rupture such as that in which nation-states find themselves now is by definition a period in which the master narrative of a society is in flux. Populations undergoing such flux are therefore open to new ideas about how to live, and utopianism is never far behind. Creative communities mirror and influence this process. Through the history of theater, especially, and the elastically theatrical visual and literary arts fields, one can witness by turns societal support, dissolution, or rewriting of master narratives. One witnesses this phenomenon specifically in the microcosm of theater and the bodily arts because of the special relationship between audience, author, and actor: the triangle of representation that models that of the state, or of society generally. To which of the vertices is agency ascribed? In Aristotle's time, theater supported the metanarrative of society, relieving the audience of agency; during the Russian Revolution, Vsevolod Meyerhold shifted the weight of agency onto the audience, and his ideas influenced Germans undergoing — and encouraging — rupture at that time as well. Now, the body of artists all over the world has again inherited the premise that using primarily extralinguistic, bodily action, audiences can be encouraged to think and imagine realities alternative to those dissolving around them.

### Background

When Aristotle delivered *The Poetics* in the mid-fourth century BCE, he had already waded through notions of virtue in *The Nichomachean Ethics* a decade before. With what was “good” settled, he was able to say decisively that “first and foremost” among the aims of developing tragic characters was, indeed, “that they be good.”<sup>1</sup> Plots were to “involve a change not from bad fortune to good fortune but the other way round, from good fortune to bad, and not thanks to wickedness but because of some mistake of great weight and consequence.”<sup>2</sup> The goal in Aristotelian theater, thus, was to excite sympathy, pity, and fear among audience members en route to recognition of themselves. Aristotle included the relativity of good character in his text — that is, that good character exists “in each category of persons: a woman can be good, or a slave, although one of these classes (*sc.* women)

1 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor, 1978), 43.

2 *Ibid.*, 38.

is inferior and the other, as a class, worthless.” He also wrote that certain types of goodness were “appropriate” to a category of persons; for example, it was inappropriate to Aristotle to render a female character brave. The relative goodness of any one character within this scheme depended on the local society within which a character’s — and viewer’s — category was inscribed. Characters were drafted to reinforce local values.

Brazilian theatrical innovator Augusto Boal honed in on this centuries later in a different context: living in the unstable political conditions of a dictatorship, he did not use theater to reinforce local values. Rather, theater became a context in which to examine these values. In fact, Boal argued that this was not a choice in a revolutionary context, but a necessary condition: with no clear values to support during unstable cultural periods, Aristotle’s conventions of good and evil have no purchase on actors or audiences. Boal explored this in his 1974 writing, *Theatre of the Oppressed*: Greek theater cuts the collective out of drama and focuses on an individual character acting out a perversion of societal mores. The character then necessarily pays for that perversion. The viewers in classical theater passively empathize with the character’s tragic flaw, relate to the character’s actions, and are purified of the antisocial impulse they share with the character through the character’s catastrophic end. The viewers leave the theater ready to uphold society’s norms. Society’s gatekeepers need this process to keep disaffection with inequity at bay. Importantly, Boal said that this “coercive system of tragedy can be used before or after the revolution... but never during it!... During a ‘cultural revolution,’ in which all values are being formed or questioned, [Aristotle’s] system cannot be applied.”<sup>3</sup> Why? “For the simple reason that the character’s ethos will not find a clear social ethos it can confront.”

Twenty-first-century governing bodies perform by turns with protectionism and territorial aggression remarkable for the postwar era, and these performances create an atmosphere that increasingly begs questions of the metanarrative of these countries and puts those implicated by citizenship, residency, or commercial association in a position to examine their relationships to the powers that be. Who defines the good for a particular category of people, and who, actually, defines the category? In fact, the last hundred years or so have seen eruptions of coups d’état, revolutions, and civic shifts that can be viewed in isolation or as part of a larger network of power, and the artwork produced during these periods is as linked and as

3 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* [1974], trans. Charles A. & Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York, 1979), Part 1: “Aristotle’s Coercive System of Tragedy, Section 17: Conclusion.” iBooks file.

transnational as are those incidents. With the social ethos shifting worldwide, artwork that inherits its modalities from twentieth-century physical and political theater has likewise inherited the opportunity, if not the mandate, to examine and explore contemporary values and their associated construction, performance, and actors.

### **Origin Story: Vsevolod Meyerhold**

At many of these moments of rupture, some artists have used interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, and particularly bodily languages to engage subjects of artworks, and, in turn, audiences, to consider their own notions of civic self. This essay invokes an early reference point for some of these principles and practices in the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold, especially in its articulation immediately after the October Revolution (1917). The combined legacy of his and other individuals mentioned here includes their commitment to deconstruct movement, the objects that support movement, the environments in which movement is staged, the narratives that define movement, the values that motivate movement, and the institutions that purport to distribute values — and to do so within a framework of pleasure. (Audiences must be engaged, after all, and conviviality is more convincing than pedantry.) In art as in politics, less is achieved by repeating forms than by revisiting first principles; a paternalistic notion of indebtedness is even less useful. Looking for principles privileged in one artist's work as they pertain to other, later examples can instead have the potential not only to elucidate an artistic framework relevant to moments of political rupture, but also a rhyme between cultures that are otherwise often positioned as antagonists.

Meyerhold is an important reference point because he was working at a time when the entire Russian state was focused on inventing its metanarrative; in transition from a Tsarist to a Bolshevik notion of the individual's relationship to the collective, every aspect of the social order was being reconsidered. His process was, then, not only interdisciplinary but also inter-institutional. His lectures and practice engaged with theater and also all of the categories of the creative arts. Meyerhold raced with his peers to create forums through which people could physically and mentally recast their notions of the good. This is rare. As Alexandro Segade has said of his contemporary practice as an artist on his own as well as with his collective, *My Barbarian*, an artist's project today may be utopian but is also very singular.<sup>4</sup> In seeing multiple such utopian practices today, is it

<sup>4</sup> Segade, Alexandro (artist), in discussion with the author. March 27, 2018.

possible to see a linked set of strategies? Is there a way to imagine a transnational goal among artists to awaken ways to witness and recast the metanarrative of daily life within populations?

Certainly, governments see one. On April 12, 2018, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis testified before the House Armed Services Committee regarding the nationalistic metanarratives solidifying not only in the United States but around the world: he characterized ours as an “era of reemerging long-term great power competition.”<sup>5</sup> Is that the metanarrative that the people of countries deemed greater or lesser powers accept? What are the categories presumed by such a metanarrative? What is good behavior within such categories? How do artworks exhibit existing contradictions to that metanarrative but also encourage alternatives?

Aristotle set forth a structure and process through which to create a mimetic theatrical environment. This was realism at its most essential: show the people who they are, and they will remain so. Meyerhold argued against this, without referencing Aristotle, per se. Mimesis and realism encourage stasis, and what society requires in order to actually uncomfortably recognize itself and move forward is stylization, according to Meyerhold. He studied the “elements by which the masses are moved”<sup>6</sup> and used a number of strategies that will be described below and are recognizable in the playfully didactic projects of artists working in later moments of political rupture.

The individual body — its training and deployment — is the first and most primary of the devices Meyerhold considers necessary for activating an actor. His studio program for 1916-17 included athletics such as throwing the discus and sailing — not just to develop fit bodies as per socialism’s ideological notions of raising social health standards or encouraging team spirit nor only to engage the physical language of commedia dell’arte he so admired, but to specifically raise awareness of how the body articulates movement by deconstructing those movements. At the State Higher Theater Workshop in Moscow, he developed the practical training exercises for actors for which he is particularly well known — “biomechanics” — which involves breaking down recognizable actions into stylized scores of intention, action, and reaction.

This deconstruction of movements enables miming without the actual objects implied by the titles of any one of Meyerhold’s etudes: *Throwing the Stone*, *Shooting the Bow*, or *Stab to the Chest*, for example,

5 News, NBC. “Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Joint Chief Joe Dunford Testify at House Hearing | NBC News.” *YouTube*, 12 Apr. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITPrYtE3ZA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITPrYtE3ZA).

6 Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* [1867], trans. George Gibian (New York, 1996), 733.



do not have to involve stones, bows, or knives in order to be legible. The biomechanical etudes were not often present onstage, but he also used objects as an aid to mime there,<sup>7</sup> stylizing them as much as the motions. For example, in his 1922 production of Fernand Crommelynck's *Magnanimous Cuckold*, "Estrugo's writing equipment and the Nursemaid's dustpan and shoe polish were of deliberately exaggerated proportions."<sup>8</sup> The inflated proportions of a prop — or its absence — influence the body of the performer and are examples of Meyerhold's techniques for stylization.

Meyerhold also wanted his costumes, instead of being authentic, to "harmonize as colour-masses with the background."<sup>9</sup> The legacy of objects, costumes, and sets that can be referenced in later work is their interactivity, modularity, flexibility of identity, and non-illusionism — insofar as all shifts in their identities during a production happened in front of the viewer. Meyerhold's focus on the body extended necessarily into his perspective on destabilizing the setting in which the bodies acted.

Space and time are not constants during periods of institutional change, and so the objects, costumes, and especially sets that he coordinated responded to that flux. Meyerhold had to think of sets that could be erected anywhere, and that would behave in a playfully utilitarian way rather than a decorative, illusionistic way. He found his solution in 1921 at the first exhibition of the Constructivists, *5x5=25*. The work exhibited signaled two salient directions. The first was the death of painting, and specifically mimesis, via Alexander Rodchenko's monochrome paintings meant to reduce "painting to its logical conclusion." With *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, and Pure Blue Color*, Rodchenko "affirmed: it's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no more representation."<sup>10</sup> Lyubov Popova's five paintings indicated a related direction: they were graphic preparations for concrete constructions, and indeed Popova gave up painting and turned to industrial design.

Popova's sets for Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* in 1922 pull together conventional theater flats, joining them with steps, chutes, and catwalks into a multi-purpose scaffolding easily erected and dismantled. The stage had no wings — no place for actors to hide, no zone in which "acting" began or ended — and much of the setting was flexible in purpose as much as in construction, including blank panels hinged to the framework that could represent doors or windows, or provide space for projection.<sup>11</sup> None of this was

7 Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre* (London, 1991 [1969]), 114.

8 Alma Law, "Meyerhold's Production of 'The Magnanimous Cuckold,'" *TDR* 26, no.1 (1982): 61-86 here 67.

9 Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, 65.

10 Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 238.

11 *Ibid.*, 183-84.

supposed to be the “definitive embodiment of the new theatre, but rather a way out toward the new theatre. Popova was generally of the same opinion.”<sup>12</sup> She said of nonobjective form that she didn’t think it was the final form: “It is a revolutionary state of the form,” she said, anticipating others.

Meyerhold’s biomechanical actions do not have to include language to be legible, either. In *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, for example, he made the character of Estrugo mute, forcing the actor to mime much of his dialogue; another character, Bruno, occasionally spoke for him.<sup>13</sup> Meyerhold had seen Otojiro Kawakami’s company in 1902 when it had come to Russia on tour at a moment of political rupture in Japan as well, during the tumultuous rise of the Liberal Party in that country. Kawakami had used the opportunity of the tour to exaggerate traditional kabuki moves, making his New Wave theater even more physical. Kawakami’s decision in this regard was due, in part, to his realization that the Japanese language would be incomprehensible to his diverse audiences; it is interesting, then, that Meyerhold’s appropriation of this Japanese theater was related to Kawakami’s need to interpret: the body speaks where language does not.

Language was not absent from Meyerhold’s productions, though; on the contrary, he treated classic texts as if they were plastic, and even directed productions wherein new texts were re-written with each successive production, such as Mayakovsky’s 1917 *Mystery-Bouffe*, rendered relevant in 1921 for the changed political environment.<sup>14</sup> Language entered Meyerhold’s sets as much as did projection. “What the *modern spectator* wants is the placard, the juxtaposition of the surfaces and shapes of *tangible materials!*” he wrote in *Vestnik teatra* [The Theater Herald] in 1920.

The body that is addressed as a result of all of these acts of deconstruction and reconstruction is not solely the individual one; it is the collective body. Meyerhold’s actors did not have to be experienced, and, in fact, he often used students for this reason. While exhibiting his work in Germany, Meyerhold employed numerous ordinary working people in *Roar China!* and *Commander of the Second Army*, and, conversely, he sent his actors to participate in a workers’ May Day demonstration in Cologne. Art and life, he believed, could and should mingle, and they did.

Finally, crucially, whether justified by his interest in Italian commedia dell’arte or otherwise, Meyerhold’s plays were supposed to be

12 Georgii Kovalenko, “The Constructivist Stage,” *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design, 1913-1935* (London, 1991), 152.

13 Law, “Meyerhold’s Production.”

14 Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, 166.

fun. Meyerhold's insistence on engaging in stylization intentionally impairs an audience's ability to transcend, and thus anticipates and influences Bertolt Brecht's strategies to achieve viewers' estrangement from a production en route to criticality.<sup>15</sup>

### Legacy: Forward from Meyerhold

Vsevolod Meyerhold was executed as an enemy of Stalin's people in 1940; his notion of the real differed from that of the state he had helped to build. His utopian vision, not to mention those of the larger Russian avant-garde, ended dystopically, but the larger goal had been to create an "artery"<sup>16</sup> between the stage and the spectator, adding a "fourth *creator* in addition to the author, the director, and the actor — namely, the spectator." He was building the active minds of the new citizenry and developing an aesthetic functionally linked to that end. The route to this goal of specialized actor training within the studio school setting is also an important part of his legacy: these actors were not classically trained — they were activated through their bodies. Meyerhold's non-teleological utopian legacy is specifically about the ongoing investigation of what constitutes transformative cultural practice, and how to practice transforming culture.

All mention of Meyerhold's name was suppressed in Russia until two years after Stalin's death.<sup>17</sup> One result of this is that the origin story of twentieth-century critical strategies of performance art and institutional critique is limited to Brecht and Berlin Dada: touchstones within which "form, representation, discourse, and narrative came to be considered political work."<sup>18</sup> To step back just one generation and to Russia rather than Germany shifts that origin story slightly to a place where the body is at stake as a subject and an opportunity. Ideas, though, are stateless. News of all of Meyerhold's innovations had long before reached Bertolt Brecht in Germany.<sup>19</sup> After the Revolution and Civil War, many Russians spent time in Germany, and interest in creative production emerged in German associations, such as the Gesellschaft der Freunde des neuen Russlands, which published a journal, *Das neue Russland*, in which, in a special edition in 1925, Soviet theater, and especially Meyerhold's theater, was discussed. Meyerhold's former pupil, Sergei Eisenstein, gave lectures at this latter association, and in 1926, the Berlin journal *Die Weltbühne* published a detailed report on Meyerhold's consciously theatrical theater. In 1928, Brecht's friend and colleague Bernhard Reich analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of Meyerhold's episodic style, calling it "Bert Brecht's unrealized dream." Another early point of influence

15 On this, see Katherine Eaton, "Brecht's Contacts With the Theater of Meyerhold," *Comparative Drama* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 3-21.

16 Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, 59.

17 C. O. Kiebuszinska, "Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre, and: Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia (review)," *Theatre Journal* 48 no. 4 (1996): 519-21. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/tj.1996.0079

18 Andrea Fraser, "My Barbarian by Andrea Fraser - BOMB Magazine," *BOMB Magazine*, 1 Oct. 2003, [bombmagazine.org/articles/my-barbarian/](http://bombmagazine.org/articles/my-barbarian/).

19 For a detailed analysis of this, see Eaton, "Brecht's Contacts."

occurred in 1930, when Meyerhold brought his ensemble to Germany for its first foreign tour, and Brecht defended their performances against conservative critics.

The creative communities in Berlin and Russia began to migrate. Brecht left Germany, fearing that he would be prohibited to publish or produce his works, and wrote *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* in 1941 in Finland. The play chronicles the rise of a fictional 1930s Chicago mobster and is meant as a satirical allegory of the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany prior to World War II. Eisenstein traveled to California and then Mexico to make his films, spreading his innovations along that trajectory. Brecht's work's trajectory then moved to the United States, where artists from the Bauhaus had gone to teach at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. At Black Mountain College, writer Eric Bentley worked extensively to publish work by and about Brecht. Bentley also taught at Columbia University from 1952 to 1969 as a professor of dramatic literature.

Allan Kaprow's happenings in the 1950s and 1960s at Black Mountain College would involve an entirely broken fourth wall as well as innovative uses of projection. Trisha Brown in New York was inspired by the work of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, both of Black Mountain College. She is famous for her work deconstructing everyday motions and her early experience with the Judson Group deglamorizing the theatrical atmosphere by refusing to utilize music, sets, or costumes. (Brown also embraced sets and music at different turns in her career, though she never took them for granted.) Her *Equipment Pieces* of 1968 involve ropes, pulleys, and mechanical devices that would have delighted Lyubov Popova, and her work in 1971, *Accumulation*, is a beautiful group etude in and of itself, with dancers' small, singular gestures accumulating to create a remarkable pattern.

Brown and Kaprow's work is part of the larger American creative response generated in the contest for American values of the late 1960s, which also includes Bruce Nauman in fine art and Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainier, and Anna Halprin in postmodern dance. In art history, this bodily trajectory complicates the hegemonic narrative of High Modernism in New York in 1968. In painting, Frank Stella reached an anti-illusionistic conclusion similar to Rodchenko's in 1921 and painting did not exist in a bubble for either of these generations. The work of New York's movement-oriented artists alludes to the constructivist argument that art needs turn to construction out of the deconstruction of everyday life at moments of political rupture.

The analytic nature of this work disrupts transcendence in its audience, activating viewers to consider the dynamics of space and the body without the dramatic phrasing and resolution characteristic of earlier dance.

This activation of viewership began to happen in Latin America as well, and the network of ideas doesn't fray, here. Kaprow, when living in New York, collaborated with the Argentine artist Marta Minujín; Trisha Brown's Dance Company in New York provided Chilean artist Sylvia Palacios Whitman a foundation for the innovative performance she developed; and Eric Bentley taught Augusto Boal at Columbia before Boal returned to his native Brazil to work with the Arena Theatre in São Paulo.

In 1964, a coup d'état in Brazil began twenty-one years of dictatorship in that country, premised on the notion of providing executive power to ostensibly restore internal order and international prestige. It led to purges of oppositional figures and intellectuals, austerity measures, and total militarization and technocracy. Thus, when Augusto Boal staged Brecht's *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* there in 1970, its implications challenged the contemporary military-industrial leadership in his country. On his way home from the theater, he was kidnapped, tortured, and exiled.

When Boal was then a fugitive traveling throughout South America, he developed an active notion of the spectator — or “spect-actor” — to contradict the power dynamics of his time. This ushered in a period of theatrical action from the “Invisible Theatre” he practiced in Peru in 1974 to his actual election as Rio's city councilor in 1992. Whether as an audience member rushing onstage to solve the social problem introduced by the theatrical company, as in Rio de Janeiro, or as a patron seated in the restaurant of the Chiclayo Hotel in Peru in the 1970s, listening to an actor (who did not reveal himself as such) pose questions concerning the salaries of the hotel's various laborers and instigating all-night conversation about class differences, “the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place.” On the contrary, the theater transfers the “means of production in the theater to the people themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Legacy: Aspects of Physical Theater in the Expanded Field**

Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Chile, which all experienced military coups and political instability, had governments that used force to

<sup>20</sup> Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Part 4: “Poetics of the Oppressed, Section 11: Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru.” iBooks file.

create and maintain stable metanarratives. The arts pushed back, strongly suggesting the absurdity of those narratives, the hypocrisy of the media as a public square, and the impossibility of identifying with popular characters. As Peruvian critic Juan Acha wrote in 1970, “[c]ultural values, the mainstay of the dominant class, are in decline — not man, not culture.” He said that young people didn’t want to replace the values of a dominant class with those of the dominated; rather, “[t]hey want freedom.”<sup>21</sup>

Acha actually pushed for art that engaged in the South American geometric tradition as he moved away from social realism.<sup>22</sup> Yet, indeed, across Latin America, many artists, in this attempt to wake up a political viewership, turned to many of the same strategies that had emerged in Meyerhold’s studio school in the late 1910s. Boal’s deconstruction of the fourth wall and focus on the collective body operated under explicit anti-Aristotelian paradigms, criticizing the political and social status quo. Other artists during this period used means other than political theater as such to configure the individual body as an arbiter of the authenticity of the experience of this work, and the collective body — or the collectivization of bodies other than through authoritarian means — as its endgame.

Marta Minujín called costumes, sets, actors, texts, and audiences into question through the body. In her 1965 piece *Leyendo las noticias* (*Reading the News*), for example, she wrapped herself in sections of newspaper, read sections of it, and then entered the Río de la Plata, letting the news disintegrate. She also used live television as a stage with no wings, as in a piece that aired on *La campana del cristal* (*The Glass Bell*): mayhem ensued in the wake of a comedically ambitious arrangement of horses dragging cans of paint across mattresses, musclemen popping balloons, and rock musicians being wrapped up in adhesive tape. The television channel panicked and tried to get Minujín off the air. “I made things for television ... There are things at the popular level, not at the aesthetic level of museums and galleries,” she said.<sup>23</sup> When societal values are in flux, physical theater reveals their flaws. In this case, the rhyme between the media and the message is evidenced through a breakdown of media taking place live.

Fifteen years later, in 1979, Argentina was in the middle of its *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, or *el Proceso* (*the Process*), otherwise known as the last military junta or the last dictatorship, the period that generated the phenomenon of *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared), and in which basic civil liberties and political parties

21 Juan Acha, “La Revolución Cultural,” *Oiga*, no. 386, Year VIII (August 14, 1970), <http://post.at.moma.org/sources/37/publications/304>

22 Rita Eder, “Juan Acha: A Latin American Perspective on Art,” *Voices of Dissent: Art in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1976 to 1989* | *Post* (27 Sept. 2016), [post.at.moma.org/content\\_items/749-juan-acha-a-latin-american-perspective-on-art](http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/749-juan-acha-a-latin-american-perspective-on-art).

23 Marta Minujín, interview with John King, Buenos Aires, September 1978, in John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural Argentino en la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires, 2007), 362, qtd. in Catherine Spencer, *Performing Pop: Marta Minujín and the 'Argentine Image-Makers'*, Tate Papers, no. 24 (Autumn 2015), [http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/24/performing-pop-marta-minujin-and-the-argentine-image-makers#footnote25\\_619f2qj](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/24/performing-pop-marta-minujin-and-the-argentine-image-makers#footnote25_619f2qj)

were suppressed. That year, Minujín created *Edible Obelisk* in the center of Buenos Aires: shaped like the obelisk erected in 1936 to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city's founding, it was constructed with 30,000 loaves of panettone, which were given to a crowd of 50,000 people to eat ten days after its erection.<sup>24</sup> This was no utopian picnic. Although Minujín's goals were to "eat the myth ... de-sacralize the myth... make the old myth fail... [and] make room for the new myth,"<sup>25</sup> there was not enough panettone for the crowd, and some people wanted more than one sweet bread. She ended up hiding in the crane used to construct and deconstruct her obelisk, and then using it to stand the obelisk up vertically again as people hung on. As this was dangerous, firemen hosed the people off the obelisk, and made the area dark; people went home, and a week later the panettone factory owner died of a heart attack. Minujín's stage was not a theater, but her productions were what she emphatically called "ephemeral art" — the "art of the instant in which the individual lives, not the thing. A society's art in constant change cannot be by any means a static image."

This is bodily work, focused on site and object as they pertain to a populist kind of comedic performance. It was not an isolated event during this period, nor exclusive to Central and South America. Another example is the work of Sylvia Palacios Whitman. Whitman was born in Chile and came to New York in the early 1960s, where she found her way to performance with Trisha Brown. Whitman's piece of 1977, *Passing Through*, is both minimal and maximal, using props, such as enormous gloves, enlarged even more than Meyerhold's had been in *The Magnanimous Cuckhold* to exaggerate her body's movement. Yet another example is Brazilian artist Martha Araujo's *Para Um Corpo Nas Suas Impossibilidades*, a participatory installation: the visitor wears a sculptural bodysuit. The bodysuit has Velcro, which sticks to a carpeted ramp as the visitor — or perhaps "spect-actor" — moves. Of course, the difficulty in navigating the ramp causes participants to question their bodies' relationship to space, and when one participates alongside another visitor, both are prompted to question their relationships to one another and the larger collective. In Mexico, where the 1990s were marked by upheaval, from border politics to a devalued peso, Eduardo Abaroa created a piece that exhibits some of the values of Russian Revolutionary object-sets — modularity, portability, everyday materials, and fun — in his *Portable Broken Obelisk*. It is a hot pink plastic and steel reference to Barnett Newman's inverted Egyptian obelisk of 1967 (dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr.

24 Minujín got the panettone and the funding for the construction from a buyer of one of her paintings, who owned a panettone factory. This should dispel the myth that ephemeral artists do not make saleable objects.

25 Marta Minujín and Richard Squires, "Eat Me, Read Me, Burn Me: The Ephemeral Art of Marta Minujín," *Performance Magazine*, no. 64 (Summer 1991): 19-28.

in 1968 after his assassination), thereby reinterpreting two “classic” texts. It was designed to be mounted as are Mexico City’s nomadic markets — on wheels.

The artworks just described do not purport to be theater, and thus do not follow narrative traditions that derive or explicitly depart from Aristotle’s precedent. They do, however, describe the artist as a new social actor: one whose role is to reveal the theater of media, of public space, and of societal relationships rather than to allow those sites and dynamics to remain silent and neutral, their rigged nature unacknowledged. Through comedic, bodily participation, they reveal the idea that all of society has turned into an Aristotelian drama, designed to make all civic participants toe perverse, stable lines.

### **Problematic Examples after Communism**

The work that prefigures a societal rupture may be less of a deliberate attempt to create a new character or social order than it is to recognize where in fact the individual stands within the cracking façade of the old. There is something of the Aristotelian in this, despite the poetry of its protest.

Sanja Iveković’s *Triangle 2000+* is an example of this phenomenon, made thirteen years before Yugoslavia dissolved. Tito’s motorcade was scheduled to drive by her apartment in Zagreb. She triangulated herself between a lookout stationed on the roof of the hotel across the street and a policeman in the street below, bringing some whiskey, cigarettes, and books onto her balcony, and pretended to masturbate. Soon, an official rang her doorbell and ordered her to “remove all persons and objects from the balcony.”<sup>26</sup> She elected to perform everyday actions in the theater of her balcony, exposing the farce of privacy and the very real roles played by all involved. The piece calls the ethos of the state into question. Anyone would empathize with her and reflect on whether one should masturbate on one’s balcony when the dictator is driving by. This is the coercive response of tragedy’s audience, and if one trusts Boal — and the trajectory of the Yugoslavian state — it is true: it didn’t fall apart in 1979.

When the centralized cultural policy of the Soviet Union and East Germany began to relax in the late 1970s and 1980s, it became clear that artists had been working on underground projects not sanctioned by the state all along. What this means is that the social

26 Sanja Iveković, in *Grammar of Freedom/Five Lessons: Works from the Arteast 2000+ Collection*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 48-49 (Moscow, 2015).



ethos — the values of those regions' characters — was not as stable as had been largely perceived or as governments had wanted them to be seen. Producers of Intermedia I, the first large-scale performance art festival in East Germany to receive official permission, were ultimately punished for having produced a popular event.<sup>27</sup> At the festival, Lutz Dammbeck showed a phase of his *Hercules Concept*, which was a live collaboration with dancer Fine Kwiatkowski weaving together film, dance, sculpture, sound, and language. At this point in the dissolution and reimagining of the German metanarrative, the piece demonstrated anything but cultural resolve. Instead, in fact, the piece continued to evolve for a decade, exploring the “responsibility of each individual to work for artistic freedom and individual autonomy and against the adaptation of the individual in the interests of other powers.”<sup>28</sup>

With no clear social ethos to support, the Aristotelian tragedy and its coercive catharsis give way to artworks with no resolution and, at the same time, no punishing authority. In 1997, “when Bulgaria lay at the crossroads of the capitalist and socialist camps,”<sup>29</sup> Kalin Serapionov directed a short film called *The Museum — Cause of Meeting and Acquaintance*. It shows a very human kind of institutional critique: two people meet wandering through the National Art Gallery in Sofia and have sex in a bathroom. The institution and all it represents is their theater; their sex describes life's urgency more than do the dead metanarratives in the museum around them. They aren't caught. One identifies with their priorities as one would in Aristotelian tragedy, but the punishment is, if anything, existential: the catastrophe is that there is no catastrophe.

In a sense, the social ethos with which the audience is expected to identify in this case is the shared notion that there is no social ethos, that history is elastic, and that historically valorized institutions are not the construct by the measure of which one can evaluate one's own place in the world. This is the kind of artwork that sits between the critical Aristotelian mirroring of Meyerhold's *Triangle* and his hyperoptimistic call to arms, and there are many artworks like it from the place and the period. The artworks do return to the body, do use hyperbolic physical actions and broken fourth walls (with respect to the confines of any one medium) to estrange viewers from the notion of representation and enable them to think about their lives, but the questions they raise have more to say about the break-up of collective identity than its construction.

27 Sara Blaylock, “Performing the Subject, Claiming Space: Performance Art in 1980s East Germany,” *Voices of Dissent: Art in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1976 to 1989* | *Post*, 1 Aug. 2017, [post.at.moma.org/content\\_items/1035-performing-the-subject-claiming-space-performance-art-in-1980s-east-germany](https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1035-performing-the-subject-claiming-space-performance-art-in-1980s-east-germany).

28 “Lutz Dammbeck. Herakles Konzept (1977-1987),” *Weserburg*, 2015, [www.weserburg.de/index.php?id=845](http://www.weserburg.de/index.php?id=845).

29 Iveković, in *Grammar of Freedom*, 92-93.

One example is work by Vladimir Kupriyanov, such as his *Cast me not away from your presence*, a photograph of workers taken from a factory newspaper. He cut the photographs into seven pieces, separating the workers from one another. These kinds of artworks do not practice transforming culture, even as they reflect a transforming culture.

### Contemporary Questions

Major events from 1991 to 2001 — the Soviet Union’s dissolution, NAFTA’s initiation, Israel’s positioning with respect to Palestine, and the immediate use of the destruction of New York’s World Trade Center to position Americans in a defensive, nationalistic posture — mark a decade of change on the level of these states, but also a ripple effect in culture: values were being formed as much as they were being questioned.

Artist collectives like My Barbarian in America and Chto Delat in Russia create playfully didactic environments in which to form values and question them. Artists like Yoshua Okón in Mexico create engagement strategies with laborers in which to do that. The subject of the artwork does not sit and wait to be represented, nor does its audience sit and wait to observe and agree or disagree with its premise. It is a dynamic process that relies on the creators’ voices to lead but which succeeds because of the specifics of the subject’s and/or (if they’re different) audience’s contribution.

My Barbarian, a performance art collective based between Los Angeles and New York, created the Post-Living Ante-Action Theater (PoLAAT) within which this process can unfold — a name that alludes to both Judith Malina and Julian Beck’s Living Theater founded in 1947 and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s work at the Action Theater and Anti-Theater in the late 1960s. Moreover, Jade Gordon, one of the three core members of the collective, with Alexandro Segade and Malik Gaines, focused on Boal in graduate school. Their PoLAAT functions by means of five categories of techniques: 1. Estrangement; 2. Indistinction; 3. Suspension of Beliefs — called “Do you believe what you see?” when the group practices in religious countries like Egypt or Israel; 4. the “Mandate to Participate,” which encourages audiences to contribute to the artwork, and 5. Inspirational Critique.<sup>30</sup> These principles guide improvisations with participants that help them ease into provocative revelations with both the irony of twenty-first-century hindsight and the sincerity of faith. Reflecting on these principles at a practice for one such performance at the ICA Philadelphia, Malik Gaines said, “Each

30 This is a take, of course, on the concept of “institutional critique.”

show is a rehearsal for a better life.”<sup>31</sup>

My Barbarian’s practice of sophisticated play began in 2000 in the context of the rock music venue, where audiences “are not seated or passive but are actively talking back to you.”<sup>32</sup> This evolved into a broad interrogative practice that takes some license with



Brecht’s notion that didactic theater is more effective when it is entertaining. Indeed, in 2013 they produced a version of Brecht’s *The Mother*, using masks to rotate between characters and gestures to speak to the contemporary audience to augment Brecht’s words. Often, though, the group elects its contemporary spectacle from music videos, television, and self-help, among many other addictive pop cultural treats.<sup>33</sup> The writing is always excellent, but the self-consciously hand-made and, therefore, accessible sets and costumes, the mannered way of speaking, and the body language communicate both entertaining footholds and an intellectual pull towards self-criticism, cultural criticism, and further questions that incite the building of a new social self.

The artistic expression of the Mexican artist Yoshua Okón, coalesced in the wake of NAFTA. He immediately remarked on the trade agreement’s impact on labor practices through increasingly physically installed video work, often engaging real people in the activity depicted, unpacking everyday motions associated with their life experience, and in so doing attracting his viewership to consider their own relationships to Mexico’s politics and international relations. His projects engage the subjects of political experience in the process of their own representation. For example, in *Octopus*, former combatants from the Guatemalan Civil War crawl across the gravel of the Home Depot parking lot in California where they now solicit work, reenacting their former battles, inverting the performance of America’s Civil War reenactors, who did not fight in that war but do crawl over the land where blood was spilled.

**My Barbarian’s adaptation of *The Mother* by Bertolt Brecht, performance on July 13 and August 17, 2013. Running time approximately 45 minutes. Inventory #MBB142. Courtesy of Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo Credit: Oliver Walker.**

31 “My Barbarian at ICA: The Mandate to Participate — ICA Philadelphia,” Institute of Contemporary Art - Philadelphia, PA, 2012, [icaphila.org/miranda/2565/my-barbarian-at-ica-the-mandate-to-participate](http://icaphila.org/miranda/2565/my-barbarian-at-ica-the-mandate-to-participate).

32 Andrea Fraser, “My Barbarian by Andrea Fraser - BOMB Magazine,” *BOMB Magazine*, 1 Oct. 2003, [bombmagazine.org/articles/my-barbarian/](http://bombmagazine.org/articles/my-barbarian/).

33 Jade Gordon in Fraser, “My Barbarian by Andrea Fraser.”



**My Barbarian's adaptation of *The Mother* by Bertolt Brecht, performance on July 13 and August 17, 2013. Running time approximately 45 minutes. Inventory #MBB142. Courtesy of Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo Credit: Oliver Walker.**

The site of *Octopus* is a question in itself, in fact: for example, if the stage where the Guatemalans reenacted their battles were Guatemala, would it be as noticeable? Does the dissonance between action and site not clarify questions about the war they fought, as well as the war they are fighting — for the

human right to pursue labor to earn food and live in peace? This is the expanded stage that Meyerhold encouraged, in this case generating meaning of the environment beyond the May Day parade.

Along similar lines, on May 24, 2003, a group of artists, architects, critics, and scholars based in St. Petersburg, Russia, carried out an action entitled “The Foundation of Saint Petersburg” during the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of that city. They left the city by train, holding signs indicating that they were refounding the city, and distributing leaflets and delivering speeches inviting citizens to think of themselves as such, rather than as consumers. They looked for a place to found the new city center and decided it was the police station where they were detained.<sup>34</sup> At this point, the Russian Federation was twenty-nine months into its second president — Vladimir Putin — whose language from his very first televised appearances even before he was empowered as president was that “of a leader who was planning to rule with his fist.”<sup>35</sup> It was a month after liberal politician Sergei Yushenkov had been shot in the chest four times. For many reasons, this founding of the new center of St. Petersburg was intended as an artifact of contradiction to the dominant narrative of the Kremlin, the statements of which concerning the tercentennial were adamantly positive and focused on the European Union.<sup>36</sup>

This action was also the founding action of Chto Delat, the collective still based in St. Petersburg that works with politicized knowledge production through video and theater plays, radio programs,

34 Chto Delat, “Artiom Magun // The Refoundation of Petersburg - Chtodelat.org.” Chtodelat.org, 20 Aug. 2013, chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/c1-1-what-is-to-be-done/the-refoundation-of-petersburg/.

35 Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York, 2013), 49. ibooks file

36 “On the Day of the 300th Anniversary of St Petersburg, President Vladimir Putin Gave an Interview to the Local Media.” *The Kremlin*, 27 May 2003, en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/30199.

murals, public campaigns, and especially its School of Socially Engaged Art. The collective's aim is not to answer questions for the people with whom it works on projects but to provide space for mutual learning. Its use of the master class format engages the collective body in the reimagination of the Russian citizen



today, as well as, through its traveling projects, the reimagination of metanarratives everywhere it goes. Its film-performance *The Excluded in the Moment of Danger* is an example of a collaboration with the school's graduates using a great deal of body language in addition to written and oral language, in Russian and English. Largely, that body language embodies the dynamics of danger.

**Octopus, 2011.** Video projection and stools. 4 channels. Dimensions: variable. Courtesy: Yoshua Okón and PROYECTOSMON-CLOVA.

These three artists or art collectives — based in the United States, Mexico, and Russia, respectively — are very active transnationally, feeding off the very state and market power their work erodes and disabling the notion of the stabilization of the ethos of any one place by moving their work from state to state, on and off the market. They represent a surge towards the utopian notion that art can not only reveal inequity, the effects of which are suppressed by existing power structures, but also provoke change. In order to do that, they each rely often on movement and a plastic relationship to all other aspects of the stage. Their goal, like those earlier practitioners and as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is to pose questions of values perceived to be stable, and of the institutions that purport to distribute values. They pose these questions within a framework of pleasure. According to My Barbarian's Jade Gordon, the form of this work is oftentimes the forum itself, even when that forum results in artifacts of performance that can be exhibited, bought, and sold.

The policies of the changing states solidified over the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century, creating protectionist

atmospheres within which atrocities like the bombing of Gaza in 2014 could occur. This was an “enough” moment for an Israeli artist like Deville Cohen, as were the Russian actions in Ukraine, which occurred at a turning point in the life and career of a Russian artist like Polina Kanis, and Trump’s election, which is a catalyst for an American artist like Madeline Hollander. While these artists have no fixed collectives, their work isolates and unpacks aspects of state and market power through extra-linguistic bodily movement that estranges viewers from their sense of the familiar and usually involves multiple actors.

In *Formal Portrait*, Polina Kanis addresses the culture of parades and mass processions as a powerful instrument in national coherence. Other of her works address fitness instruction, elementary school education, and gender identity, implicitly questioning, one-by-one, each of the aspects of Russians’ sense of self today. The concision of each video allows Kanis to avoid the theatrical character arc that enables resolution. In “The Lesson,” for example, a video from 2011, Kanis uses only a whistle to communicate with a classroom of young children. She does not say, for example, that children in Russia are programmed to respond to a region of a map with words like “beautiful” or “large,” but when she whistles the question rather than asking it with words and still gets such responses, one is left to wonder how one feels about the children’s indoctrination, and about education in general. These children are being fed the dominant social ethos. Artwork that polemicizes this condition can make an effort to jog us out of received pedagogy.

The Xeroxes, video projections, dancers, and wood sets in Deville Cohen’s works are his effort to interrupt reality, to both remind an audience of and relieve it of “poorly designed systems of representation, identification, social order, and common sense.”<sup>37</sup> He, like Meyerhold, might cry utilitarian, but the Xeroxed cars on hairy legs, the hairy nipples being waxed, the repetitions of day-glow balls, etc., all break his own, his dancers’, and his audiences’ relationship to conventional representation and therefore remind them to think for themselves. There is no illusionism in his work. The constructions and choreographies, stages and photographic frames are designed to insist that he, his dancers, and his audiences become aware of “the dynamics, and therefore the politics” of the internal mechanisms of not only the work but also the cultural contexts from which the objects dancing on stage derive.

37 Deville Cohen, “<https://devillecohen.art/about/>”.

In the summer of 2014, Cohen, who has lived between Berlin and New York for much of his adult life, was installing work in Tel Aviv during Netanyahu's attacks on Gaza. He marks that summer as the one in which his self-reflexive sculptural and performative vocabulary began explicitly to reflect an urgent and explicit invitation to political conversation, as when he stood inside a paper rollercoaster and chose rather than to sing a David Bowie song, to sing *Winter '73*, an Israeli protest song written in the '90s by the generation born after the war of 1972, reminding their parents that they had promised peace and safety, but that twenty years later, the youth are still fighting the same war. For Cohen, "it is a song about taking and claiming responsibility, pointing a blaming finger at the system of war, and saying, 'enough.'"<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

The radical theater experiments of the early twentieth century did not fail to have an impact on society; Meyerhold's achievements contributed to conditions that stabilized the social ethos in Russia under Stalin and then disabled further experimentation there, but the ideas traveled elsewhere — from Russia to Germany, North America, Latin America, etc. Society does change, if not once and for all. As Yevgeny Zamyatin said in *We*, his novel of 1924, "And how can there be a final revolution? There is no final one. The number of revolutions is infinite. The last one — that's for children. Infinity frightens children and it's essential that children get a good night's sleep."<sup>39</sup>

Artwork can raise new questions about reality when it playfully renders reality itself abstract, from the body to the setting in which the body is positioned. Meyerhold's arguments for stylization sometimes outstrip his real contribution, as a teacher, thinker, and a director: the notion that artwork is a means through which to activate the body politic, through people's bodies and *then* their minds. Using him as a reference point at all for art's work of stoking political agency — all that means is that sometimes it works, if only too well.

