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Legal Tender

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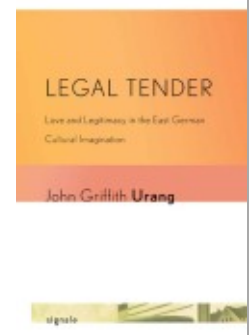
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LOVE, LABOR, LOSS

Modes of Romance in the East German Novel of Arrival

Und wenn kein Unterschied ist zwischen der Liebe zueinander und der Liebe zu einer Tätigkeit? Auch die Liebe ist eine Produktion.

And what if there's no difference between love for one another and love for an activity? Love is also a production.

—VOLKER BRAUN, *Das ungezwungene Leben Kasts*

As we saw in chapter 1, the GDR of the 1950s came to look rather like a consumer culture. This had practical consequences, but also, and perhaps more importantly, philosophical and ideological ones. After all, consumer culture is essentially a response to the questions “Why do we work?” and “What do we get, both as individuals and as a society, for our labor?” Consumer culture answers these questions with commodities: the worker exchanges his or her labor for buying power; society works together to produce more and more consumer goods.

Officially, the GDR would never have endorsed this view of work's motivation. In Marxist understanding, work represents a more fundamental, more essential activity. The entry on “labor” in the East German *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* (Compact Political Dictionary) suggests this primacy with a quote from Friedrich Engels's essay “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man”: “[Labor] is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself” (“Arbeit,” 47). Even the meaning of the word “labor” (*Arbeit*) changed under socialist rule in East Germany. An article by Joachim Höppner in the September 1963 issue of the East German literary journal *Weimarer Beiträge* maps the development of the word's meaning from the “toil” of the bondservant—and thus also “drudgery,

hardship, necessity”—in Middle-High German to “productive activity” in the age of commodity production, culminating in its elevation under socialism to the “creative, productive employment of energy toward the complete fulfillment of the social and personal needs [of human beings]” (584).¹ Yet, as the SED discovered to its dismay, this etymological evolution was not enough to inspire the East German workforce to norm-breaking productivity.

The problem of incentive was one of the most pressing challenges of the East German planned economy—and remains an important topic in GDR studies today. Jana Scholze’s contribution to the volume *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn* (Progress, Norm, and Self-Will), a collection of essays on the history and historiography of everyday life in the GDR, begins with an extended meditation on this question:

Why, in the face of . . . growing mismanagement and scarcity, did people in the GDR work? No pressure to perform, no fear of being fired or of unemployment “forced” them. Was it an understanding of social necessity? Was it the obligations of the tradition of “good German workmanship” and the pride of being a miner, doctor, or saleswoman? Was it the binding cohesion and the social control of the collective, the brigade, or the household? Was it a “fighting spirit” that, spurred by socialist competition, stimulated increased performance in production as though in a chess game? Or was it in fact just financial incentives, wages, bonuses? (85)²

This chapter will approach the question of incentive in its cultural articulation, tracking some of the hopes and anxieties regarding work in the East German public imagination.

Every socialist-realist industrial novel offers tracts on the subject of incentive, as do such films as Konrad Wolf’s 1957 *Sonnensucher* (Sun Seekers), in which Jupp König (Erwin Geschonneck) takes the time to explain to his coworkers why it is in their best interest—indeed, in their class interest—to mine uranium for the Soviets. In these texts and films, the motivation to work is usually cast as a matter of the *collective*; it is not individual gratification or reward but rather group benefit that should incite the worker to greater productivity. A paradigmatic example of the rhetoric of collective incentive is found in Eduard Claudius’s 1951 production novel, *Menschen an unserer Seite* (People on Our Side). To give a sense of the urgency with which Claudius takes up this theme, I will quote the passage at some length. In this scene, Wende, the new party secretary at the Berlin factory where

1. I was pointed toward this article by a passage in Bernhard Greiner’s *Von der Allegorie zur Idylle: Die Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR* (19).

2. In the end, Scholze suggests that a combination of these factors motivated East German workers. The strongest of these influences, however, seems to have been material gain. Prestige and recognition were gratifying, but it was the cash bonus attached to the “activist” title that made it worth struggling for.

the novel is set, interrogates the workers about the possibility of rebuilding the blast furnace while it is still in operation:

Now Reichelt rumbled: "It depends what we stand to earn. I set no store by 'peoples' own' and such nonsense, and not by 'two-year plan,' not me!"

"Oho," said Wende, amused, and smiled. He liked this fellow. Rare that someone had the courage to speak so openly. . . . Wende sat down on the edge of the kiln chamber, looked into the dirty faces, at the dusty, rough hands, became serious. He asked Reichelt: "Should we talk for real or do you want to just have a go at it?"

"Leave me alone! I only talk to workers."

"I'm a metalworker," Wende said thoughtfully, and his eyes sparkled impudently. "But that's not what's at issue now. I was listening earlier. Look here, you said the factory doesn't belong to you. You personally, certainly not, and you can't sell it or raffle it off because it belongs to us, understand? All of us! And we own other factories too, and you ask: What good does that do me? Well then, you're all doing work here that's saving some hundred thousand marks, and you're asking: What good does it do me? I don't feel it in my wallet. Aside from the fact that that's wrong, since you do feel it in your wallet and on your buttered bread, I want to clear something else up. You make export goods, but not just for export, and with your products it's not quite as obvious. Let's take another branch of production. Here in the Republic, in a factory that belongs to us, the people, we make thermometers. We've got the world monopoly, right? OK, the factory belongs to all of us, but let's assume for now that it only belongs to the workers who work in that factory. They have a kind of cooperative, and all the money that comes in from other countries gets divided up between them. Nice deal, no? Really a good deal, and boy can they buy things. . . . the workers in the factory, I mean . . . import goods, I mean, for the foreign currency they earn. Butter and bacon, my God, unbelievable what all they have! And you here. . . nada! You, you just lay bricks, your bricks don't bring in any foreign currency, and now you're standing here and watching how those guys are living large, how they've got bacon coming out their ears, how they're just busting at the seams. Nice, isn't it? Real nice, excellent!"

Reichelt made a face as though someone had poured a bucket of cold water on his head. Without saying a word Wende stood up and walked away. (209–10)

Here, responding to Reichelt's reluctance to begin a job without a clear idea of what it might pay, the aptly named Wende ("reversal" or "turning point")—whose hands-on approach will eventually turn things around at the troubled factory—gives a spontaneous lesson in socialist economics. In the *Aufbau*-era production novel, a glance at the big picture is assumed to be motivation enough to get the job done.

In the early 1960s, however, a new kind of production narrative came into being: the *Ankunftsroman*, or "novel of arrival."³ The *Ankunftsroman*, which takes its name

3. In this genre I would include such works as *Ankunft im Alltag* (Brigitte Reimann), *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (Karl Heinz Jakobs), *Der geteilte Himmel* (Christa Wolf), *Egon und das achte Weltwunder*

from Brigitte Reimann's 1961 novel, *Ankunft im Alltag* (Arrival in the Everyday), is a socialist *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story in which the ultimate goal is integration into socialist society. The *Ankunft* genre was a direct product of the Bitterfeld Way, an initiative intended to bring together cultural producers and production workers under the dual slogans of "Schriftsteller an die Basis" (Writers to the Base!) and "Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!" (Grab that Quill, Buddy!). Bitterfeld's proponents hoped that if writers and artists spent time on farms and construction sites, in mines and factories, they would better understand the perspective of the average worker. Workers, meanwhile, would make their voices heard in anthologies, literary journals, newspapers, and *Wandzeitungen* (public information boards that functioned as a cross between a group diary and a bulletin board).⁴ Echoing the ambitions of the Bitterfeld program, the *Ankunftsroman* insists on the transformative potential of production work: through the experience of industrial production, the novel's young protagonists eventually find their place in the socialist community.

In this sense, the *Ankunft* genre may be seen as an examination of the subjective experience of socialist society—and especially of socialist work—in which questions of individual motivation and satisfaction gain equal footing with socialist realism's established themes of solidarity and sacrifice. Thus the *Ankunft* narratives represent a break from the collective coming-of-age stories of the 1950s production novels, in which an emphasis on group development generally precludes a nuanced view of the incentives and compensations in the individual experience of socialism.

In the *Ankunftsroman*, a central love story tends to structure the plot and contribute to the "arrival" of the protagonist(s). The curious thing about these love stories, however, is that they usually fail. In Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (Divided Heaven), for instance, the lovers are parted when one of them emigrates to the West. In Karl Heinz Jakobs's *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (Description of a Summer), the main characters' extramarital love affair is subjected to a severe party correction, and they are forced to separate. The second volume of Dieter Noll's *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (The Adventures of Werner Holt) ends with the protagonist leaving for university; we are led to believe his relationship will not survive the distance.

As a rule, the *Ankunftroman's* love affair fails because it has in some way come into conflict with the integrative project of the whole—often because the intensity and exclusivity of the protagonists' relationship have alienated them from the

(Joachim Wohlgenuth), *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (Dieter Noll), *Mein namenloses Land* (Joachim Knappe), *Wir sind nicht Staub im Wind* (Max Walter Schulz), and *Der Hohlweg* (Günter de Bruyn). As Dieter Schlenstedt suggests in his article "Ankunft und Anspruch," the genre can be subdivided into two groups: works that narrate the socialist conversion process of young ex-soldiers after the war (Noll, Schulz, de Bruyn) and works that describe the experience of young men and women "going into production" in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Reimann, Jakobs, Wolf, Wohlgenuth, Knappe). I will concentrate primarily on the latter group, in order to draw attention to the economic and cultural developments of the 1960s, developments that are central to my argument as a whole. For an excellent analysis of the mechanisms and implications of postfascist conversion narratives, see Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, esp. 115–23.

