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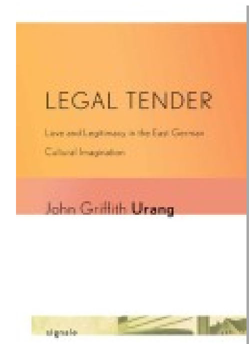

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Corrective Affinities

Love, Class, and the Propagation of Socialism

Zwischen Wand- und Widersprüchen
machen sie es sich bequem
Links ein Sofa, rechts ein Sofa,
in der Mitte ein Emblem

Between convictions and contradictions
They live like kings and queens
A sofa left, a sofa right
A party emblem in between

—Kurt Bartsch, from the poem "Sozialistischer Biedermeier"

In *Pursuits of Happiness,* Stanley Cavell explores a genre of American film he calls the "comedy of remarriage." In the films that comprise this genre, all of which were made between 1934 and 1949, "the drive of [the] plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*" (1–2). Cavell identifies a consistent utopian thread in the remarriage plot, a vision of social transformation that explores the terms and conditions of human happiness. These film comedies, Cavell suggests, are involved in what he calls a "conversation" with American culture, testing it against its own utopian aspirations (152). For Cavell, the trope of marriage relates both to the reality and to the potential of society. It is microcosm as well as utopia. If marriage is an emblem of a better way of living, then *re*marriage represents a necessary reaffirmation of this vision: "Our genre emphasizes the mystery of marriage by finding that neither law nor sexuality (nor, by implication, progeny) is sufficient to ensure true marriage and suggesting that what provides legitimacy is the mutual willingness for remarriage, for a sort of continuous reaffirmation" (142).

This chapter will consider a number of East German novels and films made between 1968 and 1978 that share with Cavell's remarriage comedies a concern with the conditions under which estranged married couples achieve (or fail to achieve) reconciliation. While none of the East German examples are, strictly speaking, comedies, they share the Hollywood comedies' utopian stakes. Through the lens of the marital relationship, the fulfilled and unfulfilled promises of culture and society come into focus; the utopia that is the implicit referent of the Hollywood comedies becomes an explicit theme in the remarriage narratives analyzed here. These are, in effect, studies in the conditions of utopian possibility, meditations on the interplay of idealism and resignation, expectation and disillusion. The terms according to which each couple chooses, abandons, then reconfirms—or fails to reconfirm—their romantic union trace the borders of real and imagined socialist community in the GDR of the 1970s.

From Production to Reproduction: The Crisis of Post-*Aufbau* Cultural Pedagogy

As suggested in the previous two chapters, the most urgent project in postwar East Germany was the rebuilding of a devastated industrial base and the remobilization of a decimated workforce. For this reason the ideological drive in cultural products from this period—known generally as the *Aufbau* (reconstruction) era—is directed primarily toward fostering the extraordinary levels of productivity necessary to the reconstruction effort, as well as toward counteracting various impediments to this productivity.[1] Bluntly put, in the productionist ethos of the *Aufbau* period, everything comes back to work. Even in texts steeped in New Course consumer culture, consumption is never an end unto itself, but rather an attempt—sometimes a last-ditch effort—to motivate production.[2]

In *Aufbau*-era cultural products, however, work is not simply a means to an end: the process of production serves a key pedagogical function. As Marc Silberman notes in his study of the East German industrial novel, for the literature of this period "the working world represents not a peripheral social activity but the *formative* sphere of social relationships and material productivity" (2). While East German workers rebuild their homeland, in other words, the experience of socialist labor would rebuild the workers. In particular, *Aufbau* public culture depicts the workplace as the primary site of denazification. Collective labor was to be a panacea for the damages caused by National Socialism, gathering together the pieces of

1. Wolfgang Emmerich observes: "Literature and other cultural activities were not only supposed to promote human productivity in general while expanding consciousness, but also very concretely to stimulate a readiness for physical work in order to help socialism toward victory in the clash of the economic systems" (115).

2. For more about the New Course, see chapter 1, pp. 42–49. For a discussion of the problem of motivation in the GDR workplace, see chapter 2, pp. 61–64.

a shattered nation and absolving its politically compromised citizens. Through the production process, workers would learn to be socialists. As the motto would later have it, "Sozialistisch arbeiten, leben und lernen" (Work, live, and learn socialistically) (Deutsches Historisches Museum). Perhaps nowhere is the pedagogical function of labor more accentuated than in the *Ankunftsroman,* which relies on the transformative experience of work to bring about the social integration, the "arrival," of the novel's troubled young protagonists.[3]

By the mid-1960s, however, the extreme productionism of *Aufbau-* and *Ankunftsliteratur* was destined for a crisis. As National Socialism and the war fell one and even two generations back in the collective experience, both the focus and the site of pedagogical and didactic efforts had to shift. The *Nachgeborenen*—those born after 1945—could hardly be expected to relate to narratives of socialist reeducation, in which soldiers and refugees, perpetrators and victims, skeptics, diehards, and neophytes all learn to live—and especially to work—together. In this sense, the *Ankunftsroman* represents the outermost limit of this paradigm: the young heroes of the *Ankunftsroman* belong to the last generation that should require reeducation. Subsequent generations would experience only the socialist order.

Given these conditions, a cultural template that emphasized reeducation through collective labor had to give way to one that could address socialist education prior to entry into the workforce. Officially nearing the end of its transition from capitalism to socialism, the GDR needed urgently to attend to the social institutions that would transmit socialist values to subsequent generations.[4] A preoccupation with production, in other words, had to be replaced with a focus on reproduction. In using the term *reproduction,* I have in mind both Marx's definition, as adopted by the SED, of the "constant process of renewing and widening social production" ("Reproduktion," 554) and a more current sociological understanding of cultural or social reproduction, in Anthony Giddens's gloss the "remaking [of] what is already made in the continuity of praxis" (171). *Reproduction,* according to these definitions, refers to the way a society replicates and renews itself over time. For Marx, reproduction encompasses a wide range of activities that, although external to the sphere of production, are nonetheless indispensable to the labor process, from the replenishment of an individual worker's labor power (sleeping, eating, doing laundry, and so on) to the maintenance and expansion of social and state institutions (*Capital,* 711–17, 732).

At the same time, it is important not to lose track of the vernacular meaning of the term. In a sense, biological reproduction is the crux of the matter: without successive generations, the question of social reproduction is moot. For Mary

3. See chapter 2, p. 64.

4. The Sixth Party Congress, in January 1963, announced the triumph of socialist production in the GDR and promised that the "transitional period" would be over by the end of the current phase of socialist development, the "comprehensive construction of socialism [umfassende Aufbau des Sozialismus]" (Zentralkomitee, *Dokumente* 1965, 209).

O'Brien, Marx's systematic devaluation of biological reproduction represents "one of the great defects" of his work, leading to an only "partial" conception of history: "Mode of production follows mode of production in providing subsistence for the reproducing of man on a daily basis. The daily reproduction of the *species* in the birth of *individuals* is not perceived as an essential dialectical moment of historical process, which of course it is" (10). The dialectical interrelation of individual, species, and social reproduction is at stake in the following analysis, as well as in chapter 4, which investigates the asymmetrical demands of reproduction on men and women.

In their influential study *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture,* Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron focus on cultural reproduction through education, understood as all the institutions that inculcate successive generations with the ideology of the ruling class. "Education," they write, "is the equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital in the biological order" (32). From the beginning, the party recognized the crucial importance of pedagogical institutions to the health and longevity of East Germany's socialist experiment. Immediately following the fall of National Socialism, officials in the Soviet Occupied Zone aggressively restaffed primary and secondary schools with party-affiliated teachers to ensure a thorough and consistent restructuring of East German society, starting with its youngest members.[5] Beginning with the handpicked *Neulehrer,* the East German educational system was carefully monitored and guided by the party, from the preschool education of crèche and *Kindergarten* to the *Arbeiter- und Bauern-Fakultät* (ABF—a kind of precollege for workers and their children) and the universities. Children's extracurricular life was also structured extensively by the institutions of the state. Participation in the recreational and pedagogical activities of the Young Pioneers (ages six–eight) and the Thälmann Pioneers (ages nine–thirteen) was nearly mandatory.[6] For youth between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, the FDJ offered organized leisure-time activities, special-interest clubs, athletic facilities, vocational training, and political education.

In February of 1965, the Central Committee of the SED announced the inauguration of the Standardized Socialist Educational System, the culmination of a reform process begun officially in 1963.[7] According to its architects, the new educational system would better prepare students for the demands of the Scientific-Technical Revolution (WTR), as well as helping them to develop into "all-around and harmoniously developed socialist personalities" (Uhlig, Günther, and Lost, 572). As its name suggests, the primary objective of the school reform was to unify the various elements of the GDR pedagogical system, ultimately bringing all the

5. See Brigitte Hohlfeld, *Die Neulehrer in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1953.*

6. By 1985, 99 percent of East German children between the ages of six and thirteen belonged to the Pioneer movement (Edwards, 36).

7. For analysis of the genesis and genealogy of East German school reform in the 1960s, see Baske, 15–43.

institutions of intergenerational social reproduction under one roof: "The Standardized Socialist Educational System will unite the educational effects of all state and social institutions and organs involved in the education and formation of the youth, uniting as well the efforts of school, home, factory, children's and youth organizations" (567).