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38 Deville Cohen, in discussion with the author; April 10, 2018.

39 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* [1924], trans. Clarence Brown (New York, 1993), Record 30: "The Final Number Galileo's Mistake Wouldn't It Be Better?" iBooks file.





## CURRENCY AND COMMUNITY: LABOR, IDENTITY, AND NOTGELD IN INFLATION-ERA THURINGIA

**Erin Sullivan Maynes**

Money is nearly always absent in utopian imaginings. But in spite of its strong associations with capitalism, money is not inherently ideological. As Georg Simmel recognized in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), money is a tool, less a material object than a series of functions: it provides a universal measure of value, mediates exchange, and circulates in order to facilitate future exchange. Can money, then, be a means for remaking the economic and social order? Reimagining the functioning of money might encourage one to reimagine how a society distributes resources and determines value, particularly the value of human labor.

Community currencies are one example of this type of reimagining. They are not revolutionary; they typically work beside existing systems of exchange rather than upending them. But their focus on sourcing and buying locally puts emphasis on the commercial activity of the community. Community currencies also stress one's potential connections to the producer or seller, elevating the role of labor in the production of goods and services, and, by extension, emphasizing human capital as the source of value within the community. The stress, again, is on local labor and local goods, suggesting that such currencies offer a way of keeping the virtuous circle of economic exchange and circulation close and tight, preserving its benefits for, and only for, those within the community.

This essay explores how community currencies were used to assert value — and, by extension, values — at a moment in which money and its legitimizing institutions were failing: the inflationary years of the Weimar Republic (1918-1923). During this period, towns and cities were compelled to create their own provisional money out of necessity, as the official currency, the Reichsmark, was in short supply. But as this unofficial money, called *Notgeld* (literally, “emergency money”), became a fixture of local economies, it also became a way of expressing anxieties, asserting alternatives, and carving out the community as a space separate from the political and economic turmoil of the nation. This currency reinforced the boundaries of local communities by creating zones of economic activity confined to contained areas. But the notes were also a visual space for reinforcing

community identity. Their subjects presented local lore, promoted local products, and praised local character, implicitly and sometimes explicitly contrasting the stability of the community with the chaos of the nation.

Other communities also emerged during the inflation — self-selecting groups whose identities were likewise shaped by economic crisis. These communities were built on the utopian aspirations of thinkers with radically different visions for the future, figures like the so-called *Inflationsheiligen*, the “saints” of inflation, who inspired followers with their rejection of bourgeois norms and the mix of radical religious and political beliefs they preached. This essay will also explore an encounter between one such community of choice: a group called the Neue Schar [New Flock], and its leader, Friedrich Muck-Lamberty, and the town of Kahla, a prolific center for the production of *Notgeld*. This encounter played out, in part, through *Notgeld* and was an expression of the different kinds of tribalism encouraged by the inflation.

Community currencies have reemerged in recent years, particularly since the global financial crisis of 2008, as a way of reconnecting consumers with their local economies. The tagline that promotes the Brixton Pound, the community currency that emerged in 2009 to cater to the south London district of Brixton, reads: “Money that sticks to Brixton.”<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is to encourage both the customer and seller to commit to buying and sourcing locally so that the economic benefits of exchange remain within the neighborhood. Brixton is a multi-ethnic community with a history of poverty and a tradition of social activism. Designers of the Brixton Pound, which exists in four denominations and nine separate issues, were mindful of this history and of Brixton’s distinct culture when creating the notes; the pounds include portraits of the district’s famous residents on one side and art with local connections on the other. Some of the currency’s portraits are activist icons, such as the one pound note featuring Len Garrison, co-founder of the Black Cultural Archive. Others feature celebrities with Brixton connections such as David Bowie, whose note celebrates the glam rocker’s aesthetic appeal, reproducing his iconic portrait from the cover of *Aladdin Sane*. The verso of the Bowie note also lifts an element from Brixton’s familiar Nuclear Dawn Mural painted in 1983, associating the currency not only with local faces but also local places. On the mural a dove morphs, Escher-like, into a peace symbol to stress the importance of nuclear disarmament. On the Brixton

1 Tagline featured on a banner promoting the currency on <http://www.brixtonpound.org/what>.

note, the dove is equated with the note's "security bonded" feature, its form appropriated and given a new function.

The Brixton Pound was one of the first community currencies in Britain, but it is far from the only one. Other British examples include Bristol Pounds, Cardiff Pounds, Cornish Pounds, Exeter Pounds, Kingston Pounds, Lewes Pounds, Liverpool Pounds, Plymouth Pounds, Stroud Pounds, Totnes Pounds, and Worcester Pounds.<sup>2</sup> The Wikipedia page for community currencies based in the United States lists 122 different currencies including Berkshares, Ithaca Hours, and Cascadas, though at least 48 are inactive.<sup>3</sup> The Chiemgauer, the largest regional currency (*Regiogeld*) in Germany, began in Bavaria in 2003 as a student project at an area Waldorf high school. An economics teacher conceived of it as a way to raise funds for school improvements. By 2012, there were more than 550,000 Chiemgauer in circulation with a turnover of around 6 million as of 2011.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond their primary role as a medium of exchange, community currencies draw attention to money's different functions, inviting its bearers to consider the note as a material object and exchange itself as a highly mediated and contingent social act. The Brixton Pound stresses the former, the currency is covetable not (only) as a signifier of wealth and status, but potentially as a desirable, designed object. Distributors offer ways of purchasing the cash as collectible and create eye-catching designs to appeal to consumers. The Bowie Bristol ten pound note, for example, is also offered as a limited edition print, with both recto and verso printed on a single sheet of A3 paper, embossed, and sold framed or unframed. The celebrated British artist Jeremy Deller designed a special edition fifth anniversary Brixton five-pound note in 2015, a colorful and complicated symmetrical knot with a face in its center. The page announcing Deller's note on the Brixton Pound website enthuses that "[Deller's] extraordinary design adds a significant and provocative message that reflects our intention to raise the conversation of how we understand, use, and value money in this time of economic instability and what we could aspire to in the future."<sup>5</sup> Certainly, offering cash as a commodity does present the community with an opportunity to make money from its money, but it also arrests its circulation. Issuers of the Brixton Pound seem to suggest this will make consumers more mindful of where and what they spend, but it also undercuts the currency's primary function as a viable medium of exchange. After all, if the note has more value as a collectible than as a currency, what is the incentive to spend it?

2 Ibid.

3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_community\\_currencies\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_community_currencies_in_the_United_States).

4 <http://community-currency.info/en/currencies/chiemgauer/#return-note-4921-1>.

5 <http://brixtonpound.org/blog/2015/07/08/deller/>.

Other community currencies have a more overtly ideological function. Their issuers present them as a means of realizing a more equitable community by creating a more equitable economy. These currencies attempt to counter the reifying character of cash by identifying alternative measures of value as the basis of exchange. This is especially true of time-based currencies, which make duration their measure of value, suggesting an awareness of both labor and leisure as “time spent.” It is also a more egalitarian measure, as time is a finite resource but also one that all possess, in theory at least, in equal amounts. “Time Is Money” announces the verso of an Ithaca Hour note, directly equating labor with value. The inscription on the note continues: “Ithaca Hours are backed by real capital: our skills, our tools, forest, fields, and rivers.” In other words, labor guarantees the value of the note but so, too, do the shared resources of the community. These notes force a more holistic vision of what, exactly, comprises an economy at the local level: nothing less, that is, than the whole of the community itself.

As these examples demonstrate, recent community currencies have emerged in places that cast them as progressive projects, in spite of the currencies’ provincial focus and anachronistic ideas about economic growth and exchange. In their form and function, these notes appear designed to counter anxieties on the left about the workings of remote financial markets that threaten to erode economic self-sufficiency. These currencies implicitly counter the abstraction of modern economic activity by insisting upon more rudimentary, concrete forms of value and traceable networks of exchange. As such, they define the community as a physical space through the boundaries created by the currency’s circulation. But they also present a conceptual and idealized version of the community, which conflates culture and economic activity and which puts a progressive spin on what is, arguably, a somewhat reactionary and isolationist attitude.

Community currencies do have a longer history. Indeed, before centralized banks, essentially all paper money was local and functioned as a kind of scrip one could exchange for the equivalent value of gold or other precious metals at private banks. These currencies reappeared in the twentieth century at moments of economic crisis and in places where normal economic exchange ceased to function. The most prolific period for such provisional money is the focus of the remainder of this essay: the inflationary decade in Germany, particularly the period from 1918 to 1923.

*Notgeld*, was the offspring of necessity and enterprise, a hybrid born of economic chaos. It proliferated throughout the German Reich from the beginning of World War I through the end of 1923, the high-water mark of Germany's hyperinflation. *Notgeld* came into circulation as a way of temporarily addressing the chronic shortage of low denomination notes and coins necessary for the majority of economic transactions throughout the Reich. This shortage was the result of hoarding—due to the military's demand for metal, the material value of most coins surpassed their face value—and the fact that inflation forced one to pay more money for the same basic necessities, requiring more of it to purchase everyday items. Thus, the amount of paper money in circulation, both official paper Reichsmarks, as well as unofficial *Notgeld*, ballooned. But because *Notgeld* was necessarily provisional, with each note valid for only short periods, and because it was an insistently local form of payment, the number of *Notgeld* issues was especially inflated by the economic situation.

As *Notgeld* became a new normal throughout Germany, local economies came to rely on it as an alternative form of payment, and, increasingly, a source of revenue. The latter function resulted in *Sammlerscheine*, collector's notes, bills designed for the audience of *Notgeld* collectors attracted to the ever growing number of unique provisional notes. The audience for this collectible cash was significant enough that specialty publications such as the journal *Das Notgeld* appeared, informing collectors of the availability of new issues and the rising value of sought-after notes.<sup>6</sup> The most famous *Sammlerscheine* are the *Serienscheine*, or series notes, most of which were created from 1920 through 1922. These were not intended for circulation but were sold directly to the collectors' market by issuers or by numismatic dealers and auction houses such as Robert Ball Nachfolger in Berlin. As such, they were designed to appeal to audiences as consumable objects. Their serial format allowed the notes to narrate stories or present thematic groupings, but their seriality was also meant to appeal to the acquisitive sensibility of collectors. Successful issuers were expert at offering designs in a range of variants, with different text, colors, and sizes, attracting those who might feel compelled to acquire each and every version of the same note. Other issuers focused on making individual sets highly desirable through their designs, hiring known artists to illustrate them or relying on popular or sensational content that would appeal to audiences outside their immediate vicinity. *Serienscheine* demonstrate how money itself had become an object that had the potential to be marketed and sold —

6 *Das Notgeld: Zeitschrift für Notgeldkunde* first appeared in 1919 and was published in Munich through at least 1922. A number of other publications with titles such as *Die Notgeld-Sammler: Zentral-Organ für den gesamten Notgeld Markt* were also published during this period, some of which were reconstituted versions of earlier publications. In addition, there were *Sammlervereine*, collectors' groups, which were organized under an umbrella association called the *Verband Großdeutscher Notgeld-Sammler-Vereine*.

and suggested that a community's self-sufficiency during inflation might depend on making money that was less currency than commodity.

True *Sammlerscheine* were not designed to circulate; in fact, notes' expiration dates often preceded their issue date, rendering them immediately worthless as currency. But as collectibles, these notes did offer potential rewards for issuers. The town of Naumburg in Saxony-Anhalt, for instance, was able to renovate the town Rathaus with the revenues generated from a set of popular *Notgeld* notes illustrating the siege of the city by the Hussites in the fifteenth century. The set, designed by the artist Walter Hege in a silhouette motif, was so successful that it went through more than three reissues. In 1921, Naumburg generated more than 900,000 Reichsmarks in profit from *Notgeld* sales alone.<sup>7</sup>

Hege's Naumburg notes underscore the characteristics typical of successful collector issues: they are attractively designed, function as a narrative set, and focus on stories drawn from local lore. Often these stories emphasize events in which the community overcame past hardship and gloss over the distinctions between historical veracity and legend. The story relayed by Hege's notes, for instance, includes what is known as the Cherry Legend (*Hussiten Kirschfest Sage*), the basis for the annual Naumburg Cherry Festival. Since the seventeenth century, the Cherry Legend has been linked to the history of the Hussite siege, putting a happy spin on the story. According to the legend, the children of Naumburg saved the town by pleading with the Hussite general for mercy. The general took pity and agreed to pull back his troops. He also gave the children cherries to calm their hunger. Like the story, which has become tied to Naumburg's identity less because of its historical accuracy than because of its repetition and reenactment during the annual festival, Hege's Expressionist-inspired silhouettes were successful enough that they likewise became, through dissemination and reissue, part of that identity as well. In fact, Hege's silhouettes are still used to advertise Naumburg's Cherry Festival today.

A community that found especially effective ways to combine craft and currency was the town of Pößneck in Thuringia. In 1921, Pößneck produced a set of *Serienscheine* known as the Industry Series, a six-note set that advertised the virtues of Pößnecker goods, including leather products, printed journals, chocolate confections, and flannel cloth.<sup>8</sup> "Jeder kennt das Pößnecker Leder" chirps one of the notes: "Everyone knows Pössneck Leather!" It is a line that evinces

7 Ursula Dittrich-Wagner, "Walter Hege und das Naumburger Notgeld," <https://www.mv-naumburg.de/notgeld>, 8. The first set of Hege's *Notgeld*, issued in six designs all worth fifty Pfennigs, included four misprints, omitting the addition of "Pfg" (Pfennig) from the denomination. The series was first issued in November 1920 in a run of 4,000. Due to immediate demand, Naumburg issued a second run of 20,000 about three weeks later, in which the missing "Pfg" had been corrected. In February 1921, Hege was commissioned to create another six silhouettes for the series, and a set of twelve notes was reissued. Finally, as Dittrich-Wagner documents, the misprinted notes, which were in high demand by collectors, were likewise reissued in a run of 5,000 in May 1921. Pictures of these designs can be found in Hans-Ludwig Grabowski and Manfred Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld: Deutsche Serienscheine, 1918-1922*, Vol. 2 (Regenstauf, 2009).

8 Grabowski and Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, Vol. 1. The catalogue number for the Industry Series is 1066.6 (1-10).

the enthusiasm of a marketing jingle, celebrating the long-standing excellence of local goods and local manufacturing.

*Notgeld* produced by the town of Genthin and decorated with woodcuts by the Erfurt-based artist Alfred Hanf suggests how the individual can create value for the community: through faith.<sup>9</sup> “Is this not a world turned upside down?” it asks, “The littlest town prints its own money! And yet the homeland (*Heimat*) reveals its image. The hometown (*Vaterstadt*), more valuable to you than money, you should value if you do not wish to be a fool on your own”<sup>10</sup> The verse on the twenty-five Pfennig note continues: “Your belief makes this slip of paper here into money. So believe in your homeland and build your world.”<sup>11</sup> If one can transform paper into value, in other words, a similar kind of magical thinking directed at the community might likewise lift the local economy. It is as if Hanf’s *Notgeld* is trying to restore economic health by attaching value not to such “slips of paper” but to individual and collective faith in the community.

*Notgeld* notes, designed to attract attention, are, in their emphasis on the visual, an anti-currency. When the primary function of currency is exchange, conspicuous currencies are counterproductive. Cash that requires careful scrutiny and study is cash that lacks institutional authority and impedes easy circulation. *Notgeld*, however, was always meant to be looked at, and regarded, carefully. Initially, this had a practical purpose. *Notgeld* was unsanctioned; the federal government reluctantly tolerated its use out of necessity, but issuers took pains to distinguish their currency from official Reichsmarks by avoiding the designation *Geld* and creating issues that were distinctive. Notes with temporary and ever-changing designs, denominations, and dates of expiration required more attention of bearers and receivers. But, for collectors’ issues, the value of notes was determined by their ability to attract attention, to invite viewers to focus on series’ designs and narratives. Because of the insistently visual nature of collector’s *Notgeld*, its function as a collectible object that could also be a cash-generating commodity superseded its function as a medium of exchange. It became a space for spreading self-referential messages and meditations—on the community itself, as noted, but also on the nature of money and value. In other words, *Notgeld* is very often money about money that made money as non-circulating money.

The town of Kahla in Thuringia was especially notable for the number of *Notgeld* series it issued, and for the way its *Serienscheine* modeled

9 Ibid., numbers 419.1 (1-5). It is likely that Hanf did not write the verses that appear on the Genthin notes but rather contributed the woodcuts. The *Notgeld* notes themselves are offset prints with reproductions (likely reduced) of Hanf’s woodcut prints.

10 The text reads as follows: “Ist’s nicht recht eine verkehrte Welt? Die kleinste Stadt druckt eignes Geld! Und doch die Heimat zeigt sein Bild. Die Vaterstadt die mehr als Geld Dir gilt, Dir gelten sollte, wenn Du nicht allein auf eigne Faust ein Narr willst sein.”

11 “Dein Glaube macht den Zettel hier zum Geld, so glaub ans Vaterland und bau’ Dir Deine Welt.”

these varied approaches to attracting collectors. Kahla, named by one scholar “the secret capital of Germany’s *Ersatz* currency,” produced fourteen series in twelve themes, of which up to six were produced in variants that were repeatedly reissued.<sup>12</sup> A number of these sets reference the larger economic and political situation in Germany to appeal to a broader collecting audience, but many others focus on local landmarks, local products, and local stories. An example of the latter includes the souvenir set celebrating the castle of Leuchtenburg, one of the city’s most notable sights. The set is composed of three notes, in denominations of twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five Pfennigs, of different aerial views of the castle. The set reaches for a broader, more nationalistic tone on the note’s recto, a quote attributed to General Field Marshall and future German president Paul von Hindenburg transcribed in handwritten *Sütterlinschrift*: “The blood of all those who gave their lives in the belief of the greatness of the Fatherland must not have flowed in vain.”

On the other end of the spectrum of Kahla’s *Notgeld* is the popular satirical set designed by the nationally recognized Norwegian artist Olaf Gulbransson, best known in Germany as an illustrator for the magazine *Simplicissimus*.<sup>13</sup> The messages of Gulbransson’s series are not specific to Kahla but are focused on issues of national importance. The series is comprised of three sets of pairs; in one set of notes, titled “Deutsche Merkur,” a man with iconographic attributes referencing the German Michael (cap), the god Mercury (winged sandals), and St. Sebastian (shot with arrows and tied to a post) faces off against a large woman in a breastplate marked “RF” for *Republique française*, who aims a charged bow at his chest. In the second note, the German Mercury is on the phone, writing out reparations payments in his own blood with one of the arrows he has pulled from his body. The notes reference Germany’s payments to France, a hated condition of the Treaty of Versailles that exacerbated the financial crisis. Another set mocks pretensions of national unity: the first note’s inscription ironically proclaims “Einigkeit macht stark” or “Unity makes us strong,” while the illustration below depicts a group of figures falling on each other in a violent brawl. In the next note, these men seem to have resolved their differences: they clink glasses together beneath an inscription that reads “Starkbier (strong beer) makes us unified.”

Perhaps the most unusual of Kahla’s *Serienscheine* is the twelve-part Statistical Series from 1921, another set that looks beyond Kahla to the national situation.<sup>14</sup> The recto of each note displays the same im-

12 Wolfgang Kemp, *Wir haben ja alle Deutschland nicht gekannt: das Deutschlandbild der Deutschen in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Heidelberg, 2016), 302.

13 See Grabowski and Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld: Deutsche Serienscheine*, Vol. 1. The catalogue number of the Leuchtenburg series, also called the Hindenburg II series, is 668.6a, b (1-3). Gulbransson’s series is numbered 668.10 and 668.11 (1-6).

14 *Ibid.* The Statistical Series is numbered 668.7 (1-12).





Unknown designer, *Porcelain Series*, verso of 25-, 50-, and 75-Pfennig *Notgeld* notes issued by the City of Kahla. Each note measures ca. 7x11 cm. August 1921. Collection of the author. Photo by author.

age of a man's head before a brick wall, with the inscription: "Was das Schicksal uns zerbrach, neu erstehe nach und nach — traget Steine zu dem Bau, deutscher Mann und deutsche Frau" [What fate destroyed for me and you, let us rebuild anew; carry stones to the structure, German man and German woman.] The verso of each note includes a different diagram, which tracks statistical measures tracing the effects of inflation, the war, and its aftermath on the German economy. This includes the growth in the child mortality rate between 1913 and 1918, the reduction in the size of the German Empire due to the Treaty of Versailles, a pie chart illustrating reparations spending as a portion of the total budget, and the inflated price of eggs, butter, and milk in different German cities on a single day in April 1921. The most self-referential note tracks the "Inflation of Notes in Circulation from 1913-1920," comparing circulation rates in different countries, including England, France, and Spain, to those in Germany. Unsurprisingly, the number of notes in Germany dwarfs that of the currency circulating in all other countries, consuming nearly half the note's vertical space. The Statistical Series attempts to visualize, literally and figuratively, the abstract nation-wide economic effects of inflation by tying them to familiar reference points and illustrating these changes in easy-to-follow charts. The assertive but optimistic message on front of the notes, which suggests that German fortitude and resolve will enable the nation to rebuild, is thus challenged by the information presented on the back of the notes, in which the sober presentation of facts and figures details only the magnitude of the crisis rather than offering a reassuring solution.

Kahla's Porcelain *Notgeld* series gets closest to the town's contemporary identity—an identity tied to a product manufactured locally since the nineteenth century and a pillar of the local economy.<sup>15</sup> The financial insecurity caused by inflation, however, threatened to undermine Kahla's status as a center for the production of fine china. This three-note *Notgeld* series, therefore, serves to advertise and celebrate, but also affirm, Kahla's porcelain as an enduring source of value, particularly when compared against the devalued Reichsmark. Visually, the notes equate two elements as essential to the city's identity: the iconic castle of Leuchtenburg and porcelain itself, both of which feature in all three notes. The red-roofed castle migrates from left to right over the course of the three notes while plates, teapots, cups and saucers float above it, among the stars in one note, blending with the clouds in another, and finally creeping over the globe in the final note, suggesting the international market

15 Ibid. The Porcelain Series is numbered 668.5 (1-3).

for this locally made good. “Kahla versorgt für billig [sic] Geld / mit Porzellan die ganze Welt,” reads the first note, [Kahla supplies the whole world with porcelain for ‘cheap’ money.] The verse separates Kahla’s porcelain from devalued currency, which suggests less that its tableware is a bargain than that its currency’s value is depressed. The next two notes refer to the popular expression, “Scherben bringen Glück” [broken pottery brings luck], with the last proclaiming, “Behaltet Kahlas Scherben fein / Das Glück soll drin verborgen sein” [Keep Kahla’s beautiful [porcelain] shards / for luck may be hidden within.] Even in a damaged and functionless state, in other words, porcelain may still have value if it grants good luck. Kahla’s porcelain thus retains material value that the “cheap” paper currency does not. Although the *Notgeld* acknowledges this fact, the town was unquestionably good at promoting both its money and its manufacturing through its many issues of *Notgeld*, using one to reinforce the other.

As an important center for the sale and production of *Notgeld*, Kahla staged a *Notgeld* exhibition from September 3 to September 11, 1921, featuring over one hundred exhibitors, with more than 50,000 *Notgeld* issues.<sup>16</sup> Collectors from throughout Germany attended, and certificates and a cash prize were issued for the best designs. Kahla notes featured prominently in advertising for the event; one series in particular was newly released in time for the exhibition itself, the set known as the “*Muckserie*,” which promised to find broad success as it related the story of a local scandal that had earned national attention: the rise and fall of the *Wanderprophet* Friedrich Muck-Lamberty.<sup>17</sup> Muck-Lamberty and the money made about him stage the encounter between two forms of community—one given, the other chosen.

Friedrich Muck-Lamberty was a charismatic representative of the Youth Reform and Life Reform Movements and one of the so-called *Inflationsheiligen* [inflation saints] of the early 1920s, a group of quasi-religious messianic figures who could be viewed, on the one hand, as an offshoot of the “colorful spectrum of Weimar ‘sect’ culture (*Sektenwesen*),” and the millenarian mood that accompanied postwar crises and economic troubles from 1918 to 1923.<sup>18</sup> According to Ulrich Linse, the *Inflationsheiligen* and their followers exhibited troubling characteristics that foreshadowed behaviors associated with Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists, not the least of which involved the apotheosis of a charismatic leader advocating radical and reactionary solutions to modern life in order to achieve national salvation.<sup>19</sup>

16 See Ingrid Bubeck, *Geldnot und Notgeld in Thüringen* (Erfurt, 2007).

17 Grabowski and Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld: Deutsche Serienscheine*, Vol. 1. The Muck Series is numbered 668.2 (1-3).

18 Ulrich Linse, *Barfüßige Propheten: Erlöser der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin, 1983), 23.

19 See *ibid.*



Unknown designer, *Muck Series*, verso of 25-, 50-, and 75-Pfennig *Notgeld* notes issued by the City of Kahla, August 1921. Each note measures ca. 7x11 cm. Collection of the author. Photo by author.

Muck-Lamberty wanted to lead his followers to a simpler life; he rejected the modern world in favor of the simplicity of premodern lifestyles and ways of being. Muck, as his followers called him, at one point stated, “I am no Rote-Fahne revolutionary, but believe in the victory of the spirit over matter, over material.”<sup>20</sup> His followers were motivated by a similar belief that the time was ripe for a spiritual turn, evidence of which was all around them in the near constant social, political, and economic upheavals of postwar Germany. As Linse argues, the rituals of the Neue Schar, especially their ecstatic dances “developed as an alternative to class struggle and prefigured the ‘community’ as a form of apolitical (*nichtpolitischen*) socialism.”<sup>21</sup>

Muck-Lamberty had contact with the Wandervogel movement when he was just nineteen years old. During the war, he joined the navy as part of a unit that was willing to accommodate his strict vegetarian diet. Although he did not experience the November Revolution firsthand, he did view it as an opportunity for the *völkisch* rebirth of Germany, which he would later call a “revolution of the soul.” By early 1920 he had founded the Neue Schar, a community of individuals composed mostly of young men, women, and children who were inspired by his teaching.

Like all *Inflationsheiligen*, the social disruption caused by the chaos of the revolution and inflation allowed Muck-Lamberty to redefine community in his own terms. The Neue Schar was self-selecting and composed primarily of young people committed to the strict lifestyle their charismatic leader demanded. As Muck-Lamberty and his flock made their now famous tour through Thuringia throughout 1920, they attracted attention and followers wherever they went, the Neue Schar dancing and singing while Muck-Lamberty preached. He was compared to the Pied Piper of Hamelin by observers based on the way he entranced the young; he was reported to have as many as one thousand followers, a number that grew with every stop he made. The leader of “the League” in Hermann Hesse’s 1932 novel *Morgenlandfahrt* is based, in part, on Muck-Lamberty.

Muck-Lamberty’s so-called *Sündenfall*, or fall from grace, transpired in early 1921 in Kahla bei Leuchtenburg. The castle of Leuchtenburg functioned at this time as a youth hostel and, due to the group’s large size, Muck-Lamberty and the Neue Schar wintered there. At this time, Käthe Kühn, a female friend of Muck-Lamberty’s and member of the Neue Schar, wrote to the local authorities in Altenburg and accused the leader of keeping a “harem” and of “defiling the sacredness of

20 “Ich bin kein Rote-Fahnen-Revolutionär, sondern glaube an den Sieg des Geistes über die Materie.” <http://www.naumburg-geschichte.de/geschichte/mucklamberty.htm#16a>.

21 “Das tänzerische Ritual war die von der Neuen Schar entwickelte Alternative zum Klassenkampf und sollte die ‘Gemeinde’ als Form eines nichtpolitischen Sozialismus präfigurieren.” Linse, *Barfüßige Propheten*, 106.



Unknown designer, *Notgeld Ausstellung* note, recto of 75-Pfennig note issued by the Stadtverkehrsamt (City Tourist Office) of Kahla, September 1921. Note measures ca. 7.5x11 cm. Collection of the author. Photo by author.

seductive appeal among his followers. After Muck-Lamberty's questioning, the director of the Leuchtenburg hostel requested that Muck-Lamberty and his group vacate the hostel by February 1921. Some of his followers left, and supporters distanced themselves in the aftermath of the scandal.

Kahla saw an opportunity in this crisis, however. Because of Muck-Lamberty's relative fame, the scandal had brought national attention to the area. In August of 1921, Kahla released its "*Muckserie*" *Notgeld*, a three-note set of twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five Pfennig *Serienscheine*, which detailed the rise and fall of Muck-Lamberty and the Neue Schar in color and verse. The first note depicts members of the Neue Schar dancing freely as Muck-Lamberty imagines his destination: a city on a hill. In the second note, Muck plays guitar and sings to his flock, his head emitting divine rays, his body towering over the city of his imagination. On either side of his head, in hexagonal cartouches, stand two storks bowing their heads in Muck's direction. Then in the final note, these storks—symbols of birth in both German and English—take flight. Muck hangs his head in shame as he is cast out of the city on the hill and his followers turn away from him. The final lines underscore the meaning of the storks, noting that it is Muck himself adding to the Neue Schar's numbers.

Kahla generated a total net profit of 170,000 Marks from the sale of the Muck Series, constituting the first major series it issued as

womanhood."<sup>22</sup> He had, it turned out, impregnated two women in the group and was engaged in sexual relationships with others. Muck-Lamberty was unapologetic, and many observers were unsurprised by the erotically charged nature of the Neue Schar's activities and Muck-Lamberty's

22 The reason cited for Kühl's action is jealousy, though little evidence is given to support this. The exact term she used was "Haremwirtschaft." The other quote reads "entheilige das Heiligtum der Weiblichkeit." Ibid.

well as its first *Notgeld* success.<sup>23</sup> The timing of the notes' release was calculated for maximum impact. It roughly coincided with the opening of Kahla's *Notgeld* exhibition in September of that year. There was even a commemorative note produced for the exhibition itself, which was

valid only for the exhibition's nine-day run.<sup>24</sup> The note's recto features a trompe l'oeil with an elegantly dressed man and a woman standing below a sign announcing the exhibition, ready to enter the exhibition space between parted curtains. On the verso, the note announces itself as "*Notgeld of Notgeld*," and depicts a large dragon crouched above the castle of Leuchtenburg, blowing notes from its mouth at the people gathered below, who rush to grab at the notes in a frenzy. The short verses on the bottom left announce: "From the hall, to the shore, *Notgeld* flies — a legion of *Notgeld*! But if its price were to decline, the collector would feel just fine."<sup>25</sup> The popularity of the Muck Series is underscored here by the fact that one of the notes fluttering above the crowd has the word "Muck" written on it.

In the aftermath of the Leuchtenburg incident, Muck-Lamberty stopped his itinerant wandering and came to settle with the remainder of his flock not far away, in Naumburg, just over the border of Thuringia in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Between 1922 and 1923, he established a *Handwerksgemeinschaft*, or community of skilled labor, which he named the *Werkschar Naumburg*, transforming the Neue



Unknown designer, *Notgeld Ausstellung* note, verso of 75-Pfennig note issued by the Stadtverkehrsamt (City Tourist Office) of Kahla, September 1921. Note measures ca. 7.5x11 cm. Collection of the author. Photo by author.

» ponderousness, but its financial worth is also anchored in substances, such as gold and silver, that maintain a more consistent value due to their limited supply. Similar metaphors of flying and fluttering are also attached to the broadsheet (*Flugblatt*, literally "flying sheet" in German) and the single-sheet print and print portfolio during the November Revolution, as Gustav Hartlaub wrote in *Die neue deutsche Graphik* in 1920. See Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, 2014), 115; and Gustav Hartlaub, *Die neue deutsche Graphik* (Berlin, 1920).

23 <http://www.naumburg-geschichte.de/ge-schichte/mucklamberty.htm#16a>, accessed April 2018.

24 Grabowski and Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld: Deutsche Serienscheine*, Vol.

1. The catalogue number is 669.1.

25 Jennifer Roberts has noted in connection with nineteenth-century American paper currency that the movement of paper notes or credit is

often described as aerial, employing metaphors of "flight or flotation." "Specie, in contrast," she notes, "had a 'ponderous gravity.'" Because of its association with metal, specie's movement may be inhibited by its »

Schar into a communal “*Werk*” *Schar*. This community, in other words, was now defined by skilled labor as much as its communal character.<sup>26</sup> With this settling down, Muck-Lamberty’s chosen community came closer, superficially at least, to the values championed by the established communities that had rejected him. The Werkschar was stationary and engaged in productive work rather than disruptive itinerant activities.

It was not a radical departure for Muck-Lamberty, however. Distinct from the other *Inflationsheiligen* of this moment, Muck-Lamberty had long believed that a *Handwerksgemeinschaft* was the appropriate communal form for his band of followers. In 1912 and 1913, before the war, he had planned for the founding of a settlement, based on communistic principles, and had the idea to develop a skilled workers’ land commune with what he called *Umwertungsstellen*, roughly translated as places of revaluation, an echo of Nietzsche’s call for the “Umwertung aller Werte,” the transvaluation of values.<sup>27</sup> The plans for this commune, however, were interrupted by the war. They were revived in Naumburg, where Muck-Lamberty decided the community would focus on high-quality woodworking, specifically turning and joinery, skills Muck himself had acquired. The products manufactured by the Werkschar also offered the means for the community to become self-sufficient. The skilled labor of the community would, in other words, improve the Werkschar in both a spiritual and material sense.

The art historian and critic, Wilhelm Uhde, recalled encountering Muck-Lamberty and his followers when they were still the *Neue Schar* in his memoirs in 1920, at the height of the *Wanderprophet*’s popularity. He noted that the two impulses Muck-Lamberty represented—the spiritual rejection of materialism with the simultaneous affirmation of handiwork—were not necessarily in conflict. In other words, for Muck-Lamberty, spiritual transcendence was connected to the material object through physical labor. Uhde argued that the *Schar* “helped the youth to ‘dematerialise,’ to be modest and happy, to free them from the ties of the mechanical. To newly connect their powers with the blessing of skilled trades [*Handwerk*], to integrate them as an essential factor of a German ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*.’”<sup>28</sup>

A 1925 catalogue of the Werkschar’s output is suggestive of this fusion of the premodern communal sensibilities of Muck-Lamberty’s Werkschar with the possibilities of modern marketing. The cover is an abstraction of one of the Werkschar’s candlesticks, depicted as a

26 The skilled labor settlement that Muck-Lamberty established in Naumburg was first tested during the winter in Leuchtenburg, where the group traded skilled work such as joinery for food with those in the community. One visitor commented on the division of labor among the women and men, the simple meals they kept, and noted that “Der Wirtschaftsbetrieb war kommunistisch” [The economic enterprise was communist]; Linse, *Barfüßige Propheten*, 119.

27 <http://www.naumburg-geschichte.de/geschichte/mucklamberty.htm#15a>.

28 “Die Neue Schar half die Jugend zu entmaterialisieren, sie anspruchslos und froh zu machen, aus den Banden des mechanischen zu befreien. Ihre Kräfte mit dem Segen des Handwerks neu zu verknüpfen, sie als wesentliche Faktor einer deutschen Volksgemeinschaft einzuordnen.” Quoted in *ibid*.



series of downward-facing arrows balanced against the tips of up-turned triangles. This delicate balancing act is not, however, realized by the rustic products inside, which are meant to evoke traditional sensibilities in their shape and assertive use of wood as material.

Yet, one wonders what the Werkschar, a community dedicated to self-perfection through labor, has in common with another communal group dedicated to design and founded during the same period of chiliastic enthusiasm as the Neue Schar: the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus, the design and architecture school founded in 1919 under the leadership of Walter Gropius and located only fifty kilometers away in Weimar, would seem to have few shared features with Muck-Lamberty's Werkschar based on the material output of both groups in spite of their contemporaneous activities and geographic proximity. Indeed, the sharp silhouettes of the Werkschar's candlesticks and lamps that appear in their catalogue are far from the smooth steel and sans-serif designs that we identify as Bauhaus modernist style. Wilhelm Wagenfeld's famous WA 24 lamp, for instance, designed in 1923 and 1924 just as the Werkschar was getting established, is emblematic of this difference; it seems purpose-built from modern materials for modern use. The Werkschar's lamps, in contrast, appear to accommodate electricity only reluctantly, hiding their wiring deep within their dark wood bases.

And yet, there are curious hints of overlap. We do know that Muck-Lamberty spent at least a week in Weimar with the Neue Schar during his tour through Thuringia in 1920, and that Bauhaus students were attracted to the communal events staged by the Neue Schar when the group was traveling through Weimar. Walter Gropius was likewise intrigued by the teaching of another of the *Inflationsheiligen*, Ludwig Christian Hauesser, whom he invited to hold an event at the Bauhaus in 1921. Much has been written about the Bauhaus, of course, including its early years in Weimar when the students and their teachers were influenced by the November Revolution as well as the spiritualism of figures like Johannes Itten.<sup>29</sup> But what of its similarities to communities like the Werkschar?

It is worth considering how inflation influenced conceptions of labor and community at both the Bauhaus and the Werkschar Naumburg, two communities of choice built around utopian ideas about labor and craft. Both were led by charismatic individuals that, initially at least, conceived of their community and the importance of labor—specifically *Handwerk*, or handicraft—in spiritual terms and

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Oliver Gabet and Anne Monier, eds., *The Spirit of the Bauhaus* (London, 2018); Christoph Wagner, ed., *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik: Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee* (Leipzig, 2005); Rolf Bothe, et al., *Das frühe Bauhaus und Johannes Itten* (Ostfildern-Ruit, 1994); and Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics*, trans. John Bátki (Oxford, 1995).

30 Muck-Lamberty and many of the other *Inflationsheligen* experienced renewed popularity with the onset of the worldwide Depression in 1930. Although Muck-Lamberty himself did not embrace National Socialism, scholars such as Ulrike Linse have argued that Muck-Lamberty and the other *Wanderpropheten* exhibited proto-fascist tendencies that the National Socialists would also embrace and use to their advantage. See Linse, *Barfüßige Propheten*.

looked to premodern sources for inspiration as a way to create, and construct, the community of the future. The opportunity for such utopian thinking was encouraged by the inflation. With the stabilization of the economy in 1924 and the introduction of a new currency, *Notgeld* disappeared and communities of place returned, if reluctantly, to the nation. The Bauhaus and the Werkschar proceeded along very different paths. The Bauhaus directed its focus toward a future aligned with modern materials and manufacturing. The Werkschar kept its vision on reviving an idealized past in the present. Their products offered a romanticized, and distinctly *völkisch*, version of that past, which would find new audiences in Germany after 1933<sup>30</sup>

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## BEYOND HISTORICISM: UTOPIAN THOUGHT IN THE “CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION”

**Robbert-Jan Adriaansen**

The “Conservative Revolution” presents a paradox to contemporary scholars, as the idea of a revolution seems to challenge the very foundations of conservatism. “Conservative Revolution” is a colligatory concept; it does not refer to any particular historical event but to a current in intellectual thought that gained prominence in the German Weimar Republic.<sup>1</sup> Comprising a broad array of right-wing authors, thinkers, and movements, the concept of “Conservative Revolution” was introduced as an analytical category by Armin Mohler in his dissertation *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland* (1949). He defined it as “that spiritual movement of regeneration that tried to clear away the ruins of the nineteenth century and tried to create a new order of life.”<sup>2</sup> Covering *völkisch* authors, Young Conservatives such as Oswald Spengler and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, National Revolutionaries — like brothers Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger — and also two more organized movements, the Landvolkbewegung and the Bündische Jugend, Mohler presented a taxonomy of a heterogeneous array of thinkers and organizations that did not regard itself as a unified movement but shared a common attitude to life, society, and politics.