4. For more on the Bitterfeld Way, see Ingeborg Gerlach, *Bitterfeld: Arbeiterliteratur und Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR*.

group. In a study of love motifs in East and West German literature, Ilse Braatz succinctly describes this dynamic in the *Ankunftsroman*: “When social and individual bonds no longer agree, the ‘private’ relationship has to give way” (56–57). Here Braatz identifies the unwritten (and sometimes written) rule of East German love stories from this period: the pair relationship is to remain subordinate to the claims of the socialist collective.⁵ This hierarchy accounts for a great deal of the internal tension in these narratives—indeed, it often forms their fundamental structuring principle. For this reason, it may be tempting to read the abortive love stories of the *Ankunftsromane* as didactic exercises in the tradition of the Brechtian *Lehrstück* (didactic play)—that is, as lessons in social priorities and personal accountability. I would argue, however, that if these love stories fail to hold up—or, persisting, fail to convince—this owes less to the polemical intent of their authors than to the peculiarity of their erotic economy. In the *Ankunftsroman*, the romantic framework becomes uncoupled from the love story proper and is deployed instead in the service of the genre’s overarching ideological project: to reconfigure the East German desiring imagination in line with what I will call the “neue Romantik” (New Romance/Romanticism). This reconfiguration does not entail simply abandoning one way of desiring for another, but rather abandoning desire altogether. Indeed, according to this model, the demands of desire *can* be met, the clamor of desire stilled, as long as the desiring subject chooses the right object. The “right object,” however, is not an object at all, but rather a process: that of production itself.

To explore the distinctive interplay of love and production underlying the “neue Romantik” I will look at two representative *Ankunft* novels: Brigitte Reimann’s *Ankunft im Alltag* (the novel that lent the genre its name), and Karl Heinz Jakobs’s *Beschreibung eines Sommers*. These close readings will illustrate how the *Ankunft* genre functioned—and why it ran afoul of the cultural politics of 1960s East Germany. Like the Bitterfeld Way, the “neue Romantik” foundered on its own radicality: its uncompromisingly progressive vision threatened to release social forces that the party, as it turned out, preferred to contain.

Halbstarker* or *Fußlatscher*: The Stakes of Romantic Choice in *Ankunft im Alltag

Ankunft im Alltag describes the experiences of Recha, Nikolaus, and Curt, three students spending a year at the Schwarze Pumpe brown-coal refinery in Hoyerswerda before going to college. From the start, Curt, Recha, and Nikolaus find themselves

5. The written rule is found, for instance, in the entry on “Liebe” in the *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch*: “Because of its social conditionality and importance to the community, a sexual-erotic relationship between a man and a woman does not transcend the responsibility to the community nor stand outside society’s moral assessment” (“Liebe,” 343).

in a love triangle as both men compete for Recha while her attraction oscillates between them.⁶ Nikolaus is kind, diligent, strong, and politically conscious—in other words, the quintessential worker-hero of the socialist-realist mode. Curt, on the other hand, is the textbook image of a *Halbstarke*, a Westernized rebel à la Marlon Brando or James Dean.⁷

In essence, the love story in *Ankunft im Alltag* is the story of competing modes of romance. At first, Recha is drawn to Curt's version: the romance of dates and driving tours, the allure of conspicuous consumption.⁸ Focused more on pleasure than on principles, in affect more sentimental than idealistic, this is the glittery romance of Hollywood, and Curt's the appeal of the leading man. At one point Recha compares him to the "glossy photos of movie stars" that she and her roommate used to collect (174). Curt's affluence is not without its attractions for Recha. When they go for a drive in his father's Wartburg, she admits: "It really is quite pleasant, seeing the world from a car" (144). Curt is pleased with this revelation: "It's about time you figured that out. Unfortunately you have a tendency toward idealism—but idealism, my dear, is not pleasant and certainly not comfortable. Pedestrians [*Fußlatscher*] are not *up to date*.⁹ . . . A few fools still haven't figured that out. Consider our Parsifal" (144).

Nikolaus, the "Parsifal" of Curt's ridicule, has a very different idea of romance. Seeing the industrial panorama of the Schwarze Pumpe for the first time he thinks: "This is the new Romantic [*die neue Romantik*]. What seemed dry and doubtful in books is beautiful reality here" (35; see fig. 6). Nikolaus dreams of heroic deeds in the name of socialism: "He surreptitiously squeezed his powerful muscles and dreamed, full of hazy longing [*verschwommener Sehnsucht*], that he was in a still-wild landscape, in a romantic, sweaty life among bold men who would fight against the forest with heavy axes—and he forgot that there were chain saws and bulldozers" (43). Content not only to be a *Fußlatscher* (pedestrian), Nikolaus's heroic longing here draws him out of the machine age altogether: he forgets about chain saws and bulldozers.

As this anachronism suggests, the "neue Romantik" seems to be romance in the older sense of the term, a kind of socialist chivalry. In *Ankunft im Alltag*, the chivalrous code of the "neue Romantik" would include not only such virtues as diligence, honesty, and loyalty, but also a chastity appropriate to courtly love. Walking with Recha one night, Nikolaus has an urge to kiss her: "In that moment he wished—and his head spun at the thought—he could find the courage to take the girl in his arms and kiss her. But he stood motionless . . . and then he said

6. As Julia Hell points out in *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, Recha's romantic choice is the real test of her "arrival"; when she ends up with Nikolaus in the end, her integration seems complete (126).

7. See above, p. 23.

8. This romantic mode is also investigated in chapter 1 above, under the rubric of what Eva Illouz calls "commodified romance."

9. In English in the original.



Figure 6. “Neue Romantik”? The sublime vista of the Schwarze Pumpe brown-coal refinery in 1958, seen from above. Source: SLUB Dresden / Deutsche Fotothek / DZL, 1958.

to himself: What a primitive notion, my friend! You can’t solve problems that way” (110). In this moment of temptation and self-denial, Nikolaus exposes the incapacity of his romantic mode—the idealistic and chaste “neue Romantik”—to accommodate the “problem” presented by desire. Thus, when Nikolaus and

Recha finally do kiss, he appeals to a different mode of romance to process the experience:

She threw her arms around his neck, and he kissed her, fervidly, clumsily, and anxiously, his head was spinning, and he believed he could feel how the thoughts fell out of his head, all the good and beautiful words, and there was nothing left but a silly, vulgar line of song, all the heavens open, a song that he had heard somewhere some-time and had long since forgotten and that now circled insistently in his head, all the heavens open, my God, what nonsense, and he was ashamed that he could think this nonsense in the same moment as he covered the closed eyes and the mouth of the Mahogany-girl with his chapped, clumsy, boyish kisses. (158)

Something about this experience, then, breaks the frame of the “neue Romantik.” The language Nikolaus used to take in the sublime landscape of the Schwarze Pumpe “falls out of his head,” and he turns to an idiom more appropriate to his rival: the “silly, vulgar” lyrics of a pop song. The failure of the “neue Romantik” to frame this “romantic” moment is telling. Especially given his designation as “Parsifal,” we might be tempted to push the correlation of Nikolaus’s socialist chivalry with medieval courtly love to claim, with Denis de Rougement, that this kind of love is actually a love of its own obstacles.¹⁰ In fact, such an appeal to anachronism would be the *fantasy of the fantasy* at work here. In other words, the portrayal of Nikolaus as a medieval knight, thwarted in the consummation of his love by a rigid code of honor, loyalty, and decorum, represents a wishful overlay upon a more fundamental (but still imaginary) hindrance to interpersonal libidinal ties within the symbolic matrix of *Ankunft im Alltag*.

This deeper fantasy, the second layer of the “neue Romantik,” would posit a subject without desire—one who has no *need* for romantic love in the first place. Indeed, on closer inspection, the “neue Romantik” is revealed to have little to do with interpersonal relationships at all. This romantic mode is more about labor than about love; what is being romanticized is not a relationship between individuals, but instead an attitude of the worker toward his or her work. The “romance” of work, according to the model of the “neue Romantik,” lies in the experience of labor as a wholesale sublimation.¹¹ Production work, in this conception, would be wholly

10. Rougement locates the appeal of chivalrous romance in the figuration of its own obstruction: “Unless the course of love is being hindered there is no ‘romance’; and it is romance that we revel in—that is to say, the self-consciousness, intensity, variations, and delays of passion, together with its climax rising to disaster—not its sudden flaring” (52).

11. On a related note, Hell points out in passing that *Ankunft im Alltag* “explicitly thematizes the Communist discourse on the nexus between sexuality and the work ethic, the ‘revolutionary sublimation’ of the Soviet Freudian Zalkind” (*Post-Fascist Fantasies*, 127–78). It would be a fascinating and no doubt rewarding project to trace the lines of influence from the “revolutionary sublimation” of the early Soviet period through East German *Aufbau* culture and into the *Ankunftroman*. One possible approach

satisfying—it would leave nothing to be desired. In discussing their foreman Hamann’s extraordinary dedication to the brigade, Nikolaus and his roommate, Rolf, articulate succinctly the economic logic at work here, according to which relations of production are exchanged for other social relations—in this case, familial ones:

“He doesn’t have a family,” Rolf said. “At least he never talks about one.”

“Who’s he beating himself up for then?”

Half with astonishment, half with reluctance, Rolf said: “For the factory. For us.” (96)¹²

The hermetic libidinal economy of the “neue Romantik” represents a significant quandary for Nikolaus and Recha’s love story. The problem, as Recha perceives it, is that Nikolaus “is indifferent to her. He only thinks about his work” (110). Even when narrative interventions indicate that Nikolaus cares more than he lets on, such interest can only be a deviation from his romantic ideal. As one might imagine, these are not very encouraging conditions for a romantic relationship. In a moment of frustration, Recha attempts to provoke the phlegmatic Nikolaus: “‘We’re always so terribly virtuous,’ Recha said unhappily. ‘We never go dancing—work all day, and after work drawing-lessons . . . It’s worse than jail!’ Nikolaus said nothing, and she added spitefully: ‘Curt was more fun’” (169). Nikolaus simply agrees. Though Recha insists she was just trying to annoy him, she later thinks: “He’s a block of ice, he’s just a block of ice . . .” (170). And that night, she goes to the Schwarze Pumpe bar with Curt.

Indeed, Curt *is* more interesting—not just for his money and social skills, but, more importantly, because he seems to *need* her. His wealth, his social grace, his physical attractiveness, are all fairly manageable variables within the novel’s libidinal equation; Nikolaus’s “neue Romantik” has an equivalent for each. It is Curt’s need—the negative value of his desire—that leaves a stubborn remainder. The nature of this need is revealed by Curt’s preoccupation with Recha’s “Egyptian eyes” throughout the novel. Curt’s desiring gaze is the one that is returned: his attraction to Recha is a product of her acknowledgment of him. As Recha seems to sense, Curt relies on others to guarantee his wholeness as a subject. At one point she wonders “why he needed an audience even for his feelings” (167). Without the “fixed point” of a love object, Curt is left only with a “disquiet” or “uneasiness” (*Unruhe*) (149). “I simply can’t be alone,” he says (166).