As this grandiose promise of social orchestration indicates, another important institution of social reproduction was also undergoing judicial and legislative scrutiny in the mid-1960s. In 1965, the Central Committee adopted a sweeping set of reforms in family law. The family law reform, as outlined in the *Familiengesetzbuch* (Family Law Code), had a unifying function similar to that of the Standardized Socialist Educational System: one of its primary goals was to ensure the political integration of the family by bringing the domestic sphere under the protection—and influence—of the state. As the preamble to the *Familiengesetzbuch* explains,

> The task of the *Familiengesetzbuch* is to advance the development of familial relations in socialist society. The *Familiengesetzbuch* should help all citizens, and particularly the youth, to shape their family life consciously. It serves to protect marriage and the family and the rights of each individual member of the family unit. It should help to prevent family conflict and recurrent problems. . . .
>
> The *Familiengesetzbuch* directs the attention of the citizens, the socialist collective and the social organizations toward the great personal and social importance of marriage and the family and toward the duty of each individual and the whole society to contribute to the protection and development of every family. (Kanzlei des Staatsrates, 118)

Although the family's "great personal and social importance" was clear to the authors of the *Familiengesetzbuch,* the ideal character and composition of the socialist family were somewhat more murky. On the one hand, the familial model presented by the *Familiengesetzbuch* is quite traditional and conservative, emphasizing the desirability of two-parent households and identifying the telos of marriage as procreation.[8] On the other hand, the *Familiengesetzbuch* claims that "with the development of socialism in the German Democratic Republic, new kinds of family relations emerge" (Kanzlei des Staatsrates, 117). These "new" family ties by no means constituted a radical challenge to the traditional nuclear family—East German family planners did not, for instance, revisit the domestic experiments of the early Soviet period. Though it stops far short of restructuring the East German family in the eyes of the law, the Family Code does acknowledge the changing structure of modern socialist families: it calls for special measures to ensure

8. E.g., § 5.2: "The family should grow out of marriage, which finds its fulfillment in shared life together, in the raising of children, and in the mutual development of the parents and children into principled, all-around developed personalities" (Kanzlei des Staatsrates, 120).

adequate support for single parents (§ 3.2) and insists that the harmony of the family should not be placed above the career aspirations of either partner (§ 2) (Kanzlei des Staatsrates, 119).

The most decisive innovation of the fairly traditionalist Family Code can be found in what might be called its strategy of legitimation. The new family law takes pains to locate the legitimacy of the family not in its congruence with preestablished norms or modalities (the two-parent household, for instance, or predefined spousal roles), but rather in its imbrication with the institutions of society and the state. The *Familiengesetzbuch* is adamant in its rejection of bourgeois notions of the domestic "private sphere" as an autonomous area distinct from society at large. Responding to West German criticisms of the new family law as a "regimentation" of the private sphere, East German Staatsrat representative Heinrich Homann argues that there has never been a "private sphere." "Bourgeois society has always exercised objective influence on marriage and the family," Homann observes, "and bourgeois law and the bourgeois state sanction this influence." Yet where the influence of capitalist society on working families must be antagonistic, in the GDR "an objectively present harmonious consonance exists between socialist social relations and family relations. Socialist relations exert a positive influence on family and marriage" (Kanzlei des Staatsrates, 42).

Homann's argument seems somewhat self-defeating: if there were in fact a "harmonious consonance" of socialist social relations with familial relations in the GDR, then why was the *Familiengesetzbuch*'s intervention necessary in the first place? The portrayals of domesticity analyzed in this chapter will help begin to construct an answer to this question. The novels and films we will examine all focus on an apparent asymmetry between the social order being reproduced within the "private" domestic sphere and the one intended by public policy and nurtured by the institutions of the state. The problematic insularity of these families directly reverses the poles delineated by Homann: where he imagines a working-class family in the West besieged by a hostile bourgeois order, these works describe islands of bourgeois domesticity within the Workers' and Peasants' State.

The cultural phenomenon—one might say, the presenting symptom—that motivates this chapter is a recurring plotline in East German cultural products from the 1970s: a young, married, career-driven urbanite suddenly finds his or her home life intolerable and leaves it behind to pursue another way of living, an alternative embodied in a new love interest.[9] What lends this narrative a particularly East German flavor is the class dynamic that informs it: the new lifestyle and lover are

9. In addition to the four works analyzed here, one could include Günter de Bruyn's novel *Preisverleihung* (1972), Karl Heinz Jakobs's *Die Interviewer* (1973), Dieter Noll's *Kippenberg* (1979), Frank Vogel's film *Das siebente Jahr* (1968), Egon Günther's *Der Dritte* (1972), and Frank Beyer's *Das Versteck* (1977). An interesting precursor to these narratives of romantic rearrangement is Slatan Dudow's 1959 film, *Verwirrung der Liebe,* which, as Joshua Feinstein convincingly argues, uses the genre of romantic comedy to examine the utopian ambitions of East German socialism (78–109).

distinctly proletarian, the home and spouse left behind unmistakably bourgeois. Given the tendencies of East German public culture from the *Aufbau* period on, such an impulse toward proletarization seems fairly unsurprising. In fact, I would argue, the magnetic pull of these working-class characters attests to the lingering influence of the "neue Romantik," the trend in East German public culture of romanticizing the sphere of production.[10] Even after cultural policy had left *Aufbau* productionism behind, the industrial narrative's characteristic pattern of libidinal investment continued to shape the public imagination.

A thornier problem, from the perspective of official ideology, was the presence of these class distinctions in the first place. According to the SED's understanding of social class, the nationalization of the means of production should have eliminated the basis for meaningful class distinctions in the GDR.[11] Though by the 1970s the SED was willing to concede that the GDR was still a "class society," it insisted that the East German class system was "nonantagonistic"—in other words, that its conflicts could be solved gradually and peacefully.[12] A 1977 treatise entitled "Development of the Classes and Social Strata in the GDR" reports

> [an] incremental growth of the similarity between the classes and strata in accordance with the worldview and ideals of the working class, as well as a gradual overcoming of remaining social distinctions, particularly the fundamental divisions between city and country and between manual and intellectual labor. (Parteihochschule "Karl Marx," 6)

The claim that the class system in the GDR unfolded "in accordance with the worldview and ideals of the working class" seems dubious; as we saw in chapter 2, East Germany's fraught labor relations bore witness to a far more antagonistic contradiction between labor and management than the official account would have it. Nor does the promise of a "gradual overcoming of remaining social distinctions" hold up well to historical scrutiny. In fact, the opposite appeared to be the case. In the course of the 1960s, under the aegis of the New Economic System (NÖS) and the Scientific-Technical Revolution, a new class of managerial, technical, and political elites began to assert itself—not only in the workplace, but also in the cultural life of the GDR.

Speaking at the Second Bitterfeld Conference in 1964, SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht announced a new cultural line corresponding to the advances of

10. In chapter 2, I argue that the romantic aura attached to production, which was widespread in socialist-realist production narratives, reached its zenith in the short-lived genre of *Ankunftsromane,* "novels of arrival."

11. The *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* spells out clearly the party's understanding of the origins of class distinctions: "In every case, the ownership-relation to the means of production is constitutive of class difference" ("Klasse," 402).

12. On the theme of "antagonistic" and "nonantagonistic" contradiction in GDR literature, see Jochen Staadt's comprehensive study *Konfliktbewusstsein und sozialistischer Anspruch in der DDR-Literatur.*

the NÖS and the WTR: "An artist who wants to achieve the Truth and the Whole cannot [do so] by assuming the perspective of an empirical observer, nor by taking on the point of view of a simple worker. He absolutely needs the perspective of a planner and leader. That is what we ask of him" (81). With these words the Second Bitterfeld Conference essentially reversed the mandate of the First Bitterfeld Conference five years earlier. Where participants at the 1959 conference were urged to immerse themselves in production, to assume the "point of view of a simple worker," they were now being told to shift their focus to the "planners and leaders." In his remarkable historical survey of East German industry literature, Peter Zimmermann characterizes this shift as a definitive indicator of the GDR's growing class divide:

> Surveying the history of *Industrieliteratur,* one sees that the most radical change in perspective occurred in the middle of the 1960s: this marks the transition from workers' literature to the literature of the planners and leaders. After the working class had done its part [in the *Aufbau*], . . . the "new socialist intelligence" . . . declared itself the most important force for economic and social progress. (39)

As we will see, however, this bid for power on the part of the "planners and leaders" was not the end of the story. Throughout the 1970s the "planners and leaders" and the working class vied for the attention of East German public culture. Ultimately, this was a struggle less for the GDR's head than for its heart, less for political power than for dominance in social reproduction. Would GDR society take a fancy to the new technocracy, realigning its ideals and ambitions to those of the intellectual and scientific elite? Or would it recommit to the principles of the Workers' and Peasants' State? The works examined in this chapter literalize this metaphor, weighing the attractions of both suitors in a scenario of romantic choice.

"Do dialectics excuse adultery?": *Buridans Esel*

Günter de Bruyn's 1968 novel, *Buridans Esel* (Buridan's Ass), follows the romantic adventures of Karl Erp, a librarian in Berlin. Erp lives with his wife, Elisabeth, and their two children in a posh suburb on the Spree. The Erps enjoy all the comforts of their middle-class status: a large house, a garden, a car. Legally (and importantly) these luxuries all belong to Elisabeth, who inherited them from her wealthy parents when they retired to the West (16). Erp allows himself another bourgeois luxury as well: an extramarital affair with a young, idealistic new colleague at the library, Fräulein Broder.[13] Elisabeth knows about her husband's affair, though she assumes it to be a short-lived and shallow fling. She rationalizes the situation to

13. Broder's first name is never revealed in the novel.

herself as a necessary consequence of the growing gulf in their marital relationship: "Karl had changed, that was true, but everything changes. Standstill doesn't exist. Do dialectics excuse adultery?" (41). This formulation captures the implicit question governing de Bruyn's novel: does the infidelity at the core of this narrative represent a positive development—a dialectical advance—for Erp, or does this explanation simply cloak more ignoble motives?

If the former is the case, it would be because Erp's affair reawakens his revolutionary consciousness, dormant since his FDJ years. Near the beginning of the novel, the free, indirect narrative dips into Erp's memories to depict the earliest days of his romance with Elisabeth:

> Country road, deserted lakeshore, pine forest, bare roadside trees reminded him of that Sunday thirteen or fourteen years ago when he first came here, on the back of a truck, freezing, in a blue shirt [the FDJ uniform] (he still had it, wore it sometimes gardening), a flapping flag above him, one arm draped over Elisabeth's shoulder. The best students at the librarian school went into the village as harvest helpers and culture bringers, sang something about the vanguard of the proletariat, and were so convinced to be just that that Elisabeth was ashamed to call a villa in this eastern Dahlem her home. (13)[14]

Here, in a description touched with the novel's characteristic wry irony, we see Erp and Elisabeth as FDJlers, full of *Aufbau* enthusiasm and caught up in a courtship under the sign of the "neue Romantik." Later, recounting these years to Broder, Erp invokes a classic text of *Aufbau* youth-movement nostalgia, Hermann Kant's 1965 novel, *Die Aula* (The Auditorium): "Surely she knew Kant's *Aula,* that's how it was, just like that, tough and splendid, splendid and tough" (45). In its periodic revisitations of the "tough and splendid" *Aufbauzeit, Buridans Esel* provides an insightful commentary on the ideological standpoint represented by *Die Aula* and prompts a reevaluation of the lasting significance of the GDR's heady early years.

