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Legal Tender

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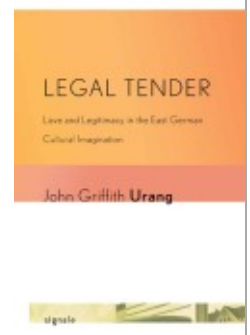
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INTRODUCTION

Eros and Exchange

At the end of Leander Haußmann's 1999 film, *Sonnenallee*, a light romantic comedy set in East Germany in the 1970s, the camera pulls back through the open border to the West, and the color fades to black and white. On the sound track, Nina Hagen sings: "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen, mein Michael" (You forgot the color film, my Michael). In suddenly—and polemically—remembering to forget its own "color film," *Sonnenallee* anticipates and satirizes the reactions of a Western audience. As in the scene where the hero and his best friend sarcastically pantomime "oppression" for a West German tour bus, *Sonnenallee* here assumes it knows what is expected of it, and adjusts accordingly. As Christiane Kuehl remarks in a review of the film for Berlin's *Tageszeitung*,

Whoever came back from there [the GDR] reported one thing above all, and it was the same thing that dominated every report made by curious newly united Germans after '89: that it was damned gray over there. The GDR was gray. Gray walls, gray streets, gray air, ashen faces. Always the same sentence, sometimes an additional one: over there you felt like you were driving through a black-and-white movie from the '50s.

With mock astonishment, Kuehl describes the overturning of this image in *Sonnenallee*: "Leander Haußmann made a color film. About the GDR. The GDR gleams."

As many of its reviewers were quick to point out, *Sonnenallee's* colors were rendered particularly bright by the lens of *Ostalgie*, or “nostalgia for the former East Germany.” In the words of a review of *Sonnenallee* in *Der Spiegel*,

Nostalgia is shorthand for “how lovely it was back then,” and Ostalgia for “we really had it good in the GDR,” even if, yeah, yeah, under further consideration a few things were not so nice back then. Ten years after the fall of the Wall, former East Germans (*Ossis*) remember above all the pleasant things....Sadness sinks into the depths of memory, details blur. (Wellershoff)

Reveling in its gleeful forgetfulness, *Sonnenallee* caused a minor scandal—even before its release. In their review of Haußmann’s film, Kerstin and Gunnar Decker make note of some of this negative press:

The film wasn’t even in cinemas yet, and already it met with antipathy. A Berlin city magazine worked itself up to the absurd and intentionally malicious opinion that *Sonnenallee* reminded one of “Nazi comedies” and of the “West German school-room- and barracks-comedies of the ’50s and ’60s.” Overall assessment: “a lack of political instinct.” (277)

In January 2000 the organization HELP, which advocates for the victims of political persecution, sued Haußmann on the basis of Germany’s Paragraph 194, which forbids the insulting of victims of state persecution. HELP objected to Haußmann’s creation of a GDR where people “dance in front of the murderous Wall—but not after the fall of the Wall, but rather at a time when this wall was a bloody everyday reality.” Even worse, in the film an “escapee who has been shot down” cries, “but not because of the attempted murder, not because of the pain, not on account of fear in the face of upcoming Stasi-imprisonment, but rather because the bullets shattered his Rolling Stones records” (“Strafanzeige gegen Film *Sonnenallee*”).¹

As if anticipating such negative reactions, *Sonnenallee* unloads its most biting satire on the tourists who peer over the Wall from a platform on the Western side. For these caricatured “Wessis,” the existence of joy or pleasure on the other side of the Wall is unthinkable: “We’re doing great,” one sneers down at Michael, the film’s hero, near the beginning of the film. “And you?” The others laugh. In another scene the tourists watch Michael dancing on an outdoor ping-pong table. “Hey, a happy commie!” scoffs one of the spectators. Thus, as much as *Sonnenallee* represents an exercise in nostalgic re-membering for the citizens of the former

1. All translations of German texts are mine unless otherwise indicated. Actually, Wuschel is not trying to escape when he gets shot down; he is running to avoid confiscation of his newly bought copy of *Exile on Main Street*.

GDR, it is also a performance for a potentially hostile—or worse yet, humorless—Western audience.

In the face of this audience, however, *Sonnenallee's* *Ostalgie* is not entirely unrepentant. During the film's final tracking shot, speaking over the opening piano chords of "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen," the hero observes in a voice-over: "Once upon a time there was a country. And I lived there. And when someone asks me, how it was—It was the most beautiful time of my life, because I was young and in love." As the last word on this riot of ostalgie exuberance, the final clause in this statement seems conciliatory, even apologetic: "because I was young and in love" provides a retroactive explanation for the film's redemptive reminiscence—as though such an account were necessary. This explanation would be less psychological than generic: in case we had forgotten to do so, Michael's final voice-over reminds us to read this film as a love story—more specifically, as a story of young love.

In this way, Michael begs the question posed to Haußmann by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* Astrid Becker: "At the end of your film the GDR is described as the most beautiful country in the world for those who were young and in love. Could one really mask the political reality that much?" With a few exceptions, *Sonnenallee's* audience seemed to think one could. Reviewers dutifully recorded that *Sonnenallee* was a work of fiction and that certain facts had been left out, but most viewers seemed to get it. Even HELP eventually withdrew the charges against Haußmann. As the film's last line reminds us, "getting it," in the case of *Sonnenallee*, is less a question of judging the film's historical accuracy than of recognizing its genre: this is a romantic comedy, and as such it *can be expected* to mask or fade out (*ausblenden*) its "political reality."