Because this attitude comprised a rejection of core values, ideologies, and theories (such as rationalism, liberalism, and capitalism) that dominated nineteenth-century politics, historians have mainly focused on the Conservative Revolution’s opaque relationship to modernity, with an emphasis on its political consequences. These analyses have often treated the Conservative Revolution as an oxymoron. To Jeffrey Herf, for example, the backward-looking rejection of modernity combined with the embrace of technology generated a *Weltanschauung* peculiar to the Conservative Revolution and Nazism, which he tried to capture in the notion of “reactionary modernism.”<sup>3</sup> According to Stefan Breuer, the Conservative Revolution was not really conservative, as its proponents saw the dissolution of the premodern world as an irreversible fact and did not argue for its restoration. They did, however, imagine a great variety of German futures—the only consensus being the overall rejection of political liberalism as a force alien to the German soul.<sup>4</sup> The absence of “real” conservatism combined with the lack of coherence in its political and social imagination caused Breuer

1 Colligatory concepts are concepts used by historians to create unity in the morass of past ideas and events; they bring them together under a general metaphor such as “Renaissance,” “Industrial Revolution,” or, indeed, “Conservative Revolution.” See William H. Walsh, “Colligatory Concepts in History,” in *The Philosophy of History*, ed. Patrick L. Gardiner, 127–44 (Oxford, 1974).

2 Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932. Ein Handbuch* (Darmstadt, 1972), xxviii. Translation cited from Keith Bullivant, “The Conservative Revolution,” in *The Weimar Dilemma: Intellectuals in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Anthony Phelan, 47–70 (Manchester, 1985), 47.

3 Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1985).

4 Stefan Breuer, *Anatomie der konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt, 2005), 180–81.

to dispose of the concept altogether in favor of the notion of “new nationalism.” Peter Osborne, discussing the conceptions of time and history of the Conservative Revolution, goes even further in claiming a particular modernism for it. In its radical rejection of modernity, Osborne argues, the Conservative Revolution could not but reaffirm the central tenet of modernity — its understanding of time as a linear progression. Regardless of whether its images of the future were derived from mythology or some primordial national essence, the fact was that by radically rejecting modernity, the Conservative Revolution actually resorted to the temporal logic of modernity, which pits a new stage in history against an old one in a logic of progression. The fact that Conservative Revolutionaries dressed up their expectations of the future as “return” or “recovery” is a simple misrepresentation of their own modernism, according to Osborne.<sup>5</sup>

The scholarly discussion on the extent to which the Conservative Revolution was modern or not opens up the possibility of an analysis of its utopian dimension, especially if we agree with Peter Fritzsche that the Weimar Republic was an era with an open horizon, a “workshop” in which “more or less fierce versions of the future were constructed” rather than an era that was characterized by the birth and fall of democracy.<sup>6</sup> It was in this context — born out of the traumatic experience of a devastating, lost war that triggered the unforeseen political, economic, and social destabilization of Germany — that the Conservative Revolution opened up a mode of imagining the future that relied on a radical rejection of the present. As Osborne rightly indicates, an understanding of its imagination of the future needs to be paired with a study of its understanding of time. However, we may question Osborne’s assessment that the Conservative Revolution was a modern phenomenon because it supposedly echoed modernity’s progressivism by longing for a new future. If we agree with Wolfgang Reinhart that the “modern period” was the only era that truly existed as it was the only one that thought of itself historically, then the Conservative Revolution can only be modern if it imagined the future as a new *historical* era. But it is the question of to what extent the Conservative Revolution does this.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in this essay I will discuss its utopianism by analyzing the conceptions of history that underlie its imaginations of the future. I treat conceptions of history as assumptions of the relationship between the three temporal dimensions of past, present, and future on which imaginations of either of those dimensions implicitly or explicitly rely.<sup>8</sup> I will not focus closely on the *contents* of the future imagination of the Conservative Revolution, as existing literature pays

5 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London, 1995), 167.

6 Peter Fritzsche, “Did Weimar Fail?,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (1996): 629–56, here 656.

7 Wolfgang Reinhart, “The Idea of Early Modern History,” in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley, 268–79 (New York, 1997), 278.

8 Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, “Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever, 73–89 (London, 2017), 81, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4\_4.

sufficient attention to notions such as *Volk*, *Rasse*, *Reich*, *Gemeinschaft*, and *Technik*, around which such imaginations evolved,<sup>9</sup> but I will look at the temporalities that inform such notions.

### The Conservative Revolution and the Crisis of Historicism

In the temporal sense one of the main tenets of the Conservative Revolution was the rejection of belief in progress. This disbelief was largely rooted in the experiences of the First World War, infused by the fall of the German Empire and the subsequent revolution and hyperinflation that uprooted the old social order and demanded the installation of a new one. But the rejection of progress was also intellectually rooted as it built on a longer tradition of critique of the modern conception of history. This critique can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century and reached its peak after the First World War in the so-called crisis of historicism.

Historicism is a broad term that has been used in many ways, but generally the concept appears in reference to either the Rankean school of historical thought or to the broader modern conception of history of which Rankean historicism is only one expression. Karl Mannheim called this the “worldview” of historicism, which refers to the all-encompassing understanding that all human values and ideas are historically conditioned and can only be understood as such.<sup>10</sup> As a worldview, historicism was — and perhaps still is — an inescapable precondition of modern existence, an idea widely shared in bourgeois circles in the Weimar Era.<sup>11</sup> According to Kurt Nowak, this worldview revolved around the notion of individuality, on the one hand, and continuity, on the other. As individuality referred to the uniqueness of individual and collective historical actors and ages, it functioned as a precondition for the experience of change and otherness and, thus, for the experience of historical distance. The otherwise atomized individual entities were brought together by understanding their relationship in terms of continuity. Historiography is only one example of the many ways in which modern historical cultures configure coherence out of discontinuities.

The “crisis of historicism” roughly spans the decades between 1880 and 1930, with Friedrich Nietzsche as one of the early critics of German historical culture. His *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* [On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life] (1874) furthered a sharp critique of historicism as a worldview, which — Nietzsche claimed — would effectively mean the end of

9 See, for example, Breuer, *Anatomie der konservativen Revolution*; Volker Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne*; Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and *der Wandel des Konservatismus* (Paderborn, 2012); Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland*.

10 Karl Mannheim, “Historicism,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, 84–133 (London, 1952), 85.

11 Friedrich Jaeger, “Theorietypen der Krise des Historismus,” in *Die Historismusdebatte in Der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Wolfgang Bialas and Gérard Raulet, 52–70 (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 52.



Oswald Spengler.  
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history if it were to grasp of all aspects of life. If mankind understands itself purely in historical terms, as the product of a historically evolved society, the demands put forward by history create a burden for individuals to act creatively and obstruct putting history in the service of life.<sup>12</sup>

In the Conservative Revolution, Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* [The Decline of the West] (1918) struck a significant blow to historicism. Or — better put — the book took followed the logic of historicism to its ultimate conclusion. In his book, Spengler provided a comparative morphology of eight civilizations, with an emphasis on the Classical (Greco-Roman), Magian (Arabian, Syrian, Jewish, Byzantine, and Islamic), and “Faustian” (Western European) cultures. Criticizing linear notions of progressive history that culminate in West-

ern Civilization as Eurocentric approaches, Spengler emphasized that cultures are units with their own worldviews, logic, mathematics, and notions of time. Spengler studied these cultures as independent units with no greater plan than their rise, decline, and fall — analogous to the life cycles of organisms. High cultures, he maintained, thrive on vitality and creativity and are organic in nature; they pass the stages of birth, development, fulfillment, decay, and death, and for every high culture, “civilization” is the fulfillment, conclusion, or finale of its goal orientation. But with the onset of the stage of civilization, the culture starts decaying as its creative potential has been played out and now results in decadence and ossification.

By seeing civilizations as incommensurable units, Spengler avoided imposing a Western, “Faustian,” linear notion of historical time upon other cultures. Rather than creating a narrative that ties all cultures together into a single causal explanation of the course of history, he emphasized something “that has never before been established: that man is not only historyless before the birth of the Culture, but again becomes so as soon as a Civilization has worked itself out fully to the definite form which betokens the end of the living development of the Culture and the exhaustion of the last potentialities of

12 Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, 57–124 (Cambridge, 1997).

its significant existence.”<sup>13</sup> Once the soul of a culture dies out, its population becomes invisible on the stage of world history, fighting perhaps for power, but no longer for greater ideas. Spengler thus effectively defined world history in terms of great cultures and their interrelationships. By doing so, he challenged the Eurocentrism of the West and of its historical understanding, in which the West had given itself a privileged position as the bearer of civilization and understood this in terms of moral, technological, or other forms of advancement.

But Spengler went even further when he stated that this historicist self-understanding was an indicator of the decline of Faustian culture. The rigid state of civilization had been reached, as belief in progress, technology, and mechanics ruled, and classical ideas of Faustian culture, such as nobility, religion, art, and honor had lost their relevance. In this light, historicism can be read as a characteristic of the decline of a Faustian culture that reads itself not in terms of creative becoming but in terms of having become.<sup>14</sup> However, by radicalizing historicism as a characteristic of Faustian culture, Spengler effectively historicized historicism and did away with its pretense of being able to transcend its historical position in the understanding of remote pasts and cultures. What was left was the task of mapping the morphology of the history of cultures, in analogy to nature, a process in which historical consciousness is itself embedded in Faustian civilization, a destiny it cannot escape. Spengler hinted that his own work — “a comprehensive Physiognomic of all existence, a morphology of becoming for *all* humanity that drives onward to the highest and last ideas; a duty of penetrating the worldfeeling not only of our proper soul but of all souls whatsoever that have contained grand possibilities and have expressed them in the field of actuality as grand Cultures” — was the last great task of Western philosophy, a work that was only comprehensible to the Faustian mind, and as such to be the last and final philosophy of Faustian culture.<sup>15</sup>

### Beyond Nostalgia

Although the conception of history Spengler aired in the *Untergang des Abendlandes* did not offer possibilities for fruitfully establishing utopian expectations for a future Germany, Conservative Revolutionaries got a different message out of the widely read book. First of all, they read it as a diagnosis of a passing age, and understood that building a new culture, which harbors new creative dynamics, should not be based on historicism since historicism was one of the

13 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Complete in One Volume*, Vol. 2: *Perspectives of World-History* (London, 1959), 48.

14 It is important to note that Spengler does not speak of “historicism” but refers to this in terms of what Eduard Meyer called “historical treatment.” *Ibid.*, 47.

15 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Complete in One Volume*, Vol. 1: *Form and Actuality* (London, 1959), 159.

hallmarks of the decaying civilization. And Spengler, while holding on to historical individuality, had taken earlier critiques of historicism's historical relativism to its final conclusion by promoting a morphology of cultures over universal histories.<sup>16</sup>

As Spengler's diagnosis indicated that a lack of vital creativity made the downfall of Western civilization inevitable, the crucial question was how to reinvigorate culture so that the future could become more than the shadow of past glory. This question was urgent for all conservatives, especially for those who rejected the fatalism and determinism inherent in Spengler's conception of history. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, for example, debated Spengler in the *Juni-Klub* in early 1920, and fully agreed with Spengler's rejection of a linear and materialistic conception of history even as he challenged his monadism.<sup>17</sup> Based on this agreement, Moeller advocated a spiral understanding of history in which possibilities for the rejuvenation and regeneration of nations existed.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, he did not refute Spengler's rejection of historicism. Moeller argued that Spengler had written his book during the war in the expectation that Germany would win. The German defeat diminished the expectation that Germany would succumb to Spengler's stage of civilization afterward. Without a homogenous West, there could be no homogenous decline. While acknowledging Spengler's overall morphology, Moeller retained an optimism for the national regeneration of vital young nations such as Germany and Russia, which were not built upon corrupted rational and liberal ideals like the old Western nations, because the outcome of the war had separated them from the fatal destiny of the West.<sup>19</sup> In this vision of rejuvenation, an artificial reenactment or revival of past glories would not suffice, because that would be exactly the type of vainglorious expression of nostalgia that a decaying culture would resort to. This is where the Conservative Revolution parted from nineteenth-century conservatism.

In his well-known book *Das Dritte Reich* (1923), Moeller set out to map the conditions of German national regeneration. Although this book has widely been interpreted in political terms, the overall narrative is one in which he positioned conservatism in Germany's historical culture. The major part of the book is not about the establishment of a Third Reich but contains an exploration of how various political movements corresponded to opposing conceptions of history. Moeller regarded the four most important positions as the

16 Joanne Miyang Cho, "Historicism and Civilizational Discontinuity in Spengler and Troeltsch," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 51, no. 3 (1999): 238–62, here 245.

17 Frits Boterman, *Oswald Spengler en Der Untergang des Abendlandes: cultuurpessimist en politiek activist* (Assen, 1992), 228. "Monadism" in this context refers to the doctrine that Spengler's cultures are self-contained and have implied goal orientations.

18 André Schlüter, *Moeller van den Bruck: Leben und Werk* (Cologne, 2010), 311; Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker* (Munich, 1919).

19 Fritz Richard Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1974), 239.



revolutionary, the liberal, the reactionary, and the conservative, the last of which he considered the most — and indeed only — positive force. The backdrop to his analysis was the question of which conception of history — and thus which political movement — was most apt to take on the national regeneration of Germany in the context of the lost war, the German Revolutions of 1918 and 1919, and the young Weimar Republic.

Moeller argued that a return of the German nation to vitality was to be expected from conservatives, and not from liberals, who — he claimed — blatantly denied the necessity of change and strove to achieve individualist personal gains in the present world. The return to vitality was not to be expected from revolutionaries either, as they held on to the ill-founded belief that the world would forever be governed by their own revolutionary principles. Nor could proper change be expected from the type of conservatives whom he dubbed reactionaries. Reactionaries considered themselves to be conservatives, but they naively clung to the image of the bygone world which they aimed to restore, lumping together what was worth preserving and what was not. The true conservative, however, retained the historicist acknowledgment of the everlasting contingency of history, as he tried to balance a preservation of what was valuable from the past with the acknowledgment that catastrophes and revolutions necessitate change. While the reactionary lost himself in nostalgia, the liberal kept believing that democratic progress continues in spite of war and revolutions, and the revolutionary contended that the world had always been amiss until the moment of his revolution. The conservative, on the other hand, balanced between these views. He acknowledged the fact that the world had gone astray and “seeks to discover where a new beginning may be made.”<sup>20</sup> But the conservative refrained from falling prey to the revolutionary’s hubris and asked himself the question of what was worth conserving. In answering that question, he had to remember what conservatives had forgotten in the course of the nineteenth century, that is, that “a conservative’s function is to create values which are worth conserving.”<sup>21</sup> Retaining what is valuable in the light of necessitated change is thus always a conscious action taken in the present, and it is not the past as such that dictates importance.

But one question remains. Moeller embraced the historicist notion of historical contingency or individuality, and saw the conservative as the mediator between past and present. But does this idea of me-

20 Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (London, 1934), 203.

21 *Ibid.*, 216.

diation not imply that he also embraced the second component of Nowak's definition of historicism, continuity? Would that not make his theory fully historicist? After all, Moeller had rejected Spengler's insistence on discontinuity. In order to answer this question, we must move beyond the focus on the understanding of history within the Conservative Revolution and include an assessment of its understanding of temporality.

### **Eternity and Temporality**

In temporal terms, Moeller's strategy of positioning conservatism vis-a-vis other ideologies relied on tying their ideological outlook to one of the three temporal dimensions of past, present, and future. The reactionary, he argued, was backwards-oriented to the past, and the revolutionary was merely future-oriented to the extent that he denied the relevance of all that came before beyond being a cause for revolution. But in order to imagine such a revolution, the revolutionary relied on the legacy of the liberal, who invented the notion of linear progress that fueled the revolutionary's conception of history. The liberal, in turn was "the reactionary of Yesterday's revolution seeking to enjoy his Today."<sup>22</sup> Mainly linking liberalism to the victorious countries of the First World War, Moeller stressed that they were enjoying the spoils of war in denial of the need for revolutionary change. The liberal had outlived his own revolution and was now seeking to reap its harvest in an individualistic manner. The temporal concerns of the liberal, therefore, were not directed at the past or future but at the present. Moeller positioned the conservative in this field of temporal orientations not by linking him to either of the temporal dimensions, but by linking him to all. In doing so, however, he introduced "eternity" as something that conservatism had "on its side."<sup>23</sup>

While the reactionary saw the world as he had known it, "the conservative sees it as it has been and will always be. He distinguishes the transitory from the eternal. Exactly what has been, can never be again. But what the world has once brought forth she can bring forth again."<sup>24</sup> Moeller here made a distinction between what was worth preserving and what was not: those elements from the past that are eternal in nature and are the result of creative acts that brought what is timeless to temporal form — that is, that exceed themselves — are worth preserving. Whatever is transitory in nature because it is not concerned with eternal principles, but with self-containment and with short-term

22 Ibid., 229.

23 Ibid., 201.

24 Ibid., 181.

interests, is not worth preserving. The act of preserving implies that the choice of what to preserve from the past entirely depends on an agent in the present who chooses what to preserve. When this agent wants to creatively establish a new foundation for society, then the choice of what to preserve must be based on what alluded to eternity in the past. Only then can the past meaningfully inform and inspire the future. This procedure entails a conscious mythification, and, in Moeller's case, led to the utopian postulation of a "Third Reich" based on conservative-revolutionary values and, as such, embodied both Germany's destiny and Europe's salvation.<sup>25</sup> This Germany for him was to be the Germany of "All Time, the Germany of a two-thousand-year past, the Germany of an eternal present which dwells in the spirit, but must be secured in reality and can only so be politically secured."<sup>26</sup>

Eternity is a category crucial to understanding the Conservative Revolution's conceptualization of history, but the concept is surprisingly excluded from the theoretical frameworks present-day scholars of historical culture use.<sup>27</sup> "Eternity" typically has one of two meanings, both of which are derived from and mobilized in different traditions of thought. In the first tradition, which relies on Aristotle's understanding of time as the number of the motion of (celestial) bodies, eternity represents an infinite row of "nows" — that is, eternity is thought of as time with infinite duration. The second, Platonic, definition understands eternity as a mode of being unconditioned by time, and as a timelessness that transcends time. This conception made it possible to imagine God as the timeless and absolute ground or foundation of Being.<sup>28</sup>

The use of the notion of eternity was not unequivocal in the Conservative Revolution. As the concept spread widely in Conservative Revolutionary discourse throughout the 1920s, it became a commonplace that required little conceptual elucidation. The notion was explicitly used to challenge positivist epistemologies that reduced life to objects of cognition, but this did not help to explain or clarify its meaning, either. It is, after all, the very nature of eternity that it is unbound and therefore cannot present itself objectively to cognition.

In his studies of fascist ideology, Roger Griffin calls the tendency to tie references to eternity to future imagination a "palingenetic" vision of a new era. Palingenesis refers to a rebirth, but "not in the sense of restoration of what has been, which is an archetypal conservative utopia, but of a 'new birth' which retains certain eternal principles (e.g. "eternal" Roman, Aryan, or Anglo-Saxon virtues) in a new, modern

25 On the complex conceptual history of Moeller's notion of the "Third Reich," see Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne*, 177–78.

26 Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire*, 264.

27 Grever and Adriaansen, "Historical Culture," 83.

28 Obviously, the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's positions are not this clear-cut, but we will stick to the ideal typical definitions for the sake of clarity. See W. von Leyden, "Time, Number, and Eternity in Plato and Aristotle," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 54 (1964): 35–52, 35, doi:10.2307/2955440.

type of society.”<sup>29</sup> Although Griffin acknowledges that such visions are not bound to specific eras or cultures, he argues that for the study of fascism, the notion offers more clarity than concepts like “apocalyptic” and “millenarian,” the religious dimension of which can easily be misapprehended. It was the combination of palingenetic visions with a racial and organicist ultranationalism that made up the typical “mythic core” of Nazism and fascism.<sup>30</sup> Griffin stresses that there was a kinship between fascists and Conservative Revolutionaries because both shared a core of palingenetic nationalism, and because authors such as Moeller van den Bruck and Ernst Jünger helped to inspire National Socialism.<sup>31</sup>

Michael Seelig advocates an analysis of the Conservative Revolution as a form of “palingenetic and synthesizing ultranationalism,” arguing that it strove for a national rebirth, “the goal of which was not a reactionary return to the past, but a ‘progressive’-modernist journey ‘back to the future,’ in which the contrasts of past and present are dialectically removed.”<sup>32</sup> Although the first part of the sentence is absolutely correct, the latter introduces a Hegelian logic that did not resonate in the Conservative Revolution. The historicist idea of historical individuality was not structurally challenged in the Conservative Revolution, and was — as Osborne argues and as my analysis of Moeller van den Bruck indicates — often used to necessitate a disruptive revolution. It was exactly because of the essential difference between past and present that the need for renewal or revolution was recognized. The idea of morphology prescribed that when social and cultural forms (ranging from customs, art, law, and political organization to religion) had outlived the spirit or ideas that gave rise to them, they became meaningless and needed to either be removed or reinvigorated. The idea of conflating past and present does not make sense in the context of conservative-revolutionary thought. What does make sense is past and present forms existing in their individuality, and being preferably invigorated by eternal values and ideas. One could say that the goal of conservative thought was not a sublimation into the eternal, but an incarnation of the eternal in history. What I mean by this could best be explained with an example of how the past was concretely made relevant to the present in conservative-revolutionary thought.

### The Middle Ages as a Utopian Category

In 1922 the 21-year-old student Paul-Ludwig Landsberg published a booklet called *Die Welt des Mittelalters und wir*.<sup>33</sup> In the book Landsberg

29 Roger Griffin, “The Palingenetic Core of Fascist Ideology,” 2003, <https://www.libraryof-socialscience.com/ideologies/resources/griffin-the-palingenetic-core/>.

30 Roger Griffin, “I Am No Longer Human. I Am a Titan. A God! The Fascist Quest to Regenerate Time,” in *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin*, ed. Matthew Feldman, 3-23 (London, 2008), 13.

31 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), 51.

32 Michael Seelig, “Die ‘Konservative Revolution’ als historische Geisteshaltung und Wissenschaftlicher Analysebe-griff: Vom Nutzen eines Umstrittenen Quellenbegriffs für die Forschung zur Radikalen Rechten in der Weimarer Republik,” *Archiv Für Kulturgeschichte* 98, no. 2 (2017): 381-418, here 418, doi:10.7788/akg-2016-0207.

33 Paul Ludwig Landsberg, *Die Welt des Mittelalters und wir: ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über den Sinn eines Zeitalters* (Bonn, 1923).

presented a cyclical philosophy of history, which argued that the history of the West had developed in three stages: order, habituation, and anarchy. He defined the first stage as the state in which “a part of the objective, divine world order has become a notion and a life form.”<sup>34</sup> In this stage obedience and commitment to God provides a guiding principle in individual and collective life. Historically, Landsberg connected this stage primarily to the Middle Ages, where the world was governed by a divine metaphysical or cosmic order. While flora and fauna served mankind, mankind in turn lived in the social structure of the estates in which each estate had its own purpose and contributed to the common good. God, whose glory was reflected in the world through devotion and obedience, reigned above all things. The stage of habituation, Landsberg held, encompasses the situation in which the social and cultural forms of the old order became ossified and maintained in a state of anxiety, as its original spirit and meaning faded through habituation and customization. Finally, anarchy promised to put an end to society being governed by empty forms from the past. Anarchy stood for an active and creative *Sehnsucht* [longing] to seek and establish a new order. According to Landsberg, this cycle had repeated itself twice in the history of the West. The order of Antiquity resulted in the habituation of old forms in Late Antiquity, which in turn was overhauled in the transition period of anarchy of the Early Middle Ages, to settle in the new order of the High Middle Ages, only to become habitual again in bourgeois modernity, represented in negative counter currents such as the Reformation, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, socialism and liberalism.<sup>35</sup>

To Landsberg his own era represented the anarchy-seeking new order, and he presented his book as an attempt to achieve that order. In terms of content, his argument entailed a revision of Jacob Burckhardt’s famous thesis that the Renaissance had laid the foundations of modernity, as it emancipated the individual from both the bonds of family and community and from the authority of faith.<sup>36</sup> Landsberg saw the burgeoning modernity not as representing the rise of individualism but the demise of what he called the “ordo-consciousness” — the consciousness of all phenomena representing universal order — of the High Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> Thus, he situated the turning point in fourteenth-century nominalism rather than the Renaissance. The nominalist victory over scholastic realism, he held, was the first sign of the demise of ordo-consciousness in favor of a modern worldview that upheld the old institutions but no longer believed in the cosmology that installed them: metaphysics was traded for epistemology,

34 Ibid., 114.

35 Ibid.

36 Robert-Jan Adriaansen, *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900–1933* (New York, 2015), 136.

37 Otto Gerhard Oexle, “German Malaise of Modernity: Ernst H. Kantorowicz and His ‘Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite,’” in *Ernst Kantorowicz*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Johannes Fried, 33–56 (Stuttgart, 1997), 40.

being was traded for thought, and eternity was traded for temporality. Consequently, universality could only be conceived of inadequately in modernity as a generalization of individualities, and eternity only as a derivate of temporality.

Landsberg's answer — much like Moeller van den Bruck's — did not entail a revival of medieval metaphysics — this he deemed an impossible task. But he thought the Middle Ages could function as an *exemplum* for the present. "We can only learn from another era," Landsberg noted, "where it is more than itself, where it protrudes into the eternal."<sup>38</sup> He therefore effectively dehistoricized and mythicized the Middle Ages to the extent that they lost the connotation of being a historical era and became a "possibility of being" that appeared most vividly during the historical High Middle Ages but would always be potentially present.<sup>39</sup> In this way, Landsberg attacked the historicist understanding of the remoteness and otherness of the past, because as a "possibility of being" the "Middle Ages" was always awaiting realization in a new era in which the nominalist tendencies towards individuation that also guided historicism would be overcome. In such an era, he argued, the question of Being instead of becoming would be the guiding principle — was it not in the tradition of medieval mysticism that the eternal God was the ground of Being? — and any form of historicist and rationalist thought would be replaced by "medieval" cosmology. Landsberg called this dawn of a new order the "Conservative Revolution" or the "revolution of the eternal." It was a "becoming and already being in the present hour."<sup>40</sup>

There is no Hegelian sublimation of two opposing positions here; there is no spirit that is essentially absolute and eternal and manifests itself in and as History in a process of self-realization. There are simply dispositions — a timeless absolute one and a temporal human one — that can be attuned or choose not to be. Redemption, Landsberg maintained, was not to come from the absolute that would then need anthropomorphisms to become imaginable, but mankind could redeem itself through a change in dispositions that would repair the broken unity of "form" and "life." In modernity, life and form had become antithetical, as the order of forms had become habitual and life appeared as anarchy, because forms no longer expressed life.<sup>41</sup> The task for the future was to create new forms drawn from life, from inner experience, which could thus contribute to a new order. The historical Middle Ages were proof that

38 Landsberg, *Die Welt des Mittelalters und wir*, 12.

39 *Ibid.*, 7.

40 *Ibid.*, 112.

41 *Ibid.*

this had been possible in that historical context, and could as such be a source of inspiration for establishing new forms of order in the context of post-World War I Germany.

To Landsberg, the dehistoricized Middle Ages were a utopian category, not because the era projected a certain historical golden age onto the future to be realized but because it encouraged that what is eternal be brought to form in that particular historical context, which the High Middle Ages allegedly succeeded in achieving. Modernity, however, by definition could not understand this because it tried to grasp eternity from the temporal and not the other way around. This process of bringing eternity to form, Landsberg averred, should be repeated over and over again as times change, and whenever this vitality is absent the danger of habituation lurks.

This attitude to the Middle Ages was widespread in the Conservative Revolution. The period became one of the focal points of utopian imagination in the Bündische Jugend, the “free” youth movement of the 1920s and early 1930s that comprised many Wandervogel and scouting organizations.<sup>42</sup> It spurred the Wandervogel Annemarie Wächter to write in a letter that one’s task as a human, and the task of all mankind, was to shape one’s life in harmony with the inner forces of life. For that reason she hiked to Gothic cathedrals to sense the medieval spirit of community. In Gothic altarpieces she experienced the essence of art, that is, the art of symbolically expressing inner powers. Consequently, she argued, the youth movement felt drawn to the medieval Gothic. A sensibility that “rose from the longing to flee the utilitarian, earthly life and discover again the powers in man that are beyond the rational.”<sup>43</sup> In the same vein, the Conservative Revolutionary publicist Edgar Julius Jung emphasized that “form and formlessness are two eternal social principles”, and whereas historical appearances continuously change, the ordering principles remain the same. “Therefore, if we connect to the Middle Ages and see the great form there, we not only explore the present, but see it as more real than those who cannot look behind the scenes.”<sup>44</sup> This is not a backward-looking Romanticism, but an acknowledgment of the metaphysical principles that govern life and history, and which contemporary society should again express in its culture and social organization: “We see the world as it is because not only are we of *this* world, but also because we sense the metaphysical and the cosmic laws in ourselves. Therefore, our hour has come: the hour of the German revolution.”<sup>45</sup>

42 Adriaansen, *The Rhythm of Eternity*, 119–57.

43 Annemarie Wachter, *Anni: Letters and Writings of Annemarie Wachter* (Rifton, NY, 2010), 26.

44 Edgar J. Jung, “Deutschland und die konservative Revolution,” in *Deutsche über Deutschland*, 369–83 (Munich, 1932), 383.

45 *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

To assess the Conservative Revolution's utopianism, we must part from the general assumption that utopias are attainable or unattainable ideal societies that individuals, groups, or societies wish to realize in the future. Such conceptualizations of utopia are themselves the product of a modern conception of history and, by definition, rule out the possibility that the Conservative Revolution's imagination of the future had utopian content, exactly because it challenged the linear premises on which that concept of utopia relies. Reinhart Koselleck explains that the concept of utopia lost its spatial association in favor of a temporal one under the influence of the rise of modern historical consciousness with the onset of modernity. A utopia was no longer imagined as a remote place, but as a remote future. He also stresses that Conservative Revolutionary Carl Schmitt, in his 1917 essay "Die Buribunken," satirized this notion of utopia into a negative utopia by means of which "readers are situated before an alternative that they are scarcely capable of perceiving in the tradition of the historical and progressive view of the world."<sup>46</sup>

In this essay, I have explored this Conservative Revolutionary alternative, but because the "historical and progressive view of the world" still informs contemporary historical scholarship, this means that the difficulties of interpreting the alternative have also affected historiography. When Peter Osborne — building on Jeffrey Herf's notion of "reactionary modernism" — argues that the Conservative Revolution resorted to a thoroughly modern temporal logic in rejecting a "modern" past and present in favor of a radically new future, he displays his own historicism by assuming that Conservative Revolutionaries conceived of the future as a linear extrapolation of the present. The alternative, which perceives past, present, and future in relationship to eternity, is not imaginable in this conception of history. This means that "Conservative Revolution" as a concept only seems oxymoronic to those who keep reading it in a historicist temporal framework. It is this framework that dictates conservatism's implied turn to the past and revolution's orientation toward the future. Within this framework, Landsberg's "revolution of the eternal" could then only be seen as a "misrepresentation," as Osborne calls it.<sup>47</sup>

To avoid these pitfalls, a more existential understanding of utopia could be helpful. For Paul Tillich, for example, utopias are rooted in the structure of being, as people are continuously projecting themselves in time. Such an approach challenges the widely held

46 Reinhart Koselleck, "The Temporalization of Utopia," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck 84–99 (Stanford, 2002), here 98.

47 Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 167.



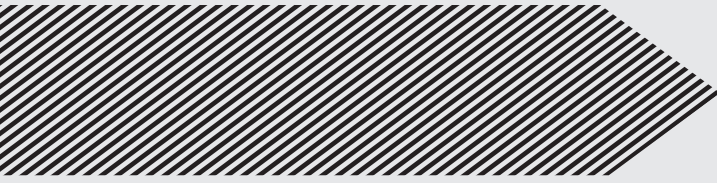
assumption that utopianism is the property of the revolutionary left and the apparent paradox of Conservative Revolutionary thinking. It opens up the analysis of the utopianism of movements of societies that think unhistorically (not ahistorically!), which rely on “a comprehension of history which is born out of something else than history, and which consequently attributes no self-reliance, no autonomy to history. This comprehension makes history reliant on other forces and thereby dissolves it.”<sup>48</sup> Such utopias rely on different conceptions of history, on different configurations of time, and may well give priority to the spatial over the temporal imagination. In this way, the Conservative Revolution’s utopianism as the spatial realization of the eternal in social, political, and cultural forms makes up the core of its paligenetic vision.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich, “Die politische Bedeutung der Utopie im Leben der Völker,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 6, ed. Renate Albrecht, 157–210 (Stuttgart, 1963), 173.

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# **Ideologies and Practices**



## KIBBUTZ AS UTOPIA: SOCIAL SUCCESS AND POLITICAL FAILURE

**Aviva Halamish**

The kibbutz, a collective Jewish settlement in pre-state Palestine and then in Israel, is the longest-lasting experiment in building and maintaining a utopian society in modern times. The first kibbutz was founded in Ottoman-ruled Palestine prior to World War I by a handful of young Jewish men and women who had immigrated to the country not too long before. Later on, more and more kibbutzim (the Hebrew plural of kibbutz) were founded, and in the late 1920s they grouped into three countrywide kibbutz movements affiliated with socialist-Zionist parties and were part of the Jewish Labor Movement in Palestine.<sup>1</sup> In 1948, when the State of Israel was founded, about 45,000 people lived in kibbutzim, constituting almost 7.5 percent of the young state's Jewish population. At present (2018) about 171,000 people (around 2 percent of the state's population) are living in 265 kibbutzim.<sup>2</sup> Up to a certain point, and no doubt until the establishment of Israel, the kibbutz's share in the Zionist enterprise greatly exceeded its demographic size (in both absolute and relative terms).<sup>3</sup> In the last three decades, most kibbutzim have undergone some major transformations, falling generally under the term of privatization, in an effort to adapt to changes in the world around them and to find answers to undercurrents from within.

This essay deals mainly with traditional kibbutz as it existed until the economic crisis of the mid-1980s. It covers a period of about three-quarters of the twentieth century, during which kibbutz maintained most of its original features, commonly regarded as utopian. This essay argues that the kibbutz, indeed, succeeded in establishing and maintaining a society with utopian components, but the story is quite different when viewed from a political perspective and analyzed in political terms. The kibbutz, which was part of the socialist wing of the Zionist movement, did not succeed in constituting an avant-garde for creating a new Jewish society in Palestine functioning according to its utopian ideals, and never evolved into a substantial political power in Israel. In other words, the success of the kibbutz as utopia was confined to the social sphere only, and not to the political one; and their social achievements were limited almost exclusively to the kibbutzim themselves, only partially and indirectly spreading out into the society at large.

1 A fourth kibbutz movement centers around a religious way of life and political affiliation and will not be dealt with in this essay, because the religious factor requires further elaboration than the present discussion would allow. For a short discussion of this matter, see Ran Abramitzky, *The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist World* (Princeton and London, 2018), 280-81. This book, focusing on the economic aspects of the kibbutz with traces of personal and familial experience, was published during the last stages of working on this essay.

2 There are no exact data concerning the number of members of kibbutzim at present because it is not easy to ascertain various residents' status within them; there is some fluidity between one status and another.

3 For a comprehensive history of the kibbutz, see Henry Near, *The Kibbutz Movement, A History* (Oxford, vol. 1, 1992; vol. 2, 1997).

## The Traditional Kibbutz as a Utopian Society

Leading publications dealing with the kibbutz point to its utopian aspects and actually all writings about the kibbutz in historical and social perspectives relate to utopia as one of its basic characteristics. Many publications written about the kibbutz deal with its utopian features explicitly by including the word “utopia” in the title (the list here includes only titles published in English; there are, of course, many more written in Hebrew). Martin Buber devoted the epilogue of his book *Paths in Utopia* to the kibbutz, calling it “the experiment that did not fail.”<sup>4</sup> A book published in the mid-1950s is titled: *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia*;<sup>5</sup> and a chapter in a book about the kibbutz is titled “From Utopia toward Modernization.”<sup>6</sup> A recently published biography of one of the kibbutz movement’s leaders is titled: *Kibbutz: Utopia and Politics*,<sup>7</sup> and the title of one of the best known books about the kibbutz, *The Children of the Dream*, evidently alludes to the utopian nature of the kibbutz.<sup>8</sup>

Books published in the twenty-first century, such as *The Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia*,<sup>9</sup> and *The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia*,<sup>10</sup> deal with the utopian characteristics of the kibbutz as a matter of the past, in contradistinction to the present. But there are those who find the utopian aspects of the kibbutz still relevant in the present as well as for the future, such as *Lessons from the Kibbutz as a Real Utopia*.<sup>11</sup>

Kibbutz founders sought to create a new type of society where all would be equal, and to foster a new human being who conformed to utopian ideals. Like other communes with a utopian orientation, the kibbutz was comprised of a group of people wishing to live in a society based on equality and cooperation. For about eight decades, they and their followers invented, developed, and maintained a unique way of life, which was comprised of a total social framework, encompassing all spheres of human society — economic, social and cultural. There were several principles guiding the construction of this framework, the most fundamental one being total, absolute equality among all members. The kibbutz fully and strictly implemented the rule “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” which eliminated the link between contribution and remuneration. Other practices of kibbutz life included communal ownership of the means of production, the abolition of private property and a wage system, self-sufficiency, freedom from exploitation and rejection of exploiting others, the primacy of the group over individual

4 Martin Buber, “Epilogue — an Experiment That Did Not Fail,” *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse, 1996), 139-50. First published in Hebrew in 1946; first published in English in 1949.

5 Spiro Melford, *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia* (Cambridge, MA, 1956).

6 Paula Rayman, *The Kibbutz Community and Nation Building* (Princeton, 1981), 250-271.

7 Aviva Halalmish, *Kibbutz: Utopia and Politics: The Life and Times of Meir Yaari 1897-1987* (Boston, 2017).

8 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Children of the Dream* (London & New York, 1969).

9 Daniel Gavron, *The Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia* (Lanham, MD, 2000).

10 Uri Zilbersheid, *The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia*, <https://libcom.org/library/israeli-kibbutz-utopia-dystopia-uri-zilbersheid>.

11 Uriel Leviatan, *Lessons from the Kibbutz as a Real Utopia*, <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ASA/Leviatan%20-%20lessons%20from%20the%20kibbutz%20as%20real%20utopia.pdf>.

interests, and communal child rearing, involving the separation of children and parents for most hours of the day and the entire night (with some exceptions).<sup>12</sup> The kibbutz was run as a comprehensive and direct democracy, and all along people joined kibbutzim of their own free will, without any coercion.

Studies of the changes that took place in the kibbutz since the mid-1980s further illuminate some of the utopian features of the traditional kibbutz, suggesting that its utopian features — such as equality, solidarity, democracy, fraternity among members, and concern for the well-being of individual members — eroded over time, so that, as communities, they have become much more similar to the outside world.

In its early years, the kibbutz vacillated between constituting a small, intimate, homogeneous, and selective commune living according to utopian ideals, a group whose intrinsic fraternity was both the goal and a way of life; and being a large, open and ever-growing collective, intended mainly to be a tool for achieving national and social aims. The small, intimate, and homogeneous kibbutz (the Hebrew term for this kind of kibbutz is *kevtzah*, which literally means “a group”) was a product of the Second Aliyah, a wave of Jewish immigrants to Palestine in the decade prior to World War I. The large and ever-growing kibbutz, which developed in the 1920s, had, of course, larger memberships and were willing to accept all newcomers, regardless of their background. In the later 1920s, a third type of Kibbutz emerged synthesizing the features of the initial two. This type was neither a small and intimate group, a secluded and isolated unit, focused on developing its own internal solidarity like the *kevtzah*, nor was it a large kibbutz aiming primarily to achieve national goals. Each kibbutz of the third type was small enough to preserve its intimate atmosphere, but, at the same time, large and robust enough to dispatch members to fulfill tasks in the outside world. This type of kibbutz incorporated revolutionary Marxism into its ideology, a matter to be further discussed below.

### **The Kibbutz as Part of the Jewish National Liberation Movement (Zionism)**

The initial push for the establishment of kibbutzim was the failure of Jewish workers to compete with much cheaper Arab labor, and their understanding that they were unable to make a living as agricultural wage workers. The founders of the first kibbutzim were young men

<sup>12</sup> See Ora Aviezer, Marinus H. Van IJzendoorn, Abraham Sagi, and Carlo Scüngel, “‘Children of the Dream’ Revisited: 70 Years of Collective Early Child Care in Israeli Kibbutzim,” *Psychological Bulletin* 116, no. 1 (1994): 99-116.

and women who originally wished to lay the foundations for a Jewish proletarian working class in Palestine. Facing the hardships of the local labor market, they soon became disillusioned. Instead, they established communal agricultural settlements, financially assisted by the Zionist Organization, a world-wide organization founded in 1897 aiming at establishing for the Jewish people a legally assured home in Palestine; and one of the means for the attainment of this purpose was the promotion of the settlement of Jewish agriculturists [farmers] in Palestine.