Just as Curt requires Recha’s gaze to lend consistency to his inchoate, *unruhige* subjectivity, Recha finds herself captivated by his need. This need brings her back

would track the way these ideological configurations played out as fantasies of the body, as Keith Livers has for revolutionary- and Stalin-era Soviet literature in *Constructing the Stalinist Body*.

12. As we later discover, Hamann does in fact have a son, though he is away, at a clinic. Hamann’s visits to his developmentally disabled son inevitably result in a twenty-four-hour drinking binge.

to him again and again, apparently against her will. Recha's stubborn attraction to Curt may be read in line with what Mary Ann Doane, in her study of the woman's film of the 1940s, calls a "desire to desire." Vis-à-vis the question of female desire, Doane claims: "The representations of the cinema and the representations provided by psychoanalysis of female subjectivity coincide. For each system specifies that the woman's relation to desire is difficult if not impossible. Paradoxically, her only access is to the desire to desire" (9). According to Doane, the female spectator is "stranded between incommensurable entities," stranded with a desire she is said to embody but never to possess (7). As Doane points out, the paradoxical role of the female spectator is particularly apparent in her relation to consumption and the commodity form: "The feminine position has come to exemplify the roles of consumer and spectator in their embodiment of a curiously passive desiring subjectivity" (32). In the parallel logic of film and advertising, the female spectator/consumer is both active and passive, consumer and commodity: she buys, but only insofar as she has been "seduced" to do so.

This interplay of spectatorship, consumption, and seduction can be observed in a scene near the middle of *Ankunft im Alltag* when Curt visits Recha in her room to persuade her to take him back after a breakup. Before Curt's arrival, the novel's free indirect discourse dips temporarily into the perspective of Recha's roommate, Lisa, as she reads one of the sentimental West German potboilers (*Groschenhefte*) that circulate among the young women at the Schwarze Pumpe. Lisa is moved by the potboiler's melodramatic suspense, though she knows that "after seventy pages of love, sorrow, and renunciation, everything will come out all right, and wedding bells will ring for the poor but pretty nurse" (131). Lisa is interrupted in her reading when Curt rings the doorbell (an echo, perhaps, of the potboiler's wedding bells). That Curt's visit coincides with this gratuitous rendition of the romance novel's formulaic plot underscores his association with Westernized romantic clichés: he would be the well-heeled surgeon to Recha's poor but pretty nurse. Like a suitor in a romance novel, Curt brings chocolates and roses. "I thought one gave roses only in pop songs," Recha says (134).

We see the other side of romance-novel melodrama, however, when Curt forces his advances on Recha, foreshadowing a more perilous attack later in the novel:

Silently and wildly he fell over her and held down her hands and covered her eyes and her mouth and her throat with kisses. She bit his lips, but he felt no pain. He whispered as though out of his mind: "...you damned cat..., I'll get you..., go on, scratch, it won't do you any good..., I kill myself for you and you..." She suddenly stopped defending herself and kissed him, benumbed and trembling. (136)

Only a few pages after satirizing the kitschy language of the romance novel, Reimann falls into equally ludicrous prose here. Though perhaps inadvertent, this juxtaposition serves as a warning to the consumer of the potboiler's fantasy; its

sensuous pleasure, we learn, has a violent core. As we discover when he attacks Recha, Curt's magnetic charisma is backed by force. Yet even this coercive violence seems to have a certain appeal as Recha, "benumbed and trembling," succumbs (temporarily) to his desire.

Having pushed Curt away, Recha rearranges her hair in the mirror. "I'm not as thin as a starving cat anymore," she says. "With time . . . I'm getting more curves, don't you think?" (137). It is telling that, in this appeal for affirmation of her desirability, Recha refers to herself as a "cat," falling into the language Curt used during his attack ("you damned cat"). Naming herself here with Curt's epithet, Recha reveals an important aspect of what she later calls Curt's irresistibility (139). Even, or perhaps especially, at his most menacing, Curt does something that Nikolaus cannot do: through his fervent—indeed violent—passion for her, he draws Recha into the economy of desire.

By reading Recha's relationship with Curt as a "desire to desire"—a longing, that is, to participate in desiring exchange—we can better understand Curt's powerful hold on Recha's romantic imagination. In this "seduction" scene, framed by the description of a melodramatic "woman's novel," Recha becomes both the subject and the object of romantic fantasy, the consumer and the commodity. By allowing herself to play into Curt's commodified romance, she becomes an object for his consumption: "I'll get you yet," he says.

In the East German cultural context, the concept of a "desire to desire" takes on an added significance, for in the psychological discourse of the GDR it was not just the woman who had a problematic relation to desire. The dominant psychological model in the GDR, adopted from Soviet psychologists such as S. L. Rubinstein, did not recognize desire at all—desire, that is, as defined by psychoanalytic theory as a lack, a space of unconscious agency that incessantly demands satisfaction yet cannot be appeased by specific objects. Instead, the Soviet model understood human activity as rational and goal-oriented. Desire, according to this model, is always determinate and can be satisfied. For Rubinstein, the psyche exists as a unity of experience—the product of activity—and self-consciousness, or introspection (24). There is no "unconscious" in the Freudian sense, but rather that of which the subject is conscious (*das Bewußtgewordene*), and not yet conscious (*das Nichtbewußtgewordene*). The psyche is knowable through an observation of the subject's activity and an understanding of the motives for this behavior (40–41).¹³

According to this model, lack is not constitutive, but pathological. The "cure" for desire is conscious activity toward a known goal. As Curt seems to suspect, a "fixed

13. According to Rubinstein, one's motives, though sometimes hidden, are likewise knowable: "Every human activity proceeds from certain *motives* and is directed to a certain *goal*; it accomplishes a certain *task* and expresses a certain relationship of the person to his environment. . . . A person who is moved by a drive [*Trieb*] will act differently when he becomes aware of the drive, that is, when he chooses an object toward which to orient himself, than he will before he becomes aware of the drive" (29).

point” would alleviate his “unrest.” Nikolaus, who has a “fixed point” in his work and his art, seems immune to the kind of inner turmoil that plagues Curt, who considers endless discontent “his personal tragedy: he worked hard to put something together, but he had no pleasure in what had been done; once reached, the goal did not interest him, and (this is how he formulated it for himself, wallowing in his own pain) every fulfillment left him sad” (81).¹⁴ Curt’s “personal tragedy,” described here with no small sarcasm by a less-than-sympathetic narrative voice, is actually that of consumption in general: the commodities thought to offer satisfaction inevitably disappoint at the moment of acquisition, and the consumer must look ahead to his or her next purchase. Through an endless series of material acquisitions, the consumer attempts to alleviate his or her ever-increasing sense of lack.¹⁵ An overabundance of goods and services ensures that consumers will never run out of things to want.

In contrast to the consumerist economy of the West, the productionist economy of the GDR functioned according to a dynamic in which the overabundance was on the side of the producer, rather than the consumer. As though embodying this principle, Nikolaus is often bested by his own physical strength. In one scene he splits the shaft of a hammer in his enthusiasm, nearly injuring Hamann with the shrapnel (64). This individual-psychological model of the “overflowing” worker paralleled the condition of the GDR labor force as a whole. One clear illustration of this is the case of material shortfall, a phenomenon depicted in nearly every East German film or novel of production. Shortfalls occurred when a given workforce exceeded the materials needed to complete their work. In the GDR’s economy, the labor force was overabundant, but material was lacking. Even more than the inadequate supply of work material, however, the East German consumer market suffered from a critical scarcity.¹⁶ The East German consumer was left “desiring to desire,” hoping for something to want.

14. When Curt suggests that Nikolaus will sell himself out to make a living as an artist, Recha replies: “Nikolaus? Never! . . . You’re just saying that because you’re jealous that he has a fixed point he’s marching toward while you just stagger around” (144).

15. In *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, Poiger also draws a connection between psychology and consumer culture. She points out that the refusal of GDR policy-makers to acknowledge the individual psychological mechanisms at work in the “youth problem” led to an inability to find an adequate solution to—or even model of—this problem. The East German “youth problem,” in both Poiger’s account and my own, occurs at the intersection of desire and consumption:

The contradictory behavior of the East German regime that engaged with the West in the battle over consumption and at the same time attacked Western culture was not simply the result of a failure of socialist production to fulfill a population’s consumer desires. Rather it had deep ideological roots. The study of psychology, which played such an important role in making consumer culture both understandable and acceptable in West Germany in the 1950s, was long repressed in East Germany. In West Germany, psychological models of adolescent development assigned consumption an increasingly important function, although this embrace coexisted with uneasiness about consumer culture. In East Germany, the focus on the individual in psychology—and on individual satisfaction in consumer culture—remained suspect for a long time. (217)

16. In fact, one of the greatest dangers for the GDR economy was that of calcification; too much money was in savings and too little in circulation, because there was simply not enough to spend it on. In his book *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989*, Jeffrey Kopstein points out

“Der Blacksmith Blues”: Forging the “neue Romantik”

Though she is reminded again and again of Curt’s ignoble intentions and dangerous tendencies, Recha does not learn her lesson: she returns to him three times in the course of the novel. Eventually the plot itself is forced to intervene. Literalizing all of the party’s warnings against the dangers of Westernized culture, Curt lures Recha into the woods and attempts to rape her. As Julia Hell points out in her insightful reading of Reimann’s novel in *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, this scene contains “an intricate, complex entanglement of desires and prohibitions” (126). In Hell’s reading, Recha’s desire renders Curt’s assault a transgression of both political and psychic taboos: “Recha’s relationship to Curt is highly ambivalent. He represents what is most forbidden—both the fascist father/past *and* the proto-fascist West/present—and Recha’s physical attraction is as strong as her moral revulsion” (126). When Nikolaus comes to her aid, then, he rescues her as much from herself—from her own forbidden desire—as from Curt. Following the pair into the woods, Nikolaus pulls Curt away from Recha and pummels him—a “throwback to the Stone Age,” Nikolaus remarks later (212). By the end of the book it would seem that, with Nikolaus’s help, Recha has rejected her participation in Curt’s consumerist romance and embraced the “neue Romantik.”¹⁷

The decisive moment in this breakthrough takes place when, abandoning a date with Curt, Recha returns to the factory to help with an all-night overtime shift. As she works with Nikolaus on this shift—or, more precisely, watches him work—Recha discovers the “neue Romantik” for herself. By a process of triangulation, the experience of communal labor, both on this long night and over the whole year at the Schwarze Pumpe, has become the shared “fixed point” of Recha and Nikolaus’s relationship. Theirs would be a relationship, in other words, in the mode of the “neue Romantik,” upheld not by mutual consumption, but by collective production.