This assumption seems fairly intuitive to a modern moviegoer or reader. A love story solicits a certain credulity, a suspension of disbelief stretching from start to finish. Love can set a plot in motion; it can provoke all manner of action and sentiment; it can mean the protagonists' life or death, joy or undoing. In the love story, all's well that ends well, and all loose ends are tied in the lovers' final embrace. Yet the conditions of love, its grounds and purpose, appear unquestionable, even if its limits are probed and its depths tested. In one of the short "figures" that comprise *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes's "amorous subject" declares: "There exists a higher value for me: my love. I never say to myself: 'What's the use?' I am not nihilistic. I do not ask myself the question of ends" (186).² Nor do we as observers tend to audit the love story's account: the balance of reasons is always the same. The following analysis explores these intuitions, taking a closer look at some of the love story's

2. Barthes is characteristically cagey about the reliability of the narrator(s) in *A Lover's Discourse*: "[These] reminders of reading, of listening, have been left in the frequently uncertain, incompletable state suitable to a discourse whose occasion is indeed the memory of the sites (books, encounters) where such and such a thing has been read, spoken, heard. For if the author here lends his 'culture' to the amorous subject, in exchange the amorous subject affords him the innocence of his image-repertoire, indifferent to the proprieties of knowledge" (9).

traditional perquisites: its capacity to act as an unmotivated motivator, its primacy in the text's hierarchy of values, its privileged relationship to narrative closure.

Such characteristics stand out in particularly stark relief within the public culture of the GDR, where the "realistic" depiction of cause and effect was mandatory, and the standard of realism dogmatically defined.³ In Günter de Bruyn's 1972 novel, *Preisverleihung* (The Award Ceremony), an East German university student complains:

Our literature is supposed to be realistic, but we write about love as though we were in the Middle Ages.... Everything's submerged in mystical darkness.... You can never tell why these two people in particular love each other. Even if they don't know, the author could at least make some speculations.... Political development and love appear in every book. On the first question—which really isn't a question for me, since it's clear—I get a thousand answers. On the second, none or a half. (44–45)

This character asks a question much like the one that set my own inquiry in motion. Why is it that in so many East German novels and films—or better yet, *even* in East German novels and films—the terms of the romantic plot are more or less taken for granted, and the grounds of the lovers' affection left unexplored? Given the tendency—indeed requirement—of East German cultural products to narrativize political economy, a corresponding reflection on the "political economy" of love, the implicit laws governing the distribution of romantic attachments within the text, is conspicuous in its absence. Why did love seem to be a self-evident exception to the rule? Why did what Northrop Frye calls the "communism of convention" (98)—the communal pool of tropes and traditions available to writers within a given culture (for instance, the topoi of romance)—trump the conventions of communism? The answer, I believe, has to do with the unique functionality of the love story, the services that it alone could render, and that were urgently needed within the public culture of the GDR.

Much of the theoretical impetus and infrastructure for this project is provided by Niklas Luhmann's extraordinary study of the origins and history of modern romance: *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. In this systems-theoretical history of what he calls the "semantics of love" (8), Luhmann analyzes love as a medium—that is, "not itself a feeling, but rather a code of communication, according to the rules of which one can express, form and simulate feelings, deny them, impute them to others, and be prepared to face up to all the consequences which enacting such a communication may bring with it" (20). By asking not "What is love?" but rather "What is love supposed to *do*?" Luhmann is able to explore the

3. Officially, the doctrine of "socialist realism," the mutable and imprecise blueprint of political correctness for East German public culture, held sway at least until 1971, when Eric Honecker declared that there should be "no taboos" in the art and culture of the GDR.

role of the romantic code in the evolution of modern understandings of subjectivity and the individual.

Modern love, according to Luhmann, carries with it a unique set of rules, assumptions, and potentialities. Among the most salient of these capacities is the ability to help organize the illogical and paradoxical into a socially acceptable form. Love thus becomes a means by which the social body can assimilate the unassimilable contradictions of modern life. As Luhmann puts it, “The task of semantics, and in our case, of the semantics of love, would seem to be to sublimate these contradictions, to reveal them in controversies, to relate them to one another and to mediate between them” (46). Love does this by providing a discursive structure in which paradox does not endanger but rather constitutes the system as a whole: “The unity of love becomes the framework in which paradox that has a practical function in life can be portrayed” (62). In its role as mediator, the “semantics of love” became paramount in negotiating the contradictions and dilemmas accompanying the rise of the modern conception of the individual, hollowing out the necessary space of autonomy within the rigid stratification of the social network.

Proceeding in part from Luhmann’s insights, I pose a question he leaves unasked: How might we understand the ideological stakes of the conventions of romantic love? More specifically, how do romantic codes interact with the operation of power, the machinery of persuasion and control?

In using the notoriously elusive concept of “ideology,” I hope to address several aspects of the discursive networks commonly associated with this term. The most immediate level would correspond to what Terry Eagleton calls “the single most widely accepted definition of ideology,” namely a set of ideas that have to do with “*legitimizing* the power of a dominant social group or class” (5). As Eagleton points out, this definition is insufficient to account for many of the characteristics and functions associated with ideology, or for the fact that many beliefs and behaviors considered “ideological” actually run counter to the prevailing disposition of political influence. What this narrower understanding of ideology lacks in agility and sweep, however, it makes up for in directness. Its stakes are fairly clear, its implications explicit: ideology in this sense oils the wheels of power, ensuring acquiescence prior to coercion. This, then, is the sense of “ideology” first intended by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: the “ideas of the ruling class [that] are in every epoch the ruling ideas”; for the “class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (64).

Though it may be true that all culture is ideological, I would argue that romance is particularly and uniquely so. It is my contention that this factor—what might be called the ideological use-value of romance—is indispensable in accounting for the love story’s ubiquity in modern Western culture. If love stories predominate, it is partly because they do something—ideologically—that few other narrative tropes can. Proceeding from Luhmann’s argument, we can see how love, referring

to an always-unknowable motivating force, acts within a narrative as a kind of wildcard, rendering the improbable believable, the injudicious justifiable. The romantic plot does not need to appeal to an outside legitimization: it is itself an authorizing force in the narrative. In a hypothetical “conventional” love story, questions about the characters’ actions or behaviors could always be answered “because they love each other.” If ideology is defined (at least in part) as the way society attempts to vindicate itself to itself, then the explanatory *carte blanche* that love provides has tremendous ideological potential. The love plot offers an enticingly simple solution to gaps or weaknesses in the narrative’s ideological infrastructure: staged as a romantic scenario, ideological conflict can be resolved according to the terms of the romance. Even the most irreconcilable positions can be subjected to the mysterious laws of elective affinity, and the most fundamental conflicts conjured away with a kiss. Thus the semantics of love picks up where politics is forced to leave off, lending a provisional legitimacy to the bankrupt claims of ideology. It renders these claims, one might say, legal tender.