In Kant's novel, Robert Iswall, a journalist, has been commissioned to give a speech for the closing of the *Arbeiter- und Bauern-Fakultät* (the Workers' and Peasants' College, or ABF), where he was once a student. Iswall's efforts to frame his experience occasion a great deal of anecdotal reminiscing, as well as a where-are-they-now of his former classmates. Kant's narrative voice, like de Bruyn's, treats the exuberance and pretensions of the young students with a good deal of irony, even if *Die Aula* tends to be more cheerful and forgiving than *Buridans Esel.* Though it touches on some of the excesses of the Stalin era and raises a few questions about the motives and methods of participants in the *Aufbau* effort, *Die Aula* finds in general that the experiment of the ABF was a success, as measured by the career trajectories

14. Dahlem was a well-to-do suburb of West Berlin.

of its graduates: "If it were up to me, distinguished guests," Iswall imagines saying in his speech,

> I'd forget about the speech. I'd do something totally different. I'd raise my finger and point at you, fellow class of '49, at each one of you and I'd say: Stand up, say your name and say your occupation, the one from then and the one now, and then sit down, and that's all. All we need are facts. Now stand up, you facts, and let's see you!
>
> Irmgard Strauch, shopgirl—lecturer; Joachim Trimborn, fisherman—chemist; Rose Paul, farmhand—sinologist; Vera Bilfert, seamstress—ophthalmologist. And now the next row, please: watchmaker—physicist; hairdresser—high-frequency-radio technician . . . (363)

Overall, *Die Aula* casts the *Aufbauzeit,* the time of the ABF, as a period of radical and salutary change that saw the construction of socialism and the dismantling of class barriers.[15] Such a rehabilitation of the *Aufbauzeit*—which, after all, was also the time of East German Stalinism—has significant consequences for *Die Aula*'s evaluation of the present.[16] Indeed, the epigraph from Heinrich Heine reminds us: "Today is a consequence of yesterday. We have to discover what the latter intended, if we would know what the former holds" (Der heutige Tag ist ein Resultat des gestrigen. Was dieser gewollt hat, müssen wir erforschen, wenn wir zu wissen wünschen, was jener will).[17] Ultimately, *Die Aula* presents a continuity between the class-leveling efforts of the ABF and the social structure of the narrative's present time. That the ABF is being dismantled would attest then not to the abandonment of the goals it represents, but rather to their achievement; the *Arbeiter- und Bauern-Fakultät* would no longer be necessary in the classless society of the "comprehensive expansion of socialism."[18]

Buridans Esel, on the other hand, posits no such correlation between the social restructurings of the *Aufbauzeit* and the present class structure. In Erp's case, material success represents a betrayal of his former ideals—or perhaps reveals the

15. Zimmermann writes: "Kant means nothing other than that socialism has brought the fulfillment of the dream of the poor—that their children might become something better than they—within reach. . . . [In *Die Aula,*] the achievements of the GDR at the level of education-politics are indisputable. Equal opportunity for workers' children, thus far an unmet goal in West Germany, had been secured in the course of the *Aufbau*" (206).

16. That Kant's intervention constitutes a rehabilitation can also be seen in his account of the genesis of *Die Aula:* he recalls being inspired to write his novel after reading a "dry and lifeless" report about the ABF in a *Festschrift* for the Fifth Centennial of Greifswald University. "I told myself," he explains, "that it would be a shame if this was all that remains of the subject [of the ABF] . . . I was motivated by a very palpable anger at a nearly heartless treatment of a very important time in the lives of many people in our Republic. I think that when we talk about our socialism, we downplay too much one of its great achievements, namely, as I see it, the educational revolution" ("Ein verregneter Urlaub!"; qtd. in Krenzlin, 59).

17. From the *Französische Zustände,* Artikel VI, Paris, 19 April 1832.

18. See note 4 above.

insubstantiality of those ideals in the first place. In his youth, Erp participated in *Aufbau* efforts to revolutionize the GDR's rural populace and aspired to do cultural work in those backwaters "where the cultural revolution was still revolutionary" (127). Since then, however, his revolutionary ideals have given way to a thoroughly bourgeoisified lifestyle, a "retreat into the comforts of prosperity: home, garden, car" (58).

In light of this apparent political regression, Erp is able to justify his extramarital affair with Broder as a social gain: "That's what made it so hard to judge this affair," he thinks. "It was a boon—for her, for him, for everyone (the kids maybe—maybe!—excepted). *He had awakened from a years-long lethargy*" (80, italics mine). After storming out of his house following an ideological showdown with his antisocialist West German father-in-law, Erp moves into Broder's rather squalid *Hinterhaus* apartment, and his youthful idealism burgeons once again (see fig. 7).[19] Broder, though usually quite critical of Erp's posturings, concedes that he has "shattered" his former bourgeois complacency (134). When Erp and Broder go public with their relationship, even the party seems to agree that this affair has had a positive influence on Erp's political consciousness. Party Secretary Theo Haßler recommends that Erp be reassigned but points out that his leaving will be a great loss for the Berlin library: "I know what we'll lose in him: a comrade who has found a new start through the productive power of love!" (116). Erp's friend Fred Mantek goes even further, arranging a promotion for Erp based precisely on his affair, arguing that his commitment to the relationship shows a "staunchness of character, resolve, and sincerity" that has allowed him to overcome his "inactivity and resignation" (178).

Eventually, however, Erp's true colors begin to show. Annoyed by the privations of Broder's apartment, Erp finds himself longing for the comforts of home and garden on the Spree (176). And when Broder, taking Erp up on his revolutionary rhetoric, tells him that she has requested to be transferred to the country, she does not get the reaction she was expecting. Instead of waxing ecstatic about youthful dreams long deferred, he asks bluntly: "Why did you do that?" (187). This moment reveals to Broder the insufficiency of Erp's transformation:

> Because of course two souls resided, alas, in his breast, which had warred but had not yet defeated each other, and the second, the love-and-activity soul, was still alive and produced pain and genuine objections when the beloved...spoke the awful truth, that his love was not big enough to jump the hedge and fence around the paradisial goal. (188)

Erp's two souls, the bourgeois and the revolutionary, give rise to the guiding allegory of *Buridans Esel* (Buridan's Ass): Erp would be the ass in the sophism (mis)

19. The back-courtyard apartment (*Hinterhauswohnung*) was the traditional and quintessential proletarian dwelling in Berlin.

Figure 7. "Happiness in the *Hinterhaus*." In Herrmann Zschoche's 1980 film adaptation of Günter de Bruyn's novel *Buridans Esel* (Buridan's Ass), Karl Erp (Dieter Mann) looks with disgust on the trappings of his bourgeois life. The caption reads: "About a man who wants to burn his bridges while leaving a gangplank behind." Source: Bundesarchiv [FilmSG1/BArch/25251 *Glück im Hinterhaus*].

attributed to the fourteenth-century philosopher John Buridan. Confronted with two indistinguishable piles of hay, the donkey starves to death because he cannot decide between the two.[20]

Of course, Erp does not starve, even metaphorically, but rather goes back to Elisabeth toward the end of the novel. Here, the novel's far-from-impartial narrative voice reveals the full extent of its preference: "The proper ending for the story would be this: when Buridan's ass finally decided for one of the two piles of hay, both were gone!" (196). After receiving a well-earned rebuke from Haßler, Erp would return to Elisabeth but find no welcome in her home. Eventually, he would spend a gloomy, rainy night in his prized Trabant. "That," we read, "would be the proper ending" (196).

20. G. E. Hughes comments: "[It] seems safe to say that to many generations of students of philosophy [Buridan's] name has brought no more to mind than 'Buridan's ass'—the donkey that starved because it was equidistant between two equally succulent bundles of hay; and yet no one has found this example in any of his writings" (Buridan and Hughes, 1).

But the novel is not finished yet. The narrator picks up the story again: "Since reality seldom has novel endings at the ready and since this report strives for clarification [*Klärung*], not transformation [*Verklärung*], the actual ending is less pretty, less clear-cut, less just" (197). The real ending, according to de Bruyn, could be summed up as follows: "A man returns to his family. The neighbors, friends, colleagues, comrades say: Thank God, finally, what luck! And they call it a moral victory. But the writer asks himself and his reader: Was it really?" (198). In this satirical reversal, the "less pretty, less clear-cut, less just" ending becomes a "moral victory" in the eyes of friends, neighbors, and party—in everyone's eyes, that is, except those of the narrator, and perhaps, by proxy, the reader. On the surface, the criticism implied in this discrepancy is directed at a petit-bourgeois morality that deems the preservation of the nuclear family good a priori, regardless of circumstances or consequences—unless the irony here goes deeper, suggesting a reversal of a reversal. How might this work?

It is tempting, as I have done thus far, to posit Elisabeth and Broder as opposing poles, bourgeois and revolutionary, between which Erp chooses—wrongly. Wolfgang Emmerich, for instance, remarks in his summary of de Bruyn's novel:

> The successful, conformist library director Karl Erp...and his masculine self-confidence are not equal to the revolution that would be necessary to realize his love for his emancipated, clever colleague "Fräulein Broder" in the long term. Spinelessly, he returns to his ostensibly idyllic family life—a "decision" that de Bruyn hardly presents as a triumph of socialist morality, but rather the opposite. (211)

Or as Karin Hirdina summarizes it, "The question—a moral victory?—is developed with great irony. But the irony is not aimed at the fact that love develops, pulls one out of the secure, definite world of habit, activates the best in those affected, makes them ready for a new, a better, life. The irony applies to the characters. Especially Erp" (36). Under closer examination, however, we will find that Erp's personal culpability is less binding than it might at first appear. Here we must remember that the story of Buridan's ass presents not simply a choice to be made, but rather a choice that *cannot* be made: there are no logical criteria by which to distinguish between the two options. This is *not* the choice template of the *Aufbau-* or *Ankunftsroman*—for instance, the *Entscheidung* (decision) between East and West in Anna Seghers's novel of the same name, or Recha's fraught decision between Curt and Nikolaus in Brigitte Reimann's *Ankunft im Alltag*. In fact, Erp's "choice" of the bourgeois lifestyle, the life of the *Spießer* (bourgeois) or *Wohlstandskommunist* (prosperity communist, 103), is already made for him: he is bourgeois not by virtue of a character flaw or a decision wrongly made, but rather by his position of privilege within the existing class structure of the GDR. Seen from this systemic perspective, both Erp's bourgeoisified home life with Elisabeth and his only apparently radical *Hinterhaus* life with Broder are in fact two sides of the same coin.