Recha’s arrival (*Ankunft*) into the libidinal economy of the “neue Romantik” can be observed in the language of her inner monologue as she watches Nikolaus chisel cracks in a massive slab of concrete:

Now that he had enough practice, his hands struck swiftly, in a measured rhythm, and the sound of metal on metal echoed off the walls and the high ceiling. Recha, who was still so close to the age of fairy tales and romantic stories, thought hazily [*verschwommen*] about a mythical smithy in a forest clearing: Landgrave, become

how the yearly increases in personal savings throughout the 1980s indicate “pent-up demand” in the East German economy. Thus, he argues, one can view the events of autumn 1989 “largely [as the] political actions of dissatisfied consumers, not . . . of dissatisfied producers” (192–93).

17. The structural logic of this scene is similar to that identified in chapter 1 as operative in *The Up-percut*. Just as Georg’s intervention stops Carolin from prostituting herself to Bubi and Onkel Franz, Nikolaus’s violent “throwback” saves Recha from being raped by her own desire. Timely constraint, in other words, once again saves the GDR consumer from herself.

hard! [*Landgraf, werde hart!*] In England there was a legendary blacksmith who, in his apron . . . and at the anvil, married lovers who had eloped. (185)

Recha's hazy (*verschwommen*) thoughts here echo Nikolaus's hazy longing (*verschwommener Sehnsucht*) for a "romantic, sweaty life" fighting back the forest with a heavy ax. It is significant that, in each case, the "romantic" aspect of the fantasy lies in its anachronistic mode of production: Recha compares Nikolaus to a blacksmith in a fairy tale, while Nikolaus imagines life as a woodcutter, before the advent of chain saws and bulldozers.

These anachronisms suggest one way to read the ideological function of the "neue Romantik": to reinvest atavistic modes of production with a new libidinal charge. As I have suggested in chapter 1, one of the fundamental contradictions in East German ideology during the *Aufbau* years was that between the party's utopian claims to have transcended capitalist modes of production and the starkly nontranscendent experience of the East German worker. Seen from the production floor, the East German factory actually appears to contain the worst of both presocialist worlds: Taylorist repetitiveness and isolation combined with the inefficiency and labor-intensiveness of preindustrial production. Like the industrial work taking place throughout the GDR at the time, the labor depicted in *Ankunft im Alltag* is physically taxing, repetitive, and dangerous, and carried out with outdated tools and inefficient methods. More importantly, it is hardly collective production at all: the GDR's radically Taylorized industrial workplace tended more toward atomization than collectivity. If not *alienated*, the starkly divided labor was at least *alienating*.

The "neue Romantik," however, attempts to recode the backwardness of East German working conditions as a romantic ideal. The absurdity of having to cut concrete by hand with a chisel, for instance, becomes the fairy-tale scene of a blacksmith working in a forest clearing. What fuels this romance is the fantasy of a kind of prelapsarian labor, an image of "satisfying" work before alienation and Taylorization took away what might be called the *jouissance* of production.

There is another mechanism at work in the "neue Romantik." Watching Nikolaus, Recha does not just compare him to a blacksmith, she compares him to several particular blacksmiths. The first, in a "mythical smithy in a forest clearing," is the Blacksmith of Ruhla, a figure of Thuringian legend and the eponymous hero of an 1894 play by Martin Pfeifer. In Pfeifer's play, the young landgrave Ludwig is more interested in hunting than in ruling and allows his vassals, in particular the reeve Kurt von Tenneberg, egregious abuses of power. While hunting one day, Ludwig loses his way and seeks shelter in the smithy at Ruhla, claiming to be the landgrave's huntsman. The blacksmith lets the "huntsman" stay, but he has no good words for the weak landgrave: "We need a just and stern [leader], with a hard head and an iron fist—in short, a man! And not— . . . With your permission, sir, not a weakling" (Pfeifer, 49). Deep into the night, the blacksmith hammers

away on his anvil, repeating with each stroke: “Landgrave become hard [*Landgraf, werde hart!*], landgrave become hard like this iron!” (57). After his night in the smithy, Ludwig resolves to take a more active role in the governance of his lands and begins by arresting Tenneberg. The blacksmith approves, saying: “If you are the landgrave, and remain the landgrave, that I saw today . . . then far-off centuries will pronounce your name with pride, and in Thuringia you will be called the just, the iron landgrave!” (81).

In the second transformation effected by Recha’s “hazy” thoughts, the Thuringian blacksmith becomes a “legendary blacksmith” from England who joins eloped couples at his anvil (Reimann, 185). Though the exact referent is unclear, this passage seems to allude to Scotland’s “anvil priests,” blacksmiths and other tradesmen who, according to a loophole in England’s marriage laws, were able to marry young couples without parental consent.¹⁸ The important aspect here is the legendary smith’s unifying authority, the fact that he marries runaway couples at the locus of production, the anvil.

Recha’s “hazy” free associations in this scene help us to map the layers of fantasy at work in the romantic mode that *Ankunft im Alltag* puts forward to its readers. On one level, the evocation of prealienated labor compensates for the failure of the GDR’s claim to have transcended alienation. Insofar as the depiction of exhausting and repetitive industrial labor can hardly be sold as “romantic,” a glorification of outdated modes of production lends the image a certain anachronistic charm. Beyond alienation (though retrograde rather than progressive), such work is portrayed as “satisfying,” that is, as addressing—and fulfilling—the full potential of the worker. This notion is supported by the understanding of psychic economy prevalent in the GDR at this time: rather than insatiable desires, the East German subject has material (hence satiable) needs and acts on achievable goals. If he or she is unsatisfied—*unruhig* like Curt—then it is due to a failure to integrate him- or herself adequately into the process of production. The libidinal economy implicit in this ideal of labor, however, presents a significant problem for the novel’s love story, and for the question of socialist Eros in general: if work is indeed “satisfying,” then what happens to the romantic relationship? Without the bonds of reciprocal need, of mutual desire, what would bring and hold a couple together?¹⁹

Within the consumerist romantic framework occupied by Curt, the commodity represents a unifying third term in the relationship: the act of mutual consumption—namely the “date”—provides the “romance” that constitutes the couple as such. Despite the party’s propagandistic efforts, however, the “romance” of

18. To this end Lydia, the youngest Bennet sister in *Pride and Prejudice*, runs off with Wickham to Gretna Green, Scotland (Austen, 257). In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie and Stephen set out for Scotland with the same intent (Eliot, 477).

19. As I suggested in the introduction (and in note 11 above), such questions were discussed with some urgency during the years after the Russian Revolution.

production was never commensurate with that of consumption. This was due both to historical circumstances—the decidedly unromantic conditions of production in the GDR—and to a fundamental *economic* difference in these modes of romance. While consumerism follows and fosters an economy of desire, of constitutive lack on the part of the subject, the libidinal economy of the ideal socialist subject is one of abundance: he works not for the purchasing power to assuage his own sense of lack, but rather to meet the needs of the socialist community. Yet, as mentioned above, the disavowal of desire necessary to the ideal of “satisfying” work, of wholesale sublimation, renders extraproductive ties dispensable or problematic.

For the “neue Romantik” of socialist production to be romantic—for it to become a discursive space of courtship and coupling—a third term is required. This third term is found in Recha’s vision of the “anvil priest,” an outside authority who will bring people together “at the anvil,” that is, within the space of production. Following the interpretive schema suggested by Hell’s reading of *Ankunft im Alltag*, I would locate this “anvil priest” in the symbolic space once occupied by Stalin.²⁰ In chapter 1, I characterized the “Stalinist” symbolic order as one that anchors its legitimacy not in the horizontal relations of collective production and social equality, but in the vertical relations of power. In the logic of the Stalinist personality-cult, socialist subjects are united not through shared (class) interest, but rather through their collective relation to a centralized authority. As ideological fantasy, Recha’s “blacksmiths” attest to an illicit nostalgia, a secret longing for the rigid certainties of the Stalinist social order. In this reading, Stalin becomes both the authoritarian kingmaker of the Thuringian tale, galvanizing the East German leadership to root out injustice and incompetence, and the “anvil priest,” forging abiding bonds in a fractured and alienating socialist society.²¹

20. In her analysis of *Ankunft im Alltag*, Hell uncovers “a problematic that while never openly thematized, ultimately structures the entire narrative, namely Stalinism and the dilemma produced by the revelations of the Twentieth Congress” (*Post-Fascist Fantasies*, 124).

21. Franz Liszt’s song “Biterolf und der Schmied von Ruhla” (Biterolf and the Blacksmith of Ruhla), from the 1873 *Wartburg Lieder*, combines both the unifying and the vulcanizing aspects in one figure:

Thuringia this day sends the huntsman and the smith
 To pay the bride obeisance with music and with gifts.
 The sight of this fine maiden, of virtue in its splendor,
 Has Ruhla’s blacksmith saying:
 Young Landgrave be tender! Young Landgrave be tender!
 But if the foe should clench his fist, as westward breaks the dawn,
Herr Major, then we’ll hammer this, we’ll hammer this:
 Young Landgrave be strong! Young Landgrave be strong, be strong!
 (Liszt, 142–45)

[Thüringens Wälder senden den Waidmann und den Schmied
 Brauthuldigung zu spenden mit Gaben und mit Lied.
 Vor hohem Frauenbilder, so tugendlicher Art,
 Singt Ruhlas Grobschmied milde:

As Hell points out, Reimann's novel stabilizes its turbulent symbolic order through the deployment of another cult of personality, that surrounding the students' brigadier Hamann: "If the loss of Stalin is the novel's unspoken problem, then the figure of Hamann is the solution to this silence. This model father figure with a 'minor' flaw fills the absence thematized by Curt's story, but Hamann also acts as a stabilizing force for the whole narrative, for each protagonist's 'novel of education'" (*Post-Fascist Fantasies*, 130). Hamann's personality cult can best be seen in his micromanagement of the brigade. No workplace incident, no after-hours occurrence, escapes his attention: "As foreman he felt obligated to see and hear everything that went on in his brigade" (Reimann, 77).²²

Indeed, the love triangle between the brigade's newest members does not escape his notice:

In the first weeks he had observed the three new members of his brigade. He had studied them with the passionate involvement of a man who has to get to the bottom of everything—whether a technical problem or the most fitting translation of a foreign word....