The importance of this argument would be found less in its utility as a political-historical “explanation” of love stories than in the approach it suggests for critical work on romance. It helps direct our investigation of the romantic plot, calling our attention to the cracks and flaws beneath the love story’s polished veneer. In fact, as we will see, this surface is not so smooth after all. For the ideological disappearing act wrought by the love story always leaves a trace: the romantic plot itself takes on the tension it was mobilized to alleviate. This tension appears in the narrative as that which cannot be metabolized within the terms of the love story. It creates loose ends and rough edges, the unresolved questions that trip up the reader and cause him or her to ask, “But what about...?” and “What now?” The gambit of this book is that an examination of incongruities in a given love plot will uncover aporias in the ideological framework of the text. What I propose, then, might be called an etiology of the romance, a search for the irritating pebble of ideological self-contradiction coated by the love story’s pearl.

Impermanent Revolution, or the Political Economy of Legitimacy in the GDR

We could choose no better case study for the mechanisms and breakdowns of the process of generating legitimacy than the public culture of the GDR. Throughout its forty-year existence, East Germany was plagued with an ongoing problem of legitimacy. Its very validity as a state, for instance, was not generally acknowledged until 1973, when the GDR was granted a seat in the United Nations. Internally, the East German state’s most potent machinery of legitimation was found in the appeal to its immediate prehistory: from the first, East Germany was defined as an antifascist state. The Socialist Unity Party, or SED, could then justify its monolithic rule with the claim—in equal parts valid and misleading—to be the inheritor of the German

antifascist tradition.⁴ In her remarkable book *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, Julia Hell shows how the cultural imagination of the GDR was marked by what she calls an “antifascist myth,” the organization of personal and national identity around an imagined legacy of antifascist resistance. In this cultural configuration, a disproportionate amount of attention was paid to the mythologized history of the heroic antifascists, to the detriment of a real coming-to-terms with individual and national culpability.

Yet, without diminishing the significance of the cultural-historical dynamic Hell has so convincingly brought to light, I would suggest that it is possible to overestimate the effectiveness and penetration of the antifascist myth in the ongoing cultural life of the GDR. Though the party insisted on the inviolability and immutability of its antifascist discourse, even this ideological stronghold was subject to the degradations of time. Eventually, as we will see especially in chapter 3, the GDR had to stop saying what it was *not*, and decide what it *was*. The reluctance or inability to do so led to an enduring legitimacy crisis, an evacuation of meaning that could be felt from the most trivial practices of everyday life to the grandest formulations of East German self-understanding.

At a colloquium held at East Berlin’s Akademie der Wissenschaften in December 1989 and January 1990, historians reevaluated East German history as a sequence of “Brüche, Krisen, Wendepunkte” (breaks, crises, turning points) culminating in the most recent and decisive upheaval, the Herbstrevolution of 1989. The incidents chosen for discussion at the colloquium amount to a succession of legitimacy crises, moments of breakdown pertaining not just to the surface effects of East German society, but to the foundations of the GDR’s ideological self-understanding. For the most part, this series includes fairly predictable entries: the June 17 uprising in 1953, the building of the Wall in 1961, the cultural “freeze” effected by the SED’s Eleventh Plenum in 1965, the economic crisis of the early 1970s, and finally the Herbstrevolution of 1989 (Cerny). The sequence of events chosen by the Akademie colloquium exemplifies what I take to be a distinctive teleology toward which histories of the GDR gravitate, one that describes the gradual, inexorable evacuation of the SED’s legitimacy claim, until all that remained was to collapse its hollow shell with the assertion “WIR sind das Volk.”

Indeed, after hindsight has made historical contingency into inevitability, such a teleological account provides a compelling narrative with which to explain the GDR’s peculiar last days, its collapse not with a bang but a whimper. As we will see, the importance of these moments of crisis can hardly be exaggerated. They will return again and again, in explicit and enciphered forms, in the public imagination of the GDR. Yet, I argue, the most profound threat to the ideological legitimacy of

4. Valid because many of the SED’s members were indeed heroes of the antifascist resistance, returning from exile or imprisonment to government posts at every level. Spurious insofar as party members’ self-stylization as the sole representatives of antifascist activity—and sole victims of fascist persecution—was an egregious act of historical revisionism. See Meuschel, 60–70.

East German socialism arose less from these explosive crisis points than from an ongoing and deepening problem throughout the history of the GDR, a problem to which nearly all of the individual crises were intrinsically related.

I follow historian Charles Maier in locating the primary engine of East Germany's slow demise in the increasing unsustainability of its economic base. In *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*, Maier describes the steady decline of an economy doomed by massive foreign debt and a hopelessly obsolete industrial base. The consumer-side problems engendered by this economic free fall, especially shortages of consumer goods, intensified and accelerated the second catalyst for the Herbstrevolution, namely the growing reluctance of East German citizens to tolerate the repression and restrictions of the SED regime. Sapped by nationwide economic fiasco and essentially abandoned by the Soviet Union, which was caught up in financial troubles of its own, the SED simply gave up the ghost.

On one important point, however, Maier's thesis resists absorption into my line of argument. Maier polemicizes against the use of the term "legitimacy" in connection with the SED regime, taking for granted that the yoke of communist rule could never be considered legitimate, at least according to the terms of Western civil society: "If the possibility of force is never renounced and organized opposition is never sanctioned, the concept of 'legitimacy,' I believe, will not serve any historical or social science analysis. The question must be reformulated: what quality of acceptance was at stake under communism?" (52). Maier's point, that even popular acceptance does not necessarily confer legitimacy on a state, is well taken. Yet the criteria by which he determines legitimacy—majority-ratified accession to power, the ability to maintain power without coercion alone, a use of power in accordance with the standards of international public opinion (51)—which may be useful, for instance, within the context of international diplomacy, have little to tell us about the system-internal struggles of the GDR. Maier's logic would demonstrate that the socialist East German state was illegitimate, but only according to the standards of Western (capitalist) legitimacy. All in all, a fairly predictable result. As I hope to show, a more compelling claim may be formulated not by appealing to the criteria of Western liberal consensus, but by considering the question of the GDR's legitimacy according to the terms of its own ideological infrastructure. The question we will explore, then, is how the GDR measured up to its own goals and aspirations—and what happened when it failed to do so.