In the early years of the British rule in Palestine, which lasted from late 1917 to mid-1948, a sort of alliance was contracted between the Zionist Organization and the socialist Zionist movements. The Zionist Organization purchased the land and laid the infrastructure for future agricultural settlements, while the labor parties supplied the human resources — young graduates of their respective pioneering youth movements, most of whom came as immigrants from Eastern Europe and shouldered the mission of building the Jewish national home in Palestine.

Obviously, this alliance produced a mutual dependence. The kibbutz depended on national funds, and the Zionist movement relied largely on the kibbutz in matters of immigration absorption, establishing agricultural settlements and securing the Zionist enterprise in various military forms. In short, the kibbutz was an arm of a national liberation movement in a period of crisis, a period of national emergency, namely, the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Europe and the intensifying struggle between Jews and Arabs over Palestine.

From the very beginning, kibbutz ideology fused Zionism and socialism, although Zionism and its goals clearly and unequivocally took precedence. The emergence and durability of the kibbutz are actually unimaginable without the Zionist component: it comprised a part of a national liberation movement, whose values and objectives it shared, and it played an active part in efforts to realize them. The other side of the coin is the dependence of the kibbutz on the financial support of the Zionist Organization and of the Israeli government; the kibbutz could have not survived during the British Mandate period, and well into Israeli statehood, without external financial support.

At the beginning of the mandate period, the Zionist labor parties toyed with the idea of having the Jewish National Home in Palestine built exclusively with the means available to the Zionist Organization



and other public funds, with no need to rely on private capital. This delusion rested on the concept of a fundamental contradiction between Zionism and capitalism, since capitalists sought quick profits and, therefore, preferred to employ Arab laborers who were willing to accept lower wages than Jewish workers. The hope, or rather the wishful thinking, of building the Jewish national home with national and public funds was reinforced by the rising optimism in the early years of the mandate period, ignited by the Balfour Declaration (November 1917) regarding the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. The Zionists assumed that the Jewish people would rally to the cause and contribute vast sums to build the Jewish National Home. However, this hope dissipated quickly. The Zionist Organization expected to raise millions of pounds every year, but actually collected only a meager amount. Consequently, the Twelfth Zionist Congress (1921) decided that it was necessary to invest both national funds and private capital in building the Jewish National Home. Then, in 1924, the Fourth Aliya (a wave of Jewish immigrants in the years 1924-1926) threatened to undermine another basic assumption of the labor camp — the belief that the new Jewish society in Palestine would be built from the ground up as a classless proletarian society, skipping over the stages of capitalism, class warfare, and revolution. This formula (not to say ideology), labeled “constructive socialism,” claimed that there was an innate identification between the interests of the working class and those of the nation as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Another view of the future development of the Jewish society in Palestine, held by a negligible minority of communists who did not share the Zionist ideology, was shaped along the Marxist line of class struggle and eventual revolution. Zionists who adopted the concepts of class struggle and eventual revolution essentially were putting off the carrying out of the socialist revolution until the realization of the national goal. They cast the revolution as a future prospect that did not require present action.<sup>14</sup>

Quite early, it became clear that the Jewish entity in Palestine would not evolve into a countrywide commune consisting of a network of kibbutzim, and would not be a socialist one, but would rather be built along capitalist principles with the kibbutzim reduced to isolated socialist islands in a capitalist sea. Furthermore, from the very beginning it was obvious that the kibbutz was not intended to include all, or even most, of the Jewish working class in Palestine, nor would that have been feasible.

13 David Ben-Gurion published an article along these lines in 1925, under the title “The National Vocation of the Working Class,” *Kuntres* 210 (Mar. 20, 1925). The idea of “constructive socialism” is attributed to Berl Katznelson. See Yosef Gorni, “The Historical Reality of Constructive Socialism,” *Israel Studies* 1, no. 1 (1996): 295-305.

14 See further discussion below in the section “The Kibbutz Artzi as a Test Case of the Contradiction between Utopia and Marxism.”

The kibbutz proved to be instrumental in achieving Zionism's national goals, and there is a wide consensus that its contribution to the establishment, defense, and development of Israel far exceeded its demographic size. The Kibbutz was at its prime during the national emergency period of the Jewish people, which had begun in the late nineteenth century, intensified in the early 1930s, and reached its peak during the Holocaust in the 1940s. At the beginning of the 1950s, after the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine (Israel), the Jewish people and Zionism were no longer enduring a period of national emergency: the very existence of Israel was no longer in jeopardy; and there were no Jewish communities around the world under acute threat or in immediate need of evacuation.

### **The Impact of the Establishment of the State of Israel on the Kibbutz**

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 confronted the kibbutz with highly complex problems, the most fundamental of which derived from the transition from a voluntary society, in which the kibbutz shouldered many national tasks, to a situation where the state took over many of these responsibilities and actually stripped the kibbutz of much of its national *raison d'être*. From being the most important form of agricultural settlement, the Kibbutz became secondary player. Even more crucial was the fact that it no longer absorbed significant numbers of immigrants, assuming a negligible role in this process. Consequently, its social and ideological prestige declined. To make matters worse, many members, both veterans and newcomers, were abandoning the kibbutzim for the cities.

Ever since the State of Israel was established, the kibbutz's demographic share of Israel's population declined continuously, its influence on the society constantly decreased, and its relevance for facing national and social challenges eroded. The root of all these processes lay in the kibbutz's inability to absorb the mass immigration of the early 1950s and beyond. The main reason was demographic. When the tidal wave of immigration began after the establishment of the state (around 700,000 people came within about three and a half years), all the kibbutzim in the country had a total population of less than 50,000; they simply lacked the capacity to absorb hundreds of thousands of newcomers. Moreover, in the early years of statehood, material conditions on the kibbutzim were inferior to those elsewhere in the country. The daily reality on the kibbutzim was backbreaking

toil and scant physical comfort. In 1954, some 40 percent of their members were still living in temporary structures; only 30 percent lived in apartments with attached sanitary facilities.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the two groups — the immigrants and the veteran kibbutz members — were not a good match for each other. Most immigrants were repelled by the kibbutz way of life, which ran counter to their values and aspirations. Few, if any, had a background that prepared them for communal living, and they were not attracted to farming and rural life. Their primary value was their family; they wanted to nurture close family settings. Most immigrants from Muslim countries were religiously observant, to varying degrees, and were put off by the blatant secularism of the kibbutzim.<sup>16</sup> Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe were deterred by what they perceived as a local version of the Soviet *kolkhoz*, a social format that was too rigid for their taste. After many years of hardship and wandering, what the Holocaust survivors wanted to do, more than anything else, was to rebuild their own homes.

The kibbutzim, for their part, were not falling over themselves to take in people they regarded as foreign and alien. Integrating immigrants into a kibbutz is very different from absorbing them into other forms of settlement and is more like admitting strangers into one's family. In the past, the kibbutzim had absorbed newcomers with prior training and socialization in Europe; there was a strong bond and a sense of solidarity between the kibbutz members and the young adults of their movements in the Diaspora, even before the latter arrived in the country. During the post-Independence era of mass immigration, however, the newcomers were older, arrived with families, and had no preparation for kibbutz life.

In the early years of statehood, there were two main lines of thought in the kibbutz movements, regarding the road to be taken under the new circumstances. One line, shared mainly by the leadership strata, advocated that the kibbutz should adhere to its role as the vanguard, the pioneer marching before the camp and leading the country towards its desirable social goals. But most kibbutz members held that the time had come to develop the kibbutz as a home and raise the members' standard of living. They wanted to build their own homes, not only as part of the society at large. After so many years of serving the national collective, they were less willing to sacrifice themselves in the name of national and social goals, if these came at the cost of their own standard of living. This line was clearly expressed by a

15 See Halamish, *Kibbutz*, 290-307.

16 The religious kibbutz movement was tiny, and many of its settlements were immersed in reconstruction after the havoc wreaked by the 1948 war.

kibbutz member in 1949: “For us, the kibbutz is not just a means to achieve national and socialist goals; the kibbutz is also a goal in its own right, to benefit our people and see them happy.”<sup>17</sup> Put simply, rank-and-file kibbutz members wanted to realize the utopian vision at home and were not interested in instilling them in the outside world, since they felt that they had fulfilled their share in this respect once the Jewish state was established.

The tension between these two lines of thought in the early years of statehood was a contemporary expression of a fundamental dilemma that had been with the kibbutz since its inception — namely, the contrast between conceiving of the kibbutz as a means for realizing national and social goals, on the one hand, and viewing it as a commune, a unique human and social milieu with value in its own right, a way of life whose very existence was a goal to be pursued, on the other.

Even after the kibbutz had lost much of its national role, and even though its prestige was diminishing, its members nevertheless continued to nurture its unique way of life and preserve much of its utopian elements as a commune for another forty years. Then, the economic crisis of the mid-1980s initiated a series of drastic changes toward privatization. The kibbutz became more flexible and took steps to adjust to the changing circumstances, among them the “industrial revolution” it began going through in the early 1960s.

### **The Impact of the Transformation from Agrarian to Industrial Economy**

Originally, the kibbutz marked a step in Jews’ return to nature and to toiling the land, as part of realizing the Zionist vision. For many years, the kibbutz economy was based mainly on agriculture, and being a kibbutznik was conceived of as an act of returning to nature and engaging in agricultural work, though kibbutz members never considered themselves “farmers” in the conventional meaning of the term. The romanticization of agrarian life as more egalitarian and natural, and thus more suitable to running a utopian society, runs deep in European history. In this section, we will explore how the industrialization of the kibbutz improved its economic situation and raised the members’ standard of living, but also how this industrialization impacted, sometimes negatively, the utopianism of these egalitarian communes. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, the kibbutz enjoyed economic stability and even prosperity, demographic

17 Sala Altman at the Kibbutz Artzi Council, June 1949, quoted in Halamish, *Kibbutz*, 294.

growth, high life expectancy, lower mortality rates among the older generation, and a greater sense of positive well-being. At the same time, the “industrial revolution” within the kibbutzim introduced managerial practices and job hierarchies into kibbutz life, even before a differential wage system was instituted. Thus, industrialization, with all its economic benefits, had a negative impact too.

In the 1990s, the kibbutz, which had always functioned within a capitalist society, introduced capitalist parameters into its domestic system. During the late twentieth century and early-twenty-first century, some of the basic utopian values of the kibbutz way of life were altered. For instance, the primary principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” was replaced with a mechanism guaranteeing a proper relationship between contribution and benefit. That is, differential salaries and the privatization of public budgets were introduced. Another fundamental change was that communal sleeping arrangements for children were gradually given up, with children sleeping overnight at their parents’ homes instead. The 1991 Gulf War, with its Iraqi missile attacks on Israel, gave this process the final push.

For many decades, the kibbutz has demonstrated an impressive ability to overcome crises and a remarkable talent to adapt and evolve, all attesting to its social success. In fact, one of the secrets of its vitality lies in its ability to expand its economic base and move from agriculture into other commercial branches, such as food processing, furniture manufacture, and plastic products, as well as irrigation systems, electronic equipment and high-tech.

### **The Kibbutz as a Hindrance to the Zionist Left**

The success of the kibbutz as a utopian society was never matched by political success, and it did not succeed in spreading its utopian ideas in the Jewish society in pre-state Palestine. The roots of this discrepancy can be traced to the establishment of communal agricultural settlements that distinguished kibbutz members from the emerging Jewish working class in the country, and excluded them from the class struggle and trade-union activity. Thus, from the very beginning, kibbutz members and the urban working class, the two crucial components of the Israeli working class and the natural base for building a political Zionist left, did not share common class interests. After 1948, the kibbutz lost much of its national significance, becoming marginal factor in both the wider social and political spheres. It did

not become a major political force and, in many respects, it turned into an interest group endeavoring to protect its privileges. This critical analysis gives rise to the hypothesis that the kibbutz was not an asset but rather a hindrance in the emergence and development of the Zionist left. This interpretation further supports the contention that the kibbutz was a political failure.

How do we determine what should be considered a success or failure? The basic formula is to evaluate the results in relation to the goals, while taking the costs into account. The results are clear: the kibbutz, as a socialist wing of the Zionist movement, did not manage to constitute a political force strong enough to shape Jewish society in Palestine and the State of Israel, in light of its utopian ideals. In fact, the kibbutz neither intended, nor even tried, to achieve these political goals and made do with realizing its utopian vision at home.

Yet from a more general perspective, and considering the negative impact that the kibbutz's political weakness had on its own fate, the bottom line is indeed that it was a political failure. It was manifested in the 1977 political upheaval in Israel with the takeover of the right wing, a situation that further weakened the kibbutz's political influence, and consequently aggravated its economic condition and contributed to the mid-1980s economic crisis.

### **The Kibbutz Artzi as a Test Case of the Contradiction between Utopia and Marxism**

Though the kibbutz is considered the ultimate example of utopian socialism, employing Marxist analytical tools in the study of the kibbutz reveals an inherent contradiction between its utopian characteristics and Marxist socialism. Marx viewed small agrarian communities as petite-bourgeois forms of utopian socialism because, in his view, they diverted revolutionary energy from the political and trade-union struggle that must be conducted in a country's centers of political power and industry; he saw them as "castles in the air."<sup>18</sup> In fact, the utopian features of the kibbutz, its existence as a rural community, based on agriculture, and its place in a national liberation movement containing elements of romanticism, made it a non-Marxist, and even anti-Marxist, socialist enterprise. Nonetheless, two of the kibbutz movements incorporated Marxism into their ideology; and one of them even embraced revolutionary Marxism.

18 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Marx, Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London, 1976), 516, quoted in Yiftah Goldman, *Kibbutz*, [https://ygoldman.org/?p=133#\\_edn4](https://ygoldman.org/?p=133#_edn4).

What follows is a short exercise in looking at this particular kibbutz movement, the Kibbutz Artzi, as a case study of (a) the political failure of the kibbutz as a utopia; (b) the inherent contradiction between utopia and revolutionary Marxism; (c) the contradiction between the kibbutz's constructive mission, of building a socialist society from the start, and the class struggle and revolutionary vision of Marxism.

The Kibbutz Artzi was a total social framework, even more so than the other kibbutz movements, since, in addition to encompassing social, economic, and cultural dimensions, it was the only kibbutz movement that established a political party of its own, a party which all kibbutz members had to join. According to its platform (1927), Kibbutz Artzi would consist of pioneer cells of the new society, as a constructive tool of the Jewish working class, and a mainstay of the class war. The Kibbutz Artzi considered its settlements a model or prototype for the future society — cells that would spread those ideals all over the country and eventually build a new society based on the kibbutz's utopian principles.

But this was all on the declarative level and contained an a priori contradiction between the introversion and individualism of the kibbutz members and the revolutionary temperament. It soon became evident that the Marxist theory of class struggle and an eventual proletariat revolution did not conform to the humanistic mentality and the type of education the members of that kibbutz movement had acquired through their youth movement, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir (The Young Guard). The attempt at combining utopian ideas and revolutionary Marxism not only created an inherent ideological contradiction and proved to be futile but also inflicted social conflicts and crises in some of the kibbutzim of that movement, leading to the expulsion of members who were too devoted to revolutionary Marxism. In the long run, Kibbutz Artzi went through the same changes experienced by the other kibbutz movements.

### **A Cautious Look at the Crystal Ball**

In spite of all the changes kibbutz went through around the turn of the century, in 2018, it still forms a dynamic living community that is economically self-sustaining and even prosperous. After years of negative demographic growth, the waiting lists for joining kibbutzim far exceed available housing facilities.

About three dozen kibbutzim are still intentionally “traditional” in their social structure and preserve many principles of equality and collectivism. These kibbutzim have been organized into an association called the “communal stream.” It is interesting to note that the highest degree of utopianism is retained in the most affluent kibbutzim, and that most of the communal kibbutzim are relatively well-off economically. It conforms to the unwritten rule that utopian ideas, primarily full equality, are easier to achieve at times of scarcity (when all have very little) or prosperity (when it is possible to satisfy all). The most difficult test of a utopian commune comes when the economic situation forces members to make decisions about priorities.

Recent years have also witnessed the rise of new types of kibbutzim that are located in cities and towns. One of the new types of kibbutz is that of “the Educators Movement,” an ideological movement composed of young individuals who live (mostly) in city communes. They are firmly committed to traditional kibbutz ideology and see their mission as being educators in Israel and a task force for changing society by means of educational and political activity. They insist on preserving their own frameworks and refuse to join existing kibbutzim, but they lack the means for stable economic survival on their own. The existence side-by-side of communes motivated by ideology and committed to social and even political activity in Israeli society, but which lack a stable economic base; and of economically-established kibbutzim devoid of clear ideological commitment and refraining from party-oriented political activity, is yet another illustration of the main contention of this essay.

Most contemporary kibbutzim do not live up to the ideals of the traditional kibbutz, but even those that have undergone various degrees of privatization preserve a high level of social solidarity and maintain elaborated systems of mutual responsibility in matters of health, education, and welfare. They have also introduced what is termed a “safety net” for securing a decent standard of living for the less affluent members. The privatized kibbutzim might even be regarded as living utopias when compared to the surrounding society. It is an open question whether those who choose to join a kibbutz, or to stay there, really wish to realize utopian ideas or are pushed by the harsh and competitive reality in Israel and are attracted by the suburban lifestyle: a small house with a piece of land and a garden, a wonderful place to raise children, etc. Still, one cannot ignore that the wish for communal life with a certain degree of social solidarity and mutual responsibility likely still plays a role.



The state of the kibbutz today proves the contention that, all along, it has evolved and developed more due to circumstances than ideology, with the proportion between the two perpetually changing. The kibbutz movement is still involved in social activity beyond the fences of its settlements out of the conviction that such work is part of its national *raison d'être*. The source for these kinds of activity is more related to human and national solidarity than to political orientation and motivation.

### Conclusions

Some of the utopian aspirations of the kibbutz seem to be incompatible with human nature, and even to transcend the limitations of human nature, almost verging on pretension or hubris. Among these, those that stand out the most are the communal education and the abolition of private property. The constraints that some utopian principles of the kibbutz put on its members were bearable during the national emergency period and continued to exist on account of inertia and the organizational power of the leadership for about forty more years, until dissatisfaction accumulated and changes continued, which combined with the economic crisis of the mid-1980s shattered all spheres of kibbutz life. It became evident that what might work under emergency circumstances failed to hold up in a “normal” situation.

The kibbutz, which was basically the product of circumstance, managed to exist as utopian society by being part of a national liberation movement — Zionism. It maintained its utopian character as long as it was a mission-oriented society; and even today, to some extent, it is motivated by a conviction that it does have a social and human mission to accomplish. On the other hand, even when the utopian principles of the kibbutz were strictly implemented in the social sphere, and in the kibbutz itself, the kibbutz did not become a crucial political factor, and to the extent that it contributed to society at large, it was mainly in the national sphere and not the social one.

When the kibbutz celebrated its centennial, a volume of articles was published under the title *The Kibbutz — The First Hundred Years*, implicitly emphasizing the word “first.”<sup>19</sup> Offering a multi-dimensional observation of the past and the present of the kibbutz, the articles present it as a vibrant and vital society, constantly seeking to maintain a communal way of life in ever changing circumstances. Nowadays, there is a wide spectrum of kibbutz types, adjusted by way of trial

<sup>19</sup> Aviva Haramish and Zvi Zameret, eds., *Ha-Kibbutz: Me'a ha-Shanim ha-Rishonot* [The Kibbutz: The First Hundred Years] (Jerusalem, 2010).

and error to the complex reality of the twenty-first century. The common denominator of these is mutual responsibility and a sense of social and fraternal solidarity among the members. The spirit of that volume of articles reinforces the conclusions of the discussion above, that reports of the kibbutz's death are greatly exaggerated and extremely premature.

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## NETWORKS: ON THE UTOPIAN QUALITIES OF TECHNOLOGY, CYBERNETICS, AND PARTICIPATION IN THE GDR OF THE LATE 1960S

Oliver Sukrow

The Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory investigates the laws, principles, methods, and models valid in all areas of the developed Socialist system for the rational organization of systems and the processes of planning and management that take place in them and between them with the aim of achieving the highest effectiveness of the systems.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: Towards the Future? Computer, Science, and Socialism

Nearly fifty years ago, on October 7, 1969, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) celebrated its twentieth anniversary. Art exhibitions in every “Bezirkshauptstadt” (district capital), political demonstrations, concerts, and festivals in the capital of Berlin were intended to generate an optimistic atmosphere. While the state Socialist Unity Party (SED) looked back at twenty years of existence, the perspective into the future was described in the brightest colors: “The GDR — that is the modern, Socialist German state that owns the future.”<sup>2</sup> Tirelessly, the leadership of the SED under Walter Ulbricht promoted the idea that the transformation of the Socialist system towards Communism would be achieved under its rule. In this deterministic conception, science played a key role: With the help of science, the future could be forecasted accurately and with certainty.<sup>3</sup> An important part of the larger frame of the festivities around the twentieth anniversary, now mostly forgotten, was the grand opening of a campus for computer training and education in Wuhlheide, in the eastern outskirts of Berlin. Here, in the middle of the woods, plans were made for the utopia of a highly developed, technologically advanced, and modern Socialism within an architectural and artistic environment.<sup>4</sup>

This essay explores this particular scientific utopia in the GDR in the late 1960s — the Academy of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory (AMLO) — which, while not a fictional utopia, was still part of an imagined utopia of modern Socialism. I will argue that the architectural plan and the exhibition design of the AMLO were based on the principles of Socialist management theory and cybernetics.

- 1 Bundesarchiv (BArch), DY 30-IV A 2/9.09/92, Parteihochschule “Karl Marx” beim ZK der SED, Forschungen zur Arbeitsorganisation, Ergebnisse der Forschungsarbeit der Parteihochschule, Bd. 5, Oktober-Dezember 1970, Studie: “Die marxistisch-leninistische Organisationswissenschaft und einige Probleme ihrer Anwendung in der wissenschaftlichen Führungstätigkeit der Partei,” 113 pages, 22.
- 2 Walter Ulbricht, “Bilanz und Ausblick am 20. Jahrestag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 7, 1969, 4.
- 3 See, e.g., Elke Seefried, *Zukünfte. Aufstieg und Krise der Zukunftsforschung 1945-1980* (Berlin, Boston, 2015).
- 4 This essay is adapted with permission from my book, *Arbeit. Wohnen. Computer. Zur Utopie in der bildenden Kunst und Architektur der DDR in den 1960er Jahren*, which was published by Heidelberg University Publishing in 2018. See: <https://doi.org/10.17885/heup.422.613>.



**Richard Paulick, AMLO, Berlin-Wuhlheide, main entrance with the relief by Willi Neubert, view from the southeast, ca. 1969, Architekturmuseum der TU München. Used with permission.**

This “future place,”<sup>5</sup> which only existed until 1972, can be read as a synthesis of intellectual and scientific history, political theory, visual arts, and architecture. It will be shown that the ideas which led to the design of this site for planning the Socialist utopia were at the same time driving forces of modernization and emancipation as well as of political oppression and ideological limitations. Seen in the global context of high modernity after World War II, the AMLO represented one peak of cybernetic thinking around the world.<sup>6</sup> However, whereas Western democracies laid the groundwork for the computer or information age of today in the 1960s,<sup>7</sup> conditions within Socialist dictatorships actually hindered the evolution of these ideas in later decades.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, this essay presents a case study of the conflict of two ideas about the computer as a “liberty tool” and a machine of oppression.<sup>9</sup>

Recent research on the history of the computer in the decades after World War II — which the tech-philosopher Claus Pias has described as the “archaeology of our present”<sup>10</sup> because of the ongoing influences of developments of the 1950s and 1960s on our digitized society — has shown the importance of an interdisciplinary approach and the need to include socio historical, technology focused, and cultural-based approaches for a more wholistic understanding. Therefore, I structure this essay in the following way. Taking the 1969 GDR movie *Netzwerk* [Network] as an example, I discuss the

5 Martin Schulze Wessel, “Zukunftsentwürfe und Planungspraktiken in der Sowjetunion und der sozialistischen Tschechoslowakei: Zur Einleitung,” in *Zukunftsvorstellungen und staatliche Planung im Sozialismus. Die Tschechoslowakei im ostmitteleuropäischen Kontext 1945-1989*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel and Christiane Brenner, 1-18 (Munich, 2010), 14.

6 *Cybernetics: The Macy Conferences 1946-1953*, ed. Claus Pias (Zurich, Berlin, 2003-2004).

7 See, e.g., Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago, 2008).

8 See Benjamin Peters, *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

9 See, e.g., Oliver Sukrow, “Designing

Freedom’ — der Computer zwischen ‘Freiheitsmaschine’ und Kontrollapparat im globalen Kontext der 68er,” in *Flashes of the Future. Die Kunst der 68er oder Die Macht der Ohnmächtigen*,

ed. Andreas Beitin and Eckhart Gillen, 410-23 (Bonn, 2018).

10 Claus Pias, “Vorwort,” in *Zukünfte des Computers*, 7-16 (Zurich, Berlin, 2005), 7.

ways in which social and ideological conflicts of modernization and automatization were negotiated in the visual arts. By analyzing the history and usage of the AMLO, I show, in the essay's second part, the strong entanglements of architecture, design, and cybernetic thinking in the late 1960s. Supporting an argument that Emily Thompson and Peter Galison already brought into the debate in the late 1990s,<sup>11</sup> I argue that the production of science and knowledge has a distinctive space and that the analysis of such spaces is important for the understanding of scientific discourse. In the third and last part of my essay, I introduce briefly the concept of a Socialist exhibition theory that would have allowed the visitors of the AMLO to deal with machines in a new way, creating an experimental and, at the same time, limited environment of human-machine interaction. I conclude with a summary of — and outlook on — the concept of historical utopias from a cultural historical viewpoint, wherein the “fulfillment” of a plan in the future was the goal.<sup>12</sup>

### Depicting Socialist Modernity: The Movie *Netzwerk* (1969)

An example of how this cybernetic future in the GDR was envisioned through culture is the DEFA movie *Netzwerk* [Network] (director: Ralf Kirsten; script: Eberhard Panitz). The film addresses questions such as what the future of work will look like, as well as how new technologies influence the ways we work and what effects automatization and efficient control have on both an individual and societal level. Based on Panitz's semi-fictional, semi-documentary novel *Der siebente Sommer: Schwedt 1966. Porträts, Skizzen, Dialoge* (1967);<sup>13</sup> the movie problematizes the phenomenon of workers being confronted both with progress in science and technology and with the challenges and difficulties they present. This confrontation is visualized in the drama through different characters and roles. It is seen most clearly in the dichotomy between an older worker named “Ragosch,” who has a lot of experience in the factory, on one side, and “Hans,” on the other, a younger engineer fresh from university and secretary of the SED in the factory. Even though the movie's narrative explores situations of conflict, it stays within the political and aesthetic conventions of official film production at that time: The film ends with an optimistic outlook, that is, the viewer receives the positive message that all the struggles of the “scientific-technical revolution” will and can be solved under the ideological leadership of the SED.

Following the aesthetic and dramaturgical conventions of “Socialist Realism,” Ragosch and Hans represent “typical people in typical

11 Peter Galison and Emily Thompson, eds., *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

12 For a recent work on planning and prognostics in divided Germany, see Elke Seefried and Dierk Hoffmann, eds., *Plan und Planung. Deutsch-deutsche Vorgriffe auf die Zukunft* (Berlin, Boston, 2018).

13 Eberhard Panitz, *Der siebente Sommer: Schwedt 1966. Porträts, Skizzen, Dialoge* (Halle/Saale, 1967).

situations.”<sup>14</sup> For example, Hans tells the factory employees that they need to understand modern bureaucracy as a necessary element of a successful economy. With the telephone and the printed data table with facts and figures of the factory’s performance being his primary working “tools,” Hans is a symbol for a new kind of worker and political activist in the factories: young, smart, rational, strategic, objective, scientific — and male.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, Ragosch faints at the beginning of the movie and has to stay in hospital for some days. He still holds on to the traditional ways of manual labor, relying on muscle power, experiences, and long day and night shifts to correct problems in the production line. Despite the fact that both heroes are staunch Socialist workers and believe in the regime’s economic and political system, their strategies for achieving these goals are fundamentally different. While Ragosch calls his job a duty and says that only hard physical work can lead to success, even to the detriment of one’s own physical and mental abilities, Hans is convinced that new methods of management and control must be implemented. On an extreme level, Hans is willing to put efficiency and rigorousness over the individual worker and his or her capacities. It would be interesting to compare the medial strategies of how workers are depicted in movies and the visual arts and how this “image” changed over the years.<sup>16</sup> Despite its official character, the movie does not offer simple answers to the challenges of automatization and the introduction of computing machines into the sphere of productivity. By presenting a variety of individuals and episodes, it tries to depict the complexity of the specific non-capitalist “East German Modernity” in the 1960s, which was coined by the sociologist Wolfgang Engler, among others.<sup>17</sup> Director Kirsten and screenwriter Panitz presented viewers with the ongoing processes of economic, social, and individual transformations of a modern society of the 1960s. In the scenes, the technological processes and other intermingled developments are prominent features. For example, many of the episodes problematize the conflict between traditional ways of working — muscle power, night shifts, manly collectives trying to overcome physical and mental boundaries — and the new challenges that are marked throughout the movie with the word “knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> In one of the movie’s central scenes, the director of the factory tells his new employee Hans that nowadays, hard work is no longer enough — what every worker need is “knowledge.” The director says, “The tasks are no longer only to be solved with enthusiasm and long day and night shifts; they require knowledge.”<sup>19</sup>

14 See, e.g., Wolfgang Engler, “Der Arbeiter,” in *Erinnerungs-orte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow, 218-28 (Munich, 2009).

15 Despite the fact that all main characters of the movie are male, Hans’s girlfriend, who is a professor of math at Dresden Technical University, gives a glimpse of the idea that questions of gender (in science and on the job) were being discussed in the GDR of the 1960s.

16 See, e.g., Paul Kaiser, “Die Aura der Schmelzer. Arbeiter- und Brigadebilder in der DDR — ein Bildmuster im Wandel,” in *Abschied von Ikarus. Bildwelten in der DDR — neu gesehen*, ed. Karl-Siebert Rehberg, Wolfgang Holler, and Paul Kaiser, 166-73 (Cologne, 2012).

17 See, e.g., Wolfgang Engler, “Die ostdeutsche Moderne. Aufbruch und Abbruch eines partizipatorischen Gesellschaftsprojektes,” in *Abschied von Ikarus*, ed. Rehberg, et al., 29-40.

18 On the paradox of the East German Modernity, see, e.g., Stefan Wolle, *Aufbruch nach Utopia. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1961-1971* (Berlin, 2011).

19 For the broader context, see, e.g., Gangolf Hübinger, ed., *Europäische Wissenschaftskulturen und politische Ordnungen in der Moderne, 1890-1970* (Munich, 2014); Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany, 1918-2014: The Divided Nation*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, 2015), 164-82.

In sum, the movie *Netzwerk* shows how people react differently to new, primarily technological, developments; what the “modern” work environment means for the individual; and, finally, what role politics play in a world ever more dominated not by class struggle and ideology but by science and technology.<sup>20</sup> Even though the movie was not

exactly a blockbuster, it gives an interesting insight into the zeitgeist of the late 1960s in the GDR. Historians have described the last ten years of the government of Walter Ulbricht, between the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the coup d'état by Erich Honecker in 1971, as “Socialist modernity” and as the decade in which science and technology played by far the most important role.<sup>21</sup> During the 1960s, Ulbricht's economic reforms, which formed part of the “Neue Ökonomische System der Planung und Leitung (NÖSPL, New System of Planning and Leading),” were intended to reform and renew the hierarchical system of planned business by implementing “capitalist” elements like investment incentives and limited autonomy for economic units.<sup>22</sup> The next section addresses the planning, erection, and functioning of the AMLO as a concrete, architectural result of the NÖSPL.

### Putting Cybernetics in Its Place: The “Academy of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory” in Berlin

In 1969, the same year *Netzwerk* was produced and the GDR celebrated twenty years of existence, a vast architectural complex in the southeastern outskirts of Berlin opened: Five large, rectangular halls settled in the forest in which leading figures of the party, economic sector, and science would be trained with the newest developments in

20 For a history of the GDR from “below” and from an everyday perspective,

see especially Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German*

*Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, 2005).



Cover page of *Neues Deutschland*, October 7, 1969, p. 1 (DDR-Presse [ZEFYS], Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

21 See, e.g., Martin Sabrow, “Zukunftspaths als Legitimationsressource. Zu Charakter und Wandel des Fortschrittsparadigmas in der DDR,” in *Aufbruch in die Zukunft. Die 1960er Jahre zwischen Planungseuphorie und kulturellem Wandel. DDR, CSSR und BRD im Vergleich*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jörg Requate, 165–84 (Weilerswist, 2004); Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The “Normalisation of Rule?”* (New York, 2009); Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2014), 727–37.

22 See, e.g., André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan. Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Munich, 2004); Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR 1949–1990*, 3rd ed. (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 2013).



**Berlin-Wuhlheide, former area of the AMLO, ruins of the curtain of 1969, photography 2015, © Oliver Sukrow.**

computer research of the GDR and learn how to “work in a Socialist way” with the computer in their respective fields. The AMLO opened in October 1969 but was shut down as early as 1972. Only the fence has survived, and nothing commemorates this important place of Socialist technological utopia in German history. The complex

was built in only a couple of months and was commissioned by the Ministry of Industry.<sup>23</sup> The architect was Richard Paulick, a student of the Bauhaus School in Dessau before the war who was then exiled during World War II in Shanghai and later returned to the GDR, where he became one of the nation’s most prestigious architects.<sup>24</sup> He also contributed to the Stalin-Allee in East Berlin. Paulick was famous for his organizational talent and his ability to solve complex problems like a lack of workers or construction materials. Both were important when erecting the complex in 1969. Paulick worked together with a large team of architects and designers to create a totally new kind of exhibition architecture and spatial staging related to the computer: He and his team not only developed a new kind of exposition in which the visitor was an active participant, but they also spectacularly exhibited the GDR-produced computer “Robotron 300” by presenting the machine fully functioning in its “natural” environment.<sup>25</sup>

Since the AMLO was only utilized for three years and since the academy was not open to the public, the academy is not part of a broader cultural memory, nor has it been explored in historical research. When Honecker took office in 1971, the academy was no longer needed and was eventually shut down. In contrast to Ulbricht, Honecker did not see technology and science as the keys to social and economic reforms toward a Socialist modernity. Instead, he and his cabinet focused primarily on housing construction and consumer

23 For a detailed discussion of the planning and building history of the AMLO, see Oliver Sukrow, *Arbeit. Wohnen. Computer*, 394-432.

24 Wolfgang Thöner and Peter Müller, eds., *Bauhaus-Tradition und DDR-Moderne. Der Architekt Richard Paulick* (Munich, Berlin, 2006).

25 On the topic of space and science, see, e.g., David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2003), 18: “[...] scientific practice is influenced by [...] spatial settings.”



goods to increase the standard of living — things that would be noticed in the short term.<sup>26</sup> To understand the function and the relevance of the AMLO, it is necessary to briefly elucidate the historical background that enabled the planning of such an institution. Even though Germany has a long tradition of inventing and building learning machines, and even though some specialized industries had been working with computing machines since the 1950s;<sup>27</sup> it was only Ulbricht's program of economic reforms of the 1960s that led to a broader acceptance of early computers in some parts of the party, government, and the planned economy. In an internal document from the SED Party school "Karl Marx" of 1970, the author explained the aims and methods of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory. Since the society was then situated in a transition phase, the predicted future had to be achieved by the "intensified scientific leadership of the SED," including the integration of cybernetics, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and computing technology.<sup>28</sup> The overarching frame, the meta-discipline, was Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory. It delivered the theoretical basis for the educational programs of the AMLO and should have guaranteed the leadership of the SED in science and research.<sup>29</sup>

Before such a position became part of the official party dogma, cybernetic thinking, strongly connected with the computer, had been labeled "decadent," "intellectual," or "inhuman."<sup>30</sup> The "Cybernetic Movement" was perceived in the GDR as an attempt by leading Western or American scientists to create a theory of convergence between the capitalist and the socialist system, which the party strongly opposed. However, when the first books on cybernetics were translated by the German mathematician and philosopher Georg Klaus from Russian into German in the early 1960s, it became more and more accepted in academic and economic circles.<sup>31</sup> The younger cadre born between the wars, which included Günter Mittag (Secretary of the Economic Commission at the "Politbüro") and Erich Apel (Chairman of the State Planning Commission), urged Ulbricht to implement planning and production tools in order to increase the competitiveness of the GDR economy. Both saw cybernetics as an integrative method to combine science and practice and to guarantee a systematic approach to all developments in society and industry that were to be centrally controlled. Since the term "cybernetics" was ideologically problematic, the GDR coined a Socialist synonym: "Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory." It was defined in 1970 by the party in an internal document as a science that

26 See, e.g., Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford, 2016).

27 For the history of computing in Germany, see Herbert Bruderer, *Meilensteine der Rechentechnik*. Volume 2: *Erfindung des Computers, Elektronenrechner, Entwicklungen in Deutschland, England und der Schweiz* (Berlin, Boston, 2018); for the GDR, see Friedrich Naumann and Gabriele Schade, eds., *Informatik in der DDR — eine Bilanz* (Bonn, 2006).

28 BArch, DY 30-IV A 2/9.09/92, "Die marxistisch-leninistische Organisationswissenschaft..." 1.

29 BArch, DY 30-IV A 2/9.09/92, Fred Scheil, "Bemerkungen zur Ausarbeitung 'Die marxistisch-leninistische Organisationswissenschaft...'" Berlin, 6.12.70, 1.

30 See, e.g., Simon Donig, "Informatik im Systemkonflikt — Der Technik- und Wissenschaftsdiskurs in der DDR," in *Informatik in der DDR — eine Bilanz*, ed. Friedrich Naumann and Gabriele Schade, 462–78 (Bonn, 2006). For a similar critique on the design of the AMLO, see BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/6.07/101, Protokoll über die Kontrollberatung der Expertengruppe zur Beurteilung der Feinddisposition für die Industrieherschau am 30.4.69, Berlin, 2.5.69, 16 pages, 4.

31 See, e.g., Georg Klaus, *Kybernetik in philosophischer Sicht* (Berlin, 1961); Igor A. Poletajew, *Kybernetik. Kurze Einführung in eine neue Wissenschaft*, ed. Georg Klaus (Berlin, 1962); Georg Klaus and Heinz Liebscher, *Was ist, was soll Kybernetik* (Leipzig, Jena, Berlin, 1965).

- 32 BArch, DY 30-IV A 2/9.09/92, "Die marxistisch-leninistische Organisationswissenschaft...", 1.
- 33 Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan*, 165.
- 34 BArch DC 20-I/4/2275, Ministerrat der DDR, 126. Sitzung des Präsidiums des MR, 29.7.70, Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, Vorlage zum Beschluß über Maßnahmen zur Weiterführung des volkswirtschaftlich strukturbestimmenden Investitionsvorhabens Akademie der marxistisch-leninistischen Organisationswissenschaft der DDR für die Jahre 1971/72, Anlage 2: Information, 1.
- 35 BArch, DY 3023/672, Büro Günter Mittag beim ZK der SED, Wirtschaftspolitik der SED, Tätigkeit der zentralen Staatsorgane und deren unterstellte Bereiche, Produktions-, Forschungs- und Ausbildungseinrichtungen. Informations- und Weiterbildungszentrum der Industrie und des Bauwesens, 1968-71: Aktennotiz, Offene Probleme 1. Bauabschnitt Investitionsbau, Qualifizierungs- und Informationszentrum Berlin (Wuhlheide), Berlin, 8.11.68, 1.
- 36 BArch, DY 3023/672, Übersicht über die Bau- und Ausrüstungsleistungen, n.d., 1.
- 37 Ingrid Schulze, "Farbiger Grundriß der Wirklichkeit. Zu dekorativen Wandgestaltungen aus Industrieemail von Willi Neubert," *Neues Deutschland*, 10 January 1970, 11.
- 38 Sukrow, *Arbeit. Wohnen. Computer*, 366.
- 39 Architekturmuseum der TU München, Archiv, Nachlass Richard Paulick, Pauli-305-1, "Die Situation der Architekten in der DDR, Sozialistischer Städtebau, EXPO 1967 Montreal," 11-12.

investigates the laws, principles, methods, and models valid in all areas of the developed Socialist system for the rational design of the systems and the processes of planning and management taking place in them and between them with the aim to achieve the highest efficiency of the work.<sup>32</sup>

Since it was understood that the modernization of the GDR economy could only be realized by comprehensive automation, Ulbricht and his fellows recognized that a special institution to teach the principles of applied computer sciences was necessary.<sup>33</sup> Because the existing capacities were not big enough and the existing teaching and training institutes were no longer seen as useful, Ulbricht and Mittag commissioned a specialized training center for the computer to underline the scientific and economic capabilities of the GDR's socialism in September 1968<sup>34</sup>

Having been started in February 1969, the complex was nearly finished when it opened in October of the same year.<sup>35</sup> Paulick and his team were under a great deal of pressure since the academy's planned opening was supposed to take place during the festivities for the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR. Photographs from Paulick's personal archive show the progress on the construction site, while archival material in the Bundesarchiv reveals the difficulties encountered in erecting this enormous complex.<sup>36</sup> In architectural terms, the academy can be easily described: Paulick designed five very large windowless halls. The façade of the first hall, the foyer, and that of the last hall, the operation center, were designed more individually and bore an abstract ornament made of metal by artist Willi Neubert, so they could be recognized as the most important parts of the building complex.<sup>37</sup> Through the large windows, the visitor could look into the building but only at the foyer and the operation center. The abstract relief at the main façades had also been used in other contexts related to the GDR-computer industry — for example, for a theater performance by the company Robotron, which constructed the computers.<sup>38</sup> The other three halls looked like factory buildings. In a review from 1970, Paulick himself described their appearance as "modern" and "contemporary."<sup>39</sup> While the outer appearance can be described as unspectacular and monotonous, it was the interior that made the academy an architectural innovation in its own right. The open and broad structure of the halls allowed the exhibition designers to create a specific environment in which visitors

were led from one station to another without any visual or spatial barriers. And secondly, Paulick's halls created a flexible exhibition architecture that could be expanded and transformed as necessary.