He liked Nikolaus entirely.... But he didn't like the friendship between Curt and Recha at all....

The boy's not right for her, thought Hamann now, watching her defiant yet sheepish bearing. She's still totally unformed. Someone had better give her something to do. (78)

In the end, Hamann's interventions help bring Recha and Nikolaus together. His influence alone, however, is not enough to guarantee the stability of their relationship. Instead, their conclusive union occurs only after Curt shows his true colors and Nikolaus, in a "throwback to the Stone Age," beats him up.

If Nikolaus and Recha participate in what might be called a "Stalinist" mode of loving, then the precariousness of their relationship alerts us to a deficiency in this mode, a gap in its libidinal network. This gap is not just that left by the loss of Stalin, but a structural deficiency inherent in the Stalinist mode of legitimization. The ties of projection and identification that should bind Stalinist subjects to each other and to the state proved inadequate to their task—a deficiency, I argued in chapter 1, that necessitated the Stalinist state's notorious apparatus of repression. In *Ankunft*

Jung Landgraf, werdet zart! Jung Landgraf, werdet zart!
 Doch wills im Westen dämmern, und streicht ein Feind den Bart,
 Herr Major, dann wollen wir hämmern, dann wollen wir hämmern:
 Jung Landgraf, werdet hart! Jung Landgraf, werdet hart!

22. Hamann does not snoop, however. Instead, the workers come to him with the details of their private lives: "Not a day went by in which someone did not come to him, to lay his sorrows and annoyances on the broad, patient shoulders of the foreman. And thus he was in fact better informed than any other foreman" (Reimann, 77).

in *Alltag*'s climactic scene, Nikolaus's violent intervention recapitulates—and, to the same degree, legitimates—the direct coercion that compensated for the failure of the Stalinist symbolic machinery. When Nikolaus has to rescue Recha, it is because she has allowed Curt to lure her away from a meeting of the brigade's youth group. Appropriately, the group's focal point in this scene is Hamann. While Curt leads Recha into the woods, Hamann holds his young audience spellbound with accounts of his heroic antifascist activities. Given the reading that I have been suggesting, Recha's decision to turn her back on the collective formed around Hamann's storytelling and follow Curt would demonstrate the limitations of the affective ties of Stalinism. It is this failure that is being "covered up" by the multiple layers of fantasy in *Ankunft im Alltag*. Ultimately, the novel's melancholic longing concerns not so much the loss of the specular bonds of Stalinism as their always-already having failed.

Indeed, for the majority of East German workers, the impetus to work had never been the glowing ideals of the "neue Romantik" or Stalin's personality cult or even the naked coercion of the Stalinist state. Instead, they were motivated by a decidedly unsocialist concern with wages and bonuses. In this respect, the attitude of the East German worker would have resembled Curt's far more than Hamann's. Describing the brigade's efforts to produce electrodes otherwise available only from West German sources, Hamann says: "You can imagine what we'll save the GDR if the experiments succeed."

"Big premium to be had, right?" Curt said and laughed, rubbing thumb and forefinger together.

"A couple of drinks might come out of it. But it's not about that," Hamann said coolly, turning away. Behind his back Curt grinned. He thought: Look at that, Napoleon's acting like an idealist, and the role suits him pretty well. He can tell it to his party secretary, but not to me. As if he doesn't care about making as much money as possible, saving up the premiums, buying a car once it's enough.

He stared at the broad back of the foreman and thought with a surge of hatred: How they get on my nerves, these damned hypocritical idealists! Work for its own sake [*Arbeit als Selbstzweck*]—what a life. (49)

As the June 17 uprising made clear, East German workers were not interested in "Arbeit als Selbstzweck." As Curt explains to Recha, the brigade's agreement to an all-night extra shift had more to do with the expected *Prämie*, or "overproduction bonus," than with the opportunity to participate in the romance of production: "You think the others hollered from excitement? If there weren't a big premium, no one would have gone along with it" (176). Like most brigades in the GDR, Hamann's is more interested in the premium than in the inherent value of work. Consumer culture, in other words, is alive and well, even under Hamann's watchful eyes.

Recha denies that Hamann's brigade is motivated by materialistic considerations. Yet in her relationship with Curt, we see that she, too, is not immune to the allure of

consumer culture. And returning to her thoughts while watching Nikolaus chisel concrete, we can observe the depth and subtlety of Western culture's insinuation into her imagination—and into the fantasy production of the GDR in general. There is a third blacksmith in Recha's vision, one that departs from the fairy-tale pattern: "And now, not like a fairy tale at all, a dance melody in her ear: the 'Blacksmith Blues,' which had been *Top Hit* for a number of weeks back then, when we had dance class" (185). Though it seems odd that the "Blacksmith Blues," an American radio hit from 1952, would be played in an East German dance class, Recha's reference to the song here is telling.²³ Just as Nikolaus, forgetting all his "good and beautiful words," resorted to a pop song to frame his first kiss, Recha's "romantic stories" here drift from work through fairy tales and into (Western) popular music.

Likewise, the "neue Romantik" of production slid toward the romance of consumption. Given the conditions of production in the GDR, the romance of work had to remain a cover story for that of consumption: one worked, as Curt tells us, for the premium and for the car it might one day afford, not for the fanciful ideals of the "neue Romantik." And, as the adoption of the consumer-friendlier New Economic System (NÖS) made clear, the party saw the writing on the wall.²⁴ Meanwhile, in the gap between *Aufbau* Stalinism and the arrival of the still-scarce socialist commodity, the GDR consumer was suspended between libidinal economies—poised, as it were, between the stick of Stalin and the carrot of the NÖS. The following section will explore this precarious liminal condition, the temporary stasis upheld by an "anticipatory consciousness" that was the GDR's greatest hope—and its most critical liability.

Love and the Perils of Affect: *Beschreibung eines Sommers*

From the first pages of Karl Heinz Jakobs's 1963 novel, *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (Description of a Summer), it is clear that the narrator, Tom Breitsprecher, has a

23. If Recha is thinking about the Ella Mae Morse version of the "Blacksmith Blues," the lyrics (written by Jack Holmes) are undeniably "American":

Down in old Kentucky
 Where horseshoes are lucky
 There's a village smithy
 Standin' under the chestnut tree

 He sings the boogie blues
 While he's hammerin' on the shoes

 You'll get a lot o' kicks
 Out of the Blacksmith Blues

(Holmes, "Blacksmith Blues," http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/ella_mae_morse/the_blacksmith_blues.html)

24. See chapter 1, esp. pp. 58–60.

problem. He first describes the weather “that summer,” then, with the same dispassionate tone, recounts a series of vacation love-affairs:

That summer I took my vacation early and stayed as long as I saw fit. First I went to Warnemünde, then to Zempin, and then to Kloster. In Warnemünde I had a second-rate affair with quite a few tears at the end. In Zempin, where I went with Lotte, there was a lot of anger, since she cheated on me with a stylish lifeguard. . . . Just before I went home I met a swell blond, but we broke up when she found out that I didn't have a car. (5–6)

Reading further in Jakobs's novel, we learn that Tom's emotional detachment extends beyond the romantic sphere. When Tom returns from vacation to his job as an engineer in Berlin, party cadre-leader Trude Neutz pays a visit to convince him to join a youth construction project at Wartha. She has some reservations about sending him there, however: “I'll tell you exactly what's wrong,” she tells him. “You're our best engineer, but morally, you're awful [Moralisch aber bist du ein Dreck]” (14). In the ensuing dialogue, Tom's political position (or, more to the point, his lack thereof) becomes clear:

“What do you want from me?”

“We know that you'll work. We know that you'll work day and night. But we don't just want your work there, like here in Berlin. There we want all of you. Head and heart.”

“And what do I have to do for that?”

She looked me in the eyes.

“Stop drinking and whoring.”

“That's possible,” I said, “but I don't know what my heart should have to do with it. I get paid, well paid, and I do my work for it. It has nothing to do with emotions.”

She said quietly: “Every undertaking demands the whole person. I mean, if one's heart isn't in it. . . .”

. . . And I said: “To build, one doesn't need heart, but understanding [*Verstand*].”

“But the understanding to see that our way is right and not Adenauer's—that you don't have.” (14–15)

Despite its air of self-evidence, Neutz's argumentation here warrants a closer look. What *does* emotion have to do with construction? If socialism is built on scientific principles, then why is Tom's “understanding” (*Verstand*) not enough to see that “our way is right and not [West German Chancellor] Adenauer's?” Why must Tom—and the reader—“put his heart into it [mit dem Herzen dabei (sein)]?” Like many East German cultural products of its time, *Beschreibung eines Sommers* sets out to answer these questions with no small urgency. Indeed, all of the novel's narrative machinery is brought to bear on Tom's slumbering affect. By the end of the

novel, Tom will find himself invested personally, politically, and romantically in the collective project of the GDR—even if, as we will see, this investment yields a surprising return.

To illuminate the narrative strategy by which Tom's change is effected, I propose to start at the point of solution—the moment, as it were, when Tom finds his heart—and work backward. The scene I have in mind is that in which Tom admits to himself that he loves Grit, a young machinist at Wartha. Tom had met Grit at a bar with his friend Schibulla, who was the leader of Grit's FDJ group.²⁵ Tom, the callous connoisseur, found in Grit a new object of consumption, literally: "She looked good enough to eat" (55). The only thing standing in his way was her marriage to Georg, a miner and party functionary in Oesnitz. Tom tackled the problem head-on and, in a flagrant abuse of his power as brigadier, demanded that she remove her wedding band (technically a safety hazard) while on the job.