The ongoing crisis of legitimacy with which my argument is most concerned consists not just in the SED-state's failure to meet the standards of civil society, nor solely in a quantitative economic crisis, the fatal accumulation of foreign debt and disastrous mismanagement of production and distribution. Far more, this analysis deals with what might be called the GDR's *qualitative* economic crisis, a problem inhering in the nature of economic developments in East Germany from the 1950s on. The trajectory we will follow describes a consistent trend toward economic decentralization, a shift in focus from the sphere of production toward that of consumption, and an ever-greater class divide. In short, the economic landscape of East

German socialism begins to look more and more like that of a market economy, with all its attendant inequalities.

In particular, we will see how the GDR's gravitation toward a market model brought with it the logic of what Marx calls the "commodity fetish," a misrecognition whereby the "definite social relation between men themselves... assumes... the fantastic form of a relation between things" (*Capital*, 165). By this process, Marx claims, the obscured social character of an object—the conditions of its production—is taken to be a quality of the object itself: its intrinsic "value." As Slavoj Žižek reminds us in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, commodity fetishism is not just a belief, but also a practice. "The illusion is not on the side of knowledge," he points out,

it is on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion. What they overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*. (32)⁵

What I call the "socialist commodity fetish," however, reverses the Marxist dynamic. According to party rhetoric, commodities would not obscure but rather reveal the social relations that produced them—and in so doing, would attest to the triumph of socialist production. The "ideological fantasy" at work in the GDR commodity fetish, then, does not uncouple the commodity from the social network that produced it, but rather erroneously believes consumer goods to be ideologically *inseparable* from this network. Ideological *belief*, in other words, would draw a straight line from the socialist factory to the socialist consumer: the socialist subject would produce and consume with the same intent. In her panoramic history of East German consumer culture, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, Ina Merkel identifies this logic as a central strategy of GDR *Konsumpolitik*:

The discourse paradigm of displacing responsibility onto the consumers as producers had an important function, both in terms of defining the community and mobilizing the masses. The fundamental idea was that the working people, as co-owners of production, were no longer working in the interest of exploiters, but rather would themselves benefit—along with the whole population—from their work. To buy and use goods, they had to work for them. (122)

5. Terry Eagleton also sees the commodity fetish as the point where ideology becomes "real": "[Whereas] in the *German Ideology* ideology was a matter of not seeing things as they really were, it is a question in *Capital* of reality itself being duplicitous and deceitful" (87).

Yet, as we will see in chapters 1 and 2, the *practice* of consumption in the GDR—and thus, by the logic of “consumers as producers,” the practice of production—was a long way from proving the superiority of socialism. If anything, it testified to the opposite.

Breaking It Down: Romantic Economies

The friction generated by the contradiction between the party’s lofty hopes and loftier promises on the one hand, and the sad state of GDR factories and show-rooms on the other, may be found behind much of the tension and anxiety in the cultural objects discussed here. To put a finer point on it, it is this contradiction in particular against which the romantic plot is so often rallied. The love story, I argue, is uniquely positioned to intervene in the economic logic—that is, the logic that determines the allocation of value, the flow of attraction, the exchange of desire—of a given text. Romance does this by appealing to its own exclusive economy, a circulation of desire that, at least in principle, flouts the laws of economic exchange writ large. This point is made incisively by Lydia Davis in her short story “Break It Down,” in which the main character systematically—and literally—puts a price on a brief love affair:

He’s sitting there staring at a piece of paper in front of him. He’s trying to break it down. He says:

I’m breaking it all down. The ticket was \$600 and then after that there was more for the hotel and food and so on, for just ten days. Say \$80 a day, no, more like \$100 a day. And we made love, say once a day on the average. That’s \$100 a shot. And each time it lasted maybe two or three hours so that would be anywhere from \$33 to \$50 an hour, which is expensive.

Though of course that wasn’t all that went on, because we were together almost all day long. She would keep looking at me and every time she looked at me it was worth something. (20)

Once he has turned over all the events of their short time together and factored in the time spent thinking about her after the fact, the hourly rate has dropped: “So when you add up all that, you’ve only spent maybe \$3 an hour on it” (27). Finally, he turns his attention to the “bad times” of the relationship, especially the moment of parting:

Walking away I looked back once and the door was still open, I could see her standing far back in the dark of the room, I could only really see her white face still looking out at me, and her white arms.

I guess you get to a point where you look at that pain as if it were there in front of you three feet away lying in a box, an open box, in a window somewhere. It’s hard

and cold, like a bar of metal. You just look at it there and say, All right, I'll take it, I'll buy it. That's what it is. Because you know all about it before you even go into this thing. You know the pain is part of the whole thing. And it isn't that you can say afterwards the pleasure was greater than the pain and that's why you would do it again. That has nothing to do with it. You can't measure it, because the pain comes after and it lasts longer. So the question really is, Why doesn't that pain make you say, I won't do it again? When the pain is so bad that you have to say that, but you don't.

So I'm thinking about it, how you can go in with \$600, more like \$1000, and how you can come out with an old shirt. (29–30)

Why, the story's "I" asks, do we let ourselves into this apparently unfavorable exchange again and again? Why does no amount of money or suffering seem to tip the scales away from love? The incommensurability of such calculations with the logic of romantic love lends Davis's story its wry poignancy. The protagonist will never know if his relationship was "worth it," because the code of love explodes the concept of worth itself.

In his preface to *The American*, Henry James captures this quality of romantic plots with characteristic precision and finesse:

The only general attribute of projected romance that I can see, the only one that fits all its cases, is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals—experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it and, if we wish so to put the matter, drag upon it, and operating in a medium which relieves it, in a particular interest, of the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities. (33)

Extending the metaphor, James imagines romance as an attempt to "cut the cable" between the "balloon of experience" and the earth—that is, the "vulgar communities" of economic logic, of "measurable states" (33). Perhaps more than any writer's, James's work shows the resilience of this cable, this taut tether between romantic flight and worldly concerns.