This complementarity is brought out by a perhaps inadvertent intertextual resonance between Erp's love story and that of the petit-bourgeois "revolutionary" Gottfried Kinkel, as retold in Marx and Engels's satirical pamphlet *Heroes of the Exile.* Kinkel, like Erp, must make a difficult decision: between the clever Johanna Mockel, a romantic revolutionary of his own stamp, and the "gentle, . . . dear, innocent" Sophie Bögehold, a match suggested by his sister (149).[21] Marx and Engels observe:

> Naturally, Gottfried soon began to make "comparisons" . . . between Mockel and his fiancée, but he had "had no time hitherto"—much against his usual habit—"to reflect at all about weddings and marriage." . . . In a word, *he stood like Buridan's ass between the two bundles of hay, unable to decide between them.* (153, italics mine)

In the end, Kinkel makes the opposite choice from Erp: he breaks off his engagement with Bögehold and opts for the radical-intellectual Mockel. Here, though, the joke is on Kinkel for thinking that his amorous posturing constitutes a real revolutionary breakthrough. Marx and Engels's blistering satire makes it clear that whether Kinkel marries Bögehold or Mockel, he is still as laughably bourgeois as before.[22] Given these circumstances, whichever bundle of hay one chooses, the result is the same.

If Erp deserves reprobation, I am suggesting, it is not for abandoning the "revolutionary" path of the *Hinterhaus,* but rather for arrogating it in the first place. This guilt, then, would fall equally on Fräulein Broder—as much a member of the bourgeois intelligentsia as Erp. Through narrative "digressions" depicting the habits and attitudes of Broder's working-class or petit-bourgeois neighbors, the text alerts us to the gap between library and *Hinterhaus.* This dynamic comes into focus when Broder's neighbor, Frau Wöllfin, makes a cameo. "Why all these digressions?" de Bruyn asks. "Certainly not because after all these figures of planner- and leader-literature it would perhaps be an accomplishment to rediscover the old washerwoman" (124). With this sardonic reference to "Planer- und Leiterliteraturgestalten," the narrative voice calls attention to its own participation in shifting the focus of East German culture from the working class to the bourgeoisie.

Against the backdrop of a self-reflexively exclusive planner-and-leader narrative, Erp's attempt to relive his radical youth through an only superficially cross-class love affair seems even less meritorious—and even more ludicrous—than it first appears. Erp's personal revolution, like Kinkel's, is more appearance than essence, more guilty conscience than transformed consciousness. In the end, the

21. Marx and Engels describe Mockel as "a female Kinkel, his romantic alter ego. Only she was harder, smarter, less confused, and thanks to her greater age she had left her youthful illusions behind her" (*Heroes of the Exile,* 150).

22. Ultimately, the polemic of *Heroes of the Exile* locates Kinkel's primary fault not in his romantic choice, nor even in his class of origin, but rather in his conception of history: like his fellow would-be revolutionaries in exile, he fails to see that the reactionary times are wrong for radical social transformation (Marx and Engels, *MEGA,* 794–95).

adjudicating reader is put in the place of Buridan's ass, confronting the forced choice of pseudo-revolution or *embourgeoisement.* The two warring souls of East German public culture—the soul of the *Hinterhaus* and the soul of the "planners and leaders"—are set adrift in the bottomless irony of *Buridans Esel.* Yet where Faust's dual souls cling to the earth and the heavens respectively, the GDR's two souls seem caught in a feedback loop: the latter dreams of becoming the former, the former turns out to be a fantasy of the latter.

"Who else could do it, if not lovers?": *Karen W.*

In many ways, Gerdi Tetzner's 1974 novel, *Karen W.,* constitutes an attempt to circumvent this feedback loop. By traversing the divisions of labor that separate the two spheres, Karen Waldau searches for a stable foundation on which to build her own life and the life of her daughter. Tetzner's novel begins in medias res: "Now, tonight, I have to do it!" the narrator declares (5). She composes a note: *"We've degenerated nicely. Apparently you feel fine. I'm leaving to start over another way"* (6). Taking her young daughter Bettina with her, Karen leaves her life in the city and husband of eight years and moves into her childhood home in the rural village of Osthausen. The grounds for Karen's decision are not immediately clear and throughout the novel remain irreducible to one distinct motive.

A number of critics have interpreted Karen's move as an inaugural act of feminist emancipation and have identified the motivating contradiction in the novel as that between Karen's "roles"—housewife, mother, professional—and her quest for self-knowledge and personal fulfillment. Sonja Hilzinger, for instance, sees Karen's development as a model of "female self-realization" (90), a condition of which is the rejection of preestablished roles. Pairing Karen W. with the eponymous hero of Brigitte Reimann's 1974 novel, *Franziska Linkerhand,* Hilzinger explains that "both women fight in their own way for freedom from the confining roles they have learned and internalized through the socialization of family and community." Hilzinger goes on to describe "Karen's rebellion against the alienating, deforming everyday of the workplace, against the masculine standard that leaves no room for self-fulfillment and happiness" (125).[23]

Although it cannot be denied that *Karen W.* engages in a strong critique of calcified social roles—particularly gender roles—I would suggest that such a reading

23. Further proponents of a subjectivist, role-based interpretation of *Karen W.* include Sara Lennox: "*Karen W.* depicts problems in the professional and personal fulfillment of women from a female perspective" (236); Dorothee Schmitz: "In Tetzner's novel, bourgeoise women's roles are lived out again, but in the end such a life proves no longer possible, at least not for the protagonist. . . . So she rejects the fundamental orientation of her female role-models and searches for living possibilities that are adequate to her individuality" (170); and Jochen Staadt: "[Tetzner] emphasizes . . . the search for subjective self-realization. The heroine of the novel does not just break with her husband, but also with her career and her social position, in order to keep her life hopes from suffocating under the bondage of social roles" (237).

contributes less to our understanding of the novel than might first appear. Indeed, Tetzner's novel nestles all too comfortably into this interpretive framework. Considering her friend Linda's career-driven life, for instance, Karen thinks: "I don't want a life like Linda's. Where is my own model?" (207). In the course of the novel, Karen considers a number of *Muster*—"models, roles"—but ultimately rejects them all, having decided that self-fulfillment must be sought outside any predefined spheres of activity. The straightforward critique of roles, in other words, recapitulates the viewpoint of the novel but sheds little light on the underlying tensions that drive the plot and determine its narrative arc.

Without diminishing the importance of the personal, the following analysis will focus on the social, exploring the implications of Karen's actions for the vision of society—actual and potential—put forth in Tetzner's novel. In fact, Karen herself casts her decision to move to Osthausen in precisely this light. Considering her conflicted relationship with her own father, Karen imagines how Bettina, her daughter, might judge her parenting:

> But Bettina now, in six years she'll be as old as I was when I left home.... What could she charge me with? The betrayal of our breakthrough through careers and the dictatorship of consumption...wait! You can't lump me in with that part of my generation; I took off when you were eight so as not to belong to that group, to set an example. (168)

Here, anticipating Bettina's future accusations, Karen gives a clear account of her intentions in moving to Osthausen; in her family, at least, the sins of the parents will not be visited on the daughter: Bettina will not inherit her parents' "betrayal" of their revolutionary "breakthrough."

A closer look at the terms of this "betrayal" reveal why the circumstances of Karen's life in the city demand such a radical break. After studying law at the university, Karen embarks on an upwardly mobile career in the legal profession. Like Karl Erp, she begins her career with revolutionary ideals, agitating among the GDR's rural farmers for collectivization: "To change a centuries-old mode of production in a few weeks! Unheard-of things were happening in this country, and I was there!" (48). After a while, however, she finds that law lacks the interpersonal connection, the "human warmth," she had expected. "Life happens outside of the courtroom," she says (213). She eventually abandons her career path to become a stay-at-home mother. Yet the life of a housewife also becomes meaningless for Karen: "My daily activities lost their meaning, you know? I became a stranger to myself" (34).

Karen explains this development partly in terms of her changing relationship with her husband, Peters. Earlier in their relationship, she says, their partnership had been based on an exchange of ideas and opinions. Over the years, though, he has become more and more dogmatic and supercilious. As a professor he reveals himself to be a rank opportunist, the kind of teacher who would (and did) change his whole pedagogy overnight to conform to the worldview of a new boss (33). The

new Peters has a new circle of friends, successful academics whose elitist attitudes repel Karen: "They live in their calculated circle, these people, and pronounce judgments about this and that...I lose myself in the shuffle and become a stranger to myself, I can't do anything about it, you know?" (157). Karen is appalled not only at the bourgeois worldview of Peters's friends, but also at her own bourgeoisified, consumerist lifestyle:

> I walk across the parquet floor between all the chair legs and plant pots as big as buckets. I lived here... where? Between the *Schrankwand* and the *Kastensesseln* from some furniture showroom we ate dinners and entertained guests.[24] Any young woman could have lived here. Where am I? At least in the bedroom.... No, these carefully made beds with the senseless runner around the bottom belong to some solid married couple, but not to me and him. For whom and for what eternity did I collect all this junk around us? For guests? For Bettina? (93)

The common thread in these characterizations of life in the city (designated as "L." in the novel) is a profound sense of alienation—vocational, social, and personal. Working as a law clerk, Karen feels distanced from the lives of others and sapped of her own vitality; in her life with Peters and her interactions with his circle, she feels distanced from herself; having assembled a house full of comforts and luxuries, Karen finds she no longer has a place there.