### **Exhibiting and Designing Utopia: The Visual Culture of GDR-Cybernetics**

As we have seen, there were important ideological issues in teaching and managing cybernetics in the GDR so that it would not be confused with capitalist strategies. So, the AMLO as a whole — that is, its architecture, design, and concept — needed to prove and demonstrate the distinctiveness of “Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory” in comparison to capitalist management.<sup>40</sup> That explains why the exhibition shown in the halls was so important. Through its spatial and artistic appearance, the exhibition in the academy was intended to be a model for a Socialist exhibition theory and practice. Paulick and his team commissioned the state-run advertising agency Deutsche Werbe- und Anzeigengesellschaft (DEWAG) to create the exhibition design. Usually, DEWAG designed exhibitions for industry for occasions like the famous fair in Leipzig. This explains why the exhibition in the academy had a lot of features typical of industrial exhibitions and sales shows. Plus, the DEWAG underlined its exhibition concept with the theory of Socialist product propaganda to “make the viewer aware of the connection between organization and electronic data processing.”<sup>41</sup> With its visual strategies and different stages, the exhibition in the academy represented the zeitgeist of the GDR in the late 1960s in which science and technology were no longer to be regarded as strange or threatening. The exhibition invited viewers to interact with and play with the machines. The designers intended to create an exhibition in which “the high potentials of the GDR for the future progressive formation of every part of social, political, cultural, and economic life” would become clear.<sup>42</sup> This aim was to be achieved in a twofold way: 1) the design of the exhibition was intended to be active, participatory, and was to motivate the viewer to engage with it; 2) architecture and design were supposed to underline the context and the systematic connection between the different stations of the exhibition: One started in the first hall with the basic principles of the economic reforms of Ulbricht and ended in the last with a realistic presentation of how the computer R300 worked and was programmed: “The division of the material into thematic complexes corresponds to the systematic structure of the exhibition. The study of the contents of each complex

40 On the design concept and theoretical-aesthetical principles of the DEWAG, see BArch, DY 3023/672, DEWAG Leipzig, Informations- und Bildungszentrum der DDR — Industrielehrschau, “Ideenprojekt für die ‘Industrielehrschau 1969,’” Leipzig, 11.12.68, 50 pages.

41 BArch, DY 3023/672, “Ideenprojekt...,” 3–4.

42 BArch, DY 3023/672, “Ideenprojekt...,” 1.



Exhibition “Partner of Medical Progress: The Pharmaceutical Industry of the GDR,” Leipzig, Autumn Fair 1969: “Information Phases of the Electronically Programmed Card-controlled Diorama in the 1st Information Zone,” *Neue Werbung*, no. 4 (1970): 36.

presupposes the knowledge of the substance of the preceding complex.”<sup>43</sup>

The most important methodological strategy applied by the designers, in my view, was to involve the viewer as an active element and, symbolically speaking, an essential part of a cybernetic chain. By walking through the halls, by trying out the machines,

and by taking part in the staging of progress in Socialism, the viewer “merged” with the architecture, exhibition design, and machines. The designers spoke about the “games” to be played during the exhibition and explained that machines would control the success or failure of participants and that each course was “programmed.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the participants, the exhibition, and the machines all became an ideal configuration of a utopian Socialist world of technology and science. Controlled and ruled by men, this scientific utopia represented the merging of cybernetic thinking, ideological assumptions, and economic progress. This was indeed comparable to “Project CyberSyn,” Salvador Allende’s program aimed at constructing a distributed decision support system to aid in the management of the national economy in Chile.<sup>45</sup> Allende’s project, somehow a very large version of the academy in Berlin, consisted of four modules: an economic simulator, custom software to check factory performance, an operations room, and a national network of telex machines that were linked to one mainframe computer. But while Gui Bonsiepe, Stafford Beer, and their team designed an “OpRoom” where controllers sat in a circle, directly *in touch* with the computers regulating the state economy, Paulick’s spatial concept for the staging of the computer in AMLO was very different.

At the end of the regulated walk along the “cybernetic chain” through the AMLO, during which visitors gained knowledge from the most



**Richard Paulick, AMLO, ORZ with the Robotron 300 and personnel, view from the lecture hall, ca. 1969, Architekturmuseum der TU München. Used with permission.**

43 BArch, DY 3023/672, “Ideenprojekt...,” 6.

44 BArch, DY 3023/672, “Ideenprojekt...,” 25.

45 See Eden Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende’s Chile* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).

diverse areas of electronic data processing, cybernetics, and Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory, they were confronted with the architectural, creative, and ideal highlight of the entire exhibition concept: The staging of the R300 in the “Organization and Processing Center” (ORZ) as a “dramatic” completion of the courses. The ORZ was where science and knowledge were presented, staged, and conveyed. Thus, one was supposed to reflect on the performative and spatial qualities of knowledge production and distribution in the ORZ of the AMLO: “If knowledge is embodied, then we need to pay attention to its bodies.”<sup>46</sup> Due to the ORZ’s prominent position within the complex, it is appropriate to concentrate on its architectural, design, and performative sides. The argument here is, on the one hand, that the ORZ generated a differentiated-distanced relationship between the users and the computer by means of architecture, and, on the other hand, that this architectural staging and the spatial arrangement of computers, devices, and spectators followed international standards. For example, the architect and industrial designer Eliot Noyes’s idea of conceiving of the computer as not only a technological but also an architectural challenge set international standards in designing an architectural staging of the computer from the 1950s.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the next section deals with the concrete architectural measures for the representation of the computer in the spatial structure and in the intellectual context of the AMLO. As John Harwood suggests with regard to the similar staging of IBM machines:

analyzing the interface also allows an architectural history to extend its scope beyond the building to the other, related media that were so crucial to the overall conceptions of the IBM Design Program: graphics, industrial design, multinational production networks, and exhibitions and spectacle design.<sup>48</sup>

A comparable architectural analysis of the ORZ needs to be linked to aspects of technological history. From a description of the concept for the ORZ, taken from the “Explanation of the Model of the Exhibition” of June 1969, it becomes apparent that the ORZ’s function and equipment had enormous importance for the whole concept of the AMLO from the beginning: “In the data center, the participants are taught the importance of using the R300 for the first stage of the introduction of data processing on a broad basis in the economy of the GDR. The participant will receive specific information about the R300 as well as information about the technological process in the

46 Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle, 2008), 776.

47 On Noyes, see, e.g., Bruce Gordon, *Eliot Noyes: A Pioneer of Design and Architecture in the Age of American Modernism* (London, 2006).

48 John Harwood, *The Interface: IBM and the Transformation of Corporate Design, 1945-1976* (Minneapolis, 2011), 11.

data center based on the demonstration of a program.”<sup>49</sup> The separation of computer and auditorium space was necessary to create the specific conditions essential to the functioning of the R300 — not only the air-conditioning technology but also the protection against contamination by dust. Any disturbances in the operation would have disrupted the balance of the programmed course of the training and was to be ruled out.<sup>50</sup> While the interaction between man and machine was desired and even demanded in the exhibition halls, this link was eliminated in the ORZ. However, the separation was for more than just climate and safety reasons. The spatial separation of the computer from the spectators in the lecture hall recalled the spatial division of computers in “parlor” and “coal cellar” proposed by the American design theorist Edgar Kaufman Jr.: the “parlor” is the place where the controller of the computer acts, whereas the “coal cellar” is a hidden, not observable space.<sup>51</sup> Symbolically, the division into “parlor” and “coal cellar” suggested that in spite of all the utopian euphoria, the controlling SED was not willing to allow course participants to freely and playfully appropriate the technology. Technologies such as the computer remained regulated and were not presented as individual-subjective promises of freedom, in contrast to the typical Californian counterculture at that same time, which was negotiating new human-technology relationships in the United States.<sup>52</sup> When entering the ORZ, participants saw the R300 through a large glass panel that extended the entire depth of the room. It separated the lecture hall from the ORZ. The lecture room, whose rows of seats ascended as in a theater or cinema, guaranteed a good view of the staging and performances. The motif of showing and hiding played a role in the ORZ in several places: there was a curtain that could cover the glass wall between the auditorium and the computer room, there were three technical rooms with various viewing possibilities, and the machines themselves also showed some things but also hid others from view. The lighting concept, the arrangement of the seats, the guided gaze, and the R300 behind a pane of glass — all of these features reinforced the stage-like nature of this space in which science was presented, performed, and theatrically staged. Also, the personnel, the engineers, programmers, technicians, and typists played an important role in this staging of the computer in the science theater of the AMLO. During the demonstrations, they acted behind the glass, and their steps and actions could be observed and commented on by the participants. Aural communication was possible via an intercom system. It could not be ascertained from the sources whether ORZ personnel followed a defined choreography, but

49 BArch, DY 3023/672, “Erläuterung des Modells der Ausstellung des Informations- und Bildungszentrums der Industrie und des Bauwesens der DDR,” Berlin, 17.9.69, 10.

50 Iwan Rhys Morus, “Placing Performance,” *Isis*, no. 1 (2010): 775-78, 777: “Actively participating audiences can destroy the careful choreography.”

51 Harwood, *The Interface*, 12: “[...] the space of the computer is to be divided in architectural terms into a ‘parlor’ (i.e., the space that the computer operator inhabits, or interface) and a ‘coal cellar’ (the concealed, distant space in which the machine itself operates).”

52 See Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*.

this would certainly have been in keeping with the overall theatrical character of the production. Certainly, the routinely performed operations in the utilization of the R300 were also the subject of the demonstrations. After all, the participants were supposed to gain an understanding of modern computer technology both visually and aurally. Since the computing processes of the R300 ran inside the machines and could not be shown, the display of the equipment and the human work processes formed the main didactic instrument of this training station. Visitors, therefore, had to have a considerable ability to abstract in order not only to understand the operation of the installations but also to be able to properly classify and interpret the computational processes that could not be made visible despite all the architectural-spatial-artistic opening and staging.

In sum, the ORZ of the AMLO can be seen as the creative, staged, and ideal highlight of the complex and as Paulick's most important spatial artistic innovation in the Wuhlheide. As an "educational architecture" dedicated to the demonstration and presentation of knowledge and knowledge production, the ORZ can be compared to other computational spaces outside the GDR. Like the 1963 IBM showroom in Toronto, which was designed a little bit earlier, the ORZ was all about visualization (with partial concealment), and about the spatial arrangement of the computer, separated from the viewer through a membrane-like glass front, on stage.<sup>53</sup> Despite all the ideological and political differences, the spatial situation played a central role for Western designers of computer showcases, as in the case of Noyes for IBM as well as for Paulick. Both intended to create functional and inspiring places of visibility for the computer as a future machine. The ORZ, like the IBM showroom, was meant to convey the message of "unquestionable moral, technological, economic, and social good that the computer represented,"<sup>54</sup> but under the banner of cybernetics-inspired high-tech socialism. In this respect, this space mirrored the political-ideological expectations of the technology of GDR society in the 1960s: the R300 was presented as a future machine but only to a select group of participants, and it only functioned in a strictly regulated and controlled framework. What was playful and experimental, which characterized the AMLO's exhibition and revealed approaches to a new, more individual approach to technology, gave way to a clear hierarchy and strict order in the ORZ. Technology and progress or individual interpretations could only develop in the GDR in a controlled environment: The future, which the SED aimed to realize in a manner accelerated by the

53 Harwood, *The Interface*, 162: "Replacing the stuffy atmosphere of the ocean liner with an open, modular gridded space visible from the street through large plate-glass windows, Noyes set the computer on stage."

54 Ibid.



computer, had to be controlled — no autonomous or individual developments were considered or allowed. Eventually, after the change in power from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971 these overarching future expectations were replaced by new goals: The AMLO was no longer a future place in the GDR.

### **Conclusion: This Was Tomorrow!**

Mittag wrote in his 1991 autobiography that the economic reforms of the late Ulbricht era were never efficient in reality. However, if we understand the AMLO as a specific form of implementing economic theories in practice, one could modify Mittag's critical judgment. I suggest seeing the AMLO as an ideal "future place" of the GDR that combined the elements of Ulbricht, Mittag, and Apel's reform program in one designated place: the (however limited) unity of theory and practice, new technologies and forms of diffusion and presentation of knowledge, an overarching concept of the capacities of science and technology for a modern society, and an optimistic interpretation of the future as a solvable challenge for everybody. In a similar vein, the movie *Netzwerk* — with its dialectic of "new" ways of working with science, data, and information, on the one hand, and the need to integrate more traditional ways like hard physical work, experience, and teamwork, on the other — represented a fictional "future place." But while the AMLO was the point of crystallization for reformist approaches, an artificial counterpart against the economic reality in the GDR, and a concrete alternative to the technophobia dominant in large sections of the party, *Netzwerk* did not challenge the narratives of the predicted future as seen by the party. And while Honecker shut down the AMLO in 1971, he gave Panitz prestigious prizes, including the Heinrich Mann Prize (1975) and the National Prize of the German Democratic Republic (1977).

As Galison wrote in 1999, "architecture can help us position the scientific in the cultural space; buildings serve as both active agents in the transformations of scientific identity and as evidence for these changes."<sup>55</sup> Keeping this in mind, I would ultimately suggest three hypotheses concerning the utopian character of the academy: 1) The AMLO was a place in which an adopted future was exhibited and staged, in which a specific group of people were to be prepared for this future, and a place in which an attempt was made to "naturalize" the computer through architecture and design. 2) The AMLO was both a symbolic and concrete place for the ongoing negotiation

55 Peter Galison, "Buildings and the Subjects of Science," in *The Architecture of Science*, ed. Peter Galison and Emily Thompson, 1-25 (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 3.

in GDR architecture and design on how science and technology were to be situated in the Socialist society. 3) And finally, the AMLO was a place of a Socialist way of “producing” knowledge and was planned to create an alternative to capitalist spaces of science and knowledge. That made the AMLO an exceptional example of a Socialist utopia of science and technology.

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## A HISTORY OF THE "SOVIET": FROM BOLSHEVIK UTOPIA TO SOVIET MODERNITY

Anna Krylova

### Introduction: Crossing out "Proletarian," Writing "Soviet"<sup>1</sup>

In early 1936, Aleksandr Kosarev, the thirty-three-year-old leader of the All-Union Young Communist League (Komsomol), and his Central Committee worked away on a draft of the organization's new membership rules. The draft was forwarded directly to Joseph Stalin, who must have spent hours hand-editing the lengthy document. The resulting document was cleansed of what most scholars today would associate with the signature Bolshevik *lingua franca* of the socialist project undertaken in the Soviet Union. Stalin consistently crossed out the familiar Bolshevik terms, categories, and metaphors that Kosarev had copied from the old rules. Stalin wrote "nonaffiliated" in place of "proletarian" and "laboring" in place of "class conscious."<sup>2</sup> Two months later, at the Komsomol Congress that gathered to adopt the new membership rules, Stalin began to use the term "Soviet" to refer to these "party-less" and "laboring" young people. The toast with which he ended the Congress, "Long live the Soviet youth," sounded like a definitive corrective to Kosarev and other weathered Komsomol leaders, who still preferred to refer to their organization as the "young generation of the proletarian revolutionaries."<sup>3</sup>

The odd but explicit opposition between the Bolshevik political *lingua franca* and Stalin's discursive intervention carried out under the rubric of the "Soviet" cannot help but give a scholar of modern Russia pause. On what conceptual grounds does one account for the oddness of the Stalin-Kosarev controversy, which, as we will see, far from being an inexplicable glitch, permeated the 1930s political, cultural, and institutional struggles over changing meanings of the socialist project under construction in the modernizing Soviet society? What, for example, could the notion of the "Soviet youth" capture in the mid-1930s that the Bolshevik *lingua franca* could not? And, why did contemporaries deploy the terms "Soviet," on the one hand, and the "Bolshevik-proletarian," on the other, as notions that were discordant at best, and oppositional, at worst?

1 I am grateful to *Social History* for allowing me to draw on materials published in Anna Krylova, "Imagining Socialism in the Soviet Century," *Social History* 42, no. 3 (2017): 315-41, in this essay, DOI: 10.1080/03071022.2017.1327640, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com>.

2 "Ustav VLKSM," draft, RGASPI, fond 1, opis 23, delo 1157, list 64.

3 "Da zdravstvuet sovetskaiia molodezh!," editorial, *Komsomolskaia Pravda (KP)*, 22 April 1936; "Rech Kosareva", *KP*, 16 April 1936; see also Kosarev's report to the congress, *KP*, 13 April 1936.

These questions present a serious challenge to the field of modern Russian history and the broader scholarly community that draws on the field's analytics. Vividly, they throw into sharp relief the limitations of the longstanding convention that has allowed scholars to conflate most basic categories of modern Russian history in their work: the Soviet, the Bolshevik, the proletarian, the socialist. When utilized in the analysis of cultural change over the course of the twentieth century, this convention rests on a body of scholarship that assigns cultural continuity to what is, in fact, a period of social and economic transformation unprecedented in Russian history. Most recently, for example, scholars have viewed the *Soviet* socialist experiment as *Bolshevik*, *proletariat-inspired*, *collectivist*, and avowedly *illiberal*, and falling within an anti-individualist and anti-capitalist camp of utopian projects to transform human nature and society. In fact, as I have argued previously, it is the treatment of the Bolshevik collectivist, illiberal, and anti-capitalist objectives as the “fundamental tenets” of the Bolshevik/Soviet project that has allowed scholars of modern Russia to be comfortable with the interchangeability that informs our use of the “Soviet” and “Bolshevik” notions. For example, figures of speech in which the “Soviet people” accept, resist, or subvert the “Bolshevik,” that is, “collectivist,” that is, “socialist” modernity have become familiar and unproblematic in academic narratives, both in the scholarship on Stalinism as well as on the post-Stalinist period.<sup>4</sup>

4 For an extended discussion of the state of the field's analytics and approaches to Stalinist and post-Stalinist modernity from the grounds of Bolshevik tenets, see Anna Krylova, “Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament,” *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 2 (2014): 167–92.

5 Jochen Hellbeck has focused on Soviet citizens who turned this dictum of the collective's supremacy (which I refer to as the collective ideal without borders) into an exasperating practice of self-policing inclinations toward personal considerations and happiness. For these individuals, the argument goes, the collective became the “ultimate measure of individual happiness and fulfillment.” Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 146, 349–50; for a discussion of the “Soviet self” and the “Soviet subject” in the context of the 1920s, see, for example, Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 35–38; also Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 283.

In my previous work, I have explored how this accepted view of Soviet modernity as predicated on fundamental, Bolshevik tenets has impacted contemporary work on Soviet subjectivity. Our conceptualization of the Soviet subject, for example, is characterized by a striking lack of interest in exploring qualitative differences between the “New Man” — the militant proletariat-styled, Bolshevik ideal of the 1920s— and the “New Soviet Person” — a discursive creation of the 1930s. Regardless of the decade, the generic New Man and/or Soviet person demarcates the Soviet cultural project of the twentieth century as a *longue durée* component of Soviet history and as a self-evident category of scholarly analysis. Either “new” or “Soviet,” the ideal subject is identified with a Bolshevik “collectivist orientation” and, depending on the circumstances, with one's willingness or eagerness to derive or merge one's personal life with the life of the collective.<sup>5</sup> It is hardly an imposition, I argued, to say that Stalinist modernity and, to a significant degree, the whole Soviet period are

presently viewed as one collective-inspired and anti-liberal attempt at remaking human nature.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I further my interrogation of the unsettling implications of such a Bolshevik-identified view of socialist modernity. One problem I consider here is the defining term in modern Russian history — the “Soviet.” Impossible to avoid, the notion, I argue, tends to remain historically unsignified. Defined through the complex adaptation and reconfiguration of Bolshevik utopian objectives and used interchangeably with them, the “Soviet” — as a concept, language, and cultural practice — lacks a history in its own right, a history in which its fundamental aspirations part with the Bolshevik utopia.

My goal in this essay is to zero in on this pivotal term of modern Russian history and, in so doing, to account for the conflicting terms of the Stalin-Kosarev controversy. In what follows, I refrain from treating Stalin’s intervention as a history-making move of an all-powerful dictator capable of shifting cultural codes and vocabularies single-handedly. Rather, I approach Stalin’s 1936 imposition onto the Komsomol organization, which was still a rather small and militant community at that time, as symptomatic of a deep restructuring of the societal understanding and expectations of socialism — a development not under anyone’s direct control. Thus, I ask where the discordant notion of the “Soviet” in Stalin’s political rhetoric came from. Further, I explore what connotations the term “Soviet” carried prior the 1930s.

Here, the history of the “Soviet” thus begins in the 1920s within the formation of Bolshevik discourse. Far from being a versatile cultural marker, “Soviet” in this context connoted a narrowly defined political-administrative principle of the Proletarian Republic — the rule of the Soviets — and, as such, resided within the symbolic possibilities of the Bolshevik *lingua franca*. Connoting just one aspect of the proletariat’s historical mission, its creation of new principles of governance, the term was powerless to define phenomena that exceeded its realm of connotations. As a result, it completely lacked the identity-, value-, or quality-signifying and -ascribing powers for which it is known today. In the 1920s politico-discursive universe, it was impossible to refer to the proletarian New Man ideal as “Soviet,” or to call upon citizens residing in the territory of the Soviet Union as “Soviet people,” or to compliment someone on one’s “Soviet character” or “Soviet personality.”

The birth of the concept as we use it today — as a signifier of a distinct and inherent quality of a personality, a nation, things and goods —

6 Such an approach, of course, does not prevent scholars from studying changes, shifts, developments, and adaptations that the alleged Soviet/Bolshevik utopia underwent in the twentieth century without losing its presumed undergirding tenets. For a detailed explication of this critique, see Krylova, “*Soviet Modernity*,” 167–92; idem, “Imagining Socialism.” On developments within Soviet legal culture, and mainstream artistic and literary conversations away from the Bolshevik and the Socialist Realist traditions, see Benjamin Nathan, “Soviet Rights-Talk in the Post-Stalin Era,” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, 166–90 (Cambridge, UK, 2011); and idem, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism,’” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4 (2007): 630–63; a pioneering essay is Susan E. Reid, “Toward a New (Socialist) Realism: The Re-engagement with Western Modernism in the Khrushchev Thaw,” in *Russian Art and the West*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, 217–39 (Dekalb, 2006); see also Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (2014): 805–27.

occurred in the 1930s when the political discourse of the Soviet Union underwent a significant transformation to relate the new realities and demands of the emergent industrial society. Suddenly, that is, in a course of several years, in the mainstream national press, the state school system, at public Komsomol and party events, and even in the routine work of Komsomol and party institutions, the “Soviet” turned out to be an indispensable conceptual tool for thinking about modernity and socialism.

The explosion of the signifying powers of the “Soviet” concept in the 1930s, which I trace in the second half of this essay, marks a radical discontinuity in the concept’s history and in the Soviet Union’s imagining of a modern socialist society. As such, it was neither an add-on to nor a revision of the Bolshevik tradition. Rather, it is under the rubric of the “Soviet” and by means of building a new Soviet-marked language of modernity that the prewar society began to re-imagine the contours and basic principles of the socialist alternative to capitalism. The Soviet Union’s experiment with socialist modernity, in other words, contains more than one normative script, and it is not a history of continuity.

At its early stages, the emerging Soviet-marked *lingua franca* was a cultural response to the glaring fact that the 1930s assault on Russia’s industrial and cultural backwardness brought about a modernity that defied the Bolshevik scripts of the 1920s. One of the first striking departures from the Bolshevik tenets was carried out not by Stalin but by desperate journalists in an effort to address emergent social phenomena that seemed to contradict Bolshevik ideals — the first army of school graduates heading for university degrees and middle-class careers. It was in relation to this cohort, as this article shows, that the term “Soviet” was first used as an identity-signifying category. The term “Soviet” in this new usage connoted a “Soviet personality” that, contrary to the ideals of the 1920s, was no longer predicated on one’s merger with the collective, that is, one’s de facto ontological disappearance in it. Nor was this new “Soviet personality” first and foremost measured by one’s class position. The new political discourse under the rubric of the “Soviet” foregrounded culture, education, and one’s professional and personal self-realization as indispensable markers of Soviet socialist personality. As importantly, it did not abandon the notion of the socialist collective but redefined it. To its creators and users, the emergent “Soviet” *lingua franca* did not herald a termination of the socialist project but rather the first steps towards a distinct —

post-Bolshevik — socialist vision necessitated by the needs of the modern society under construction in the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of my exploration of this post-Bolshevik concept, language, and cultural practice falls within the social, political, and cultural realms that first faced the limitations of the Bolshevik worldview and were forced to experiment, that is, mainstream journalism, the national Kosomol headquarters and its local organizations, the state secondary school system, and public events organized on behalf of the “Soviet youth.”<sup>8</sup>

### The “Country of the Soviets” without the “Soviet People”

Contrary to the conventional scholarly use of the term as a versatile signifier, the term “Soviet” connoted a narrowly defined political-administrative principle of governance in the 1920s: the rule of the proletariat via its representative councils — Soviets (*sovety*). The Soviets were first formed by striking workers during the Russian Revolution of 1905. Nearly immediately, a young and militant Russian Marxist, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of a radical Bolshevik wing of the underground Social Democratic Party, theorized that they embodied the proletarian creative energy to make history and to offer new forms of political and administrative governance to the world.<sup>9</sup>

Having sprung to life again in 1917, the Soviets gave a name to the “first country of the victorious proletariat” — the Republic of the Soviets — and to its government, determined to differentiate itself via the “Soviet” principle of state organization from “bourgeois” models. What the “Soviet” of the 1920s signified — as customary figures of political and everyday speech, such as “the country of the Soviets,” “Soviet state,” “Soviet power,” “Soviet Russia,” and “Soviet Republic,” captured — was the establishment of the proletariat-generated political-administrative organization of the Soviet Union in the form of a proletarian dictatorship.<sup>10</sup>

7 The analysis of the “Soviet” undertaken here thus also questions neo-traditionalist interpretations that treat the discontinuities in the Bolshevik discourse of the 1930s as a return to pre-Bolshevik systems of signification and argue that the transformation of

Soviet society ended the Soviet experiment with socialism. See, for example, critical discussions of the neo-traditionalist school of thought in Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet

History,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54 (2006): 535–55; David Hoffmann, “Was There a ‘Great Retreat’ from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004): 651–74.

8 For an analysis that takes the history of the “Soviet” beyond the scope of this essay into the 1930s state educational system, party and state educational policies and reforms, as well as pedagogical theory and practice, see Krylova, “Imagining Socialism.”

9 For an analysis of the impact of the Revolution of 1905 on Bolshevik conceptualizations of the working class, see Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context* (Boston, 2006); Anna Krylova, “Beyond the Spontaneity-Consciousness Paradigm: ‘Class Instinct’ as a Promising Category of Historical Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–23.

10 As prevalent figures of political and everyday speech in the 1920s, “the country of the Soviets,” “Soviet power,” “Soviet Russia,” and “Soviet Republic” run the risk of generating endless citations. Citations in this section are thus representative examples only of these articles, reports, and speeches that directly refer to the nature of the Soviet-proletarian state, the Soviet-proletarian worldview of the ruling class, and anti-Soviet/anti-state moods; see Ya. Yakovlev, “O ‘proletarskoi kulture’ i Proletkulte,” *Pravda*, 24 October 1922; “Tov. Trotsky na s’ezde,” *Pravda*, 14 October 1922; Riutin, “Melkoburzhuznyye cherty neomenshevizma,” *Pravda*, 6 January 1928; Teumin, “Uchebnik perioda sotsializma,” *KP*, 13 September 1931.

Connoting a political-administrative principle of the class that was eagerly expected to realize its historical mission on a global scale, the “Soviet” of the 1920s also inherited the working class’s assumed “international” ambition.<sup>11</sup> Especially in the early 1920s, state and party leaders, Bolshevik-affiliated journalists, and writers saw “Soviet power” as a transnational form of governance that did not have to respect national borders. The Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Bavarian Soviet Republic of 1919 seemed to support the thesis:<sup>2</sup>

As such, “Soviet” did not carry a meaning outside the Bolshevik-Marxist political discourse that unconditionally situated the proletariat as the “progressive class” — and simultaneously as the liberator of mankind from social injustice, the incarnation of true human nature, and the creator of new social forms. “Soviet” thus captured and was synonymous with one of the proletariat’s many creative activities on behalf of history.

As a result, it is futile to look for 1920s references to “Soviet values,” “Soviet character,” or “Soviet patriotism,” not to mention discussions and social policies in the name of the legendary “New Soviet Person” or “Soviet culture.” Throughout the decade, the term “Soviet” was powerless to describe the nature and qualities of individuals and social groups living in the territory of the Soviet Union.

The best way to illuminate the naming, descriptive, and conceptual limitations of the notion of the “Soviet” is to draw attention to the fact that, within the political and literary discursive universe of the period, there were “Soviet citizens” but no “Soviet people.” “Soviet citizens” referred to the class-divided, ethnically diverse, and antagonistic individuals and social groups living under the proletarian rule of the Soviets, who did not easily add up to any collective noun or adjective.

Symptomatic of the lack of a term to address Soviet citizens as a whole was a prevalent use of such vague, unidentified forms of address as “masses” and “population.” The word “population” generated especially awkward phrases in the Bolshevik language. Speaking as late as 1929, at the Seventh Congress of the Union of Educational Workers, Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky still had to employ that unnamable all-Union term “population” to refer to proletarian, peasant, employee, and intelligentsia masses and their feelings, thoughts, and demands: “The population feels perfectly well the full weight of non-culturedness... The population understands perfectly well that what comrade Lenin said... The population has

11 For analyses of the role of the international and transnational imagination in Bolshevik politics and culture, see V. A. Shishkin, *Stanovlenie vneshnei politiki poslevoennoi Rossii (1917–1931) i kapitalisticheskii mir* (St. Petersburg, 2002); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford, 2011).

12 “Glavnyi urok III Kongressa,” *Pravda*, 12 July 1921; see also G. E. Zinoviev’s speech at the Second Congress of the Communist Youth International and L. D. Trotsky’s speech at the Russian Young Communist League: “Rech tov. Zinovieva,” *Pravda*, 12 July 1921; “Tov. Trotsky na s’ezde,” *Pravda*, 14 October 1922; for a continuation of this discourse, see “Budushchee prinadlezhit nam,” *KP*, 18 August 1929.



understood perfectly well and now demands from the government ... to have its cultural hunger satisfied..." The Soviet as a signifier of a distinct or inherent quality of a personality or a nation endowed with some common features did not yet exist for Luncharsky to draw on.<sup>13</sup>

The narrow understanding of the "Soviet" citizenship as living under "hammer and sickle" rule also informed literary and poetic undertakings in the Soviet Republic. Take, for example, the well-known 1929 "Poem about the Soviet Passport" by Vladimir Maiakovsky. In it, the "red-skinned paper" that Maiakovsky parades during his foreign travel is "a bomb," "a hedgehog," "a razor" because it serves as a threatening reminder to "those very official gentlemen," gathering up passports, that a new kind of state has come into being. The "Soviet passport" is thus simultaneously and narrowly the symbol of a new state principle and a "red-taped paper" produced by the Soviet state's bureaucratic machine.<sup>14</sup>

The red-taped world of Soviet bureaucracy with which Maiakovsky begins his poem empowered the most common use of the "Soviet" in the 1920s press, literature, and everyday language. To the vast majority of Soviet citizens, whether they welcomed Maiakovsky's ode to the Soviet state or not, whether they worked in or outside the Soviet apparatus, "Soviet" signified the cumbersome bureaucracy of Soviet institutions. The term rang with negativity. In the early 1920s, contributors to *Pravda* already could offer, in an indisputably self-evident tone, the following list of administrative realities known as "Soviet": being routinely late for work, irresponsible indifference toward fellow citizens, unnecessary proliferation of paperwork as a way to avoid one's duties, bribe-giving and bribe-taking — "in one word," as Yakov Yakovlev, the party's propaganda chief, summed up in a 1922 feature article, "our wasteful-irresponsible-Soviet style" (*nash razgildiaiskii-sovetskii obrazets*).<sup>15</sup> In Maiakovsky's case, the Soviet passport was, in fact, the only Soviet paper for which the poet pledged his admiration and respect. Every other red-taped Soviet document he would "chuck without mercy/To the devil himself."<sup>16</sup>

Another classic of the era, Fedor Gladkov's novel *Cement*, written between 1922 and 1924, offers multiple variations on the Soviet theme as a bureaucratic routine, set up to realize the rule of the working class and yet threatening and boycotting this new principle of governance.<sup>17</sup> Devoted to the post-Civil War reconstruction and the market-friendly and, to the novel's characters, deeply unsettling New Economic Policy, much of the novel's plot takes place within

13 "Doklad narodnogo Komissara Prosveshcheniia PSFR tov. Lunacharskogo," in *Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR* (Moscow, 1929), 74.

14 In less than a decade, millions of schoolchildren would read the poem and would be able to expand the meaning of the "Soviet" in their imagination toward distinctly Soviet qualities of the Soviet people. VI. Maiakovsky, "Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte," *Izbrannye stikhi* (Moscow, 1936).

15 Yakovlev's two-part article was devoted to a critique of the Proletcult movement and its leaders: Ya. Yakovlev, "O 'proletarskoi kulture' i Proletkulte," *Pravda*, 24 October 1922.

16 Maiakovsky, "Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte," *ibid*.

17 Here I do not engage the novel as a founding canon of Socialist Realism. Rather, I treat it as a monument to the period — that is, as a deliberate compression of the everyday language, expressions, and literary debates of the 1920s and thus ideally situated to introduce us to the nuances and limitations of everyday Soviet-speak.

- 18 Fedor Gladkov, *Tsement* (Moscow, 1947), 30.
- 19 Gladkov, *Tsement*, 28, 30; see also 24, 54, 118, 121.
- 20 The 1920s debates about New Men, mankind, culture, and, specifically, education and upbringing without the use of the “Soviet” as an identity-ascribing category also run the risk of generating endless citations; see, for example, V.I. Lenin, *Zadachi soiuzov molodezhi* [a speech delivered at the Third Congress of Russian Young Communist League, 2 October 1920] (Moscow, 1966); O. Tarkhanov, “Itogi IV s’ezda RKSM. Vmesto predisloviia,” *IV s’ezd RKSM. Stenograficheskii otchet. 21-28 Sentiabr 1921* (Moscow, 1925), 3-6; Nikolai Bukharin’s speech on working youth’s upbringing and education at the Fifth Congress of the Russian Young Communist League, *Pravda*, 14 October 1922.
- 21 Research on the Bolshevik, Marxist worldview and practice has a rich bibliography that goes back to the 1950s. See, for example, Alfred G. Meyer, *Marxism: The Unity of Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1954); Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Oxford, 1978); Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca, 1997); Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2000); Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, 2002).
- 22 See Wendy Goldman’s brilliant analysis of the way labor and social policies in the 1920s clashed with working-class economic interests: Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, UK, 1993).

the walls of the flourishing Soviet bureaucracy. To Gladkov and his characters, “our Soviet ... daily life” (*sovetskie budni*) narrowly means the work done or sabotaged in numerous rooms and offices of Soviet councils and party committees.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the “Soviet worker” (*sovetskii rabotnik*) in the novel is not defined by any inherent qualities. “Soviet workers” could be good — “firm and tested” administrators — or bad — opportunist, unmotivated, unqualified bureaucrats. Regardless of one’s attitude, a “Soviet job” in a Soviet institution, epitomized by a life of sitting at a desk and moving papers, is hardly an exciting prospect. It is precisely “this Soviet and party daily life” that the novel’s main character, Gleb, the worker-hero of the new proletarian age, decides to “disturb.”<sup>19</sup>

In the 1920s, whether we follow the political discourse on the “Soviet state” as a realization of the proletarian will to govern or its popular version that allowed for a counterposition between Soviet bureaucracy and proletarian rule, we face a narrowly defined notion of the Soviet, either as a part of the proletarian self-realization through governance or its negation.

### The Short-Lived History of Bolshevik Utopia

The founding Bolshevik discourse of the Republic of the Soviets proved fully sufficient to empower Bolshevik intellectuals, revolutionaries, and statemen to carry on their class politics without having to draw on the “Soviet” as an identity-ascribing category.<sup>20</sup> In fact, within the vibrant and militant Bolshevik political discourse of the 1920s, it was inconceivable to refer to the sought-after New Man as a “Soviet.” The New Man of the 1920s was, of course, modeled on the proletariat, an innate collectivist formed, in accordance with the Marxist theory of productive and creative labor, on the factory floor and in the midst of class struggles. The working class, as it was then asserted to be and since then much written about, contained in itself a script of alternative socialist modernity. From within this philosophical and political ideal, working-class personal aspirations were understood either as identical to or derivable from the needs of the collective good.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1920s, this philosophical and political worldview reigned supreme but its powers to set, to describe, and to evaluate virtually anything in relation to the “proletariat” were largely unleashed on paper: newspapers, journals, magazines, routine educational and celebratory speeches.<sup>22</sup> During the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), the

Bolshevik vision of collectivist modernity seemed to triumph in deeds as it finally materialized into radical social policies that celebrated, privileged, and promoted the working class and decidedly discriminated against other classes.<sup>23</sup> The popular metaphors of the 1920s that called for the remaking of human material in the image of the working class — literally “remelting” or “recasting” (*pereplavka*) — exploded at the time of the First Five-Year Plan and pronounced industrial labor as the privileged tool and the industrial plant as the privileged place for making ordinary people “new.” Anatoly Lunacharsky elaborated this Bolshevik vision-to-become-reality in his featured article “What Kind of Person Do We Need?,” which was serialized in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* in 1928. Reframing issues raised in the debates of a few years earlier as tangible goals, Lunacharsky wrote that there in the midst of “intimate unity” with material, machines, and tools, larger industrial collectives, and “different kind of chemical processes,” factory newcomers were made into the proletariat, with its “production-based qualities,” “natural collectivism,” “natural predisposition towards truly scientific understanding of things,” liberated appreciation of beauty, unbounded creativity, and organic antagonism toward self-centered limitations of capitalist/bourgeois forms of being.<sup>24</sup>

The education system responsible for the making of new socialist citizens also seemed to be moving into the space of production and productive labor. Throughout the 1920s, the Komsomol and the Commissariat of Enlightenment had been lobbying for the Bolshevik dream of making general education radically polytechnic and relocating it into “the proximity of factories and plants,” and now the dream seemed to be acquiring tangible funding. The Komsomol organization, already led by Aleksander Kosarev, fought militantly and successfully for factory-based schooling to be expanded to the masses — the project that translated the Bolshevik-Marxist theory of the collectivist productive worker into a nationwide institution. During the high point of this polytechnic campaign, when enrollment numbers increased in just one year from 73,000 in 1929 to 473,000 in 1930, Kosarev’s Central Committee worked de facto as a state agency, supervising the construction, operation, and even instruction of factory-based schools. The organization, together with the Commissariat of Enlightenment, celebrated what appeared to them to be the definitive beginning of a qualitatively different system of national education. The party’s support for the campaign at the 16th Party Congress in 1930 reinforced everyone’s expectation that

23 For the recent research on the unevenness of this process of “proletarianization” and increasing rates of exploitation, see Andrew Sloin, “Theorizing Soviet Antisemitism: Value, Crisis, and Soviet Modernity,” *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 249–81; see also Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*.