Tom's cynical stratagem worked: Grit took off the ring (with Tom's help, when it got stuck), and a short while later, they began their love affair. This inaugural subterfuge makes for an unpropitious start to Tom and Grit's relationship; from the first, it seems that the roué will corrupt the ingénue. To a certain degree, this turns out to be the case. With this extramarital affair, the party-loyal Grit puts herself at odds with her own ethical "compass" (44) and the moral codes of the party. At heart, however, Grit does not undergo the radical transformation that Tom does. She begins and remains a passionate, politically engaged idealist. Tom, on the other hand, will abandon his apathy and cynicism under Grit's influence: "I might as well admit it," he says, "I had fallen for her" (204). Here we find ourselves at the end of what seems to be a fairly standard love-plot, a narrative conforming to the template that Mark Rubinfeld, in a book on the Hollywood romantic comedy, calls "the coldhearted redemption plot." Rubinfeld explains: "Simply put... the coldhearted redemption plot... features a bitter hero who is incapable of love. He is heartsick... What the hero most needs, it turns out, is a redemptive heroine" (13–14). Yet when Tom reveals his love for Grit, it becomes apparent that the redemption plot in *Beschreibung eines Sommers* reverses this model. Tom comes to the conclusion that it was not his love for Grit that revived his emotion, but rather it was his emotional revitalization that made him capable of love:

And suddenly I knew how it was that I had fallen for Grit... The experience of the last months had brought me to it, the experience: Wartha; the experience: youth construction project; the experience: forest and in the middle of it the future chemical

25. For more on the Freie Deutsche Jugend, see chapter 1, p. 55 n. 30, and chapter 3, p. 97.

factory;...I had lived every second at Wartha to the full. Everything had penetrated into me and prepared the ground for Grit. (Jakobs, 204)

It is the whole Wartha experience, then, that enables Tom to overcome his apathy and listlessness, and to achieve, by the end of the story, a strong emotional commitment and a tentative political consciousness. In this redemption plot, the love story is not so much the engine of change as the proof and product of Tom's transformation.

That *Beschreibung eines Sommers* modifies the traditional redemption plot in this way is due to the novel's distinctive affective economy. In Jakobs's novel the romantic plot becomes a site less of the quickening of emotions than of their containment, providing a supple framework to accommodate the novel's contradictory agenda. As I argued at the beginning of the chapter, this contradiction can be seen to revolve around the problems of motivation and sublimation. Even more than in *Ankunft im Alltag*, the underlying ideological dilemma of Jakobs's novel is this: how can the productive power of the East German workforce be unlocked without unleashing the destructive potential of its collective desire?

Mit glühenden Herzen: Enthusiasm and Sublimation

In Jakobs's novel, the interplay of motivation and sublimation is inscribed in the opposing poles of *Herz* and *Verstand* ("heart" and "understanding or intellect"). These signifiers do not simply refer to emotion and reason but rather represent broader ideological positions. Tom's abundance of *Verstand* is the characteristic that makes him an effective construction manager, and is the grounds for his employment at Wartha. His is the calculating *Verstand* of the mathematician, the practical insight of the engineer. Yet his calculations also have a politically problematic side, as we see in the conversation with Trude Neutz that brings Tom to Wartha. Neutz asks: "And you're not for the SED either...but what *are* you for?" Tom replies: "I'm for mathematics" (16). By Tom's figuring, work is a rational exchange, rather than an expression of ideological commitment: "I get paid, well paid," he says, "and for that I do my work" (19). Tom's calculations extend even to the romantic sphere: "Love," he insists, "is really nothing other than technology. The scientist will triumph over the poet, the head over the heart. Emotion is just fine and can be charming, but the refined and well-executed approach is irresistible" (203).

Having mocked Neutz's suggestion that the socialist worker needs *Herz*, Tom admits to himself that his logical arguments do not address the real source of his dispassionateness. Instead, we learn the psychohistorical origins of Tom's lack of affect in a long inner monologue recounting his childhood experiences in the Third Reich. With remarkable candor and detail, Tom describes the thrill of the fascist mass spectacle and outlines his emotional and practical complicity with the crimes

of the Nazi regime, both at home and on the Eastern Front. As Tom explains to his imaginary interlocutor, all of these experiences render excitement impossible, and any kind of engagement questionable:

And after you had lived through all that, that all and POW camp and flight and the years '46, '47, '48, then there was nothing in the world that could get you excited. Besides mathematics. And music. But they were worth getting excited about, since they were the only things that seemed to touch on objective laws, therefore the only things with any constancy. (23)

Too young to have experienced fascism and the war, Wartha's young volunteers—including Grit—operate with a very different emotional palette. The youth brigades are brimming with *Herz*, even if *Verstand* is somewhat lacking. As Tom remarks sarcastically to Martin Kamernus, a foreman at Wartha:

I know it all: they came here voluntarily, and they're young fighters for socialism, and they've come here with hearts aflame [*mit glühendem Herzen*]...I'll tell you what, my good man, if their glowing hearts help to put together a top-quality tank foundation and pronto, then they might as well glow. But if they don't understand anything...

In response, Kamernus reminds Tom that it is their job to guide this enthusiasm into productive channels: "If they don't understand," Kamernus says, "then we have to teach them" (50).

From the earliest days of the GDR, the productive enthusiasm of youth was considered an essential component of the party's economic strategy. As one of the earliest formulations of East German youth policy puts it,

We need real enthusiasm for the plan.... I believe the youth can contribute the most to this effort.... It shouldn't just be a matter of inspiring the young people, but rather of the youth with their enthusiasm infecting the rest of the population and sweeping them along.... In the mobilization of ideological energy for this plan the youth, with their ability to be inspired [*Begeisterungsfähigkeit*], can really be the avant-garde. (F. Selbmann at the Zentralratsplenium, 1948; qtd. in Skyba, 51)

Here it is hoped that, inspired by the heroic *Aufbau* project, the youth will "infect" the rest of the population with their enthusiasm. Soon, however, the idea of a young avant-garde gave way to a more cautious policy. Youth enthusiasm was still considered a powerful productive force, but one that had to be steered and contained. In the words of the Politburo resolution "Enthusiasm and Activity of the Youth for the Realization of the Great Ideas of Socialism" (September 3, 1957),

We have to take into account much more strongly than before the adventurousness and revolutionary romanticism of the youth, above all in the work of the FDJ and GST.²⁶ Both adventurousness and revolutionary romanticism reveal the active spirit of youth, which must be guided into the right channels and made useful for the construction of socialism. (Jahnke et al., 436)

Here, the “revolutionary romanticism” and “adventurousness” of East German youth is not to be denied, but neither should it be allowed to divert into unproductive channels. East German youth institutions such as the FDJ and the GST were expected to find a middle ground between enthusiasm and discipline. The emphasis here on “guid[ance] into the right channels” attests to a growing concern, as we saw as well in chapter 1, that the party’s leadership function could be hijacked by the propaganda of the Western media.

By the mid-1960s, youthful energy had come to be seen as a liability, and enthusiasm as an extremely dangerous and unstable force. A resolution of the SED’s Leipzig district leadership, entitled “On Several Questions of Youth Work and the Appearance of Groups of Rowdies” (October 13, 1965), asserted:

The goal of the enemy is to instigate ideological maceration and to provoke licentiousness and anarchy, especially among the youth, in order to turn segments of the young population against their own Workers’ and Peasants’ State and to foment violations of the public peace. The enemy cleverly carries out this agitation through radio and television stations . . . by means of the decadent culture [*Unkultur*] of Westernized music and dancing, Beatles ideology, loafing, and slacking. (Qtd. in Rauhut, “Beat in der DDR,” 377)

In this passage, the Western “enemy” attempts to provoke young East Germans to a twofold betrayal: on the one hand, Western *Unkultur*—music and dance—is used to drive GDR youth into a frenzy of riotous, anarchic licentiousness. At the same time, however, the enemy uses these methods to encourage loafing (*Gammlertum*) and slacking off from work (*Arbeitsbummelei*).

Underlying this only apparently contradictory set of effects is a simple economic logic: if young workers squander their energy on rock and roll and boogie-woogie, their performance at work is sure to suffer. Behind this logic, however, is a more complex ideological fantasy concerning the body and its susceptibility to outside influence. In an essay on the rhetoric of the GDR “youth problem,” Dorothee Wierling calls attention to the trope of “undisciplined bodies” in the party’s descriptions of youthful rebellion: “The ‘standing on corners, loitering, and loafing’ [*Eckenstehen, Herumlungern und Gammeln*] imputed to youth, like the wild, destructive dancing [*Auseinandertanzen*] and frenzied guitar-playing described with horror [by party

26. The Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik (Society for Sports and Technology), or GST, was an East German youth club.

reports], were part of an undisciplined, unmanly, and out-of-control corporeality” (410–11). The SED’s rhetoric vis-à-vis youth culture betrays a profound anxiety concerning the corporeal dimension of the West’s influence on East German youth. In the party’s descriptions of Beat fans in orgiastic, Dionysian ecstasy, for instance, we can observe an explicit sexualization of Westernized popular culture. The 1965 Leipzig resolution quoted above insists:

We are fully in favor of a modern and refined dance music. We are also not against fiery rhythms, but we strongly reject those groups who violate every principle of morality and ethics, who take the stage barefoot and half-naked, who contort their bodies and use inflammatory rhythms to drive young people into a frenzy and tempt them to excesses. (Qtd. in Rauhut, “Beat in der DDR,” 377)

One can identify in such rhetoric a constellation of related concerns: What is the proper affect of enthusiasm, the correct embodiment of youthful energy? What are the appropriate expressions of individual, interpersonal, or collective passion? The consistency of these concerns attests to a particular logic—a particular economy, to use the language of this book—of control and release, discipline and desublimation.