What are we to make of all this alienation? Is it a subjective condition—an incidental "feeling"—or does it derive from the material circumstances of Karen's life? Dorothee Schmitz suggests the latter, applying a Marxist conception of alienated labor both to Karen's domestic disaffection ("The life of a housewife confines her, alienates her from herself and her environment" [70]) and to her vocational estrangement ("Karen W. suffers the most from a loss of the emotional-sensual connection to work. The lack of connections to other people creates feelings of objectification and dehumanization" [61]).[25]

At a theoretical level, the claim that exclusively domestic labor could be alienated—in the Marxist sense—should not cause much surprise. Feminist criticism has consistently emphasized the disparity created by a division of labor between wage earners and homemakers—an unequal partnership analogous to the dependence of the worker on his or her employer. Michèle Barrett, for instance, points out that

> capitalism not only took over and entrenched the differentiation of tasks, but divided the workforce itself into wage earners and those dependent upon the wage of others. Capitalism did not create domestic labour, or the "feminine" areas of wage labour, but

24. The *Schrankwand* (built-in shelving unit) and *Kastensessel* (armchair) were fashionable and ubiquitous in GDR homes of the 1970s.

25. Marxist alienation, in Schmitz's gloss, is "a reduction of the human being in the labor process" (60).

> it did create a set of social relations in which pre-existing divisions were not only reproduced but solidified in different relations in the wage labour system. (182)

Even within noncapitalist countries like the GDR, Barrett notes, fundamental inequalities remain.[26] Though the exact relationship between domestic work and wage labor is a matter of great debate, it seems legitimate to claim that exploited labor-power within the home is no less alienated than comparable work outside the home.[27]

And yet, though we are not obligated to take her word for it, we should not overlook the fact that Karen directly addresses and denies the supposition that domestic work is tantamount to alienated labor. In a letter to Peters, she writes:

> The formulas that say that a woman shrivels up as a person between wash-bucket and stove and doesn't really work when she's only a wife and mother because her life—seen from outside—doesn't have any economic or otherwise quantifiable purpose—I'm honestly past such formulas, please believe me, it's not that at all, not even in a hidden corner of my heart. (29)

We can infer from this denial that Karen would not characterize her alienation as intrinsic to domestic labor as such, but rather as arising from the specific circumstances of her home life. This impression is compounded by the fact that Karen is equally discontented when, in the early days of their marriage, she and Peters occupy the opposite domestic roles. While she works as a notary public, he stays home to cook, clean, and take care of Bettina. Yet where housework had merely left her unsatisfied, this arrangement begins to produce physical symptoms of repulsion: "My revulsion toward judicial categories was no longer to be channeled into rational objections and began to take embarrassing forms: in meetings I would suddenly fall out of my chair, or I would throw up on irreplaceable documents" (205). Is this repugnant work, as Schmitz suggests, alienated?

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,* Marx characterizes alienation as a product of the objectification of the worker, the exploitation of his labor power, and the appropriation of the product of his labor by the property owner: "The realization of labour is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labour appears as a *loss of reality* for the worker, objectification as *loss of and bondage to the object,* and appropriation as *estrangement,* as *alienation*" (Marx, *Early Writings,* 324). It would be absurd to claim that Karen's high-level career exploits her labor power in the sense described by Marx. Far more, her profession

26. "The tenacity and intractability of gender ideology, and the failure of socialist societies to socialize domestic labour and childcare to any significant degree, must lead to the conclusion that these processes are not restricted to capitalist systems of production" (186).

27. For an account of one such debate, see Maxine Molyneux, "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate." Barret draws attention to Molyneux's useful summary (173).

would make her one of the "planners and leaders," the East German elite. In fact, her elevated social position is precisely the problem both in her home life and in her career trajectory. From the "daily ordering, assessing, judging" (204–5) required by her leadership position to the accumulated "junk" of her middle-class home, Karen's very privilege—her *embourgeoisement*—seems to be at the root of her alienation.

This intriguing reversal of the Marxist paradigm, an inversion by which class privilege appears to cause social and self-estrangement, can be found in a number of texts from this period. The logic at work here is similar to the redoubled *ressentiment* described by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious.* In a chapter on the novels of George Gissing, Jameson turns Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment,* the slavish resentment of one's masters, on its head:

> What is most striking about the theory of *ressentiment* is its unavoidably autoreferential structure. In *Demos,* certainly, the conclusion is inescapable: Gissing resents Richard [the novel's militant working-class hero], and what he resents most is the latter's *ressentiment.* We are perhaps now far enough distant from this particular ideologeme to draw a corollary: namely, that this ostensible "theory" [i.e., Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment*] is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation, at the apparently quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat. It may therefore be concluded that the theory of *ressentiment,* wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of *ressentiment.* (202)

This autoreferential *ressentiment,* the resentment of resentment, can be seen in nearly every "planner-and-leader" narrative. For instance, it is behind the recurring trope identified by cultural historian Jochen Staadt as "the loneliness of the planner-leader": "They worry about their workers, while the latter only in exceptional cases show any concern for their harried leaders, upon whose shoulders rests the weight of broad economic, scientific-technical, and moral responsibilities" (81–82). The roots of worker-party estrangement, in other words, appear to reside in the workers' failure to appreciate the selfless efforts of the party leadership on their behalf. For Staadt, this estrangement would constitute an inversion of the actual conditions—a transposition, like the one described above, from privilege to alienation:

> Taken together, these factors account for the loneliness and solitary struggle of the heroes: as representatives of social progress, they still remain separated from the class to whom this progress is guaranteed because the leap over the shadow of their real prototypes (privileged state functionaries . . .) comes only at the price of a blatant distortion of real conditions. (84)

In *Karen W.,* the mutual *ressentiment* between "planners and leaders" and workers in the GDR can best be seen in Karen's relationship with her neighbor, Paul

Werlich. Karen's split with Werlich, the father of her first boyfriend, occurred just before she began studying law at the university. Home from boarding school, Karen visits Werlich to confront him about his continued obstinacy in resisting agricultural collectivization. In the ensuing argument, she accuses him of being a selfish petit bourgeois, and he calls her a "stuck-up and pigheaded girl" who, despite her education, has forgotten where her bread comes from (Tetzner, 69). This altercation is the essence of mutual *ressentiment:* Werlich resents Karen's presumption of knowing what is best for him, while Karen resents Werlich's resentment, made manifest in his stubborn refusal to recognize the benefits of communal farming.

Karen's biography illustrates the double-edged nature of the GDR's emphasis on the upward mobility of its working class. On the one hand, Karen's opportunity to attend a college-preparatory high school—as the first in her village to do so—typifies one of the real achievements of East German socialism. The party's efforts to make higher education readily available to workers and their children represented a concerted attempt to address the problem of class at the level of reproduction. As we have seen in the previous section, however, such initial mobility does not spell the end of class stratification. In fact, as Peter Zimmermann points out, to a certain degree it actually highlights the inequalities of the social system: "The socialist version of 'rags to riches' refutes exactly what it wants to prove, for this kind of ascent is only possible in a society in which social hierarchies have been largely maintained" (210).

This contradiction activates the utopian impulse behind Karen W.'s remotion. In leaving her bourgeoisified life in L. and moving to Osthausen, Karen redresses her drift away from her agrarian, working-class origins, traversing each of the divisions of labor represented by her personal trajectory: physical versus mental labor, agricultural versus urban production, domestic work versus work outside the home.[28] In Osthausen, Karen learns again "where her bread comes from," and even takes part in the process of agricultural production: to make ends meet, she gets a job picking potatoes on the local LPG (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft,* a communal farm). She literalizes this learning process when she visits an egg factory near Osthausen. Noticing the distinctive packaging of these eggs, she thinks:

> I remembered when I first saw this silvery packaging on the shelf. I asked the cashier about this new kind of egg The women standing around jumped in: those are the eggs of chickens that never see the light of day, that never go outside, those aren't real eggs! At home I carefully tasted the yolk; tasted like real egg yolk. A few months later one took the silver packet off the shelf and put it in the shopping bag with butter and cheese. One didn't ask oneself: Why are there fresh eggs in February? One has forgotten that seven years before . . . there were only cold-storage eggs in the winter. (224–25)

28. For a more thorough examination of divisions of labor in *Karen W.,* see Staadt, 237–49.

In circumstances updated for the age of the factory farm, Karen discovers where eggs come from. This visit to the egg factory represents a twofold reconciliation. On the one hand, it symbolically reclaims her agrarian roots. By overcoming the urbanite's indifference to the origin of his or her food, Karen would shift her allegiance from the side of the consumer to the side of the producer.[29] At the same time, her tour of the factory represents a literal bid for rapprochement with Werlich: she has come to the factory to find him a job.

If Tetzner's novel ended here, it would be a fairly straightforward back-to-production narrative. Having decisively rejected her *embourgeoisement,* Karen would settle in Osthausen and work on the LPG. She would continue to live with Dieter Steinert, the veterinarian who had rented a room in her house and with whom she has gradually become more intimate. Her daughter would have the childhood she herself had left behind. Yet just when it seems that this provisional household might become permanent, might even increase, Karen balks. "I could live here with Dieter," she thinks (235), then continues:

> Why not have a child with Dieter? A child is a child and a new beginning! We would live well together. We would give each other warmth and security. And one day I would not love him less than he loved me... what good would it do to ask for more? I lost what I had before. I'm turning thirty. I shouldn't want everything anymore.
>
> And yet I blushed in the face of Dieter's fervent caresses like a liar. (236)

Karen suddenly decides to return to L., where she intends to renew her connection with Peters. "How long can one talk oneself out of a longing?" she asks by way of explanation (237).

Why does Karen return to Peters? Which is also to ask, why were they together in the first place? Their first real encounter is occasioned by a student hearing at the university in 1957. Peters stands accused of counterrevolution on account of his radical writings: "If we believe the magic formulas of the politicians and social scientists," he had written, "we have already overcome war and existential scarcity. I mean, the revolutions of many centuries cannot be finished with social changes. The most important step begins there: the freeing of the human being as a personality!" (111). Karen is intrigued by Peters's attitude and ideas, which are so out of keeping with the dogmatism of the times. "What kind of time and place was that?" Karen thinks later. "I was always getting tangled up for or against something, and every choice included the unchosen flip-side. Was there never a perfect, round yes? Not even in love?" (113).