24 A. Lunacharsky, “Kakoi chelovek nam nuzhen,” *KP*, 22 July 1928; “Za bolshee iskusstvo bolshevizma,” *KP*, 11 May 1931; L. Perchik, “Idet izumitelnaia pereplavka liudei,” *KP*, 10 August 1933. See also Polonsky’s and Riutin’s articles, which presented the reader with the opposite of the proletariat, the petite bourgeoisie, Viach. Polonsky, “O meshchanskoi belestistike,” *KP*, 19 February 1929; Riutin, “Melkoburzhuaaznye cherty neomenshevizma,” *KP*, 6 January 1929; for more metal-processing-, technology-derived terms (such as “zakaliat,” “vulkanizirovat”) or machine- and collective-identified narratives and images, see N. Ivushkin, “Novoe pokolenie Moskovskoi organizatsii,” *KP*, 28 September 1931; E. Kriger, “Liudi – sobytiia, liudi – geroistvo,” *KP*, 7 September 1931; Ev. Kolesnikov, “Istoriia v odnoi mashine,” *KP*, 30 October 1931.

factory-based education would become the main educational venue of the first socialist state.<sup>25</sup>

- 25 In 1931, fifty workers of Kosarev's Central Committee worked at different construction sites supervising the construction of factory-based schools (*shkola fabrichno-zavodskogo uchenichestva* [FZU]). For an impressive record of the Komsomol's decisive involvement in the organization of the FZU system in the early 1930s, routine dealing with the Council of People's Commissars, the Party Central Committee, and militant participation in the state discussion on the reform of the Soviet secondary school system, see RGASPI, fond 1, opis 23, delo 1006, list 49-50, 54-55, 56-58; delo 1003, list 38-43. On Kosarev's personal role, see V. Kozlov, "Sterzhnevaia zadacha," in *Aleksandr Kosarev, Sbornik vospominanii* (Moscow, 2002), 67-69; N. Trushchenko, *Kosarev* (Moscow, 1988), 168; see also Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 105-106; Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class* (Pittsburgh, 1997), 114-15; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (Cambridge, New York, 1979), chapters 3, 9, 10.

- 26 N. Pogodin, *Poema o topore* in *Sobranie sochinenii, Tom 1* (Moscow, 1972), 136, 155-57.

- 27 V. Kataev, *Time Forward!* (1932). Proletarian poets, writers, and literary critics who wrote for *Komsomolskaia Pravda* and *Literaturnaia gazeta* in the early 1930s also resolutely set the "intimate" in opposition to the proletarian and the new. See A. Volkov and B. Meilakh, "Za bolshevitskuiu literaturu o molodezhi," *KP*, 30 September 1931.

Similarly radical interpretations of the Bolshevik vision of socialist modernity and "new people" came into being in literature and on stage, seemingly finalizing the divorce of the New Man ideal from cultural languages of individuality. In industrial classics of the Five-Year Plan period, the New Man happily disengaged from the world of interpersonal relations and individual peculiarity unrelated to work and, indeed, seemed to identify his personal fulfillment entirely with the collective purpose. This development was powerfully announced, for example, in a highly acclaimed 1931 play with a telling title, *Poem about an Axe*, by Nikolai Pogodin. As Pogodin's characters galloped on and off the stage, the viewer got acquainted with a new role model: a proletarian or proletariat-emulating hero portrayed at moments of "sleepwalking" home after an intense day of work and contemplating an answer to the problem that had been tormenting him for months. Suddenly, the hero is brought up short by a solution. He charges back to work, without remembering that he has not slept for days.<sup>26</sup>

The most extreme representation of such a work-consumed character comes from another hit of the period, Valentin Kataev's 1932 novel *Time Forward!* The author's hero Ishchenko illustrates well the extreme erasure of personal life depicted in the industrial novel. His ability to feel anything for his pregnant wife Fyenyia is vitiated by intense and complete dedication to his work that, in the form of a "burning, insistent thought," overtakes his whole being. "If he could only... get rid of her, get her off his hands, and get back to the sector!" he thinks as he takes the pregnant Fyenyia to a hospital.<sup>27</sup>

Such "sleepwalking" and work-consumed characters did not have any personal time to themselves. Nor did they seek home, let alone an intimate relationship, as a destination. Unlike his 1920s predecessor who, devoted to the revolutionary struggle and reconstruction work, still longed for private happiness but did not know how to achieve it or willfully turned private life into a painful sacrifice, the popular hero of the early 1930s achieved complete personal satisfaction on a construction site. For this industrial hero, the personal and the collective become one, and even the world of intimacy (a major issue in the 1920s) ceases to be of interest.

And yet, contrary to the prevailing scholarly consensus, this Bolshevik collectivist discourse and practice were short-lived. Ironically, the

key to understanding why this was so lies in the undergirding tenets of Boshevism: the belief that members of the working class are naturally predisposed collectivists, the living negation of the individualist ethos of capitalism, and the kernel of the future socialist society.<sup>28</sup> Journalists and Young Communist functionaries were the first to confront the limitations of the Bolshevik *lingua franca* to account for emergent, unanticipated complexities of the modern society under construction in the prewar decade. Already in the early 1930s, advocating the proletarian path toward mankind's liberation while reporting on the millions of children in the rapidly expanding educational system made journalists, for example, look like prisoners of their own device. On what grounds was one to include classroom children, this living embodiment of the world of study's crippling alienation from the world of production, in the New Man project?

The question became increasingly acute as the decade witnessed record growth in the number of children in the expanding state school system, from 12 million in 1931 to 32 million in 1940. At the same time, the 1930s shattered the Komsomol and party constituents' expectations for the radical remaking of the secondary school system along the lines of the factory-based ideal. Heeding the needs of modern society, which called for continuous secondary and higher education — the launching ground for classic middle-class careers such as accountant, economist, planner, engineer, scientist — the party began to require academic and competitive education for the postrevolutionary generations as early as 1931. The remainder of the decade saw an avalanche of school reforms and educational initiatives that unconditionally parted ways with the polytechnic dreams of the earlier period. To “study well” was highlighted as schoolchildren's primary obligation, and it was now placed within the four walls of a classroom.<sup>29</sup> In 1937, a labor class holdover from the 1920s dreams about people's polytechnic education that met only once a week was removed from the national curriculum.<sup>30</sup> The school population's much resented alienation from the proletarian experience became set in stone.

The school reform turned militant Komsomol activists of the Kosarev generation into confused and resentful functionaries who could hardly wrap their heads around schoolchildren, for whom “proletarian

28 For the most comprehensive and insightful discussion of the Marxist

identity discourse that “placed labor at the center of ideas about the

self,” see Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 69–71, 103–12.

29 Between 1931 and 1937, the Party Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars issued nine decrees. These included the September 1931 Decree on Primary and Secondary Schools; the August 1932 Decree on School Curricula and Regime in Primary and Secondary Schools; the February 1933 Decree on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools; the May 1934 Decree on the Structure of Primary and Secondary Schools of the USSR; the May 1934 Decree on the Teaching of Civic History in the Schools of the USSR; the September 1935 Decree on the Structure of Learning and Rules of Conduct in Primary, Incomplete Secondary, and Secondary Schools, and they were published in *Pravda*. See the editions of 5 Sep. 1931, 1; 28 August 1932, 1; 16 May 1934, 1; 4 Sep. 1935, 1; 5 July 1936, 1.

30 Members of the Komsomol Central Committee were still distressed by this fact in the early 1940s; see the 1940 report “O trudovom vospitanii shkolnikov,” RGASPI, fond 1, opis 23, delo 1423; Larry E. Holmes, “Magic into Hocus-Pocus: The Decline of Labor Education in Soviet Russia's Schools, 1931–1937,” *The Russian Review* 51 (Oct. 1992): 545–65; see also Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, ch. 10; E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York, 2002), 7; Larry E. Holmes, “School and Schooling under Stalin, 1931–1953,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia: Legacies and Prospects*, ed. Ben Eklof, Larry E. Holmes, and Vera Kaplan, 56–101 (London, 2005).

psychology” was supposed to become a school assignment and the factory, a sightseeing trip (a cultural tradition started in the 1930s). In an act of uncoordinated unity, driven by a resilient institutional practice and mindset, Komsomol leaders and rank-and-file workers did not heed the government requests accompanying the school reform to refocus their work on the school generation. In fact, they obstructed the unavoidable change in the social composition and the proletarian ideal of their organization right into the mid-1930s.

The membership numbers for the years of 1931 and 1939 demonstrate vividly what this obstruction meant in practical terms. In 1936, there were only 234,919 Komsomol members in Soviet schools, constituting less than 6.5 percent of the organization’s membership, which fluctuated from 3 million in January 1931 to 4.5 million in 1934 and back to 3.6 million in January 1936. The growing numbers of school youth did not begin to translate into growing numbers of Komsomol members until Stalin’s intervention in 1936, with which this essay began.<sup>31</sup> What is more, Komsomol activists, those who had been seasoned in the proletarian debates of the 1920s and, most recently, in the campaign for factory-based education, treated school teenagers who did manage to become Komsomol members as “second-rate members,” piling them together with another “second-rate” group — “young employees” with office jobs. A typical city Komsomol committee, Kosarev’s close coworker and friend V. Bubenkin admitted in 1936, could go for months without “discussing one single school-related topic” and without “admitting a single person from the schools” into the organization.<sup>32</sup>

31 For a compilation of published statistics, see Ralph Talcott Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918–1954* (New York, 1959), 409.

32 Between 1932–37, Bubenkin served as *Komsomolskaia Pravda*’s editor-in-chief. V. Bubenkin, “Nekotorye voprosy Komsomolskoi raboty v shkole,” *KP*, 8 April 1936; “Po-novomu rabotat s molodymi sluzhashchimi,” *KP*, 22 March 1936. The problem of excluding white-collar workers from the Komsomol organization persisted into 1937; see RGASPI, fond 1, opis. 23, delo 1291, list 21–23.

Journalists covering youth and school issues faced challenges of their own. Having abandoned the idea of factory-based polytechnic education for the first postrevolutionary generation in Soviet schools, the party did not offer a language to address the change. The cultural code to address the school generation alien to the revered Bolshevik project was not immediately apparent. The first half of the 1930s was spent groping for a term that could describe the youth who witnessed the grand industrial effort of the First and Second Five-Year Plans from within the walls of Soviet schools. Unable to fit these young people into a proletarian profile, journalists initially resorted to uncommitted and vague terminology. Writing for the Komsomol main national newspaper, *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, writer and journalist Vera Ketlinskaia, for example, referred to the school youth as “successors,” whom she still defined as outsiders to the “intense construction

of socialism.” Other journalists got around the problem of naming the cohort disconnected from the working-class experience by taking pride in “the studying youth” or by simply omitting the usual “proletarian” in front of “kids,” “children,” “teenagers,” and “youth.” Until his arrest in 1938, Kosarev, who regularly wrote for *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda* and whose speeches were reprinted in all the major national newspapers, preferred “our youth,” “the Stalinist generation,” and “the young person of the country of socialism” — the figures of speech that allowed him not to comment on the class nature of the school generation.<sup>33</sup>

In the mid-1930s, journalists began using the term “Soviet” to refer to this alien generation of the country of socialism were preparing for even more alienating middle-class careers. For the first time, “Soviet” became a signifier for school youth separated from the proletarian world of production and, at the same time, synonymous with socialism.

As such, the term “Soviet” was tried out in a poll of teenagers from the Soviet Union and France. The poll was published and discussed under the caption of “Soviet children” and “French children” between November 1934 and January 1935 in *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda*. As *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda* editors explained, eleven children from each country, “coming from similar social backgrounds” and all between eleven and fifteen years of age, were asked about their life goals, career plans, and general world awareness.<sup>34</sup> It was likely Western outsiders — French journalists — who suggested that the editors use “Soviet” as a descriptor for the children’s identity. Ironically and yet not surprisingly, given the use of the word “Soviet” in the West, first instances of its use as a marker of identity produced in the Soviet Union appeared in the Soviet press when journalists cited foreigners. One of the earliest examples can be found in a 1932 article by journalist E. Estova, who informed her readers that “what amazed foreign delegates and tourists the most in the Soviet Union” was its “Soviet youth and Soviet children.”<sup>35</sup> In this case, this identity-assigning understanding of “Soviet” was a literal translation from German and was unique in the Soviet Union’s cultural universe of the early 1930s. What set *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda*’s 1934/1935 use of the term “Soviet” apart from earlier cases was that the “Soviet children” did not thereafter disappear from the newspaper until its next encounter with a Western publication but entered the press to stay, becoming a topic of discussion and reporting

33 A. Kosarev, “Uzlovye zadachi komsomolskoi raboty,” *KP*, 24 May 1938.

34 “15 voprosov sovetskim detiam,” *KP*, 29 November 1934; readers’ letters in response to the Soviet-French poll, *KP*, 1 January 1935.

35 E. Estova, “Pokolenie, rozhdennoi Oktiabrem,” *KP*, 30 October 1932.

on character, personality, sensibility, *et cetera*, from then until the end of the Soviet Union.

In the spring and summer of 1935, the term “Soviet” was picked up again by *Pravda*, this time to cover the first graduating class of the Soviet ten-year school and an unprecedented government reception in its honor. The June reception of this quintessentially classroom youth heading for more classroom learning in the institutions of higher education was held on the government’s initiative and on its territory, in the Column Hall of the House of the Soviets.<sup>36</sup> In the coverage of the reception, a *Pravda* editorial celebrated the “Soviet Person” for the first time when it called upon its readers to “have a look at the Soviet youth, at the Soviet children,” these “true new people, cut out of new material” and “inoculated with qualities of the Soviet person.”<sup>37</sup>

When, in the following spring of 1936, Stalin addressed the Xth Congress of the All-Union Komsomol Organization as “Soviet youth” — the example with which this essay began — he treated not only Kosarev but the organization’s “proletarian youth leaders” to a public lesson on how to use a new category of identity.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the decade, journalists had turned “Soviet” into an active identity signifier. The schoolchildren (*ucheniki*), the kids (*rebiata*), the teenagers (*podrostoki*), the student body (*studenchestvo*), and the youth (*molodezh*) all became “Soviet.”<sup>39</sup>

The mid-1930s rise of this Soviet-marked discourse was more than a mechanical replacement of one category with another. More than just a word, “Soviet” served as an overarching rubric. Under it, journalists and party leaders, soon to be followed by rank-and-file functionaries and activists, writers and literary critics, and the youth themselves, engaged with the emerging modern society, its complex social structure, and with the individual/collective dilemma in terms formerly missing from the official discursive space. In order to understand the magnitude of the cultural development, we need to explore the making of the Soviet into a distinct cultural language and signifying practice.

### The “Soviet”: A Concept, Language, and Cultural Practice

Let us go back to the first episode of the featured use of “Soviet” in the poll of “Soviet and French children.” Within it, the term “Soviet” was resolutely employed independently from the Bolshevik discursive

36 “Pokolenie velikogo budushchego,” *Pravda*, 29 June 1935; Yuri Zhukov, “Molodye sovetskie patrioty,” *KP*, 16 April 1936; “Tsvetushchaia iunost Rodiny,” *KP*, 2 June 1935.

37 “Pokolenie velikogo budushchego,” *KP*, 2 June 1935.; also see “Organizovat vpolnenie reshenii s’ezda,” *KP*, 24 April 1936; “Proverochnye ispytaniia v shkole,” *Pravda*, 25 May 1936.

38 “Da zdravstuet sovetskaia molodezh!” *KP*, 22 April 1936; for experimentation with the “Soviet youth” talk before the congress, see “Preds’ezdovskaia tribuna: Obiazannosti komsomoltsa,” *KP*, 15 March 1936; G. Glezerman, “O Novoi programme Komsomola,” *KP*, 30 March 1936.

39 “Sila i moshch sovetskogo naroda,” *Pravda*, 24 July 1938; “Po-Bolshevitski podderzhat zamechatelnyi pochin,” *KP*, 11 July 1938; Evg. Vorobev, “Na vsem gotovom,” *KP*, 10 September 1938; E. Kononenko, “Egoisty,” *KP*, 21 March 1938; E. Kononenko, “Grubost,” *KP*, 3 January 1939; “Vooruzhit kadry Komsomola marksistsko-leninskoi teoriei,” *Pravda*, 21 February 1939; teenagers began to refer to themselves as “Soviet” in *Komsomolskaia Pravda*; see, e.g., “Dnevnik Toni Shatrovoi,” 18 March 1936; S. Kolosov, “Chest sovetskogo shkolnika,” 14 November 1938.



tradition. It was used to relate the content of the school teenagers' dreams and aspirations, the meaning of which conflicted with the "proletarian" ideal.

At first glance, the French children and the children from the Soviet Union appeared to be markedly different. While planning on ambitious professional careers, the French kids were enraptured by trivial and inconsequential dreams for themselves. The "Soviet children" were predictably doing the opposite of trivial dreaming. They seemed to be obsessed with serious "studying," which served as the leitmotif of the Soviet portion of the poll.<sup>40</sup> However, what perhaps is even more worthy of a historian's attention is not what set the teenagers from the Soviet Union and France apart in this propagandistic project, but what they had in common. A striking commonality between the French and Soviet children was their professional ambition, which carried not a trace of the "proletarian" ideal as a concept or life goal. Out of the eleven "Soviet children," only two were from working-class families. This fact alone could have been easily explained away should the non-proletarian kids have fancied proletarian career paths for themselves. But the contrary was the case. Betraying no defensive intonations, the majority of the admired Soviet children (eight out of eleven) reported dreams of professional self-realization that would preclude them from having first-hand working-class experience in production. Having excused themselves from the ranks of the proletarian community, they saw their futures unfold into institutions of higher education and professional careers as pilots, coaches, doctors, writers, actresses, ballet dancers, and engineer-inventors.<sup>41</sup>

Having declared their professional goals as their life goals to be achieved by means of continuous study, the young people, however, did not part with the discourse on class per se since they were asked about their parents' social origins. The change was, I argue, subtler. What was missing from their answers was the familiar Bolshevik discourse on class prescribing that one's individual identity be oriented around one's class origins; that is, what was missing was the notion of class as the primary marker and signifier of one's self. What was new was a socialist profile presented as one of highest achievements of the industrializing nation that revolved around professional choices and featured education and culture as essential social experiences bestowing individual status and value. In it, no class represented an ideal type to be imitated by all; "class" no longer figured as a privileged category of identification, but was merely one among many.<sup>42</sup>

40 "15 voprosov....," *KP*, 14 November 1938; letter by schoolboy V. N. Buianov, *KP*, 1 January 1935.

41 "15 voprosov....," *KP*, 14 November 1938; also see Ania Mlynek's speech on behalf of the first graduating class of the Soviet ten-year school in the Column Hall of the House of the Soviets, 1935, "Vystuplenie Ani Mlynek," *KP*, 3 June 1935; "Pismo vypusknikov moskovskikh shkol tov. Stalinu," *KP*, 2 June 1935.

42 To avoid a misunderstanding, the argument here is not about the disappearance of the class discourse but about a plurality of class discourses in late 1930s Stalinist culture. For an influential analysis of the 1930s class identity discourse, which utilized the prerevolutionary category of "sosloviia" to explain a move away from class thinking, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 65, 4 (December 1993): 745-70.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the novelty of this concept and language entering the mainstream of official culture and the changing meaning of the class discourse is to note the new treatment of the working-class kids it featured. The two such children who participated in the Soviet-French survey and modestly wanted to become metal turners were no longer singled out or praised as ideal specimens of humanity by either the journalists or readers subsequently responding to the newspaper. In the discussion that followed the poll's publication, the decision to become a turner was a professional choice of little popularity. Kids whose responses to the survey were featured in the newspaper did not want to become workers. They began their letters with excited statements that they recognized themselves in these schoolchildren who were preparing for non-proletarian careers as writers, engineers, and athletes.<sup>43</sup>

The schoolchildren's new life ideals and role models signaled a major crack in the monolith of the proletarian ideal of the New Man as well as a striking expansion of the conversation about socialist modernity in the national press. In addition, the young people who wrote to the newspaper also introduced the first accounts of the post-reform school culture that had been constitutive of their mindsets. The Soviet youth told readers about their exciting recreational activities, which indiscriminately included "visiting the factory," going to the theater, going to the movies, visiting a club, skiing, and skating. "Lusia, I think you go sightseeing [too]," wrote a teenager from the Cheliabinsk region, sharing his everyday life with a survey participant. "We visited the factory and also they took us to the club."<sup>44</sup>

Visits to the factory constituted a tribute to the proletarian culture, which was on its way to becoming a tradition to be studied, visited, consumed, practiced once a week, but not to be lived. I argue that turning workers and their factories into an exhibit for "Soviet children" was one of constitutive moments in the making of the Soviet concept, marked by a practice of voyeuristic observation of the working class and, simultaneously, alienation from it.

In the mid-1930s journalists writing for major national newspapers made a major effort to bring the worldview and the language of the Soviet-marked youth into the press. How did the young people themselves account for their nonproletarian aspirations? For young journalists and self-proclaimed experts on the Soviet youth's inner world, such as Elena Kononenko and Yurii Zhukov, the school theme constituted a professional opportunity to differentiate themselves

43 Ibid.; letters by schoolchildren Kolia Kuznetsov, V. N. Buianov, Vladimir Starukhin, V. Agapova, *KP*, 1 January 1935.

44 Letter by Vania Komissarov, *KP*, 1 January 1935.

from the journalistic cohort that preceded them and its traditional contempt of non-proletarian young people. Thanks to them, *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda* became leading sites of construction of the “Soviet” vision of socialism as the Soviet school became a routine and no longer perpetually negative subject of reportage. Together with the “new Soviet person,” there thus also appeared a new Soviet journalist who frequented the Soviet school and produced a long list of school-based documentary articles, investigation reports, sketches, and short stories.

As a result of these efforts, which reverberated across the national press, the new — Soviet — hero also turned out to have a new biography that foregrounded Soviet teenage preoccupations with their “innate gifts,” a figure of speech from the period. The new post-Bolshevik biography displayed little use for the previous decade’s familiar narratives of “building” or “remaking” the self either to emulate or strengthen a working-class character. With the new leit-motif of “discovery” of one’s “innate gifts,” notions of “self-building” acquired new connotations.

For example, according to Soviet teenagers featured in *Pravda*, deciding on one’s professional calling was predicated on a discovery of one’s individual talents and innate abilities, or, in the language of this evolving discourse, one’s “nature-given” and, thus, unique self. Published surveys of Soviet children and teenagers answering questions such as “Who do you want to be?” presented young people narrating their very short lives as gradual, sometimes effortless, and sometimes frustrated and torturous, discoveries of their latent talents and professional predispositions.

Starting with 1934 and 1935, when the first surveys of teenagers’ post-school plans appeared in *Pravda*, this new “Soviet” model of searching on one’s own for one’s “nature-given abilities” already constituted a shared *lingua franca* of autobiographical essays by school graduates. Seventeen-year-old Vitalii Moskalev, a son of an accountant, like 115 other graduates in his Stalinskii district of Moscow, concluded in early May 1935 that his school journey of self-exploration naturally called for higher education. In a manner typical of his cohort and strikingly different from the proletarian biography, Moskalev organized his autobiographical essay around his nature-given individual “inclinations.” He offered a close account of his Soviet self, whose innate dynamics and progress the teenager had been closely following since he was thirteen years old:

I have felt love toward nature since childhood. At the age of 13, my inclinations towards natural sciences, mainly biology, geology, and astronomy, manifested themselves.... My interest in natural sciences grew gradually. At the age of 15, it reached a high point and acquired a more concrete form: I focused my studies on biology. Since the age of 16, I have felt a strong striving toward research and scientific work. Because of it, I felt compelled to apply to a circle of young biologists at the Zoo.... After graduation I intend to apply to the biology department of the Moscow State University.<sup>45</sup>

The mid-1930s coverage of Soviet teenagers, I argue, introduced into the mainstream of official culture a post-Bolshevik identity discourse that relied on a notion of a human nature that pre-existed class. In the articles, sketches, and short stories that journalists devoted to the Soviet youth, “nature” handed out gifts, enabling or disqualifying people for certain professions, regardless of their class belonging and thus individualizing the human predicament. Venturing into schools and encountering teenagers in person, journalists enriched the conversation about human nature and the making of the Soviet person with more detail.

45 Essay by Vitalii Moskalev, *Pravda*, 9 May 1935; also “Sovetskaia shkola i Komso-mol,” *Pravda*, 7 Feb. 1936; N. Sats, “Tsentralnyi detskii teatr,” *Pravda*, 28 Feb. 1936; “Schastlivoe detstvo,” *Izvestiia*, 29 June 1936; “Prazdnik molodosti i sily,” *Izvestiia*, 12 July 1937; A. Krylova, “Nashi deti,” *Izvestiia*, 18 July 1939.

46 See Kononenko’s discussion of a survey of children’s New Year’s wishes on the eve of 1936 at another school that introduced readers of *Komsomolskaia Pravda* to pupil X, who intended to become a better filmmaker than the Vasiliev brothers; to pupil Kukharev, who wanted to become “the best mathematician and win the first prize among mathematicians and physicists” in his district and city; and to pupil Arkhipov, who aspired to be “a well-known painter like Repin and Vasnetsov,” to name just a few featured dreams. E. Kononenko, “Podrostki,” *KP*, 28 January 1936.

Becoming an expert on youth issues, Elena Kononenko, in particular, confessed in her serialized contributions in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* that she was taken aback at the ambition and “confidence” with which some children and teenagers drew parallels between themselves and their chosen role models — Soviet filmmakers, French writers, mathematicians, and Russian prerevolutionary painters — across class lines and historical epochs.<sup>46</sup> She was equally attentive to the pervasive anxiety among the recently designated Soviet people about their individual capabilities, since many children feared that their search for an innate gift would not yield a desirable outcome.

Familiar to most scholars of Soviet Russia, though not yet a focus of academic research, the fears of “mediocrity,” “stupidity,” and “talentlessness” — the flipside of the modern preoccupation with one’s nature-assured individual self — constituted, I contend, another defining trope of the emerging Soviet culture. To Kononenko, worrying about one’s “talentlessness” (*bezdarlost*) and “mediocrity” (*posredsvennost*) appeared to be so rampant among Soviet schoolchildren that she turned a meeting with a teenager torn by doubts about his individual talents into a plot in her 1936–37 essays.

One such character was sixteen-year-old Arkadii Ch., to whom Kononenko devoted an essay in August 1937. By the time she met Arkadii, she wrote, the teenager was suffering from paralyzing “disappointment in himself”: formerly the best student in his class, Arkadii confessed to lacking any motivation to do anything. The cause of his depressed state was the devastating conclusion he had reached that he “had no talents” and “was a mediocrity.”<sup>47</sup> Though it is difficult, given the limits of our academic interpretive paradigms, to account for this young Soviet person obsessed with his own self to the degree of depression, Arkadii and the other young people who appeared in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* during the second half of the 1930s constitute a historical — “Soviet” — subject in their own right.

Putting his generation’s ambitions for self-realization into practice, Arkadii’s particular choice of role models were test pilots Mikhail Gromov and Andrey Yumashev. In the spirit of his cohort, he valued the two pilots for their professional skill, which enabled them to set world records and become famous. Parting with the Bolshevik class-centered identity discourse of the previous decade, Arkadii, according to Kononenko, was convinced that Gromov and Yumashev were gifted individuals because they were singled out by nature, not class: “Do you really think that anybody can be like Gromov? And you think I do not know what you are going to say?!..., [t]hat he [Gromov] is a master of his profession, that he has worked very hard for all these years. But after all, he is still a talent!? Mother Nature has imparted him with abilities....”<sup>48</sup>

At the heart of Komsomol and the national press, then, this teenager dreamed of glory in his own name, that is, as someone uniquely gifted and different. Kononenko’s reply was indicative of the complex and contradictory cultural situation Soviet journalists found themselves in. On the one hand, she drew on familiar Bolshevik tropes from the 1920s and explained to Arkadii and her readers that they should “derive their personal glory from the glory of their motherland.” On the other hand, now speaking in a different — “Soviet” — register, Kononenko assured Arkadii that a “path toward glory is open to each citizen *in his/her own name* and in the name of the motherland [*vo imia sebia I rodiny*].” As a result, Kononenko encouraged Arkadii to derive his sense of self from a larger whole and, at the same time, acknowledged that the “name” (i.e., identity) of an individual citizen and the name of the country were two distinguishable entities.

47 E. Kononenko, “Mechty o slave,” *KP*, 5 August 1937.

48 Ibid.

In their essays on teenage vanity, journalists did more than simply posit a tormented modern individual. Their essays exemplified what foregrounding of that kind of individual meant for rethinking the classic individual-collective conundrum of the socialist tradition. Journalists' interest in young Soviet people's nature-given selves turned out to be intrinsically connected to an even larger question: How were these new Soviet people to navigate between their innate gifts and the collective good?

The reconsideration of the individual-collective relationship that began in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* resulted in an acknowledgement that individual experience in modern society had a complex structure and incorporated new notions of distance, boundary, and connection. The second half of the 1930s also saw the rapid production of a new language with new figures of speech journalists employed in attempts to capture Soviet modernity. Initially, much was borrowed from post-reform school culture.<sup>49</sup>

As mid-1930s teenager questionnaires attested, a new ritual was clearly in the making in the Soviet school: pledging one's investment in what was now more and more often referred to as the "social good" (*obshchestvennoe*) rather than the collective. Utilizing new figures of speech, the youth proudly and repeatedly stated that they wanted to be "useful" (*byt' poleznym*) to society; they were eager to "pay their debt" back to the party and society for the time they had spent on their individual development; they felt "responsibility for the collective."<sup>50</sup>

The very possibility of voicing one's relationship to the collective good in terms of "usefulness," "debt," and "responsibility" constituted, I argue, a marked development of the public conversation about the individual and his social milieu. In a society where, less than a decade previously, an individual was to become one with the collective in order to begin one's rise toward a new humanity, and in a society where the dictum to be a collectivist man was often understood as making a virtuous sacrifice of one's personal striving, an invitation to be simply "socially useful" was a conceptual step forward. The notion of "being socially useful," for example, no longer implied that the personal and the collective (or the social) were identical or merge-able, nor that the personal was a derivative of the collective. Instead, the agenda to be "socially useful" implied that the personal and the social were distinct and distinguishable experiences, entities that needed to be related but not equated with one another.

49 In "Imagining Socialism in the Soviet Century," I directly address the problem that the "speaking Bolshevik" figure of speech, coined by Stephen Kotkin, posits when used indiscriminately in relation to different periods of Soviet history, particularly, its postwar decades. Krylova, "Imagining Socialism," 316-19.

50 See the essay by Nikolai Mikhailov, *KP*, 9 May, 1935; letter by ten graduates of Moscow school #5 of the Proletarsky district, *KP*, 1 June 1935; letter by V. N. Buianov (the Gorkovskiy krai), *KP*, 1 January 1935. For examples of the "giving up all one's strength" tropes circulating in the mid- and late-1930s press next to the emerging new language of "being socially useful," see "Otvaga I doblest sovetskikh liudei," *KP*, 20 October 1938.

The youth's discursive register contrasted strikingly with that of their parents' generation. The parents continued to write to newspapers with stories of their "sacrifice," "disregard," and "neglect" of their personal aspirations as the highest virtue and proof of their selfless participation in common cause of the proletarian remaking of the country — that is, in the manner most familiar to scholars of modern Russia.<sup>51</sup>

In the late 1930s, the conversation about the relationship between the personal and the emerging modern society in the lives of educated and professional youth found its way into newspaper editorials in *Pravda* and acquired a new official terminology. The old — Bolshevik — clichés that identified the individual with the collective were losing their seemingly universal applicability. The new — Soviet-marked — clichés of "connecting" (*sviazyvat*) one's "personal happiness...to the well-being of the country" that Soviet journalists tried out in the late 1930s simplified both a relation and a differentiation between the personal and social realms.<sup>52</sup> The confidence projected by editorials that such a connection was to be harmonious was of course a wishful mobilizing gesture, but the change in vocabulary from "deriving" the personal from the collective to "connecting" the two was profound.

By the end of the 1930s, the Komsomol organization had no choice but to start mastering and even developing the new, Soviet language of socialist modernity and to begin a painful reorientation toward the Soviet school and its constituency. This process was facilitated by the change of the Komsomol leadership brought about by the Great Purges. Between 1937 and 1938, Kosarev and his militant Komsomol elite were replaced with new cadres whose immediate practical task, posited by the party, consisted of bringing the school and white collar youth into the ranks of the Komsomol organization.<sup>53</sup> In 1936, the Komsomol opened its ranks to all "Soviet" young people regardless of social origin. The number of school-based Komsomol members increased by almost six times by 1939 and reached 1,500,000. The change of the Komsomol's day-to-day activities and responsibilities was equally impressive. The new Central Committee now made it its business to conduct careful surveys of schoolchildren's grades and to monitor students' time devoted to study. It reported on grade inflation to the Party Central Committee and organized competitions in school physics, chemistry, and mathematics.<sup>54</sup>

By the late 1930s, joining the Komsomol was no longer tantamount to coming to the proletariat, as Komsomol activists had believed less

51 Letter by Tonia Gubarevich's father, comrade Gubarevich, *KP*, 1 January 1935; "Lichnaia i obshchestvennaia zhizn," *KP*, 22 August 1937.

52 "Po-bolshevitski podderzhat zamechatelnyi pochin," *KP*, 22 August 1937.

53 For the best discussion of objectives and methods of the Great Purges, see Oleg Khlevnyuk, "The Objectives of the Great Terror, 1937-1938," in *Stalinism: Essential Readings*, ed. David L. Hoffmann, 158-76 (Oxford, 2002).

54 See RGASPI, fond 1, opis 23, delo 1358, list 68-69; delo 1423, list 67-68; delo 1427, list 32-36, 37, 40; delo 1470, list 89-108; delo 1315, list 2-9.

than a decade before. Instead, foreshadowing the kind of revisions to be applied gradually to the Soviet state's founding documents over the next thirty years, the Komsomol organization remade itself in the image of the "New Soviet Person." The Komsomol line towards factory-based education underwent a corresponding change. No longer were factory-based schools, which steadily deprived students of hours devoted to general education, treated as a training base for new humanity. In a factory-based school, working-class youth became skilled workers, not "new people."

### Conclusion

The history of the "Soviet" — as a concept, language, and cultural practice — thus makes one rethink the presumed monopoly of the Bolshevik tenets on political, institutional, and cultural terrains of the prewar and, by extension, postwar Soviet Union. As early as the mid-1930s, the Bolshevik proletariat-styled scenario for alternative modern life began losing its cultural currency to engage the emerging modern society under construction in Russia. The graduating cohorts of the expanding school system, on whose behalf the term "Soviet" as an identity-ascribing category first appeared, had especially little in common with the Bolshevik ideal of the New Man, which uncompromisingly insisted on the proletarian collective as the indispensable blueprint for a socialist way of being. The rise of new connotations of the "Soviet" in the press, school, and public events was thus necessitated by the magnitude of the social change that, in the mid-1930s, was most vividly objectified by school graduates preparing for middle-class professional careers. Impossible to ignore and badly needed, this growing army of white collar and specialized professionals, defining as much of non-market as of market modernities, required a new language. It was also during the second half of the 1930s that Soviet journalists, party and state officials, and song writers experimented with the post-proletarian connotations of the term Soviet by describing the identity and qualities of the people living in the territory of the Soviet Union as "Soviet," such as in "Soviet people" and "Soviet patriotism."<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Stalin did not invent the concept of the "Soviet" with its new connotations in 1936. Instead, astutely sensing the limitations of the Bolshevik master vision, he borrowed the new, still-in-the-making term and language from the emergent effort taking place in the press and the school system. His editing corrections of the

55 See, e.g., Karl Radek, "Sovetskii Patriotism," *Pravda*, 1 May 1936; V. I. Lebedev-Kumach, "Esli zavtra voina," song, 1938; "Rodnoi Stalin," editorial, *Pravda*, 21 December 1939.



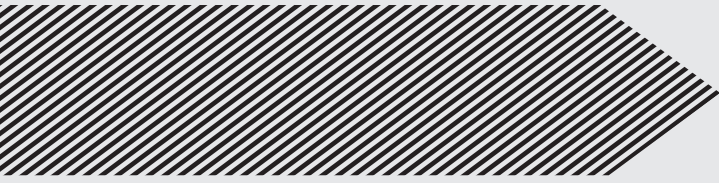
Komsomol Membership Rules made him undoubtedly a highly influential participant in the construction of the new cultural language of socialism. As a result, he too added to the conflict-ridden terrains of official culture and party policies that, I argue, defined the epoch of the Great Purges.

The history of the “Soviet” does not end in the 1930s, of course. Rather, it marks the beginning of a long cultural process — the gradual, expansive, and never complete departure of the Soviet Union’s socialist project from the straitjacket of the 1920s romance with the proletariat. Far from being uniformly enchanted by the proletarian collective, different Soviet generations, already in the 1930s, spoke different languages of socialism, including the one that evidenced a concern with the delineation of boundaries between the personal and the social in a socialist society and bore witness to the fact that such preoccupations do not constitute the prerogative either of capitalist modernities or the twentieth century liberal tradition.

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# **Alternative Visions**



## REVOLUTION OR REPETITION: WOODSTOCK'S ROMANTICISM

Maarten Doorman

If we try to understand global history by pointing to revolutionary moments we would probably mention 2001, 1989, and 1968 as the most striking years in the postwar Western world. And if we discuss utopian thought and the quest for “alternative realities,” the year 1968 comes to the fore, more than the years 1989 and 2001, which might be seen as more important turning points in political history.<sup>1</sup> As the writer Mark Kurlansky puts it in his book *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*: “There has never been a year like 1968[...]. At a time when nations and cultures were still separate and very different — and in 1968 Poland, France, the United States, and Mexico were far more different from one another than they are today — there occurred a spontaneous combustion of rebellious spirits around the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Even for historians less focused on specific years than journalists and writers like Kurlansky it seems hard to deny that the late 1960s are often regarded as the most revolutionary years of the postwar period. However, if we take a closer look at the changes of that time, the question emerges in how far the cultural revolution of those days represented a shift in cultural values that was completely new. So in *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985), Richard Holmes describes how he tuned in to Radio Luxembourg in the spring of 1968 and heard a live report on the storming of the Bourse in Paris: crowds shouting, the crack of tear-gas grenades, breaking glass, and cheers. An authority on Romanticism and eminent biographer of Shelley and Coleridge, Holmes then claims he was suddenly gripped by “the Revolution”:

It was not the destruction that excited me but the sense of something utterly new coming into being, some fresh, immense possibility of political life, a new community of hope, and above all the strangely inspired note — like a new language — that sounded in the voices of those who were witnessing it. It was a glimpse of “the dream come true,” the golden age, the promised land.

Moreover, I identified it — immediately, naïvely — with that first French Revolution as seen by the English Romantics ....

1 This article and my presentation at the conference “Alternative Realities” are based on the second chapter of Maarten Doorman, *De romantische orde* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2004/2012), 49–71.

2 Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York, 2004), xvii. Kristin Ross tries in *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, 2002) to restore the political relevance of the revolution of these days.

For what I was feeling, what my friends were feeling, seemed to be expressed perfectly by the Romantics, and by no one else.

He then quotes lines written by Wordsworth on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille: “’Twas a time when Europe was rejoiced, / France standing at the top of golden hours / And human nature seeming born again.” He thus draws a parallel between the revolutionary events of the Romantic era and those of that legendary May of 1968 in Paris. Graffiti on the walls of the faculty of medicine declared “Imagination au Pouvoir” — power to the imagination — in glaring red, and though this time there was no Robespierre, there was many a rabble-rouser who resembled his right-hand man, the youthful and long-haired Saint-Just.

Holmes thinks that the whole ethos of the 1960s, of the counterculture, “was based on a profoundly romantic rejection of conventional society, the old order, the establishment, the classical, the square.”<sup>3</sup> That hypothesis was perhaps not at all original in 1985, but it can still inspire further inquiry into the romantic heritage of that era, particularly for those who prefer to consider the counterculture in its broader cultural context and not simply from the traditional politically revolutionary perspective of Paris ’68.<sup>4</sup> After all, these political aspirations were imbued with the desire for a different conception of society and a different way of life, for a humanity and a utopian way of living inspired by the ideals of authenticity and self-realization.

A look at the most renowned pop festival of all time, held at Woodstock in the United States a year later, might explain such aspirations. Which conventions were rejected at this focal point of the 1960s? What values stirred the imagination of the new generation? What was the role of the imagination itself? If one ignores the immediate and different political dimensions between the Paris student movement and Woodstock, which in Paris was largely embodied in the longing for democratization of the universities and in worker demands, and at Woodstock in protest against the war in Vietnam, a number of striking commonalities stand out that pertain to the entire generation.