Luhmann, as well, comes to the conclusion that love precludes any kind of cost-benefit analysis, especially of an economic nature:

Paradoxicalization and particularly the incorporation of effort, worry and pain into love further result in a differentiation of love and interest, i.e. love and economy (in the broadest sense, i.e. including the household economy). In contrast to what is true of one's interests, it is impossible in love to calculate the costs or weigh up the accounts, because both one's profits and one's losses are enjoyed, indeed, they serve to make one aware of love and to keep it alive. (66–67)

Indeed, love stories seem to exult in spurning considerations of profit and loss, leading the protagonists to renounce power, status, fortune, and sometimes even life itself in the pursuit of romantic fulfillment. How, despite the general trend toward ever greater rationalization in the modern age, does romance—at least in its cultural articulations—continue to resist economic rationalization?

One framework within which to begin constructing an answer to this question may be found in the so-called numismatics of Freudian-Marxist theorist Jean-Joseph Goux. In *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, Goux presents a sweeping system of convergences and equivalences, tracing the outline of a general theory of social exchange. Yet in the whole series of symbolic substitutions that constitutes the numismatic system, love never makes an appearance. In this sense, Goux seems to follow Freud in his tendency to treat love more as a psychic and biological phenomenon than as a social or cultural one—that is, to subsume romantic love into sexuality.

That the “love” of Freud’s libido theory often represents an object quite different from the one under consideration in this project may be seen in the “economic” element introduced in the opening passage of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

In the theory of psycho-analysis we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle. We believe, that is to say, that the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure. *In taking that course into account in our consideration of the mental processes which are the subject of our study, we are introducing an ‘economic’ point of view into our work;* and if, in describing those processes, we try to estimate this “economic” factor in addition to the “topographical” and “dynamic” ones, we shall, I think, be giving the most complete description of them of which we can at present conceive, and one which deserves to be distinguished by the term “metapsychological.” (3, italics mine)

As Davis’s story in particular teaches us, it is precisely such “economic” considerations that the cultural topos of romantic love works so hard to resist. The individual psyche may hedge its bets, weighing the yield of pleasure against that of unpleasure, but in the romantic plot, love is always all-in. As mentioned above, the disparity here does not arise from incommensurable theories, but rather from non-identical objects of study: love as a psychic phenomenon versus love in its conventionalized cultural articulation.

From this latter point of view, we can speculate why Goux must exclude love from his numismatic chain. Goux’s system identifies a number of “general equivalents” that anchor various social organizations: money, language, the state. Within these symbolic economies, general equivalents serve to make comparable the values

of dissimilar objects. Just as one commodity, gold, became the standard by which all others were evaluated, such general equivalents as the father, the phallus, the monarch, and the spoken word came to unify their various symbolic networks, rendering the elements of those networks assimilable into a hierarchy of value. Yet romantic love, as we have seen, insists on the *incomparability* of its object, locating all value within the closed system of the lovers' union.

Shakespeare's twenty-first sonnet calls our attention to the paradoxical implications of this injunction for romantic literature—in particular, for the sonnet's traditional use of metaphor to communicate the incommunicable:

So is it not with me as with that Muse
 Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse,
 Who heaven itself for ornament doth use
 And every fair with his fair doth rehearse
 Making a couplement of proud compare,
 With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
 With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
 That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.
 O let me, true in love, but truly write,
 And then believe me, my love is as fair
 As any mother's child, though not so bright
 As those gold candles fixed in heaven's air:
 Let them say more that like of hearsay well;
 I will not praise that purpose not to sell.⁶

As it is characterized here, metaphor would function like Goux's general equivalent, translating disparate qualities into "marketable" value. As the sonnet's concluding couplet points out, the poet should in fact want the opposite: that the beloved's charms remain inscrutable, inestimable, invaluable in the eyes of the world. Insofar as romantic love claims to resist such systems of exchange, it also defies economic rationalization. It demands exclusion, in other words, from the symbolic economies described by Goux.

Yet if love were, indeed, only in the eye of the beholder, few love stories would be of interest to anyone but the participants. And even these participants would always be uncertain of each other's affections. According to Luhmann, this paradox, which he formulates at one point as "the incommunicability of genuineness" (45–46), necessitated the creation of the romantic code in the first place. Luhmann remarks: "[Precisely] the irrationality of passion makes it improbable that two people are seized by it at the same time with respect to one another. Cupid does

6. Shakespeare, "Sonnet XXI," ed. Wells and Taylor, 781.

not, after all, shoot off two arrows at once; love may well occur by coincidence, but normally not as a double coincidence" (62). The radical doubt generated by this state of affairs demanded a semantic codification of passion, a shared language with which to encourage, express, compare, and evaluate these experiences. Thus Luhmann notes: "Love as a communicative medium refers not to the psychic but to the social system" (63).

In this sense, we can call the love story's bluff: love may be an ineffable experience, and the virtues of the beloved incomparable—this may be, in other words, an economy without a proper general equivalent—but the love story is forced, for the sake of communicability, to establish a more universal arrangement. Striving to get its point across, the romantic plot enters into dialogue with the symbolic economies of its social and cultural context: it may, for instance, cross the no-man's-land between warring families, proving the characters' love stronger than the prohibition of father or clan; love may trump money when a fortune or a fortunate marriage is sacrificed for its sake; worldly passions may get the better of religious faith and sacred commitments. In each of these cases, the introduction of love into a symbolic economy neutralizes the ruling term of that system, rendering father, money, or God merely a foil to demonstrate the supremacy of romantic passion.

Yet the love plot is equally likely to incorporate elements of these neighboring economies into its own semantic framework and value structure. In the interest of intelligibility, the love story collects and redeploys whichever symbolic configurations will best complement or accentuate it. By this mechanism, certain characteristics or behaviors that in fact belong to other sign systems entirely become "romantic." Such qualities as "good breeding," for instance, or virtue and piety or material wealth may come to signify the desirability of a romantic partner. At the same time as it insists on its primacy and autonomy, romance becomes entangled in symbolic structures that threaten its narrative privilege. It is here, as we will see, that the love story becomes harnessed to ideology, and its romantic economy begins to look like the political economy of the society from which it springs.