As they were perceived at the time, the stakes of these questions were nothing less than the security and stability of the socialist order, for the series of quotes above narrates the transformation of youth “from great hope to security risk” (*von Hoffnungsträger zur Sicherheitsrisiko*), to borrow the title of Peter Skyba’s history of East German youth policy. This group, which in the *Aufbau* period had been a cornerstone of the GDR’s ideological optimism, came eventually to be considered a significant threat to the East German state. Though the quotes here span a period of nearly twenty years, Skyba designates the decisive moment of disillusionment as occurring quite early: “The youth of the GDR, who in 1950 were still considered the great hopes of the party, had by 1953 become particularly unreliable politically . . . in the eyes of the SED” (277). The reason for this initial break, in Skyba’s account, was the disproportionately high numbers of youth who participated in the June 17 uprising in 1953.²⁷

In the wake of the 1953 uprising, the increasing involvement of GDR youth in Western popular culture was a cause for great alarm, especially because it seemed to open the doors to a second June 17. The bourgeois imperialist powers, according to this line of argument, were bombarding the GDR’s youth with Western popular culture “to make them into willing tools of the warmongers”—in other

27. See Skyba, 253: “In general the FDJ had to conclude that in those places where strikes and demonstrations had broken out, a ‘large proportion’ of young people took part in them. This statement has all the more weight insofar as it could not have been in the youth organization’s interests to call attention to the strong participation of its clientele in the riots. In the larger striking factories it was even the ‘majority’ . . . of adolescents, in some factories the entire youthful workforce, who took part in the walk-out. A reliable quantification is not possible on the basis of the reports.”

words, to incite them to revolt against the East German state. And this revolt did in fact occur, in the famous “Leipzig Beat riots” in the fall of 1965. These illegal demonstrations—which, with more than 2,500 participants, were the largest since the June 17 uprising—broke out after the Leipzig district leadership revoked the licenses of fifty amateur rock-and-roll bands.²⁸ Enraged by this seemingly arbitrary attack on their lifestyle, Leipzig’s Beat fans took to the streets, chanting: “All we want is Beatles.” The youthful protesters were dispersed by policemen and water cannons, but the riots cast a long shadow: the shock of the Leipzig demonstrations can be felt in the tone and content of the notorious Eleventh Plenary Session of the SED in December 1965, which censured and censored East German cultural producers for their “corrupting” influence on the young.²⁹

Beschreibung eines Sommers was written well before the Leipzig riots, but the conditions that led to the uprising are emphatically present in Jakobs’s novel. *Beschreibung eines Sommers* can be said to occupy the field of force stretching between June 17, 1953, and the Leipzig Beat riots. It articulates, on the level of its underlying fantasy-structure, the continuity of ideological anxiety that would link these two traumatic events. The fear is that the powerful, unstable, libidinal energies of young workers, released in part by their not-so-harmless leisure-time interests, would erupt into a mass expression of frustration and resentment. Reflecting this concern, the novel’s *Ankunft* plot turns on the question of infectious youthful enthusiasm and its proper containment. Working, talking, and falling in love with the young idealists at Wartha, Tom will overcome his apathy and listlessness and achieve a tentative political consciousness by the end of the story. His budding enthusiasm, however, must be channeled and controlled. The novel’s love story, integral to Tom’s revival of affect, will be essential to this second process as well.

In a pivotal scene in the novel, Tom surreptitiously watches the Wartha FDJ group read passages from a Soviet novel around a campfire. The book, which is never named (but fits the description of *The Second Day*, aka *Out of Chaos*, by Ilya Ehrenburg), narrates the construction of a steelworks in the Russian town of Kuznetsk. “Why did I come here? thought Kolya [the protagonist of *The Second Day*]. Sverdlovsk was cleaner and quieter. . . . Can I live in a dump like this? Kolya read further on the bulletin board. ‘We’re building a giant.’ He smiled incredulously: all around him he saw only tired and unhappy people” (73). Tom looks around the circle of listeners and tries to imagine their reaction to this story: “I knew that somewhere in [their heads] lurked the thought, why did I come here? And day after day they looked tired and unhappy as they struggled not to collapse under the merciless sun. . . . Some of what was written in the book they had experienced themselves” (73–74).

28. See Wierling, 408.

29. Rauhut, “DDR Beatmusik zwischen Engagement und Repression,” esp. 130; and Agde, *Kahlschlag*.

His young coworkers, however, take a wider historical perspective: “In every face you could see the work going on in their heads: 1917 the revolution [to] 1931 this in Kusnezsk [where *The Second Day* is set], that’s fourteen years. 1945 the liberation plus fourteen years equals 1959. NINETEENFIFTYNINE.” By this logic, the GDR in 1959—the year *Beschreibung eines Sommers* takes place—is at the same level of revolutionary development as the Soviet Union in 1931, the year in which *The Second Day* is set. Though the living conditions described in *The Second Day* are primitive and harsh, the Soviet Union has come a long way since then: as one of the FDJers points out, they had Sputniks by 1957. According to this calculus, the GDR has a great future in store. By 1985, the FDJers decide, they will have full-fledged communism and fly to Venus and Mars. Finally, Morlock, the youth-group brigadier, spells out the moral of the equation:

How else could they have started in the Soviet Union after the intervention, since they had nothing but their hands? Of course, they could have said: We’ll only build steel-works when we have decent barracks, reasonable tools, and if there’s plenty to eat. If they had said that, though, then their state wouldn’t have lasted the next ten years. I think the new can only grow when there are enough bold people. And who can be bold if not us, the youth? It doesn’t do us any harm to work.... The Comsomols of 1931 are now enjoying the fruits of their labor. We’ll certainly have something tomorrow out of our work today. (76–77)

The FDJers have come to the conclusion that, as the party slogan puts it, “*wie wir heute arbeiten, werden wir morgen leben*” (as we work today, so shall we live tomorrow).³⁰ They are willing to overlook the privations of the present for the sake of future prosperity.

Thinking back on the campfire scene, Tom is struck by the volunteers’ forward-looking optimism:

What they were saying owed a lot to popular science from books and magazines. There was a lot of fantasy in the way they embellished and misinterpreted scientific fact.... But most of all there was romanticism, what you could call socialist romanticism. In the newspaper I had once read the formulation “forward-dreamers” [*Träumer nach vorn*]. It had amused me at the time. This was exactly the kind of dreaming being done that evening around the campfire. (82)

One of the most eloquent “forward-dreamers” of the GDR’s early years was the philosopher and theologian Ernst Bloch. Bloch’s magnum opus *The Principle of Hope*, a sprawling study of the question of socialism and utopia, was written

30. See also chapter 1, p. 44.

in American exile in the 1940s and first published in three volumes by East Berlin's Aufbau Publishers in 1954, 1955, and 1959. Echoing Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* Bloch's *Principle of Hope* calls for precisely the kind of forward-dreaming being practiced around the campfire at Wartha.³¹ The "anticipatory consciousness" necessary to socialist revolutionary thinking, Bloch writes, is the proper affect of youth. When the utopian enthusiasm of youth comes together with historical circumstances fostering change, revolutionary results are possible (121–22).

What is realizable in spirit, however, is trickier in practice. Throughout *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch makes an effort to distinguish between "abstract" and "concrete" utopias. The "abstract utopia," a wistful dream of a better world, is the product and propagator of false consciousness, whereas the "concrete utopia" would represent the anticipatory consciousness of a partially realized and fully realizable revolutionary program (157–58). The "concrete utopia," in other words, must eventually come into being. To paraphrase Engels, it is a pudding proved only by the eating.

For Bloch, as for a number of other prominent East German intellectuals of the time, the tentative political "thaw" after the Twentieth Congress provided an opportunity to begin realizing the "concrete utopia" of the GDR.³² Bloch joined with other leading academics and scientists such as Robert Havemann, Rudolf Bahro, Wolfgang Harich, Walter Janka, Friedrich Behrens, and Hans Mayer in calling for a comprehensive course of democratic and economic reform, codified by Harich and Janka in the "Platform for a Special German Path to Socialism."³³ As Wolfgang Engler points out, the "Platform" recapitulated many of the demands made by the striking workers on June 17, 1953: an immediate change in party leadership, full democratization of party and society, the dissolution of state security (the Stasi), guaranteed freedom of expression and assembly, the right of workers to organize and strike, and a limited licensing of small businesses. The "Platform" also contained a provision for German reunification, as long as certain socialist characteristics were retained (Engler, 94). While distinct in certain ways from the platform of the striking workers in 1953, the "concrete utopia" outlined in the 1956 "Platform" grew out of the same basic demand: it was time to see some of the changes promised by the sloganeering of the SED.

As the workers had been in 1953, the 1956 reform movement was suppressed with fierce efficiency. The Soviet intervention in Hungary afforded party leaders in Berlin an opportunity to clean out the GDR's "Petöfi sympathizers," and the resulting purge sent Harich and Janka, among others, to prison.³⁴ Bloch was

31. In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin defends the right of a Marxist to dream, as long as that dream is anchored to a realizable goal (167).

32. At the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev revealed and denounced the crimes perpetrated under Stalin.

33. For more on this group of reformers, see Engler, 88–107; Bathrick, 57–83.

34. The Petöfi Club was a group of reform-minded intellectuals in Hungary in 1956. The "club" included Georg Lukács, Tibor Déry, and Julius Hay (Engler, 95).

forced to resign from his teaching position at the Humboldt University and to relinquish his editorship of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (German Journal for Philosophy).

“Day X”: Conspiracy and Containment

As the party’s reaction to the 1956 reform movement makes clear, it was not yet ready to cash the check its slogans had written. In the late 1950s the party continued to rely on the kind of optimistic futurism embodied by Wartha’s young volunteers, who were content to work and wait for the payoff—Wartha, after all, is a homophone for *warte*, the imperative of *warten*, “to wait.” Tom considers himself incapable of summoning up this kind of forward-looking enthusiasm. His traumatic encounter with fascism has rendered him emotionally disengaged and politically cynical. Near the end of the novel, however, a new narrative emerges. At the party hearing called to discuss Tom and Grit’s affair, Tom’s friend Schibulla speaks up to defend Tom’s character. To do so, he brings a new element into the mix: the events of June 17, 1953.

As Schibulla tells it, he and Tom were working together on a construction site in Berlin when the strike began. Apparently worried that Tom might join the demonstration, Schibulla suggests that they walk home together. They see the hordes of West German invaders held at bay by East German police at Potsdamer Platz and streaming through the Brandenburg Gate. Schibulla describes a solitary Soviet tank under attack by hordes of West German invaders—a historical inaccuracy of obscene boldness. Though exact numbers of the killed and wounded strikers are not available, historians agree that the suppression of the uprising by Soviet troops was quick, brutal, and bloody. In its factual distortion, Schibulla’s story mirrors exactly the party’s official account of the uprising, which blamed the events of “Day X” on instigators and provocateurs sent across the border by “the Enemy,” the United States, and the BRD (Zentralkomitee, *Dokumente* 1954, 438).