### Primacy of Youth

To start with, there was the primacy of youth: previous generations have had their day, so the thinking goes, and their ideas are

3 Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London, 1985), 73–75. See Richard Holmes, *The Romantic Poets and Their Circle* (London, 1997), 7.

4 See Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters, eds., *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Bern, Oxford 2010); Eric Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968–1981* (Berkeley, 2012); Lessie Frazier and Deborah Cohen, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke, 2009); Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, ed., *A Revolution of Perception?: Consequences and Echoes of 1968* (New York, 2014); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York, 2008).

outdated; moreover, the new generation is unquestionably right simply because it is young. And visitors to Woodstock were indeed young, as a documentary by Michael Wadleigh about this muddy festival shows. Was it not the very child-like spontaneity of this unexpectedly



**Opening ceremony at Woodstock, August 15, 1969. Wikimedia Commons.**

massive gathering that lent it the character of an almost unreal Utopia?<sup>5</sup> The four organizers were also young, the oldest being twenty-six. Some of the people involved did deign to make compassionate comments about older people and about their parents in Wadleigh's documentary. Most of the musicians were under thirty. The Who played "My Generation," with the following lines, to enthusiastic applause: "People try to put us down / Just because we get around / Things they do look awful cold / I hope I die before I get old." Music was the great divide between young and old. Even an advocate and theoretical designer of the counterculture, Theodore Roszak, was unable to identify with the new generation. In 1968 he was ready to admit that "the pop and rock groups ... [were] the real 'prophets' of the rising generation," but he could not stand "the raucous style of their sound and performance", much of it being "too brutally loud ... too electronically gimmicked up."<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the Woodstock generation, the age of musicians had not mattered so much in music — even in popular music. Elderly

5 Michael Wadleigh, director, *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace, Music ... and Love*, 1970 (Warner Bros. home video, 1989). See Andy Bennett, "Everybody's Happy, Everybody's Free: Representation and Nostalgia in the Woodstock Film," in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett, 43–54 (Aldershot, UK, 2004). The spontaneity of the

mass gathering has often been highlighted after the fact, but it was relative, as there had been a long-running advertising campaign beforehand. See, for example, Alf Evers, *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock* (New York, 1972), 711–12, 714. For a statistical impression of the opinions held by the American Woodstock generation, see Rex

Weiner and Deanne Stillman, *Woodstock Census: The Nationwide Survey of the Sixties Generation* (New York, 1979). A manageable account of the Woodstock festival is Elliot Tiber (1994), "How Woodstock Happened ...", from *The Times Herald Record* at <http://www.geocities.ws/curlybraces/Music/woodstock69.html>.

6 Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London, 1970), 291. For the role of protest in pop music, see Dario Martinelli, *Give Peace a Chant: Popular Music, Politics and Social Protest* (Berlin, et al., 2017).

soloists or jazz musicians were nothing exceptional, nor are they now, but something seemed to change forever at that moment in time. Woodstock was youth, and youth was the criterion. In the twenty-first century, the age of pop idols has sometimes fallen to under fifteen. But at the same time it doesn't seem quite new. The fact is that the first generation of Romantics — in both England and Germany — was young and all too conscious of its own youthfulness, even considering it a positive quality. On his years spent in Jena around 1800, Henrik Steffens wrote: "A new era dawned and manifested itself in the spirit of all the young people who were receptive to it (*in allen empfänglichen Jugendgemütern*). — We beheld the blossoming spring of a new spiritual age, which we jubilantly welcomed with youthful élan."<sup>7</sup>

This high esteem for youth was already foreshadowed in two eighteenth-century best-sellers: Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) and Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'Éducation* (1762, *Émile, or On Education*). Both books are testimony to an unprecedented attention to the brittle disposition of the adolescent, to deferred adulthood and budding sexuality. Moreover, Rousseau's influential work explores the emotional world of the earlier years of youth, and advocates allowing the child to develop in as natural a manner as possible, an argument that was applied and elaborated by Romantic pedagogues like Pestalozzi and Fröbel.

Romantics did not shine the spotlight on youth merely as a phase in life distinct from adulthood; they also held the young in high esteem because, in the words of Rousseau, they were not yet tainted by culture. In Europe after the French Revolution, where the twenty-something Napoleon held sway, the ambivalent interest in the youthfulness of a suicidal Werther turned into admiration for young people who were decisively energetic and vital, and among youngsters themselves into a mood of self-assuredness and power. According to Novalis, the French Revolution and the conflicts that followed were actually a struggle about what should prevail: the ripeness of adulthood or the blossoming of youth. And for the Romantics, at least while they themselves were still young, the preference lay with the latter, as Wordsworth waxed lyrical in *The Prelude* (1805): "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!"

From a societal perspective, the triumph of youth in the Romantic era was for the time being perhaps limited to the upper crust — in the nineteenth century student movements burgeoned everywhere, with far-reaching consequences in the political sphere — but it seems that

7 Qtd. in Eduard Engel, *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1913), 23. See Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, 2002), 18, 193–94.



something definitively changed across a broad front in the perception of youth. And then it was not merely a case of what Anita Brookner terms in her book about Romanticism “the right to earn disapproval from one’s elders.”<sup>8</sup> The censurable naïvety, fantasy and impulsiveness of the child now specifically gained the much more positive overtone of open-mindedness, of imaginative power and of spontaneous creativity, character traits that were also regarded as marks of genius. Therefore even among students, Schopenhauer wrote, it was still sometimes possible to descry some spark of brilliant eccentricity. Yet as soon as these youngsters become adults, “they pupate and are then resurrected as obdurate Philistines (*eingefleischter Philister*), who shock one if one comes across them later.”<sup>9</sup>

This could well have come from *Émile*, just like Novalis’s lament that “*Wo Kinder sind, da ist ein goldenes Zeitalter*” (“Where children are, there is a golden age”) or, in the words of the painter Runge, “*Kinder müssen wir werden, wenn wir das Beste erreichen wollen*” (“We must become children, if we want to achieve the best”).<sup>10</sup> And Schiller went considerably further in his *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–96, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*), comparing children with fauna and flora and peasants and so-called primitives, all bearing witness to a natural state. “Children *are* what we *were*,” he wrote, “they are what we should become once more. We were nature like them and our culture should lead us back to nature.”<sup>11</sup>

### Free Love

What else was remarkable about Woodstock? Many have mentioned “free love” with varying degrees of enthusiasm or indignation. There is, however, little to suggest a three-day orgy, though the *idea* of liberated sexuality hung in the air. For example, there was public skinny-dipping engaged in on a large scale, which participants experienced as liberating but conservative critics perceived as a threat. It caused almost as much brouhaha as the Broadway production *Oh! Calcutta!*, which had its premiere that same year, with naked actors indulging in erotic acts on stage. In the documentary by Wadleigh, two cohabiting youngsters arrive at the festival and explain with barely concealed pride that they will hanging out there independently. It is obvious they have no desire to be forced into the straitjacket of a marriage devoid of fantasy.<sup>12</sup> New York’s radical weekly, the *Village Voice*, commented more sympathetically on Woodstock: “Public nudity was also pretty cool and by Saturday couples were swimming together in the lake

8 Anita Brookner, *Romanticism and Its Discontents* (New York, 2000), 56; cf. Gerald N. Izenberg, *Romanticism, Revolution, and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1782–1802* (Princeton, 1992), 51–52.

9 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zurich, 1977), 4:469.

10 The quotes from Novalis and Runge are cited in Eckart Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik* (Cologne, 1987), 161. See also M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York et al., 1973), 413–15.

11 Qtd. in Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (Harmondsworth, 1991), 311.

12 See Weiner and Stillman, *Woodstock Census*, 163–77.

without anyone stopping to gawk. [...] By Monday a few couples were making it in public, guys were walking round with unembarrassed erections.”<sup>13</sup>

In respect to this “free love” aspect, it is also tempting to draw a parallel with early Romanticism, if only because of the similarities to a long literary tradition that contrasts oppressive marital ties with true and spontaneous love, taking as its springboard Rousseau’s *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761 *Julie, or the New Heloise*) and, once again, Goethe’s *Werther*. The spontaneity of romantic love forces a surrender that has little to do with the harmonization of passion and reason — the classic convention that prevailed far into the eighteenth century and lent the institution of marriage its enduring resilience.<sup>14</sup> The new, boundary-breaking love can be detected in the sometimes exultant but fleeting alliances of the English poets, and even more so in the relationships within the Romantic circles in Jena and Berlin. The commencement and breaking of relationships evident there might at first appear to be a kind of eighteenth-century hedonism, but that soon pales against the backdrop of profound seriousness with which those relationships start and end, a gravitas that is rooted in the desire for authenticity and mutual self-actualization. The novel *Lucinde* (1799) by Friedrich Schlegel, then considered scandalous, also originated in this milieu.

*Lucinde* is a hybrid and almost plotless book, part epistolary, part fantasy, dialogue, allegory, autobiography, and polemic. This experimental work, described by Schlegel’s critical brother, August Wilhelm, as an *Unroman*, a “non-novel,” portrays the love between Julius and Lucinde, who is betrothed to another. It was scandalous because unlike *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Werther*, it is not the traditional marriage that eventually triumphs, but romantic love. Liberated Lucinde has no sense of guilt, and the two protagonists’ mutual self-fulfillment is taken to such an extreme in the romantic *Verwirrung* — confusion — that the polarity between male and female no longer pertains, the man displaying feminine traits and vice versa. That is sexually exciting, Schlegel explained, and is at the same time “an allegory for the completion of masculine and feminine in the unified fullness of humanity.”<sup>15</sup> That hybridization of gender is highly reminiscent of the androgyny that is brought to the fore in so many Romantic portraits and in the supposedly feminine traits of the predominantly male Romantic genius.<sup>16</sup>

Even looking beyond the controversy-sparking personal outpourings and Schlegel’s implicit reference to his adulterous relationship with

13 Qtd. in Bennett, *Remembering Woodstock*, 66.

14 Cf. John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy* (London, 2002), 1–7.

15 Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 165.

16 See Friedrich Overbeck’s portrait of Franz Pforr from 1810 in Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 119, or Pforr’s *Allegorie der Freundschaft* (1808), idem, 147.

Dorothea Veit, the book was scandalous for another reason. Sensual and spiritual love are present in equal measure, and the former was described without the usual scruples. Despite the alternation with lofty passages about love, the book was deemed pornographic. However, was this intense and multifaceted love not in fact true marriage, Schlegel teased his critics, when compared with the loveless traditional marriage driven by self-interest that they were defending?<sup>17</sup>

### Return to Nature

A third striking theme that surfaces repeatedly with Woodstock is the return to nature and the unsullied countryside. “I wanna leave the city ...,” sang the singer with the not so subtle name of Country Joe, and Canned Heat’s “Going up the Country” had a similar thrust. And when Max Yasgur — a dairy farmer and the owner of the land where the festival was held — was brought on stage to speak to the hundreds of thousands, the rhetoric of his opening sentence was hardly devoid of craftiness in playing up to this theme. “I’m a farmer,” he proclaimed, and the cheers rang out.<sup>18</sup> The organizers had deliberately chosen a rural setting, about one hundred miles from Manhattan, since this tallied with the “back-to-the-land spirit of the counterculture.” (The area was hardly farmland pure and simple: besides “country bumpkins,” musicians such as Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin were already living there.)

The glorification of the countryside as opposed to the unpleasant and noxious life in the big city is a theme that is perhaps as old as the city itself. From Virgil’s *Georgica* to the bucolic poetry and Arcadian painting of the Renaissance, the nostalgia for simple country life returns time and again. At Woodstock, though, the desire for natural simplicity acquired typically romantic traits, since it not only centered on the simplicity of the farmland but looked to a more radical back-to-nature lifestyle, one which flew in the face of societal conventions in a way similar to those described by Rousseau. Woodstock’s visitors longed for nature and authenticity — in themselves and their surroundings; they longed for their natural roots. The spontaneous youngsters losing themselves in free love also cast off society’s imposed prudishness by stripping bare, exchanging artificial, feminine make-up for a natural look, and a smooth-shaven face for manly stubble, as well as the unnatural bra and off-the-rack suit for loose and fanciful clothes. This generation also looked up to the natural

17 Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford, 1995), 33–34; Lillian R. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective: A Comparative Study of Aspects of the Romantic Movement in England, France and Germany* (New York, 1970), 224; Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, 2013), 131–32.

18 See video footage of his appearance at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Hfzv04sx4E>.

primitive man: the Native American, the long-haired, wise, close-to-nature, drug-using variant of Iron Eyes Cody, who would re-emerge in Carlos Castaneda's cult books.<sup>19</sup>

This matches the romantic ideal of the all-natural man still wholly at one with himself. Rousseau, one of the founding fathers of Romanticism, adored the wealth of what grows and flourishes in nature, as captured wonderfully in his *Les reveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782, later translated as *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*), which portrays a philosopher wandering in the fields and admiring the flora. The love of nature — which lent “nature” its present-day meaning, as in terms like “nature conservation” or the expression “untouched, open nature” — is a sentiment that resonates loudly in the work of the English Romantic poets, for example, in Wordsworth, as restless and as great a devotee of flora and wandering as Rousseau. He, or at least his poetic alter ego, settles down beneath a hazel tree. “Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played,” he writes in *Nutting*, continuing,

... And — with my cheek on one of those green stones  
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,  
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep —  
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,  
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay  
Tribute to ease ...<sup>20</sup>

19 Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley, et al., 1968).

20 William Wordsworth, qtd. in R. S. Thomas, ed., *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse* (London, 1971), 27–28. (The poem goes beyond merely singing the praises of nature, since in the following lines the “I” attacks the hazel tree and later regrets it.) On the “gaze” of the English Romantic poets, see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, 1991), 110–21; cf. Alan Day, *Romanticism* (London, 2001), 39–64. On the relationship between city and countryside, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London, 1983), 243–45. On the representation of nature in the landscape, see Honour, *Romanticism*, Ch. 2.

21 Qtd. in Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 79.

The relaxation in the bosom of nature that these lines capture still falls under the classic opposition of town and country, but the poet's childlike receptiveness is already less classical, as he lays his cheek against the moss and feels sheltered and secure under the shade of trees. It becomes truly romantic when the stones seem to metamorphose into sheep and nature becomes animated, foreshadowing the last line of the poem: “Touch — for there is a spirit in the woods.” In the holistic words of Novalis, “People, animals, plants, stones and stars, flames, tones, colours ... must act and speak together, like a single family or community, as a single race.”<sup>21</sup>

### Spirituality

The surrender to nature touches on a fourth remarkable issue of Woodstock: a general leaning towards spirituality and mysticism, in which the bounds between imagination and reality are stretched. One of the opening speakers of the festival was the Indian religious teacher Swami Satchidananda. Joe Cocker, as a preacher-like bard,

eventually had no real-world contact with his audience and dissolved into a kind of trance, while the public at the performance by Santana seemed to become hypnotized by rhythmic clapping.<sup>22</sup> As the fences around the grounds were broken down and thousands entered the festival for free, the organizers shrugged their shoulders. For them it was not about the money, though this would certainly hit their takings hard, but that mattered little at this celebration of communality: “People communicate!” one of them exclaimed, and that spiritual experience was clearly enough. The sense of community took all of them to a higher plane — and the music helped in this, for example, when Sly & the Family Stone drove the crowds ecstatic with an infinitely spun-out rendition of “I Wanna Take You Higher.”

Such a shared, mass experience of “spirituality” was foreign to the Romanticism fixated on the subjective individual. Yet the substance of that transcendental experience calls to mind the thinking of the Romantic era, in which the interest in theosophy, pantheism, magnetism and somnambulism that had already existed in the eighteenth century now flourished. Romantics’ aversion to financial matters and worldly possessions, to a way of life focused on the material, was as strong as their predilection for the inexplicability — the enigma — of another, spiritual world filled with mysterious forces. These forces manifested themselves in ways that could be terrifying and represent the “dark side” of existence, like the ghost ship in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), countless scenes from the “gothic novel,” and the supernatural phenomena in tales by the musician, painter, and writer E.T.A. Hoffman.

The enigmatic forces could, however, also exercise a more salutary influence, as in *Hymnen an die Nacht* (*Hymns to the Night*, 1800) by Novalis, in which night-time actually provides solace from “the other side,” or with the German physician, philosopher and painter Gustav Carus, who established a link between spirituality and health that has experienced a recent popular revival. This is also true of work by the visionary poet and painter William Blake, which certainly conjures up threatening forces but, in imitation of the writings of the Swedish theologian, philosopher, and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, in the first place has Christ, angels, and less well-defined forces offer hope or other forms of succor. The supernatural alarmingly stirred the imagination of many of the Romantics. “I have very little of Mr Blake’s company,” his wife Catherine once said, “he is always in Paradise.”<sup>23</sup>

22 See Bennett, *Remembering Woodstock*, 82–83.

23 Holmes, *The Romantic Poets*, 17. Cf. Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (London, 2010), Chapter 2; Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background* (Oxford, 1981), 41–53; Richard T. Gray, “Introduction,” in *Inventions of the Imagination: Romanticism and Beyond*, ed. Richard T. Gray, Nicholas Halmi, Gary J. Handwerk, Michael A. Rosenthal, and Klaus Vieweg, 3–14 (Seattle, 2011), 6–7; Honour, *Romanticism*, 286–93; Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 58–59; Joseph Viscomi, “The Lessons of Swedenborg; or, The Origin of William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,” in *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Compendium*, ed. Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner, 173–212 (Durham, 1998). See also Gerhard Schulz, *Romantik. Geschichte und Begriff* (Munich, 1996), 119–25; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 169–71; Paul Kluckhohn, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen, 1966), 31–34, 50–54, 135–37. On the spiritual interest of the Romantics in France, see Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme – Théosophie 1770–1820, Deuxième Partie, La génération de l’Empire (1800–1820)* (Paris, 1979).

## Drugs

From these penchants to surrender to nature and engage in spirituality, it requires no great leap of the imagination to arrive at the next thing that was remarkable at Woodstock, namely, the openly professed use of drugs. Besides marijuana, a whole medicine chest of psychedelic drugs was consumed. Tens of thousands of people sat and lay there tripping or half-stoned around the immense stage, and many of the musicians were patently under the influence. At Woodstock, this widespread use of drugs was not so manifest in a demented, bacchanalian ecstasy, since these spiritual youngsters — devotees of free love longing for a return to nature — were more into relaxation, wholly in keeping with the renowned motto of the drug guru Timothy Leary: “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”<sup>24</sup>

They probably identified closely with what Jimi Hendrix sang on Monday morning, at the end of three days of “love, peace and ... music”: “Purple haze all in my eyes / Don’t know if it’s day or night / You got me blowin’, blowin’ my mind / Is it tomorrow, or just the end of time?” And while “the end of time” might have been understood as an allusion to the end of the festival by the odd soul who was not too hazy, there were even fewer people who interpreted it as the biblical “Day of Judgement,” which had exercised its threatening influence for so many centuries. “The end of time” here, rather, points to the experience of rapture, the feeling of no longer belonging to a world in which Monday mornings exist, the trip through a different region of reality, the kingdom of the imagination, “The Other Side of This Life” (Jefferson Airplane).

This escapist longing is not far removed from the Romantics’ interest in dreams, hypnosis, and sleepwalking. The gateway to the other side can be accessed in the dream state and in ecstatic rapture or being “high,” and the latter is induced by alcohol and drugs, which were used by many a Romantic as a means to broaden the mind. Though it is true that Thomas De Quincey started out using opium as a painkiller, he soon cultivated an addiction that offered him a glimpse of another world, as recorded in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) which has seen a resurgence in interested readers since the late 1960s.

Coleridge, De Quincey’s contemporary and spiritual kinsman, also experienced the double-edged blessings of the medicine, which was then easy to procure and usually imbibed as laudanum, a concoction

24 Weiner and Stillman, *Woodstock Census*, 73–74. Cf. Joel Makower, *Woodstock: The Oral History* (London, 1989), 263–70.

of wine and opium. The creation of his fragmentary and unfinished poem, *Kubla Khan*, is often attributed to an opium-induced high. Charles Rosen notes that this strange work is the embodiment *par excellence* of Novalis's methodology for the writing of poems and stories "without sense or logic, but only with associations like dreams or music."<sup>25</sup> Coleridge's and De Quincey's use of drugs predated Prosper Mérimée's, who perhaps knew better how to handle it — partly thanks to his Oriental travels — as well as Baudelaire's drug experiments (and later Rimbaud's). Sometimes you have the feeling that you are evaporating, wrote Baudelaire about his opium experiences, "and you will attribute to your pipe ... the strange faculty of *smoking you*." He was deeply curious about other, exotic worlds, which he was able to conjure up with hashish, though he repeatedly warned of the addiction that "the transient Paradise of the pharmacy" might lead to.<sup>26</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe, so deeply admired by Baudelaire, was no less colorful an example, and in the midst of his turbulent life he regularly set aside objections to opium and drink. Poe's *Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) ends with a pointless description of a journey by canoe on the Southern Ocean, which is difficult to interpret as anything other than an opium-induced vision. In this vision, the company of the protagonist glides across a milky white ocean, from which a wild flare of vapor arises, and they are overwhelmed by a white, ash-like shower. A gigantic curtain of vapor spreads out in front of them, behind which indistinct images flit, and gigantic, pallidly white birds continuously fly from behind this veil. A chasm throws itself open and a giant, shrouded human figure arises, with skin as white as snow ...

### It's Just Music

The intoxicating, rapturous dream has also, of old, been fed by music, and the important role of that music is, in the final analysis, perhaps still most remarkable in the case of Woodstock and in the pop culture of recent decades for which Woodstock was a model. It is the music that drives all these hippies and youngsters into their altered state and helps them to escape their everyday existence and societal conventions. "You know," declaims Janis Joplin in typical 1960s vernacular, "I mean you don't have to go take anybody's shit, man, just to like music .... You know, it's just music." The music was the element that bound together the counter-culture, which rapidly

25 Charles Rosen, *Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 47.

26 Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York, 1986), 116. See also Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 416; Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*, 86-88; Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics 1500-2000* (London, 2001), 35-47.

became a worldwide youth culture. At the pop concert the music culminated in an overwhelming experience for various senses: thanks to new technology it became loud, encouraged dancing without the restrictions of a concert hall, and induced a mental trance. It appealed to unrealized emotions, to feelings of solidarity and to a longing for transcendence. Music opened *The Doors of Perception*.<sup>27</sup> And it became a means of expression for political protest and utopias.<sup>28</sup>

Music was the most important art form for the Romantics, because it could express the inner world of emotions in the most immediate way, without the intercession of language — a necessity in literature — and without the distanced and static character of the visual arts. Music is the ultimate expression of the imagination: just like mind-altering substances, it offers a portal to “the other side of this life.” It is an emotional language, August Wilhelm Schlegel noted, and is independent of all extraneous objects. It is, to quote E.T.A. Hoffmann, the most romantic of all the arts, perhaps the only one that is “purely romantic.” Among the Romantics, music enjoyed a nearly religious significance; Ludwig Tieck called it “the last secret ... the wholly revealed religion.”<sup>29</sup> It is remarkable, in retrospect, that the art song genre, notably the German *Lied*, gained in status during the Romantic era, while at the same time the Romantics were starting to perform and arrange folk songs from the past, in a manner that is not so far removed from the folk and country revival that started in the 1960s and was also a major element at Woodstock.

It is tempting to extrapolate these parallels and compare the long hair of poets like Shelley, Coleridge, Keats, Novalis, Rückert and Hölderlin, of composers like Schumann and Beethoven, of writers like Gogol, Chamisso, Wackenroder, Heine, Constant, and Balzac, or painters like Millet, Gros, and David, with the hairstyles of the male heroes of Woodstock, or to pay more attention to clothing and appearances. Although there is something intriguing about these parallels, something else is important here: it is about a way of understanding and experiencing life and reality that is expressed in these fashions.

### The Myth of a Revolution

Since the foregoing comparison does at least suggest that the cultural revolution of the late 1960s was composed of romantic tendencies, it prompts the question of the extent to which those changes actually signified a break with previous decades or whether it was more like the revival of a more comprehensive and more extended period.

27 “The Doors of Perception” alludes to William Blake’s statements: “In the universe there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and between them there are doors,” and “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.” *The Doors of Perception* is also the title of Aldous Huxley’s book from 1954 about experiences with drugs. Robert C. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Rise of America’s 1960s Counterculture* (Lanham, et al., 2015), 12–13. The name of the band The Doors is an abbreviation of Blake’s “The Doors of Perception.” For the role of music in U.S. counterculture, see Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Ch. 7.

28 Sheila Whiteley, “‘1, 2, 3 What Are We Fighting 4?’ Music, Meaning and ‘The Star Spangled Banner,’” in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Bennett, 18–28; cf. Detlef Siegfried, “Music and Protest in 1960s Europe,” in *1968 in Europe*, ed. Klimke and Scharloth, 57–70.

29 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, 1971), 50–51, 91–95; Paolo d’Angelo, *L’estetica del romanticismo* (Bologna, 1997), 186–88.



Michel Foucault argues that the standard historical periodization based on political upheavals is not always the best way to understand the past, and that insight has proven to be a fruitful line of inquiry.<sup>30</sup> A long period in history can be understood as an “episteme,” a whole set of ideas and experiences that (mostly unconsciously) determine what is accepted as knowledge in a specific time. For historians, revolutions often appear to be not so revolutionary as contemporaries perceived them since the deeper structure of the period has hardly been changed.

It can therefore do no harm to turn one’s attention to the supposed discontinuities. Did the 1960s represent a revolutionary change? To what extent did Woodstock simply fall out of the sky? Though there had been pop concerts before, and with very similar components, Woodstock was much more large-scale, and recordings were made that would become a great commercial success. That musical (and visual) registration meant that the festival could become the myth that it still is. One is still left with the question of whether one can talk about a revolutionary transition in culture during these years. Thanks to the rich diversity of history, such revolutions are always accompanied by a series of phenomena that casts doubt on the apparent break with the preceding decades. The rise of youth culture and a new self-awareness among young people had already been seen on the West Coast of the United States in the late 1940s, for example. Beat poets such as William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, who looked up to Baudelaire and Rimbaud, shaped this culture and were the mouthpieces of a counterculture that saw a revival from about 1950, a counterculture in which young people experimented with alcohol and drugs and free love, and protested against bourgeois lifestyles. Spontaneity, imagination, and new “spiritual” values were almost as important then as at Woodstock.<sup>31</sup>

Various avant-garde circles of the twentieth century briefly displayed the same anti-bourgeois and romantic traits, as already demonstrated by the Dada movement. In *Children of the Mire* (1974), Octavio Paz points out the many similarities between the Romantic era and the avant-garde, and he also clarifies to what extent thinking in terms of watersheds in history is *itself* a romantic artifact. The early Romantics were initially profoundly impressed by the French Revolution, and it was already evident that their thinking was permeated with a keen desire to definitively break with the past.<sup>32</sup> In his classical *Naturalism Supernaturalism* (1971) M. H. Abrams presents six fundamental

30 Michel Foucault, “Sur les façons d’écrire l’histoire,” in *Dits et écrits I (1954–1969)* (Paris, 1994), 585–600, 586. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, 1966), 64–65.

31 Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley, 1994), 152. Cf. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1989), 268–70.

32 Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, trans. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

characteristics of this influential romantic idea of revolution, of which three are particularly relevant here. The revolution will

(2) bring about abruptly, or in a remarkably short time, the shift from the present era of profound evil, suffering, and disorder to an era of peace, justice, and optimal conditions for general happiness; [...] (4) though it will originate in a particular and critical time and place, it will by irresistible contagion spread everywhere, to include all mankind; [...] (6) it is inevitable, because it is guaranteed either by a transcendent or by an immanent something, not ourselves, which makes for the ineluctable triumph of total justice, community, and happiness on earth.<sup>33</sup>

One can, however, pinpoint a number of features of the counterculture even before the avant-gardist revivals. In France, or rather in Paris, the tradition of an artistic Bohemia started to define itself in the mid-nineteenth century. In its “adolescent rebellion and withdrawal,” this group of young artists, journalists, and dropouts taunted the bourgeoisie with a lifestyle that ranged from dandyism to the anti-social.<sup>34</sup> It is true that this circle usually lacked the admiration for nature and the countryside, the use of drugs was mostly restricted to alcohol, and music was not the only “chosen” art form. However, they demonstrate an anti-bourgeois stance that corresponds with much of the youthful rebelliousness noted above.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to all this, there is a long tradition of youth movements from the first half of the twentieth century. This ranges from youngsters motivated by political idealism who were affiliated with revolutionary parties (communists, fascists, and socialists) to the scouting movement of Baden-Powell and many national variants of youth organizations that focused on the appreciation of nature. Many of the above-mentioned traits can be found in these youth movements: anti-bourgeois sentiments and rejection of prudery, and idolization of nature, dance, and music, albeit in the form of folk music, folk dancing, and campfire songs which have been considered old-fashioned since the 1970s<sup>36</sup>

In this light Woodstock is indeed subversive, but not so revolutionary as it seems. Put differently, it was revolutionary in its scale and in the influence that it had in the dispersion of a counterculture that, because of increasing prosperity and the technological capability to

33 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, 62–63. Cf. Maarten Doorman, *Art in Progress. A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam, 2003), 46–47.

34 Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 270; Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1989), 195–97.

35 Malcolm Easton, *Artist and Writers in Paris: The Bohemian Idea, 1803–1867* (London, 1964).

36 See Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875–1945* (London, 2007).

broadcast that culture (radio, vinyl albums, and television), would eventually become mainstream. The massiveness of the resistance was undoubtedly threatening to traditional faith-based values and the family. However, with the advantage of hindsight, one can say that Woodstock was hardly revolutionary in its ideas, which had a respectable and widely dispersed prehistory, nor in the desire for a new way of life. The six points mentioned above can be found everywhere, in the twentieth *and* the nineteenth centuries, though perhaps not in so concentrated or innocent a form as in the pure culture of the three-day pop festival. The illustrious 1960s, in short, have the character of a romantic revival rather than demarcating a break with the past.

### The Birth of the Imagination

In their concentration of romantic ideas, Woodstock and Paris 1968 present a useful panorama of Western culture. They blow the dust off a whole array of this culture's by no means outdated clichés, a culture which displays a remarkable stability in its desire for change and the accompanying revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> It is a culture that was driven by a dynamic of resistance and aspiration for about two hundred years. This may easily be said of the eighteenth century and, ultimately, of other periods and cultures. However, the enduring force behind this dynamic resides in something that emerged in the course of the eighteenth century and only began to manifest itself fully in the Romantic era: the imagination. At that time, the idea gradually dawned that it was possible to invent a different world and a new life — one that did not lie “on the other side,” as Christian precepts would have it, but was also accessible in other ways. This newness was also deemed attractive rather than corrupting, implying that reality would be perceived differently from then on. With the aid of the imagination, one can potentially transform the world into something different. That is what science and politics achieved at the dawn of the nineteenth century, and what the arts achieved: they all present us with a structurally different and better world thanks to the imagination. The proclamation daubed in red in the Paris of 1968, the call to give power to the imagination, was therefore a fairly hollow slogan: the imagination had been the leading light for almost two centuries already.

The birth of the imagination, a revolution in the understanding and perception of the world that was as complex as it was wide-ranging, occurred across epistemological, aesthetic and ethical domains.<sup>38</sup> It

37 Cf. Doorman, *Art in Progress*, 45–47, 54–56.

38 James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981). Cf. J. J. A. Mooij, *Fictional Realities: The Use of Literary Imagination* (Amsterdam, 1993). Cf. Doorman, *Art in Progress*, 36–43.

began to manifest itself in a poeticization of the world — romanticizing, as the German Romantics called it — striking to the heart of the Romantic program. Novalis put it as follows in these well-known lines:

The world must be romanticized if we are to rediscover its original sense. To romanticize is simply to potentialize qualitatively. In this operation the lower self is identified with a better self [...] By giving a lofty sense to what is common, a mysterious aspect to the everyday, the dignity of the unknown to the familiar, the appearance of infinity to the infinite, I am romanticizing these things.<sup>39</sup>

Such grandiosity seems to detach itself from reality, but is in fact permeated through and through by the way in which Westerners perceive and understand the world to this day. The idiom of Novalis and his contemporaries marked the dawn of a duality that has dominated life ever since, structuring the way in which we still approach the world.

It is a duality that may well be inherent in the world, but is above all attributed to it by mankind. It is an equivocality that, philosophically speaking, can be traced back to the epistemological precepts of Immanuel Kant and of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In the parallel between the “infinite striving” of the I as formulated by Fichte and the view of the Romantics that the imagination is the progenitor of all things lies the crucial similarity between Germanic idealism and Romanticism: in the creative faculty that inevitably “animates” the world, culture, and politics, and, in fact, *must* animate them. That is why art became so important, because it is the ideal vehicle for this. In the winged words of Blake, the ultimate goal is “To see a World in a Grain of Sand: / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.”<sup>40</sup>

39 Novalis, *Fragments I* (Kap. 24), <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/fragmente-i-6618/24>. Translation cited in Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, and Bernard Dieterle, eds., *Romantic Prose Fiction* (Amsterdam, 2008), 479. Cf. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 200.

40 René Wellek, “The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History,” in *Romantic Writings*, ed. Stephen Bygrave, 326–35 (New York 1996). On the transition from imagination in German Romanticism to that of English Romanticism, see Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford, 1995), 6–10.

Since the dawn of Romanticism, the imagination has formed one of the main features of human experience in the West, yet this fact does not have a wholly auspicious significance. The spaces of the imagination are filled with fears and horrific fantasies, as Goya illustrated with his monsters, and as were also evident in the improvised medical facilities at Woodstock, where many a “flipped-out” hippie had to be treated for the horrors an imagination speeding on amphetamine. Here, too, lies the basis of what has come to be

known as the “romantic agony,” thanks to the English translation of Mario Praz’s standard work about the secretly admired offshoots of Romanticism: the mixture of decadent debunking and exuberant erotic desires, of Satanism, the death urge, sado-masochism, spleen and *femmes fatales*.<sup>41</sup> However, for most of the Romantics the longing inspired by the imagination was first and foremost an expression of optimism, hope of the kind that Holmes characterized so tellingly.

In the years after the French Revolution, the imagination conjured up “a visionary world,” to quote the writer Robert Southey, Coleridge’s brother-in-law and friend. Southey echoed the lines of Wordsworth quoted above: “Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race.” In short, it was the dawn of an era of a “dizzying sense of total possibility,” as George Steiner would later describe it.<sup>42</sup> Though the enthusiasm for the Revolution among the German and English Romantics quickly waned during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and eventually disappeared, political aspirations for a better world were an enduring component of romantic thinking. Woodstock and Paris 1968 display the rebelliousness and aspirations — utopian and personal, in politics, and in affairs of the heart and love of nature — which were ignited by the imagination.

Now, a few decades on, this hope sometimes evokes compassion, since various aspects of the ideals of Romanticism that were reformulated during those years now seem naïve and sometimes even to have been corrupted. Is it not true that a good few of the above-mentioned aspirations for freedom have degenerated into a frenetic pursuit of self-fulfillment and pleasure, in the same way that Horkheimer and Adorno saw the Enlightenment craving for freedom and emancipation transform into its very antithesis, into an ever-stricter control of the subject?<sup>43</sup>

The Frankfurt School’s struggle to achieve the emancipation of the subject might have contributed to this dialectical development. For example, the appeal by Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm for the sexual liberation of mankind, for mankind’s liberation from the oppressive structures of a capitalist, performance-driven society, was an important impulse for the sexual revolution. This revolution seems not only to have been a romantic emancipation but also the harbinger of a new hedonism, in which consumerism and eroticism have become interchangeable, and in which the individual’s pursuit of romantic love is perverted by the culture industry, symbolized by

41 Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford, 1970).

42 Both quoted in David Duff, “From Revolution to Romanticism: The Historical Context to 1800,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu, 23–34 (Oxford, 1999), 25.

43 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2002 [1944/1947]).

44 Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley, 1997), 7, 145-47; Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism," in "The 60's without Apology," ed. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, *Social Text*, nos. 9/10 (1984): 91-118.

45 Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1989), 88-90, 190-92; cf. Lilian R. Furst, *Romanticism: The Critical Idiom* (London, 1971), 2, 64. For a critique of this view, see Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York, 1996), 16-21. Critique of a suspect utopianism nourished by the Romantic imagination can be found in Forest Pyle's study of the ideological content of the imagination in the works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and George Eliot (Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination*).

46 Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 201.

a deluge of commercials broadcast on television and ubiquitous soft porn. Feminist critique added arguments to the skepticism about what first was understood as unequivocal emancipation.<sup>44</sup>

In that sense the revolution of the late 1960s might not only be understood as repetition of romantic values, but also as a disenchantment with those values. The imagination has always (that is, in the last 250 years) been seen as a positive human faculty. But what if, as suggested above, the reign of the imagination were not an unqualified positive power, because it also generated the "romantic agony" of Mario Praz, because it was the core reason for Goethe judging the Romantic as "sickly," because it appeared to be a prerequisite for today's hopeless consumerism and the foreshadowing of the post-truth era?<sup>45</sup> What if there were to be a dictatorship of the imagination, a tyranny of romanticizing? What if, to quote the sociologist Colin Campbell, Romanticism has mainly served "to provide ethical support for that restless and continuous pattern of consumption which so distinguishes the behavior of modern man?"<sup>46</sup> For the time being, it can at best be concluded that the revolutionary and emancipatory character of the late 1960s from the perspective described here was more limited than might be expected. It only became truly revolutionary when graffiti, instead of calling for imagination's elevation, declared war on it.

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## UTOPIAN (TELE)VISIONS

### Anikó Imre

Few people would have believed in the early 1990s of post-Wall euphoria that, only a decade later, Russia would reemerge as an authoritarian country with imperial aspirations, expanding its worldwide spy operations over the Internet to influence the political futures of other countries. Even fewer would have believed that semi-authoritarian regimes would also return and entrench their illiberal positions in the former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, or that countries that had been so eager to denounce their history of socialism and correct their path towards European democracy in 1989 would willingly realign themselves with Russia, barricade their populations behind walls and fences, and take a hostile stand towards the European Union.

Not coincidentally, we are witnessing the resurgence of interest in the histories of socialism and the Cold War in popular media culture. Television dramas such *The Americans* (FX, 2013–2018), *Counterpart* (Starz Network, 2017–), *Comrade Detective* (Amazon, 2017–), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–) or *A Very Secret Service* (Arte, 2015), *Deutschland 83*, *84* and *89* (AMC Networks and RTL, 2015–), *1984* (Netflix, 2018–), as well as recent blockbusters such as *Atomic Blonde* (2017) and *Red Sparrow* (2018), have resurrected the familiar narrative tropes of the spy series and transposed their relevance into our contemporary times of omnipresent surveillance and rising authoritarianism. Other popular TV shows reach back to dystopian novels about autocratic oppression written during the Cold War, such as the Amazon alternative-history drama *The Man in the High Castle* (2015–) based on Philip K. Dick's 1962 novel and the Hulu series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–), adapted from Margaret Atwood's 1985 book of the same title. Such recent representations have infused the familiar nostalgic Cold War clichés with a decidedly contemporary sense of ambiguity, allegory, and dystopia. They probe themes of socialism and the Cold War for current, global political resonances of oppression, anxiety, and fear. These resonances include widespread digital state and corporate surveillance, Russia's performance on the international stage as a meddlesome power headed by a former KGB agent, and the appearance of "fake news" delivered by algorithms, along with the attendant loss of trust in institutions of state governance and the centralized authority of legacy news media.

Scholarship focused on the history of socialism and the Cold War has also flourished in the past ten to fifteen years. It has developed particular strength in historical and anthropological studies of everyday cultures of socialism, departing from the attention to political systems and the struggles between party-led dictatorship and dissident intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, the study of socialist and post-socialist nostalgia has also generated a vibrant area of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The renewed interest in the Cold War and the formerly discarded model of socialism is an indication of a search for alternative values at a time when it has become blatantly clear that propaganda, demagoguery, surveillance, primordial nationalism, corruption, and authoritarianism are not the exclusive properties of communism and that neoliberal capitalism does not inherently lead to democracy and social justice. While capitalism “won” the Cold War, it has failed to bring about an alternative; the widespread interest in socialism and post-socialist nostalgia is a symptom of a renewed search for an alternative vision. The vantage point of the stunning historical developments of recent decades now allows us to reconsider the legacy of socialism in ways that are unburdened by what was in 1990 an incontestable narrative of total victory versus total failure in a longstanding battle between two worlds systems.