Theirs is a relationship, then, based on the utopian ambitions of post-Stalinist reform. Peters is looking for "the freedom of the human being as a personality,"

29. At a more literal level, this process begins with her work on the LPG and culminates with her job at a similar egg factory near L.

Karen "a perfect, round yes." When she returns to Peters at the end of the book, Karen hopes to renew her earlier ideals and aspirations. "Consistent, wholehearted openness and trust!" Karen thinks on another occasion. "Who else could do it, if not lovers?" (120).

In this respect, the novel's two utopian impulses seem to be mutually contradictory: Karen's optimistic appraisal of love's potential contrasts with the disappointing results of her experiment in Osthausen. Thus, Staadt argues, *Karen W.* seems suspended between disillusionment and hope:

> Disillusionment with a society that can offer no general perspective on the possibility of overcoming fundamental social contradictions (the divisions of manual and intellectual labor, city and country). Hope in the readiness of the individual for personal revolt and noncompliance. This hope expresses itself in the encouragement to break out of preestablished roles, to refuse to adapt and subordinate oneself. But since this hope does not find itself born up by social progress, this literary anticipation of concrete utopia must find its expression in individual emotional depth and sensibility, the social unfolding of which remains unrepresentable. (253)

As much as Karen seems to be able to slough off and take on new roles more or less at will, one might ask whether her fellow potato-pickers in Osthausen have the same palette of choices available to them.[30] They are well aware of the class divide that separates them from Karen, as we learn when Karen defends the much-maligned potato-harvesting machines:

> "The first machines are always imperfect," I said. "The first cars were too, but in ten years…" I don't get any further. "Whaaat? Maybe the cows will believe that! Or are you going to eat bread this winter that'll be baked in ten years? You're one of them!" shouts Erna Meink. Everyone gangs up on me. They can finally unload their fury on a city slicker. (52–53)

Karen, it seems, has not made the transition from city to country, from intellectual to manual labor, as smoothly as she had hoped. Her planner-and-leader optimism and citified impracticality expose her to Erna Meink's *ressentiment,* which is every bit as virulent as Werlich's. Here, however, the foreman jumps to her defense: "She's standing here in the same muck as you!" (53). The logic of this retort mirrors the reasoning behind the Bitterfeld Way, which hoped to overcome social

30. To follow this line of thought, one could look to the debates within Western (Anglo-American) feminism in the late 1970s and 1980s over the role of class in the experience of gender, and vice versa. In this respect, East German feminist works were in a curious position: though necessarily materialist-Marxist in outlook, they could not adequately address the problem of class as a problem of women's emancipation. If the question could be raised at all, the available answers were limited.

stratification by enjoining writers, artists, and intellectuals to "stand in the same muck" as the workers.

Karen's decision to return to L., however, gives the lie to this "trading places" strategy of class convergence, for the experience of class is not entirely localizable to the production process but rather mediates all of one's attachments to the social environment. This view of class would be closer to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of a class habitus, "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails" (101). According to Bourdieu, even the most apparently personal and arbitrary judgments of taste are in fact practices of class and as such are conditioned by one's familial, educational, and cultural background.

From this perspective, the driving conflict of *Karen W.* becomes the struggle between opposing modes of class habitus. In light of this internal tension, Karen's sojourn in Osthausen begins to take clearer form. The initial impulse to move to Osthausen arises from the friction generated between Karen's proletarian origins and the bourgeois class habitus demanded by her life in L. Once in Osthausen, however, the poles of this conflict reverse: now it is Karen's residual *embourgeoisement* that rankles, alienating her from her LPG coworkers and leaving her bored and frustrated with small-town life. While Karen is eventually able to adjust to most aspects of life in Osthausen, one barrier remains: she's left her heart in L.

Through this final twist of the novel's romantic plot, class habitus demands its due. The same social forces that raised Karen out of the working class—in particular, the privileges conferred by higher education—continue to draw her to Peters and her life in L. This is the "longing" she cannot talk herself out of. By this route, and in light of Karen's final decision in favor of Peters, we reach a conclusion quite different from the one the novel intends. In the end, Karen's rustication has contributed less to renewing her working-class ties than to breaking them. She has come to Osthausen, we might even conclude, precisely for the latter purpose. If the chief hindrance to Karen's well-being in L. is the residual class habitus of her upbringing, then it becomes possible to recast her return to Osthausen as a bid to remove this impediment. This process occurs through the resolution of her clash with Werlich.

That Werlich somehow impinges on Karen's happiness is suggested by a passage just before her visit to the egg factory. "Somewhere behind that dark hill," Karen thinks, looking out the window, "off to the east, Peters is walking through illuminated big-city streets, sits with friends, eats, sleeps, works—lives. And I can't get away from Werlich and can't live out my life" (212). Karen finally "gets away" from Werlich in the last pages of the novel. Having found him a job as a technician at the egg factory, she stops by his house to tell him about it. When she launches into a detailed description of his new opportunities and responsibilities, however, he cuts her off. In a drunken, paranoid rant, Werlich makes clear that he wants neither her job nor her sympathy.

In the context of the redoubled *ressentiment* theory outlined above, this conversation would absolve Karen of her culpability in the feedback loop of resentment.

She has tried to lead her stubborn neighbor into the Scientific-Technical Revolution. If he refuses her assistance, he has only himself to blame and no more right to resent her for her foresight than she has grounds to feel guilty for it. Or so she reasons, and returns to L. to start over with Peters. Ultimately, the reconciliation in question is as much with her own biography as with Werlich. In justifying her final rejection of Werlich, she also authorizes herself to enjoy the privileges of her well-earned—and socially necessary—middle-class status. If we generalize out of this logic, we discover a familiar ideological strategy, namely that of the "perspective of the planner and leader." In the forward march of progress, this is the class that sees the farthest; it therefore requires the highest cultural standing. When Karen W. decides finally to embrace her social role as a "planner and leader," she also validates the cultural dominance of the East German elite and secures the conditions of possibility for an established East German middle class.

Buridans Esel and *Karen W.* lead the reader to rather pessimistic conclusions about the possibility of overcoming class stratification within GDR society. *Karen W.*'s initial back-to-production enthusiasm and concluding subjectivist utopianism reveal themselves to be progressive facades over the novel's ideological raison d'être: to help clear the way for an expanding bourgeoisie of "planners and leaders." *Buridans Esel* takes a more explicitly skeptical position, presenting the allure of middle-class comfort and the temptation of pseudo-revolution as halves of the same whole. If *Buridans Esel* and *Karen W.* portray failed attempts at proletarization, the two texts discussed below are more optimistic about the durability of the protagonists' break with bourgeois complacency. Although *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* and *Es geht seinen Gang* share the basic romantic plot of the previous two novels, they achieve wholly different results.

"Paul is different from Paula": *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*

Heiner Carow's 1972 film, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (The Legend of Paul and Paula), may be the best-known East German love story of all. The most popular production in DEFA's history, Carow's film continues to enjoy cult status—so much so that Berlin's Börse cinema ran *Paul und Paula* several times weekly for eight years before closing in 2003 ("Wie soll das nur ohne 'Die Legende von Paul und Paula' weitergehen?" 23). Many reviewers have attributed the film's popularity to a universally and perennially engaging love story. In the words of a 2003 review from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* "The film has retained its cult status. Young and old, from West and East, [even] people who did not experience the GDR are drawn into this story of a love that was stronger than communism" (Schwartz).

Like many classic love stories, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* constructs a highly hermetic romantic scenario—a love story so fiercely independent that a

viewer prone to Cold War cliché might call it "stronger than communism"—and challenges it with a similarly formidable social or economic impediment. Thanks to its relative autarky within the film's narrative economy, Paul and Paula's romance can navigate the perilous straits of class affiliation in "actually existing socialism."[31] These lovers accomplish the leap that was foreclosed in *Buridans Esel:* between the world of the "planners and leaders" and that of the *Hinterhaus.*[32] Yet the strain of doing so takes its toll; the problem of class ultimately shapes the tragic arc of the film's romantic plot.

After the film's title sequence, we see Paula, dressed in the brash height of 1970s fashion, exiting her apartment building, a crumbling Berlin *Altbau.* Paul, similarly stylish in Beatles-inspired hair and a leather jacket, steps out of a similar building down the street. As he walks past Paula, each mumbles hello and does a double take. This chance encounter is followed by another near miss at the Berlin fairgrounds, where Paula goes home with Colly, a carousel operator, and Paul with Ines, a shooting-gallery attendant. Paula lives with Colly until, returning from the hospital with his newborn child, she catches him in flagrante delicto with another woman. Paula kicks Colly out of her apartment and continues on as a single mother, struggling with the double burden of breadwinning and caregiving. Meanwhile, Paul marries Ines and begins a life trajectory more like Erp's or Karen W.'s: after finishing at the university, he becomes a high-ranking ministry official and moves into a posh new apartment building across the street from Paula's. In accordance with a logic by now familiar, Paul's bourgeois luxuries are bought at the price of an increasingly intolerable family life, and when he returns unexpectedly from his two years of army service, Paul finds Ines in bed with her lover. Though Paul and Ines patch things up, their marriage seems doomed. Ines remains as uncultured and materialistic as when they first met. The couple's spoiled son (who receives two identical new bicycles for Christmas) and Ines's parents, who are carnival barkers and inveterate capitalists, round out the picture.

Paul and Paula meet at a dance club, both seeking respite from their home lives. After a night together, they begin a tentative love-affair. The careerist in Paul equivocates about his commitment to the relationship, blaming the moral guidelines of his job. Paula, however, does not want to hear his excuses. As she covers and uncovers her ears, the film's sound cuts in and out. "My wife and I," Paul stammers, "that . . . she'll want a divorce right away. She's just waiting for a reason and I . . . can't afford a divorce in my position. There's no regulation against it, but that's

31. "Actually existing socialism" (*real existierender Sozialismus*) was the official term for the East German political system. It is used here (as it was in the GDR and still is in postcommunist scholarship, albeit sometimes ironically in the latter) to distinguish between the lived experience of the socialist order and socialist theory.