Within the romantic mode, the temporality of love is as self-referential as its semantic content: entirely self-sustaining, love would escape the demands of time, persisting immutably in the face of fate and circumstance. The notion of "everlasting love," however, owes its poignancy in large part to the fact that it is the direct inverse of what is happening at the narrative level: as soon as we can be assured that the couple's love is eternal, the story ends and we are released from its libidinal economy. Sometimes this release is brought about by the lovers' deaths, sometimes by the promise of their living "happily ever after." The precipitous tragic or happy ending of the romance testifies to the extraordinary narrative exertion required to sustain this temporary utopia. Before the inevitable realities—the economic realities, broadly defined—of coexistence catch up with the lovers, we must part company with them and return to our own everyday lives. The love story's utopia is

thus less a revolution than a state of exception: it does not negate the laws of political economy; it only suspends them.

Even so, this provisional rearrangement of the hierarchies of value within a given symbolic structure represents a significant threat to the hegemony of that order. Indeed, the same functions that render it so effective an instrument of ideological persuasion also constitute the subversive pleasure of the romantic text: in insisting on its narrative prerogatives, romance invokes a world beyond the tyranny of political economy, a private utopia shared by the lovers and their empathetic audience. In this way, the couple's intractable self-involvement undermines the totalizing claims of any given social network or institution in the narrative: even the most law-abiding citizen roots for Bonnie and Clyde. The love plot, in other words, always presents an *alternative* regime to the one(s) that claim primacy in the text—it holds the promise of what James Baldwin calls “another country.”⁷ For this reason, it is a dangerous proposition to borrow legitimacy from the love plot. “For love is so created,” the narrator of Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften* tells us, “that it itself alone claims to be right and all other claims disappear before it” (86). Or, in the words of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's aphorism, “Love does not just have rights, love is always right” (15).

German Democratic Love Stories

The love story's unique and unpredictable mix of stabilizing and subversive effects helps illuminate its peculiar status within the East German cultural sphere. While traditional romance presented a potent challenge to the aesthetic and ideological orthodoxy demanded by East German cultural policy, it could also bypass some of the unavoidable and insoluble contradictions of the GDR's ideological infrastructure—and, perhaps more importantly, it could provide a welcome respite from the onerous polemicism of East German public culture.

East German love stories were the inheritors of a fraught and ambivalent tradition: on the one hand, East German writers had recourse to the age-old history (discontinuous and heterogeneous though it may be) of what Denis de Rougemont calls “love in the Western world.” Romantic texts and tropes made up a good deal of the so-called *Kulturerbe* (cultural heritage), that part of the Western cultural tradition that the party deemed acceptable for inclusion in the East German canon. Thus classic love stories such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Madame Bovary* played as important a role in shaping the romantic imagination in the East as they did in the West.

At the same time, however, the East German love story was heir to a long history of suspicion regarding the institutions and practices of romantic love, from

7. Baldwin's novel *Another Country* follows several romantic couples in their search for love's alternate reality, for a union that transcends the constraints of class, sex, and race. Whether this state is attained—or attainable—within the terms of the novel is a question for another forum.

the critiques of bourgeois familialism put forward by Marx, Engels, Bebel, and Zetkin to the rearrangement of traditional gender roles and relations effected by the Russian Revolution. The latter was particularly significant in this regard, since it seemed destined to implement the changes its architects had only theorized. As Sheila Rowbotham notes in an intriguing chapter on sexual politics during this era in her book *Women, Resistance, and Revolution*, “In the early years of the revolution it was generally assumed that the family would wither along with other institutions which had persisted from capitalist society” (145).

Perhaps no one was more attuned to the psychosexual consequences of the Russian Revolution than Alexandra Kollontai, whose writings—and biography—at test to the transformed erotic potential of the revolutionary period. In the chapter “Love and the New Morality” in her book *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, for instance, Kollontai uses a then-recent book by German writer Grete Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, to put forward a program of sexual liberation for the new socialist society:

Society must above all learn to accept all forms of personal relationships however unusual they may seem, provided they comply with two conditions. Provided that they do not affect the physical health of the human race and provided they are not determined by the economic factor. The monogamous union based on “great love” still remains the ideal. But this is not a permanent or set relationship. The more complicated the individual psyche the more inevitable are the changes. “A succession of monogamous relationships” is the basic structure of personal relationships. But side by side there are a whole range of possible forms of “erotic friendship” between the sexes. (25)

Other cultural producers as well articulated the turbulent status of erotic relationships in the years following the revolution. Abram Room’s 1927 film, *Bed and Sofa*, for instance, depicts a complicated love triangle between three young people who are forced by the housing crisis to share an apartment. They live together in a number of amorous permutations before the woman finally decides to seek fulfillment on her own. Dasha, a character in F. V. Gladkov’s 1928 novel, *Cement*, reaches a similar decision, finding marriage incompatible with her new role in socialist society. “I don’t know, Gleb,” she tells her husband. “Perhaps I don’t love any man. And perhaps I love—. I love you, Gleb; that’s true—but perhaps I love others, too? I don’t know, Gleb; everything is broken up and changed and become confused. Somehow love will have to be arranged differently” (292).

As these examples suggest, it seemed for a time that Soviet revolutionary culture would indeed arrange love differently. The conservative social policies of the Stalinist era, however, systematically stifled such challenges to gender roles and sexual norms. In *The Great Retreat*, Nicholas Timasheff describes some of the radical changes brought about by Soviet social policy, then outlines the process by

which these developments were reversed in the 1930s: marriage was reemphasized, divorce made more difficult, abortion declared illegal, and parental (paternal) authority strengthened through propaganda and legislation (192–203).⁸ When socialist realism was adopted as official doctrine at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, it bore the marks of Stalinist social conservatism in its suspicion of the love story, a genre prone to irrationality, individualism, and excess. In the end, love plots were to be warily tolerated, as long as they remained subordinate to the overall ideological template of the work.