Television has been one of the privileged sites where academic attention to everyday cultures of socialism and to popular nostalgia have converged. I want to examine some of the central features of socialist television in the Soviet Union and the former Eastern bloc that were relegated to the dustbin of history in 1990 along with communism. These features underscore the overarching communal sociality and educational ethos of socialism that television

1 See, e.g., Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2012); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, 2010); Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor, 2014); Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics and Everyday Life after Socialism* (Princeton, 2000); Shana Penn and Jill Massino, eds., *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist East and Central Europe* (New York, 2009).

2 See, e.g., Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-33; Dominic Boyer “Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 361-81; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001); Anikó Imre, “Why Should We Study Socialist Commercials,” *VIEW — Journal of European Television* »

» *History and Culture* 2, no. 3 (2013): 65-76; Kateryna Khinkulova, “Hello, Lenin? Nostalgia on Post-Soviet Television in Russia and Ukraine,” *VIEW — Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1, no. 2 (2012): 94-104; Sabina Mihelj, “The Persistence of the Past: Memory, Generational Cohorts and the ‘Iron Curtain,’” *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 3 (2014): 447-68; Maya Nadkarni

and Olga Shevchenko, “The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2004): 487-519; Irena Reifová, “Rerunning and ‘Re-watching’ Socialist TV Drama Serials: Post-Socialist Czech Television Audiences between Commodification and Reclaiming the Past,” *Critical Studies in Television* 4, no. 2 (2009): 53-57; Irena Reifová, Kateřina Gillárová, Radim Hladík,

“The Way We Applauded: How Popular Culture Stimulates Collective Memory of the Socialist Past in Czechoslovakia: The Case Study of the Television Serial *Vyprávěj* and Its Viewers,” in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, ed. Timothy Havens, Anikó Imre, and Katalin Lustyik, 199-221 (London, 2012); Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York, 2010).



dispersed more successfully than most other institutions. At its most successful, this ethos manifested itself in socialist television's earnest utopian impulse to educate while entertaining in the relaxed environment of the home, as well as in its investment and success in contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals who were committed to cultivating their own faculties, and in encouraging a community-oriented sensibility. Admittedly, it is impossible to generalize across the different phases, forms, and geopolitical manifestations of television. But even during the system's waning years, when socialism's ideological principles had been increasingly eroded in a capitulation to market-based competition and individualism, in most countries within the Soviet orbit, television sustained this sensibility.

### Television's Utopian Temporality: "Not Yet"

While the communist parties of the 1950s technically owned the new institution, its purpose and potential remained something of a mystery to them. Television's technological base as well as its programming was a mix-and-match of ideas imported and borrowed from Western European broadcasters, filtered through Soviet ideological directives. More centralized attempts at political control over television increased only in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Communist parties then tried to mold the new medium to their own purposes: they developed centralized programming to standardize citizens' everyday, domestic life rhythms. As television was becoming a mass medium, authorities also attempted to instill in television the utopian ethos of socialism, which was propelled by the idea of ongoing revolution that would eventually lead to the radical egalitarian society of communism.<sup>4</sup> Historian Kristin Roth-Ey evokes Russian theorist Vladimir Sappak who, in his 1962 book *Television and Us*, argued that television should capture everyday reality in the spirit of Dziga Vertov's *kinopravda*. It should be not so much an instrument for staging reality but, rather, a force of democratization and truth.<sup>5</sup> In a way, television was romanticized and "futured," along with its imagined audience.

The goal of constant self-development oriented towards the communist utopia was served by offering a range of education-based programming that underscored hard work and self-improvement as inherently valuable to individuals who make up the socialist collective. Virtually every program was imbued with the overarching intention to educate. Tele-education was seen by party leadership as a key to the citizenry's erudition, from academic and ideological training

3 Sabina Mihelj, "The Politics of Privatization: Television Entertainment and the Yugoslav Sixties," in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, 251–67 (Bloomington, 2013).

4 Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable, *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television* (Cambridge, 2018), 245–46.

5 Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, 2011), 236.

through learning a variety of practical skills to the all-important but most contradictory goal of “taste cultivation,” rooted in the Kantian idea of aesthetic education. Heather Gumbert’s apt term to describe East German TV, “education dictatorship,” can be generalized across the socialist region.<sup>6</sup>

The operative term of television’s temporality was “not yet.” For instance, after the tenth annual Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party in 1970, an article in the party newspaper stated: “The hardest task for the leaders of our television is to find the right balance between providing cultural service and guiding the audience. This is because this right balance has *not yet* emerged with reassuring certainty” (emphasis mine).<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, a prominent critic wrote in the journal *Rádió és TV Szemle* [Radio and TV Review] in 1971, “Society does *not yet* prescribe the mandatory behavioral models and achievement levels in the area of entertainment as it does in the areas of education and the acquisition of high culture.”<sup>8</sup> The audience imagined by such assessments was always a bit disappointing: never quite sophisticated or enlightened enough, always falling short of the standards marked out by science, literature, and art.

Of course, these efforts did not automatically inject hope and motivation into viewers. In fact, by the 1970s, in much of the Eastern bloc, the failure of the utopian future to materialize produced a nostalgic structure of feeling for the lost possibility of revolution. Television recorded, reflected, and facilitated the shared experience of this complicated temporality. While it did not function well as a centralized schoolhouse, it helped make socialism manageable, redirecting its high ideals into the ethical principles of everyday habits of mind and body in a way that was much more effective and lasting than political speeches. Instead of becoming a vehicle for popularizing the idea of forward-marching progress, television became a site of permanent, self-reflective nostalgia for the revolution’s lost potential. Due to its domestic, intimate context of watching, the impossibility of centralized control over its reception and, indeed, the choice of viewers to ignore it altogether, the medium remained at odds with the goal of mass mobilization and ideological indoctrination. Instead, it foregrounded the stalled progress of socialism towards communism and became a platform for reflecting on socialism’s faults and failures, often ironically, at least in the most politically liberal countries. By the late socialism of the 1980s, television had turned into the primary medium of ironic overidentification with official socialist rhetoric.<sup>9</sup>

6 Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor, 2014), 2.

7 Miklós Jovánovics, “Pro and Contra Television,” *Népszabadság*, September 27, 1970.

8 Tamás Szecskő, “Szórakoztatás — Műsorpolitika” [Entertainment — Programming Policy], *Rádió és TV Szemle* 71, no. 3 (1971): 9.

9 See Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, “Postsocialist Studies. Cultures of Parody and American StioB,” *Anthropology News* (November 2008): 9-10.

This was exacerbated by the increasing leakage of information about capitalist lifestyles and consumer products despite even the most repressive states' efforts to keep it out. Television gave melancholic testimony to the permanently "transitional" state of socialism, and its increasing emulation and incorporation of capitalistic, market-based features and ideologies.

The 1970s and 1980s, nevertheless, managed to develop some program types and approaches that successfully and effectively molded education with emotional mobilization and participation. Recognizing the limits of straightforward propaganda and the specific affordances of a domestic mass medium, more and more educational programs began to solicit viewers' emotional engagement and participation, employing a playful or humorous tone, embedding their lessons in competitive game and quiz formats, mixing live footage with animation and studio conversations with dramatic reenactments, and employing well-liked, entertaining personalities as guides and moderators instead of academic experts. In the long run, these proved to be the most enduring types of programs, many of which survived socialism or have been revived by post-socialist nostalgia. I focus here on two recurring recipes for success in facilitating viewer engagement and participation: *emotional mobilization* and *competition*.

### Moving TV

By the late 1960s and 1970s, the failure of Soviet-type socialism to compete on the international stage in the sphere of industrial production became evident. Following a political thaw, cultural policy in most socialist countries shifted emphasis instead to extolling the superiority of socialist lifestyles.

Leonid Brezhnev defined the concept of the "socialist way of life" at the Soviet Union's Twenty-Fifth Party Congress in 1976 as "an atmosphere of genuine collectivism and comradeship, solidarity, the friendship of all the nations and peoples of our country, which grows stronger from day to day, and moral health, which makes us strong and steadfast."<sup>10</sup> As Christine Evans explains, the concept embodied a new direction in Soviet ideology towards identifying a moral, spiritual, and emotional existence unique to socialism and superior to capitalism. On television, this new form of emotional engagement was to break up the boredom and ineffectuality of formulaic news and documentary programs. It was to serve as a form of passionate

10 Christine Evans, "The 'Soviet Way of Life' as Way of Feeling: Emotion and Influence on Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev Era," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 56, nos. 2-3 (2015): 543-69.

counterpropaganda that would bring ordinary people and their stories of everyday heroism to the screen.

Evans analyzes the popular Soviet program *Ot vseï dushi* [From the Bottom of My Heart], launched in 1972 and hosted by legendary Soviet Central Television hostess Valentina Leont'eva, as the most evocative showcase of the Soviet socialist way of life: the program packaged propagandistic messages about the strength of the working class and the peasantry in a live, semi-religious traveling celebration, which was complete with sentimental music and imagery (close-ups, candles, and pastoral scenes). It foreshadowed the explosion of talk and reality shows on post-Soviet television, several of which continued to feature highly emotional stories of past sacrifice and suffering in order to foster nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

While this mode of nationalistic sentimentality was fairly specific to Soviet culture, similar variety shows that invited the nation to participate in emotionally charged televisual moments also functioned as a regional format. For instance, the 1960s East German program *Mit dem Herzen dabei* [With Open Hearts], produced by the Entertainment Desk, was a live, traveling variety show intended to “celebrate socialism” and “honor ordinary East Germans for embodying ‘socialist’ values such as hard work, devotion to *Heimat* and teaching children the value of *Familientreue*” [loyalty to family].<sup>12</sup> Like *Ot vseï dushi*, the show solicited audience involvement, from nominating coworkers and neighbors to viewer feedback in the form of letters. Both programs also relied on hidden cameras to surprise their unsuspecting protagonists, often showering them with lavish prizes such as a new car or a vacation, anticipating the more manipulative and commercialized reveals of reality shows to come. Heather Gumbert calls *Mit dem Herzen dabei* a utopian “spectacle that ‘advertised’ socialism.”<sup>13</sup>

Paulina Bren also describes the post-1968 normalization period’s televisual turn in Czechoslovakia in terms of pursuing “a more qualitative socialist lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> Bren also identifies this turn as part of a European and even global shift in the 1970s and 1980s towards moving the exercise of politics into the sphere of private relations. Her main case studies for analyzing this shift are the dramatic serials that dominated Czechoslovak TV.

Drama serials or socialist soap operas also developed into a regionally shared, traveling format by the 1970s. They were created in an atmosphere of increased attention to women, consumerism, and

11 Ibid.

12 Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor, 2014), 149.

13 Ibid., 150.

14 Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, 2010), 207.

socialist authorities' recognition of the ideological power of emotional engagement. They took for granted viewers' familiarity with and yearning for imported drama serials and continued the earlier project of political education in less didactic, more entertaining ways.<sup>15</sup> While most scripted dramas of the early socialist period revolved around men doing manly things in the public sphere, from war drama through adventure drama to historical mini-series, the post-1960s period variously called the "thaw," "consolidation," or "normalization" era turned the spotlight on the family as the microcosm of the socialist nation.

While socialist soaps were not overtly politicized, they all modeled ideal socialist lifestyles in ensemble dramas that encompassed the institutions of the socialist collective, most prominently the family and the workplace. Unlike historical dramas, which removed the narrative into the past and revolved around heroic male figures in the public arena, these domestic serials took place in the present and featured central female characters who acted as problem-solvers, linchpins between the public and private worlds.

Nowhere was socialist soap production as prolific and profitable as in Czechoslovakia. Dramatic serials date back to 1959 when *Rodina Blahova* [Family Blaha] began broadcasting live once a month. The most popular serials were created by the writer-director duo Jaroslav Dietl and Jaroslav Dudek during the thaw period and circulated within and beyond the region. By the 1970s, the genre settled into a one-hour format, with four 12-13-episode serials covering the entire year<sup>16</sup>

The soap opera genre has been called escapist or at least utopian, depicting a universe of privileged consumption.<sup>17</sup> The Dietl serial with the most direct gendered address, *Žena za pultem* [Women Behind the Counter], from 1977, fully indulges in this utopianism. The protagonist, Anna Holubova, works in the delicatessen section of a grocery store, behind a stack of canned caviar; and her daily interactions take place among heaps of tropical fruits and an extravagant array of cheeses, an unrealistic spectacle in the austere shopping conditions of the 1970s. But the show stands out in the first place because it was designed to demonstrate the success of state feminism.<sup>18</sup> The feminized workplace setting allowed the 12-episode program to focus on a female collective and thus model women's desirable roles in socialist society. Characters and narrative arcs were determined by an ideological framework: the morally superior, helpful characters were all party members while the anti-social, selfish characters were

15 As Paulina Bren points out, this was not an isolated strategy. Under Brazil's military rule, Globo teamed up with the government to showcase upscale lives in telenovelas as a sign of modernization and upward mobility. See *ibid.*, 125.

16 *Ibid.*, 126.

17 Christine Geraghty, "Soap Opera and Utopia," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey, 246-54 (Harlow, 1993).

18 Jakub Machek, "'The Counter Lady' as a Female Prototype: Prime Time Popular Culture in 1970s and 1980s Czechoslovakia," *Media Research* 16, no. 1 (2010): 31-52, here 44.

not — although, unlike in the earlier period of strict socialist realism, these “bad” characters were gently mocked rather than punished for their consumer greed or bourgeois manners.<sup>19</sup>

Viewers were offered a range of female behaviors and were directed to identify with Anna, who begins her job as a shop assistant in the store after her divorce, embarking on a new life as a single mother of two. She is caught in a realistic struggle among her roles as a colleague, mother, and ex-wife. Anna, a socialist superwoman, demonstrates exemplary self-reliance and dignity in all three areas. Paulina Bren interprets her character as a mother figure symbolic of all women of the nation, who were called upon to heal the collective wounds of the 1968 trauma. To mark this convergence between the national and nuclear family, much of the serial was first broadcast over the 1977 Christmas season.<sup>20</sup> Actress Jiřina Švorcová was carefully selected for the role of Anna as she was known to be a diehard Stalinist.<sup>21</sup>

In most of the region, by the 1970s television was no longer seen simply as a school that summoned the masses to receive instruction from experts in a top-down fashion, but also, increasingly, as a public forum. The tellingly titled Hungarian program *Fórum* (1969) bypassed lectures and propaganda and invited artists, intellectuals, and politicians to a live town hall meeting held in varying locations. It put party leaders in front of the cameras and connected them with actual viewers, who asked questions about the economy and its reforms, political issues, and foreign relations. In this experimental format, “forum” meant an actual public forum, where party officials took a considerable risk: they realized they could not hide behind official releases any longer in the age of television; but once on TV, they were unprepared for the visibility it afforded and often exposed their own insincerity.

Similar to *Fórum*, the Yugoslav program *Current Debates* (TV Belgrade, 1965–1969) was a participatory discussion program that revolved around current issues based on audience suggestions, including unemployment, living standards, and political reforms. The East German *Prisma*, which ran from 1963 to 1991, was conceived to serve a similar purpose. As Heather Gumbert explains, it was one of the most tangible outcomes of the Agitation Commission’s appeal to television producers to create popular programming that would uncover and find solutions to the contradictions of socialism.<sup>22</sup> The ultimate goal, of course, was to teach viewers to see themselves as part of a functioning socialist collective. Gerhard Scheumann, creator and first

19 Ibid.

20 Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, 164.

21 Ibid., 174.

22 Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 146.

host of the show, modeled *Prisma* after the West German current affairs magazine *Panorama*. Unlike *Panorama*, however, which focused on large-scale political issues, *Prisma* was positioned as a liaison between the party leadership and ordinary citizens, inviting viewers to contribute questions, comments, and complaints about a variety of issues that affected everyday lives.<sup>23</sup> Like *Fórum*, *Prisma* performed a delicate dance. On the one hand, it offered critical, participatory journalism that invited viewers to feel like they had a voice in shaping the system, and that the SED was on their side. On the other hand, *Prisma* embraced the license to criticize the party and allowed a range of previously unheard voices to be part of the national conversation. In one of the most memorable cases, *Prisma* successfully intervened on behalf of a young woman who was disqualified from attending teachers' training college because she refused to swim due to a water-related childhood trauma and subsequently failed gym class.<sup>24</sup>

Participatory programs like these opened the door to audience involvement wider than ever before. Television had begun to take advantage of its unique ability to let people observe and vicariously participate in others' lives. Propelled by the socialist ethos of collectivity, such programs directed the attention to collective memory and systemic inequality rather than to a display of others' misfortunes.

This opening towards socially committed participatory TV was accompanied by television's experiments with mixing documentary and fictional genres as a way to reach viewers and loosen the definition of tele-education. From the clumsy, heavy-handed, and technologically burdened ambitions of mass tele-education through a variety of hybrid docu-fictional experiments, socialist TV reached its most effective educational formula in such hybrid, participatory programs. They underscore the fact that, in their most mature form, socialist educational TV was far from the ideological mouthpiece of the party. At their best, these programs supported self-improvement and life-long learning as goals that are always embedded in the collective interest rather than isolated as individual problems. They encouraged learning through participation and mobilized affective engagement without yielding to voyeurism or self-serving emotional display.

### Competition TV

At the heart of socialism is a collaborative, collective orientation, routinely set in contrast to the competitive and individualistic forces that drive capitalism. It is therefore somewhat surprising, if not

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-46.

contradictory, that competition was embedded into socialist lives and served as a permanent source of motivation for socialist citizens. In the broadest sense, all socialist institutions were implicated in the Cold War competition between the two superpowers. But beyond constant reminders of the arms race and the importance of diplomacy, even friendly encounters that showed no obvious traces of contest were underscored by a competitive spirit.

As economic, diplomatic, and military competition proved to be a losing battle for the Soviet Union, culture became the preferred battlefield. From as early as the 1930s, the Soviet Union pursued a policy of cultural dominance, declaring itself to be a true guardian of European classical heritage, as opposed to the corrupt and commercialized culture of the West. This rhetoric of cultural warfare intensified in the entire region during the Cold War.<sup>25</sup> In the Soviet Union of Khrushchev's thaw, television played a major role in shifting the emphasis to leisure and a particular way of life as the areas where socialism was to prevail over capitalism. It was the primary medium to coordinate Cold War competition in the form of various kinds of contests referred to as a cultural Olympics.<sup>26</sup> Soviet Central Television's musical and youth programming underwent a significant procedural transformation after 1968 to lead this charge. For instance, it began producing popular musical competition programs such as the *Song of the Year* contest.<sup>27</sup>

Quiz, game, and variety shows were some of the most popular program types on socialist TV. The generic boundaries among these types tended to be muddled everywhere, but they all had competition and participation as their central attractions. Much as on Western European public service television, quiz shows were some of the earliest genres on socialist TV everywhere, introduced as part of live broadcasting in the late 1950s. If we trace their history, we see a transformation from the early, open-ended formats of the 1950s to more or less centralized attempts at instituting more rules and controls, which were intended to adjust the genre to serving the mass-educational policies of the 1960s and to marry socialist TV's educational mandate with an engaging format. The earliest formats arose in an era of fairly low regulation and high confusion among socialist parties as to the purposes, potentials, and dangers of the new medium. This uncertainty gave TV professionals some leeway to experiment with the genre, which was cheap to produce. As entertainment increasingly came to define television in the 1970s and

25 Pia Koivunen, "The World Youth Festival as an Arena of the 'Cultural Olympics' in Meanings of Competition in Soviet Culture in the 1940s and 1950s," in *Competition in Socialist Society*, ed. Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic, 125-41 (London, 2014).

26 Koivunen, "The World Youth Festival."

27 Evans, "Song of the Year and Soviet Mass Culture," 619-20.



1980s, quiz and game formats bore more and more of the pressure from capitalist competition and viewer demand. Direct, codified format borrowings began on a large scale in the 1990s:<sup>28</sup>

Quiz and game shows resolved the contradiction between two ethical legacies: One was the value of hard work, which meshed together a pre-socialist, bourgeois, Protestant work ethic and early socialism's emphasis on competitive, numerically measurable production. The other legacy was the ethos of cultural nationalism, which embraced high art and revered the Romantic notion of creative talent. The joint effect of these two ethical mandates was the expectation that socialist citizens should continuously be in training to maintain a good intellectual and physical condition.

The purest form of continual training was of course sports. Every successful athlete from the Eastern bloc carried the double burden of proving at once the competitiveness of their nations and the viability of socialism. Broadcasts of international competitions such as European, world and Olympic championships were cult events. More broadly, the structure of sports competition was often directly projected onto quiz and game show formats, which helped minimize the genre's ideological disagreement with the spirit of socialist collectivity. In other words, the competitive structure of quiz and game shows was ideologically neutralized by the association with the alleged ethical purity of sports. Many of these programs actively cultivated this association, registering their work as an extension of sports, a form of cultural or intellectual Olympics.

For instance, Soviet television's most successful game show of all time, *Club of the Merry and Quick-Witted* (*Klub veselykh I nakhodchivlykh* or *KVN*, 1961-), was described by its co-creator Sergei Muratov as "intellectual soccer."<sup>29</sup> *KVN* continued the format developed by its predecessor, *Evening of Merry Questions* (*Vecher veselykh voprosov* or *VVV*, 1957). Both shows borrowed from similar programs produced in Czechoslovakia, the US, Poland, and the GDR.<sup>30</sup> *VVV* was modeled after the most popular 1950s Czechoslovak program at the time, *GGG*, or *Gadai, Gadai, Gadalschchik* ("Guess, Guess, You Guessers").<sup>31</sup> *VVV* was created in 1957 as part of the activities that led up to the Moscow International Youth Festival. It was thus integrated into a quintessential socialist international event. It took place in front of a live audience. Random participants answered random questions for funny, token prizes. Its open-ended format and open-door policy made it a

28 Noémi Dóra Dankovics, "Játékmesterek és vetélkedőműsorok a magyar televíziózás történetében" [Quiz Show Hosts and Game Shows in the History of Hungarian Television] (PhD diss., Budapest College of Communication and Business, 2012).

29 Christine Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* (New Haven, 2016).

30 Ibid.

31 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 246.

remarkably liberal phenomenon on 1950s Soviet TV. The producers assumed little control over who or what appeared on stage.<sup>32</sup>

The successor program, *KVN*, launched in 1961 as a monthly broadcast, was more overtly guided by socialist principles of democratic education. At the same time, it was enabled by a web of pro-competition ideologies, which underscored the functioning of Soviet society: the pre-Soviet, nationalistic, Romantic elitism of a creative class, the cultivation of work and the Stalinist legacy of competitive labor within factory and agricultural production; and the competition against the seductions of capitalist media. *KVN* followed a format similar to *VVV* but with more centralized control over the rules: the participants, all students and almost all men, engaged in a contest of wit and satire, including plenty of improvisation. The format also lent itself to political satire, although it was heavily censored on the spot.<sup>33</sup> The competition was organized by leagues, with early matches leading to playoffs, culminating in the annual championship round.<sup>34</sup> Teams were led by a captain, with members specializing in tasks that best matched their individual talents.<sup>35</sup> *KVN* offered a microcosm of the hierarchical, militaristic, and sports-like organization of the socialist public sphere, led by male heroes. This was not so much because women could not be leaders but because they were not thought of as funny or witty. As Kristin Roth-Ey sums it up, “*KVN* delivered a neat and useful package by design: ‘the thinking person on the screen’ (a male figure marked universal) as a model for Soviet viewers.”<sup>36</sup> The program inspired regional competitions among *KVN* teams in factories, schools, agricultural collectives, the armed forces, and many other groups. Thus, it significantly fostered youth mobilization and mass recreation. Some *KVN* stars became celebrities. The program was discontinued in 1972 but was resurrected during *glasnost* and is still broadcast in Russia.

Such instances of offscreen mobilization around a competitive TV program were common in the region. A 1965 Hungarian program called *Csak egy kicsit jobban* (“Just a Little Bit Better”) covered a competition among factories for the number and quality of their innovations. Another program from the same year, *Versengő városok* (“Competing Towns”) set towns in competition. The 1966 show *Forog az idegen* (“Spinning the Tourist”) staged a contest about tourism among nine regions. The 1970s *Fekete fehér, igen, nem* (“Black and White, Yes and No”) was a 15-month, 22-part competition in prime time among Budapest’s districts. The winner, District XI, was

32 Evans, *Between Truth and Time*.

33 *Ibid.*, 253.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 257.

36 *Ibid.*, 259.

awarded a fully equipped preschool. As a commentator enthused after the final, “Along the way, the noble goal ceased to be the 5-million-forint preschool; that became only a symbolic prize compared to the mass collaboration of historic significance.”<sup>37</sup>

The German Democratic Republic was another major laboratory of socialist competition. In fact, the entire history of GDR TV can be seen in terms of increasing competition for its own audiences against the lure of West German TV.<sup>38</sup> This is why TV historians have argued that German TV history can only be written as a combined and comparative account of Eastern and Western developments.<sup>39</sup> The demand for entertaining content presented itself earlier and more urgently for GDR television than elsewhere in the Soviet camp. In 1967, GDR TV’s Department of Entertainment issued guidelines that discouraged aesthetic experiments that were too intellectually demanding and were to be avoided.<sup>40</sup> At the 8<sup>th</sup> congress of the GDR Socialist Unity Party (SED) in 1971, Party Secretary Erich Honecker famously diagnosed “a certain boredom” around television and urged programmers to create TV content that was “good entertainment.” The SED thus folded entertainment into its ideology as an important condition for reproducing labor and raising intellectually active individuals. This form of entertainment was still to be distinctly socialist, unlike the “pseudo entertaining measures” employed by capitalist media, which lacked a “positive, character-forming and culturally educating component.”<sup>41</sup> GDR TV chairman Heinz Adameck put these new guidelines into practice, phrasing the initiative in the language of competition and even war: the task was to keep people in the line of fire in order to increase their socialist awareness and prevent them from turning to West German channels.<sup>42</sup>

The GDR tried to incorporate West German TV into its own programming and pitted popular Western shows against its own most successful products. This was especially important in the week’s high viewing times.<sup>43</sup> In Friday prime time, the beginning of the weekend, GDR TV showed thrillers, as well as popular clips from old movies, as part of the variety show *Rumpelkammer*. Saturday night was reserved for variety shows (such as *Ein Kessel Buntes*), competing with ZDF’s and ARD’s programming. Sunday night was important in influencing the following week’s mood, so they broadcast the popular thriller serial *Polizeiruf 110* dramas and feature films, as well as variety shows and game shows such as *Schaetzen Sie mal* (“Take a Guess”).<sup>44</sup>

37 Vera Vajk, “Fekete fehér, igen, nem,” *Népszava*, February 17, 1970.

38 Claudia Dittmar, “GDR Television in Competition with West German Programming,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 327–43, here 328.

39 *Ibid.*, 317.

40 Uwe Breitenborn, “‘Memphis Tennessee’ in Borsendorf: Boundaries Set and Transcended in East German Television Entertainment,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 391–402, here 392.

41 Ruediger Steinmetz and Reinhold Viehoff, “The Program History of Genres of Entertainment on GDR Television,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 317–25, 320.

42 Dittmar, “GDR Television,” 322.

43 *Ibid.*, 337.

44 *Ibid.*, 336.

East German quiz and game shows were strategically important in this relationship of competitive co-dependence. There were themed programs with specific demographics in mind such as *Glück auf!* (“Good Luck!,” 1957-68) about workers; *Das Grosse Spiel!* (“The Great Game,” 1963) about sports; and *Die Augen — links!* (“Eyes Left!,” 1967-69) about the army. *Wer raet mit — wer gewinnt* (“Who Guesses — Who Wins?,” 1952-54) and *Sehen-Raten-Lachen* (“Seeing, Guessing, Laughing,” 1955-57) were some of the first live shows with a studio audience. *Da Lacht der Bär* (“What Makes the Bear Laugh,” 1955-65), *Amiga-Cocktail* (1958-64) and *Zwischen Frühstück und Gänsebraten* (“Between Breakfast and Roast Goose,” 1959-91) were also popular live variety-game shows. Several of these developed from radio programs. *Da Lacht der Bär* featured a trio of hosts from Berlin, Saxony, and the Rhineland, respectively. Their jokes wove together popular tunes (*Schlager*), comedy, acrobatics, and operettas. The variety show *Jetzt schlägt Dreizehn* (“That’s the Last Straw,” 1961) celebrated the building of the Berlin Wall and included live conversations with border guards.<sup>45</sup>

With the genre of the game show, socialist TV found a balance between providing educational content and an entertaining format. While socialist television programs participated in the circulation of European and American game show formats, for the most part they adapted these formats to the stricter moral codes of socialist citizen training. The 1970s-1980s brought about what popular “quiz master” István Vágó, the creator and host of numerous quiz and game shows for Hungarian TV, called the golden age of the genre.<sup>46</sup> The golden age issued a threat to the equilibrium between the official ideologies of state socialism and the “capitalist” properties of most game show formats. These programs, after all, whipped up competition, fostered a desire for consumer goods, and revolved around individual talents rather than democratic participation. Indeed, when commercial television broke up Western European public broadcasters’ monopoly in the 1970s, the ensuing dual-system broadcasting also pushed socialist game shows to become less educational, more commercialized, and even more popular than before.

Nevertheless, while some late socialist quiz and game show formats incorporated entertaining elements and mobilized bottom-up, inclusive, off-the-air competitions, they were aspirational, relentlessly wedded to the idea that TV should feature people who are better, smarter, and more competitive than ordinary viewers. Vágó claims he experienced the shift from the ethos of socialist quiz and game shows

45 Breitenborn, “‘Memphis Tennessee,’” 391.

46 István Vágó, interview by Anikó Imre, December 18, 2013.

to that of global formats most directly in his own persona as a host. Under socialism, his inclination was to help contestants, to be their benevolent, if condescending, coach and teacher. By contrast, post-socialist, global formats required him to learn to be the contestants' enemy, rooting against their success.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

While the patronizing intention to guide a “gullible population” towards a utopian future undoubtedly prevailed throughout socialist TV's history, this is not a narrative of failure. It is also one of experimentation with creating collective value, with socializing individuals to educate themselves in ways that were community-oriented. The genres and programs born out of this experimentation were often playful and creative, deploying aesthetic formats that were problematic for and critical of socialism. The number of boring, propagandistic programs should not overshadow the bright achievements that punctuate this history and resonate even today.

There is renewed momentum to revisit these experiments now that neoliberalism seems to have run its course. Surveying the contemporary post-socialist media landscape provides stark evidence of the losses that attended the end of socialist TV. In the past ten to fifteen years, neo-authoritarian parties in Russia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have been using public money to consolidate media holdings among their loyal oligarchic networks, including television channels, local and national print media, and Internet sites. These centralized media networks are not unlike late socialist networks in their structure and politics, except for being more slick and powerful. By accumulating economic power, concentrating ownership, and silencing opposition, they are able to ensure the uniformity of news and restrict access to alternative news.

However, these media operations do not simply emulate socialist television's paternalistic attitude. While they build on the familiar authoritarian infrastructure, and the ethos of nationalism, they have replaced socialism's educational approach and communal orientation with divisive, carefully coordinated fear campaigns, embedded in depoliticized entertainment content that is largely a mix of home-produced material and US imports. In an ironic twist, in a time of countless competing terrestrial, cable, and over-the-top streaming services and widely available broadband that links most citizens to the Internet, state news media in the former socialist countries has

47 Ibid.

propagated a sense of willful nationalistic isolation. By contrast, while socialist TV and radio held a broadcasting monopoly through the mid-1980s, it was far from insulating or isolated in its operations in most countries. Rather, similar to Western European public broadcasting, it was thoroughly networked through both Warsaw Pact and Europe-wide collaborations, broadcast exchanges, television diplomacy, and a constant flow of know-how, technology, and personal connections.<sup>48</sup> The post-socialist recentralization of television around ruling parties' oligarchic networks holds up a dystopian mirror image to late socialist TV.

Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that the arrival of cable and satellite technologies, and the rapid globalization of international media markets under a US-led neoliberal agenda of economic domination happened exactly at the same time as the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Socialist TV's broadcast monopoly allowed it to position itself as an extension of the family, a national institution within the home. As such, it did manage to foster a shared ethos and give viewers a sense of belonging even if this sense was at least partially built on the mockery of aggressively educational programs and the increasing awareness of the system's failure to deliver on its lofty goals.

Given this context, post-socialist nostalgia is far more complicated than a near-visceral yearning for the false sense of safety derived from the memory of socialism, fetishistically attached to public personas or consumer products of the past. Instead, nostalgia indicates the disruption of a sense of intimate sociality caused by the collapse of a centralized system of governance and the influx of globalization. This disruption of communality, by definition, has been national at its core. Rather than an ideological framework that is aligned with — and lends an institutional and affective structure to — the everyday management of socialism's utopian trajectory, nationalism in post-socialist countries has increasingly functioned as a self-protective security blanket against the threat of perpetual expansion that propels neoliberal market logics. Unlike socialist ideology, which constantly revealed its own shortcomings and had to be periodically adjusted to sustain some semblance of credibility, the logic of neoliberal markets, along with the mantra of freedom and democracy, is experienced as an irresistible, almost biologically driven evolution through competition towards an eventual future.<sup>49</sup> Rather than fostering a sense of community and security, market competition generates anxiety and hopelessness. Crisis and depression, which have been identified

48 See, e.g., Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham, 2016), 12–19.

49 John Clarke, "After Neoliberalism? Markets, States and the Reinvention of Public Welfare" *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 375–94.

as constitutive elements of neoliberalism, rather than exceptional states, align with neoliberalism's signature structures of feeling on an individual level.<sup>50</sup>

It is not surprising that post-socialist identities, unmoored from the manageable context of livable socialism, have been recruited in the service of nationalistic party politics as well as commercial profits.<sup>51</sup> This anxious attachment to nationalism as the last, recognizable resort of collectivity has been evacuated of exactly those enduring values of socialism that television, at its best, conveyed and confirmed: the values of communality, the dignity of work, education, and art.

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<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Clarke, "After Neoliberalism?"; Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York, 2007); Julie Wilson, *Neoliberalism*, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Dominic Boyer likens post-socialist nostalgia to Bakhtin's heteroglossia to illustrate its complexity. See Dominic Boyer, "From Algos to Autonomos: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as Postimperial Mania," in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. Todorova and Gille, 17-28, 19. See also Zala Volčič and Mark Andrejevic, "Commercial Nationalism on Balkan Reality TV," in *The Politics of Reality Television: Global Perspectives*, ed. Kraidy Marwan and Katherine Senders, 113-26 (London, 2010).





Inspection #8909 by: A & K Tylevich

Büro: Friend & Colleague

**This has never happened before.**

[adapted from the educational film.]

**Manual for enrichment.**

*The less you say today, the less you will regret tomorrow. Greeting:*

Hello. You have reached the voice mailbox of someone who once would have answered. I am present, but not currently here.

Please do not disturb me with questions about the future. Such questions have no answers and serve no purpose.

Am I at a spiritual retreat? Unlikely I would call it that. Am I at a symposium for intellectual enrichment? Am I listening to a single voice telling me an excellent thing?

I cannot answer that right now, because I am not here. You may choose to leave a message, and I may choose to ignore it.

*Don't break your neck looking at the past. Entertainment:*

**Scorpio:** Reaching the embassy is half the journey. It is much harder to defect from yourself.

**Sagittarius:** Public opinion is a matter of what's played on the radio that day.

**Capricorn:** Would a closed society have an open bar?

**Aquarius:** Every speakeasy has its last call.

**Pisces:** In a landlocked country, do not order fish.

**Aries:** Flexibility within our range of motion.

**Taurus:** In romance, it is better to be State than dissident.

**Gemini:** Every visa has its thorn.

**Cancer:** The grass is always greener right where you are.

**Leo:** Instead of searching for the right words, consider keeping your mouth shut.

**Virgo:** The cult of the body is recruiting members.

**Libra:** When awarded a great honor, it is impolite to question its origins.

**Scorpio:** With society in retrograde, move forward with personal achievement.

**Rat:** At least the skeletons in your closet have good bone structure.

**Poodle:** A broken leg is worse than a broken heart.

**Sagittarius:** Repeat: I am betrayed only as many times as I befriend.

**Capricorn:** Those who love their art, never miss their family.

*Suppress evidence of degenerate health.*

*Valerian root.*

*Sleepytime tea.*

*Energizing tea.*

*Body oil.*

*CBD oil.*

*Flax seed oil.*

*Extra virgin.*

*Life aversion.*

*Sensitivity.*

*Chicory extract.*

*Fair-trade coffee.*

*Probiotics.*

*Prebiotics.*

*Aroma therapy.*

*Breathing exercise.*

*Inhale.*

*Sauerkraut.*

*Autumn leaves.*

*Leave of absence.*

*Basil.*

*Dill.*

*Cilantro.*

*[clear search results]*

*Is this healthy?*

*Am I healthy?*

*Is this normal?*

*Am I boring?*

*Am I unique?*

*How to sleep better?*

*How to eat better?*

*How to feel better?*

*How to think better?*

*What is Valerian root?*

*What is side effect?*

*Green tea.*

*Ceylon tea.*

*Mint tea.*

*Sleepytime.*

*Turmeric root.*

*Essential oil.*

*Paraben-free.*

*Cruelty-free.*

*Tea, for rest and relaxation.*

*Inspire our youth!*

*[ages 7-9]*

Before the children are allowed a pet, they must first respond correctly to the following question.

Children, where is a safe place to walk a dog?

- a) Our neighborhood, within view of Mama, Papa, or a trusted adult.
- b) The park, where the drunks sleep with their pants around their ankles and piss on our war monuments.
- c) The banks of the river, where the perverts squat in bushes and further remove themselves from society.

[The children answer with a resounding 'a!']

No, children, it isn't fair to deprive a dog of its ability to be a wolf. No pet this year. We'll try again when you are older.

*[ages 3-12]*

Instructions: Recite together aloud.

You are a model citizen — of country and of city!

To be a selfish misanthrope would be a silly pity!

You measure wealth as use of time —

Your currency is the sublime —

When mired by bureaucracy

You rail against hypocrisy!

You are a model citizen — of verity and truth!

When asked what you would like to be — You say: ‘an active youth!’

When asked what you would like to do — You say: ‘To go down fighting!’

‘I’ll empty every ink cartridge toward history’s re-writing!’

**alt. for the child who does not meet military medical requirements**

You are a model citizen — of verity and fact!

When asked what you would like to be — You say: ‘an architect!’

When asked what you would like to build — You say: ‘I’ll build it all!’

‘A site-specific paradise buttressed by a glass wall!’

*The aggressor also procreates. He has wealth. His children have questions.*

*[ages 15 and up]*

Instructions: For distribution abroad.

Dear mother, why are we bourgeois?

Why am I soft and fluent in French?

Why can’t I operate a tank?

Or turn a proper worker’s wrench?

Why did you hire me an au pair

When all I’ve known and understood

Are lessons learned from common folk

Whose common tongue is common good —

Good lord, our pockets are so big

I would prefer they were petit!

And I don’t like what Grandpa did

Around, like, 1943.

And I've denounced my father's name  
His D-N-A spells E-M-barrassment  
I will not be —  
— gene-tically  
Accomplice to his *harassment*!

Dear mother, I have taken ill.  
I'm sickened by society.  
My doctor has prescribed a pill  
To dull my class anxiety —

But I will not be silenced so  
Lobotomy is not for me  
The only way I will get well  
Is when all shackled are set free.

Stop calling me a militant  
It's not a cult — I've joined a faction  
We're doing all of this because  
Your peers took no redemptive action

My generation is ashamed  
Your past clogs our esophagus  
We're choking on the lives you lived  
We've finally had enough of this.  
I hope this helps you light a fuse  
Ignites your sense of right and fair

I hope you'll help us fund our cause

I hope — in perfect French: *J'espère.*

*National Poem, titled: We have enough 'theoreticians.'*

Two roads diverged on the factory floor

As a technician, there I stood

Aware that one road led to steel

The other led to processed wood.

The time we have on earth is swift

So a decision must be made:

Shall I continue to mend steel?

Or take to craft my wife forbade?

The working life is for us fools

Us fools who hunger to hone skill

With accident rates at work so high

The toll of toil is deadly thrill.

My wife, she worries for my limbs

But work is paramount to love

So, I must do what I adore

And work by hand, or lack thereof.

**Available in audiobook form. Voiced by national treasures.**

Stills from *This has never happened before*, a film by Friend and Colleague. Used with permission.











**Friend & Colleague** is a platform for editions, fiction, and special projects, founded by siblings Katya & Alexei Tylevich. Their work has exhibited at The Storefront for Art and Architecture, The Neutra VDL House, the DMV, baggage claim, and the white curb used for immediate loading or unloading only. Their film, *This has never happened before*, considers recurring impulses in the modern search for Utopia.