32. Joshua Feinstein also calls attention to the connection between Paul's class position and the preoccupations of East German public culture of the time: "Paul's position makes him precisely the *Leiter und Planer* (leader and planner) type celebrated in other DEFA films of the same era" (207).

how it is. They just tell me: Educate her!" (48). Paul's colleagues have a simple solution for the education gap in Paul's marriage: "Educate her!" This advice echoes the party's broader strategy for ameliorating social friction in the GDR: with the democratization of educational opportunity, the party reasoned, class difference would simply wither away.

Instead of his wife, Paul tries to educate his mistress by taking Paula, against her mild protestations, to a classical concert. By the end of the first movement, however, the tables are turned. Moved to tears by the music, Paula stands up and applauds, much to Paul's consternation. Eventually the entire audience joins in, inspired by Paula's untaught, authentic enthusiasm. Surprised and pleased, the soloist takes a bow. The next day, Paula takes Paul on an excursion of her own, an elaborate flight of psychedelic fantasy. In this justifiably famous scene, Paul and Paula float down a river on her bed—he wearing a ruffled tuxedo shirt, she a wedding dress—while Paula's extended family looks on. In *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema,* Joshua Feinstein reads this moment as an encounter between two modes of temporality:

> Inherent in this phantasmagorical image is nothing less than an alternative understanding of time that contrasted markedly with the regime's transcendent vision of history. Here Paul, who as a family father and a loyal career man embodies conventional virtue, finds himself unable to resist the vital forces that Paula represents. If the premise of his lifestyle up to now has been the promise of steady material advancement in exchange for discipline, then she stands for an understanding of life emphasizing cyclical renewal rather than endless horizons, tradition instead of progress. Thus Paul's vision is organized around a wedding, the rite of passage most closely associated with genealogical replication. (209)

At her wedding, Paula literally introduces Paul into the continuity of proletarian tradition: "This is Paul!" she says to her family. "I also have a son!" (Plenzdorf, 56). That she mentions her son but not her daughter underscores the fact that this is a question of symbolic lineage—apparently patrilineage. Paula comes from a long line of bargemen, as she tells Paul in the previous scene:

> *[Paul] indicates the portrait of a stout old man in an oval frame that hangs in Paula's room. The man is wearing a sailor's uniform.*
>
> Paul: Seadog, no?
>
> Paula: Seadog?—We're rivermen! I was born on the "Paula." Six hundred tons—or nearly. But the part about the six hundred tons is true. All women and all barges are called Paula in our family…
>
> Paul: So riverdog. And now?
>
> Paula: Nothing. No men left in the family. Paul? Let's buy a barge! (52–53)

Now, with a raucous marriage ceremony aboard the barge "Paula," the family binds Paul to their line—actually draping heavy anchor chains over the couple.

Unsettled, perhaps, by the intensity of his connection to Paula—or perhaps by its implications for his career—Paul stays away for a few days, then makes it clear that for him the affair is over. "We can stay friends," he suggests. In the next scene Paula, visibly depressed, yells at her children for pestering her and sends them away with money to go to the movies. We see the children running toward the street, then hear squealing brakes. After the death of her son, Paula is inconsolable. She goes to work but otherwise withdraws from society completely. When Paul comes by her apartment, she turns him away: "You're right, Paul. What I want won't work. It had to happen this way" (68). Having given up on love, Paula begins to entertain the advances of Herr Saft, an elderly, well-to-do entrepreneur who has been wooing her unsuccessfully for years. A marriage to Saft would ensure a comfortable lifestyle and a secure future for her and her daughter. The trade-off for this security would be, if not happiness, certainly sexual desire: Paula tells her obstetrician she no longer needs birth control pills. "I'm getting married soon," she explains. "He's older, you see" (78).

Meanwhile, Paul has realized that he loves Paula after all. Although she refuses to speak to him, he camps out in front of her door and even follows her on an outing with Herr Saft. Finally, after he has missed a week of work, Paul's coworkers come to fetch him. Clean-shaven and wearing a new suit, Paul returns home to Ines with flowers, chocolates, and champagne, as well as a new bicycle for his son. It seems that this might become a remarriage narrative after all. Perhaps Paul, like Erp, will choose the path of comfort and career over life in the *Hinterhaus.* Back at home, Paul breaks out the champagne and sweet-talks Ines: "Let's drink to your beauty," he says. Suddenly he begins laughing, opens the closet door, and hauls out Ines's lover, who has been hiding there all along. "Let's do this another way," he says to them. "Another way entirely, colleagues!" (83). With that, the possibility of reconciliation with Ines collapses, and *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* diverges from the route taken by *Buridans Esel* and *Karen W.* Paul strides purposefully across the street and into Paula's building. When she does not answer his knock, he rings a neighbor's doorbell and requests an axe. The neighbor, who has hitherto glared with disapprobation at any goings-on in the stairwell, gladly hands over a massive woodsman's axe. As Paul batters down the door, Paula's elderly neighbors crowd around, shouting encouragement—an audience of well-wishers to match the throng of revelers at the barge wedding, most of whom were also of Paula's grandfather's generation.

Through a dramatic act of "mock chivalry" (Feinstein, 207), Paul turns his back on "planner-and-leader" *embourgeoisement* and interpolates himself into Paula's line. As we have seen in *Buridans Esel* and *Karen W.,* however, the initial *Aufbruch* (break, departure) alone does not constitute a revolutionary break with prevailing conditions. Significant change in this respect must be abiding, which is also to say, it must be reproducible. If Paul is to be inserted into the continuity of proletarian culture,

the line must continue through and beyond him. Given this emphasis on lineage, it is not surprising that, to conclude the "legend," Paul and Paula would have a child together. Despite the near-fatal complications she experienced with the birth of her son, and against the grave warnings of her obstetrician, Paula insists that she wants a child with Paul. In the next scene, she descends into the darkness of a subway station. A sonorous voice-over declares: "Paula did not survive the birth of the child" (87).

The abrupt tragedy, even violence, of the film's ending can be read as symptomatic of unresolved anxiety in the film, of lingering doubts that disrupt the smooth resolution of the plot.[33] We might look for such anxiety in the film's underlying fantasy of the proletarization—or re-proletarization—of GDR culture in the 1970s. Like the other texts analyzed in this chapter, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* responds to the GDR's increasingly pronounced class stratification and the growing hegemony of "planner-and-leader" culture by envisioning a scenario of class convergence through downward mobility. Where *Buridans Esel* and *Karen W.* cast doubt on the endurance of the protagonists' déclassé experiment, however, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* sustains the new arrangement even into the next generation. The film's final shot is of Paul sleeping in Paula's bed with three children: Paula's daughter, Paul's son with Ines, and Paul's son with Paula.

Yet why does Paula have to be absent from this scene? How can we make sense of her death in light of the reading proposed here? In the film's internal logic, Paula's death is related to the leitmotif of destruction and renewal that runs through the film. This motif is most clearly captured in the demolition scenes that frame the narrative. At the beginning and end of the film we see footage of houses imploding, while the Puhdys (East Germany's Led Zeppelin) sing Ecclesiastes: "Jegliches hat seine Zeit / Steine sammeln, Steine zerstreuen" (For everything there is a season / A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together") (9, 86). The script tells us that the final house to fall is Paula's, "the last old house on Paul and Paula's street" (87). According to Feinstein, the opening demolition sequence "efficiently establishes" one of the film's main themes, "the cyclical nature of human existence" (206). As he goes on to say, however, the endless replacement of old with new is not presented uncritically in Carow's film:

> [The] film's attitude towards progress as expressed in the ideological reinscription of urban space is at best ambivalent. Indeed, if anything, the lifestyle and the comfortable proletarian sociability that Paula represents appear threatened, an impression

33. h. sander and r. schlesier see this violence as a clear sign of the film's misogyny: "paula, the emotional, ambivalent woman-child finally has paul all to her self and can let her maternal instinct run wild again. she makes paul into the father of her third child, filled with the will-to-victimhood of the loving woman, since she knows she won't survive the birth. . . . paula's *liebestod* as self-sacrifice for a child from her beloved man is a fitting ending for this 'legend'" (22–23). Despite their overindulgent sarcasm and unsubtle argumentation, sander and schlesier make an important point: in Paula's maternal self-sacrifice, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* falls all too easily into an age-old "patriarchal cult of the mother" (38).

> heightened by premonitions of her premature death throughout the film. Arguably, the picture is ultimately about preserving what Paula embodies against the relentless pressures of supposed progress. (210–11)

Yet, while *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is concerned with preserving the proletarian tradition embodied by Paula, the resolution of the film's narrative of class convergence also depends upon her disappearance; Paul's insertion into the lineage of the East German proletariat can endure only if the trace of difference that would exclude him from this lineage is removed. Just before the barge wedding scene, Paula and Paul discuss the question of difference as such:

> PAULA: Can you explain to me what an inequality [*Ungleichung*] is? My [daughter] asked a little while ago. Do you think I knew? Never learned that. One equals two?
> PAUL: Nonsense. One is smaller than two. That's an inequality.
> PAULA: Everyone knows that.
> PAUL: I'm bigger than you.
> PAULA: Everyone can see that.
> PAUL: You're different from me.
> PAULA: Of course! Where would we even start with each other otherwise?!
> PAUL: Be serious. Inequalities are…
> PAULA: I am. Very serious. Paul is different from Paula, particularly in certain…
> *Paul covers her mouth.* (Plenzdorf, 58)

Where Paula is interested here in the "little difference" of gender, Paul wants to focus on inequality: greater than, less than. In the latter sense, the governing inequality in this scene is (formal) knowledge: Paul, with his college education, sets out to teach Paula mathematics. Given this imbalance, we can imagine Paul and Paula's life together in terms of a familiar narrative, one in which a married couple from different educational and social backgrounds find these differences more difficult to negotiate than they had planned. In short, we would be right back where we started. The fantasy of proletarization at work in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* can be maintained only by erasing the mark of difference that would give the lie to this vision of class convergence. The gap between the culture of the "planners and leaders" and that of the *Hinterhaus,* the film seems to suspect, is too wide to be bridged by love alone, however legendary. This symptomatic anxiety would help to account for the violence with which the plot casts Paula out, and the unequivocal finality with which Paul supplants her in the film's social universe.