In many ways, however, socialist realism has a great deal in common with the bourgeois romance. Considering how little romance actually appears in these texts, it is remarkable how romantic socialist realism tends to be, retaining such elements as the ideal hero, the binary organization of good and bad characters, the utopian tendency, and the predictable happy ending. Indeed, as Andre Zdanov observed at the First Soviet Writers' Congress, "Our literature, which stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism" (Scott, 21). In terms of the above analysis, we might say that revolutionary romanticism wanted to retain the ideologically stabilizing effect of the traditional love story, but without the destabilizing tendencies of passion and desire. Referring to this propensity for stabilization, Régine Robin calls socialist realism "an aesthetics of the return to order" (7).

Along with the rest of socialist-realist doctrine, this socially conservative prototype of the love plot was carried over into the cultural policy of the fledgling East German state. From the outset, however, doctrinal socialist realism had an uphill struggle in East Germany. As commentators such as David Bathrick have pointed out, a significant challenge came from countercurrents within the East German public sphere, especially in the form of what Bathrick calls a "return of the repressed," a reappearance of the modernist and avant-garde traditions of the early revolutionary period in the works of artists like Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler (89).

Even more, however, socialist realism's aesthetic hegemony was threatened by the entertainment superpower to the west. Before the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, "imperialist propaganda" was only as far away as the nearest border-cinema.⁹ As we will see in chapter 1, the influence of the Western culture industry was particularly noticeable in what might be called the "romantic imagination" of the East German audience—their assumptions and expectations regarding the structure and mechanics of the love story—for romance, from the comic to the melodramatic, was what Hollywood and its imitators did best.

8. See also Robin, 6–7.

9. For a fascinating discussion of border cinemas in divided Berlin, see "Border Cinemas: Mediascapes of the Cold War," in Katie Trumpener's *The Divided Screen: The Cold War and the Cinemas of Postwar Germany*.

David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger claim in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* that 95 of the 100 films they surveyed include a romantic plot, and 85 have romance as their primary plot.¹⁰ “Screenplay manuals,” they write, “stress love as the theme with greatest human appeal” (16). Love has always been the bread and butter of Hollywood, and from the beginning the film industry set out to refine and redefine the genre, capitalizing on both its commercial and its ideological potential. Film became an extremely effective means of organizing and disseminating changing practices of courtship and romance. The larger-than-life images on the screen were a far more efficient romantic primer than theater or literature had been, as a 1933 study by Herbert Blumer makes clear.¹¹ Based on interviews, questionnaires, and direct observation, Blumer concludes that both children and young adults are highly susceptible to the influence of motion pictures and tend to imitate the attitudes and behaviors they see on screen. Romantic love, Blumer claims, is particularly significant in this regard: “From the earlier discussion of love pictures and imitation and of the influence of love pictures in stimulating emotions, one would expect young men and young women to derive from these pictures ideas of love and of the behavior associated with it” (153).¹²

The movies were especially instructive in one particular area. Virginia Wright Wexman observes: “If close-up photography has influenced the subtlety with which emotions and information are signified through performance, it has also privileged a particular element associated with romantic attraction: the kiss” (18). The long-deferred kiss, the terminus of countless romantic movies, represented a powerful new technology in the semantics of love: all the anticipation of courtship, all the promise of happiness to come, could now be distilled into one moment, one gesture.

Just as the screen kiss taught audiences how love’s fulfillment was supposed to look, the development and cultivation of Hollywood’s star system gave romance a recognizable face. The star system took the love story’s traditional machinery of projection and identification to a new level: instead of a particular character, the moviegoer could now identify with or idealize a “real” person. As Edgar Morin expresses it,

Henceforth we embark upon the stellar dialectic. The star’s beauty and youth magnify her roles as lover and heroine. Her love and heroism magnify in turn the young and beautiful star. In the movies she incarnates a private life. In private she must incarnate

10. I am indebted to Virginia Wright Wexman’s book *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* for alerting me to this quantification (3).

11. Eva Illouz’s *Consuming the Romantic Utopia* (44–45) pointed me toward Blumer’s study.

12. In Buster Keaton’s *Sherlock Jr.*, an inexperienced young projectionist woos his girlfriend in the projection booth while a romantic movie is playing. Unsure how to proceed, he simply imitates everything he sees on screen.

a movie life: by means of each of her film characterizations the star interprets herself; by revealing her own character, she interprets the heroines of her films.

What is a film if not a "romance," i.e., a personal story destined for the public? The star's personal life must be public. (58)

In this way, the movies' glamorous fantasies were brought into the "real world," hypostatized in an offscreen lifestyle as romantic as any the actor portrayed in his or her films.

The nature and content of this romance constitute Hollywood's most significant reorganization of the romantic code. Borrowing a phrase from Leo Lowenthal, Richard Dyer has called American movie stars "idols of consumption," glorified not for their social productivity, but for their activities in the sphere of leisure (Lowenthal, 115; qtd. in Dyer, 39). Living advertisements for the life of luxury, movie stars helped cement the bond between romance and consumption in the cultural imagination of the United States and beyond. In her remarkable analysis of modern American romance, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Eva Illouz offers a useful terminology with which to approach the connection between romance and consumption. She juxtaposes what she calls the "romanticization of commodities," the romantic aura attached to commodities in films and advertising, and the "commodification of romance," the intertwining of romantic practices with the consumption of consumer goods and leisure technologies (26). As we will see, both of these developments took root in the East, notwithstanding the many obstacles to their transplantation.

East German romance, then, may be seen as a unique combination of four distinct strands: first, the romantic tradition of the *Kulturerbe's* classic love stories, with the accumulated tropes and tendencies of its venerable pedigree; then, in almost diametrical opposition, the radical challenge of revolutionary socialism, the attempt to realign Eros with the new social ties of the coming order. Such restructuring was cut short by the socially conservative hard line of Stalinism, with its cultural corollary in the doctrine of socialist realism, which projected its own romantic vision onto the socialist tradition. Finally, to the vexation of ideologues and functionaries, the GDR's amorous imagination bore the unmistakable stamp of Hollywood's commodified romance, especially by way of West German imports and imitations. We will see these strands interweave and intersect in the public culture of the GDR, as writers, filmmakers, functionaries, and audiences searched for a model of love appropriate to the demands and achievements of East German socialism.