Schibulla goes on to recount how he and Tom were beaten by a mob, then arrested by the West German police and held for interrogation. Schibulla explains that Tom refused to cooperate with the police, declaring: “I am a citizen of the German Democratic Republic, and I demand to be set free” (206). “On the seventeenth of June,” Schibulla concludes, “Tom saw fascism in action again. There’s nothing that he hates more than fascism. Fascism made him into a cynic” (206).

Though Schibulla insists that it was fascism that made Tom a cynic, his evocation of the June 17 uprising allows us to reevaluate our understanding of the origins of Tom’s cynicism, and to reinflect the story of his transformation. If we tell Tom’s story as that of the East German worker after June 17, the underlying ideological tension in *Beschreibung eines Summers* begins to come into focus. In this reading, June 17 would indeed be, as Schibulla suggests, a traumatic revisitation of fascism.

However, the “fascism” of June 17 would be found in the naked display of coercive, totalitarian violence on the part of the workers’ state rather than in the tactics of West German agitators. The revolt was successfully neutralized, but at a high cost: the ideological credibility of the party was weakened, and the motivational efficacy of its slogans and promises destroyed. To borrow language from Tom’s other trauma, “After that, there was nothing in the world that could get you excited.” Thus Tom and his generation are motivated not by socialist conviction, but by what, from the party’s perspective, would be alarmingly unsocialist considerations: “I get paid . . . and for that I do my work.”

If the party’s promises were bankrupt for workers of Tom’s age, there was still hope for ideological credibility with the succeeding generation. They could still be convinced to mortgage the present against the future, to work under the assumption that “as we work today, so shall we live tomorrow.” Viewed programmatically, then, Tom’s story is that of a disgruntled East German worker being “cured” by the optimism of the post–June 17 generation.

Yet, as the East German reform movement in 1956 showed, the repressed will always return. And, albeit on slightly different terms than the June 17 demonstrations, the repressed did return in 1965 when Leipzig’s youth took to the streets for the Beatles and rock and roll. In *Beschreibung eines Sommers*, the anxiety about a “return of the repressed”—a repetition of the events of June 17—does not materialize as an explicit thematic concern: here we do not have, for instance, the fear of workplace anarchy that is openly discussed throughout Erik Neutsch’s 1964 novel *Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones). Instead, the uneasiness and tension that permeate *Beschreibung eines Sommers* manifest themselves in more indirect ways. By one such circuitous route, the landscape itself becomes the principal antagonist in the novel, as constant forest fires hinder and undo the work of the youth brigades. In a now-familiar logic, these fires are attributed to the efforts of Western saboteurs. Tom is skeptical of this explanation, but when the chimney of the boiler house collapses, even he is forced to conclude that “sabotage was the only possible cause of the mishap” (137). This time, however, the cause turns out to be accidental: the boiler house had been constructed over an underground tunnel. This tunnel, according to Wartha legend, was dug by a local count as a secret escape route for his wife.

In a conversation with Tom shortly after this accident, Grit draws a connection between the chimney’s collapse and the acts of sabotage that continue to plague the Wartha site, thereby suggesting a second repository of ideological tension in *Beschreibung eines Sommers*:

“See who all is conspiring against us,” said Grit.

“Against us?” I said.

“Yes, against us, against the chemical factory,” Grit said. “Even the margrave is playing along. Adenauer’s East Ministry and Heinrich Emanuel—same brothers, same caps.” Then after a short pause: “But aren’t we two actually on their side?”

“We?” I said. “Why?”

“Oh, Tom, don’t ask,” said Grit. “You know very well that in loving you, I’m hiding from my party.” (139)

In Grit’s mind, the margrave and the arsonists from the West are in league against the construction of the chemical factory—as are, she suggests, she and Tom. How can it be that this love, the proof and product of Tom’s emotional and political reawakening, has become as dangerous as arson and entangled Grit and Tom in a conspiracy with Adenauer and a centuries-dead margrave?

From Grit’s perspective—and the perspective of the party—the question is quite readily answered. In betraying her husband and her marriage vows, Grit has also betrayed the party. As Schibulla puts it, “Grit’s husband is in the party, and Grit is in the party. So it *is* our business” (175). For this reason, she is summoned to a party hearing, given a stern rebuke, and sent off to Oesnitz to straighten things out with her husband.

In Tom’s case, however, the moral significance of the love story is more ambivalent. This love affair, though illicit, is the token of his emotional and political reawakening. Within the novel’s narrative logic—that is, within the redemption plot that forms its core—Tom’s newfound capacity to love must be regarded as a positive development. Why, then, is the catalyst and object of his desire forbidden to him in the end when the party steps in to end the affair? Which is also to ask, why must Grit be married in the first place?

Tom’s always-already foreclosed relationship with Grit reflects a fundamental contradiction at the heart of Jakobs’s novel, a disturbance in the economic logic that informs the narrative. The problem ultimately comes back to the question of incentive: why should Tom do what Trude Neutz demands and “put his heart” into his work? To put a finer point on it, why should he, or any of his coworkers, work on faith alone? How long can production be maintained by promises and payment deferred? On this question, *Beschreibung eines Sommers* mirrors the ambivalence of a wavering party line. On the one hand, if the SED had learned anything from June 17, it was that slogans alone would not increase production or keep the producers satisfied. In chapter 1 we saw how, by the logic of the New Course of the 1950s and the “New Economic System” of the early 1960s, consumer goods were to provide the impetus for individual and collective labor. An overriding concern with buying power, however, was a far cry from the socialist consciousness that policy makers were trying to foster. Through Tom’s conversion narrative—the story of his *Ankunft*—*Beschreibung eines Sommers* attempts to supplant the materialistic calculations of an apathetic *Verstand* with the “forward-dreaming”—the *Herz*—of Wartha’s volunteers, who are willing to endure hardship and hard work for their part in “building a giant.”

Such revolutionary enthusiasm, however, carries with it a significant danger: what if the “giant” never materializes? What if the boundless energies of

youth—and of East German workers in general—become truly unbound, no longer held in check by an investment in the *Aufbau* project or in its prospective returns? If Tom's newfound capacity for romantic passion corresponds to the enthusiasm he acquires from his young coworkers, then the party hearing that ends the affair would represent the steering and containment that must accompany the risky project of inspiration. The ideological fantasy at work here, in other words, is that the party could have it both ways: releasing the energies of revolutionary romanticism while retaining control over its objects and effects.

The perceived stakes of this undertaking become clear in the sudden violence of the novel's penultimate scene. Having convinced Grit to visit him once more before she leaves for Oesnitz, Tom waits for her in his Berlin apartment, drinking cognac and fretting. When Grit arrives, a drunken Tom begs her not to leave him and says he can't live without her. Grit replies that she loves him, but that they have to be apart for a time while she sorts out her life. Suddenly, the scene turns violent and degenerates into a near rape. Here, Tom seems to have lost his *Verstand* completely: "I was out of my senses. . . . I had lost all trace of control" (215–16). Fortunately for Grit, he eventually loses consciousness entirely and collapses to the floor.

Like the similar scenario of near rape in *Ankunft im Alltag*, Tom's attack here would prove the wisdom of separating the two lovers in the first place. The party's intervention, it seems, is intended only to save them from themselves—that is, from the violence of Tom's uncontrolled desire. In light of the reading I have suggested here, this scene would rehearse an anxiety about the potentially explosive effects of productive energy bound neither by the satisfactions of nonalienated labor nor by the pleasures of consumption. Tom's ferocious loss of control would represent the fear on the part of the East German state that the citizens' desire—desire the state itself had helped create—would, when thwarted, turn to violence. If the Leipzig Beat riots in 1965 represent such an outbreak of frustrated collective desire, then the state's reaction to this event demonstrates that the ideological apparatus of the GDR was unable to metabolize this mass dissatisfaction: the SED had to resort consistently to direct coercion.

In this light it is significant that when Tom comes to, he raves feverishly about escaping with Grit "to freedom": Toronto, he thinks, or Madrid (217). Once again, the party will have to protect Tom from his own madness. And in August of 1961, just after the first installments of *Beschreibung eines Sommers* began appearing in the FDJ newspaper *Junge Welt*, the Berlin Wall was built to do just that.

In the introduction to this book, I suggested that stories of romantic love share a potent narrative capacity: acting as an unmotivated motivator, love can instigate, sustain, convolute, or resolve a plot. As we have seen, the *Ankunftsroman* avails itself of this potential, employing a romantic framework to structure and stabilize its account of social assimilation. Both *Ankunft im Alltag* and *Beschreibung eines Sommers* insist, however, that it is not love that facilitates the "arrival" of the protagonists,

but rather it is their “arrival,” their harmonious integration into socialist production, that makes love possible. This reversal is the basic machinery of the pattern of libidinal investment I have been calling the “neue Romantik.” In essence, the “neue Romantik” represents an effort to romanticize the process of production, wresting the passionate attachments of the East German citizenry—and especially of the youth—away from the desiring economy of commodity culture. Subordinated to production, romantic love becomes both a source of inspiration and motivation and a force of containment, directing and channeling the unstable energies of productive drive.

In a way, we can characterize the “neue Romantik” as an experimental narrative technology, part of the broader cultural experiment known as the Bitterfeld Way. As we will see in chapter 3, the radical productionism of the Bitterfeld Way was not destined for longevity. Ultimately, East German cultural and social policy followed the path marked by the NÖS, placing its faith once and for all in the sphere of personal fulfillment—including the satisfactions of consumer choice—rather than in the realm of collective production.³⁵ The short-lived genre of the *Ankunftsroman*, the culmination of a decade of *Aufbau* culture, stands as a signpost of a road not taken: the development and cultivation of a distinctly socialist libidinal economy in the GDR.

35. In the cultural sphere, this shift has been characterized variously as a “subjective” turn (Emmerich, 174 ff.) or a “retreat into interiority” (Zimmermann, 4).