The first chapter of this book explores the collision between two of these romantic paradigms: the Westernized template of glamorous, commodified romance on the one hand, and the rigorously ideological couplings of 1950s socialist realism on the other. Tracking the gradual loss of ground by hyperpoliticized socialist-realist love plots to a romantic model more Lubitsch than Lenin, we will gain insight into not only the characteristic tendencies of modern romance, but also the mechanisms

by which ideological friction became encoded in the East German romantic imagination. This drift does not just represent a capitulation to the West or a concession to the demands of East German audiences, but rather marks a rift internal to the self-understanding of the SED state. Within the changing fortunes of East German romance, in other words, we will see the inconsistency and ambivalence of an uncharacteristically erratic party line. In the early part of this decade, East German cultural policy underwent an extensive revision, essentially reversing the mandate of cultural producers overnight while insisting that the underlying principles remained the same.

Chapter 1 examines these shifts through the lens of film policy, specifically the debates around the proper role of romance in the East German cinema. As we will see, the increasingly volatile dissatisfaction of the GDR's citizenry made the need for distracting "light entertainment"—comedy and romance—greater than any scruples the champions of socialist realism might have about the films' political content, or lack thereof. This cultural concession, however, was just the surface effect of a deeper and more radical transformation in the GDR's political economy. Scrambling to find a brake to its accelerating labor crisis, the SED was putting policies into effect that would bring the East German economy closer to that of its neighbor to the west. This was, in short, the start of an East German consumer culture. It is this change, then, that is reflected in—and was fostered by—the ever-greater role of commodities and consumption in the libidinal economy of 1950s East German public culture.

If love stories were harbingers of East German consumer culture, however, they were also mobilized in the nascent opposition to this trend. The second part of chapter 1 takes a close look at two important DEFA films from the late 1950s, emphasizing their shared concern with the eager participation of East German youth in the attitudes and practices of Westernized, commodified romance.¹³ Though the stance of these films represents a significant challenge to the course of East German public policy at the time, they fail to present a viable alternative to the glamorous promises—whether from the West or from the East—that lead the young protagonists astray.

In this respect, we can say that the novels described in chapter 2 pick up where these films leave off. Both novels, which belong to a genre known as the *Ankunftsroman*, or "novel of arrival," set themselves the task of forging the bonds that would connect young East Germans to their socialist homeland. The *Ankunftsroman* attempts to do so not through the allure of conspicuous consumption, but rather through the satisfactions of industrial production. This objective, I argue, is structured, supported, and often brought about by the *Ankunftsroman's* central love story.

13. The Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft, or DEFA, was the state film studio of East Germany.

The first part of chapter 2, a reading of Brigitte Reimann's *Ankunft im Alltag* (Arrival in the Everyday), identifies two competing modes of romance in the text: the idealistic "neue Romantik," which finds erotic charge in the rigors and rewards of the production process; and the Americanized romance of conspicuous consumption. Wavering between these poles, the heroine's romantic decision comes to stand in for the choice—or desired choice—of her generation. As we will see in the second half of chapter 2, a "neue Romantik" also seems to fuel the irrepensible optimism of the young protagonists of Karl Heinz Jakobs's *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (Description of a Summer). Yet it is precisely this enthusiasm, this "anticipatory consciousness," that necessitates the scenario of correction and control that concludes the novel, for although the young workers' productive zeal is indispensable to the socialist project, their uncompromising vision also presents a threat to the stability of the East German state.

Chapter 3 considers the situation created by the economic developments outlined in the first two chapters. In particular, the works analyzed in chapter 3 respond to the ideological friction created by the emergence of salient class divisions within "real existing socialism." In my readings of these works—novels and films spanning the years 1968–1978—I show how their love stories mediate the problem of class in the GDR, providing a language with which to discuss the experience of class antagonism without undermining the legitimacy of the SED's claim to preside over a society in which such dynamics had been overcome. In these novels and films, the love relationship becomes the space in which the protagonists experience—and often resolve—immanent class tensions. Each of the texts analyzed here discovers the same "solution" to the problem of class (though the authors approach this solution with differing amounts of credulity or irony): a bourgeois protagonist rediscovers his or her dormant penchant for the "neue Romantik" and begins a love affair with a member of the working class. The course and outcome of this cross-class romance, then, become ciphers for a negotiation of the increasingly stratified society of "real existing socialism."

The first part of chapter 4 sketches the priorities and horizons of East German gender discourse by investigating a fascinating anthology published in 1975: *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* (Bolt from the Blue), a volume of short stories envisioning magical or scientific sex-reversals. Whereas *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* makes a strong case for what might now be called a postmodern conception of gender as performative, fluid, socially constructed, and universally disseminated, the following decade saw a reconsideration of these assumptions; works from the 1980s tend to portray gender as an inherent and essential component of one's identity—especially women's identity. Chapter 4 tracks the significance and consequences of this shift through close readings of two key novels by Irmtraud Morgner: the 1974 pastiche picaresque *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* (Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice) and the 1983 epic *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman* (Amanda: A Witch Novel). Read together, these novels constitute a radical interrogation of

the conditions of possibility for real love between equals—even in the allegedly egalitarian society of “real existing socialism.” The final section of the chapter speculates about how romantic love might have fared in the bleak, postutopian landscape of Morgner’s ambitious, unfinished novel, *Das heroische Testament* (The Heroic Testament), the third work in the planned trilogy.

The ideological arc described by the first four chapters is that of a state increasingly at odds with its foundational and guiding principles (the ideals of socialist equality) and ever more out of touch with its own populace, especially its nominal “ruling” (that is, working) class. By the 1980s the SED state was effectively out of control, reduced to helpless (but not harmless) watching and waiting. This condition is epitomized in the metastasis of the state surveillance apparatus: the notorious *Staatssicherheitsdienst* grew ever larger the weaker its masters became. Chapter 5 focuses on three “Stasi novels,” one written before unification and two after, all sharing a concern with what could be called the psychosexual dimension of surveillance work: the conscious or unconscious desires and fantasies that motivate the professional snoop. These are not love stories, but rather stories of not-love: more specifically, I argue, stories of perversion. In the perverse fantasy-lives of three Stasi men—and, more importantly, in the novels’ fantasies of these fantasies—we can see reflected both the necrotic condition of the East German state in the 1980s and the retrospective reevaluation of life in the East from the vantage point of a newly unified Germany.