"A typical GDR bourgeois": *Es geht seinen Gang*

Erich Loest's 1978 novel, *Es geht seinen Gang, oder Mühen in unserer Ebene* (It Runs Its Course, or Struggles at Our Level), presents one of the 1970s' most provocative

and involved literary explorations of the East German class system. The protagonist of Loest's novel is Wolfgang Wülff, a midlevel engineer at a washing-machine factory. He and his wife, Jutta, live in a *Neubau* apartment building in the upscale "Oktober" district of Leipzig. Wolfgang feels out of place in this posh neighborhood. As the son of a metal cutter he is, as he repeats throughout the novel, an *Arbeiterkind.* Like Karl Erp, Wolfgang married into his bourgeois lifestyle: Jutta, the daughter of an industrialist, brought 43,576.56 marks into the marriage, as Wolfgang meticulously records (54). He feels much more comfortable, he tells us, in the working-class neighborhood where his mother lives:

> I knew my way around in this neighborhood, I could talk to the people in any house, could sit at any table in a bar and say: I was a toolmaker, now I'm an engineer. Toolmaker is the king of all metalworking jobs, and engineer is so close to worker that every worker knows enough engineers to have a sense of it. If I were to say, I'm a historian or a doctor, it would be different. (28)

Significantly, there are no such bars near Wolfgang's new home. Instead of frequenting bars, the residents of the "Oktober" district drink Bulgarian "Hemus" wine in the comfort of their homes.

Though he misses the familiar sociability of his mother's neighborhood, Wolfgang is quite aware of the privileges that have been afforded him: "[I] found again that I had it good, attractive wife and new apartment and a clever child... I lived in a *Neubau,* was an engineer" (30). Though hardly at the top of his career ladder, Wolfgang is far from the bottom. As his mother succinctly puts it, "Just be happy you're not on the assembly line" (62). Like Karen W., Wolfgang feels uncomfortably suspended between classes. Amid the bourgeois comforts of the "Oktober" district he longs for the gritty familiarity of his mother's neighborhood, yet from the perspective of the laborer, he is part of the managerial class, a "tie-wearer" and "briefcase-carrier" (192).

Adding to this friction, Jutta is pressuring him to take courses to become a higher-ranking *Diplomingenieur* (graduate engineer). She insists that the money and the status are not at issue, but rather the principle. It is his duty, she says, to make the most of the opportunities he has been given—he, like Karen W., was able to attend a college-preparatory *Erweiterte Oberschule* (Extended High School) (55).

As Wolfgang explains it, his unwillingness to become a true "planner and leader" goes deeper than laziness or complacency. He traces his reluctance to a formative and traumatic encounter with state power: as a teenager, Wolfgang got caught up in the Leipzig Beat riots of 1965.[34] When the police broke up the Leuschnerplatz demonstration, Wolfgang was attacked by a police officer and bitten by

34. For more on the Leipzig Beat riots, spontaneous demonstrations by young, frustrated rock-and-roll fans, see chapter 2, p. 86.

a dog. This, Wolfgang explains to Jutta, his friends, his mother, and the reader, is the real reason that he eschews any position of power. In one formulation of this rationale, Wolfgang states: "I didn't want to work evenings and weekends, I didn't want to give myself digestion problems, but the main reason was this, that I didn't want to be a *boss,* that I dreaded the responsibility of power. I imagined the hot red face of the police officer in the Leuschnerplatz" (55).

In Wolfgang's view, his decision to remain a lowly engineer ought to be commended, rather than censured. Walking past the home of the district party secretary, one of his neighbors in the "Oktober" quarter, Wolfgang imagines receiving the public recognition his selflessness so richly deserves:

> I looked up at the windows of the high comrade and thought: Actually, you ought to be pleased with me. For whatever reason, I'm not increasing the oversupply of *Diplom*-engineers. On the contrary, I would be happy as a traveling washing-machine repairman. I imagined how the comrade would come out of the house and embrace me, in his hand a copy of *Die Aula,* one of the few books I've read, this book from the Stone Age, when every little bit of intelligence was scratched out of every corner. He'd say: Colleague Wülff, I congratulate your outstanding dialectical thinking! (80)

Here, as in *Buridans Esel, Die Aula* is used to signify the *Aufbau* period's sweeping changes in educational opportunity. Back in the "Stone Age," Wolfgang says, any and all educational advancement was necessary. Now, however, the Scientific-Technical Revolution's emphasis on qualification has led to an overabundance of planners and leaders.

Continuing with his fantasy, Wolfgang frames his story as a kind of anti-planner-and-leader narrative: "I imagined that a writer would interview me about my ideas and goals and write a book: a man forgoes a course of study and returns to his job as a toolmaker and works in three shifts" (80). This reversal levels criticism at the growing hegemony of planner-and-leader culture in the GDR. If this is a workers' state, why does its public culture foreground the managerial and intellectual elite? Shouldn't voluntary proletarization be a plausible—even an ideal—plot trajectory? Wolfgang's reverie then takes him into the party secretary's apartment:

> He had three children, I imagined. They sat peacefully at the table and ate potatoes with cheese and talked about their career goals. One was going to be a petty officer in the army, another was traveling to Orenberg for two years to work as a welder on the natural-gas pipeline, a daughter wanted to be a spinner in a three-shift factory; she had been offered a place in medical school but had turned it down. The second daughter wanted to become a *Zoo-Technikerin,* as we say—one used to say milkmaid. I thought: *Listen, comrade, on your honor, if you had four children, and they became a petty officer, a welder, a spinner, and a milkmaid, would you be happy about it? Would you be proud?* (80–81, italics mine)

Wolfgang's flight of fancy enables him to ask a naïve and incisive question, one that exposes the problem of class reproduction in the GDR. Why does it seem unlikely that this powerful official's children would forgo university to work in three shifts? Why is Wolfgang skeptical about whether the comrade would be happy, satisfied, and proud if his family did not reproduce as planners and leaders?

By the late 1970s the view that the GDR was a class society was not a heretical one. More problematic, however, was the increasingly undeniable actuality that the proletariat was not in fact East Germany's ruling class. One of the SED's strategies to overcome this dilemma was to expand the definition of working class to include party officials and technical intelligence. This expansion process seems to be underway in *Es geht seinen Gang:* Wolfgang's friend Wilfried Neuker, a historian, reveals at one point that he is part of a secret commission dealing with the definition of the working class, in particular the designation "of working-class origins" (186). Wolfgang sees immediately the personal implications of this inquiry: "I said: 'That's important for your son, if he wants to get into the EOS.'" As intelligentsia, the Neukers are having trouble getting their son Peter into the *Erweiterte Oberschule.* Wilfried's work with the commission might clear away such problems. Wilfried clarifies that the committee is in fact investigating "[what] the concept of class consciousness [means] today" (186).

This correction is significant. As indicators of working-class legitimacy, there is a considerable difference between class origin and class consciousness. In practical terms, the latter would include—even privilege—the political and intellectual elite (such as Wilfried). Meanwhile, Wolfgang, though an *Arbeiterkind,* has a highly questionable sense of class consciousness. "Everything has to fall into your lap," scolds his colleague Huppel, an old Communist Party veteran and ABF alumnus. He continues:

> "No interest in art, ideology, politics. Now tell me without thinking about it, off the top of your head: What do you think of when I ask, What's the difference between the GDR and the FRG?"
>
> "Spee und Dash, Trabbi und Volkswagen, Buschner und Schön."[35]
>
> "I thought so."
>
> "And what should I have answered?"
>
> "Who owns the means of production."
>
> "But I know that!"
>
> "Yes," said Huppel sadly. "You learned it, of course. But, believe me, back when I was an ABF student, you could have woken any one of us up in the middle of the night and asked that question, [and] he would have hit the nail on the head."
>
> "Yeah, back then."
>
> "Yes, Wolfgang.... You're a typical GDR bourgeois [Bist 'n typischer DDR-Spießer]." (212)

35. Wolfgang lists laundry detergents, cars, and soccer stars from East and West.

For Wolfgang, class ties are not predicated on consciousness ("art, ideology, politics") but rather on an unconscious set of shared interests and concerns—in short, on a shared habitus. Thus he asks Wilfried, only half facetiously, whether it was class consciousness "when as a 'Chemie' fan I carried my green-and-white banner to Leutzsch? We were all workers" (186). Though Wilfried dismisses this model of class affiliation as "clique mentality" (186), Wolfgang's point has been made. What really unites the East German working class, he suggests, is soccer.

In his descriptions of the working-class bar, Wolfgang advances a model of proletarian solidarity based not on politics or ideology but rather on entertainment, sports, and gossip:

> These people watched sports and variety-shows, they pontificated about Udo Lattek [a West German soccer star] and Rudi Carrell [a West German entertainer], and when an East German soccer team played a West German one, they rooted for the one from the GDR. They talked about politics only when something big was going on. . . . They rarely complained about the government, since complaining, they'd long since realized, doesn't help at all. . . . In these bars no one ever talked about a book or a play and certainly not about a concert. The debate about whether it was better in the East or in the West had run out of steam. There was always some Kurt Fritsche who was having an affair or a Helmut Paulik who had got in an accident or a Wolfgang Müller who was buying drinks. (28–29)

This is the class to which Wolfgang feels he belongs. It is less a bond of material circumstance than of shared mental and geographical disposition: "Others say: I'm from the country, from Silesia, from the working class, from a doctor's family. I can say: I come from this apartment, from the neighborhood behind Thälmannstraße, from East Leipzig; I talk like they talk here, I think like they think here" (89). Rather than focusing on the ownership of the means of production or the relative position of the worker within the relations of production, Wolfgang sees the operative differences between East and West as those of dialect, soccer allegiance, television personalities, and brand names. What seems to define the East German proletariat is precisely the refusal to engage with political distinctions of class consciousness. In this light, Wolfgang's rejection of power becomes more specifically a rejection of politics; to become a "planner and leader," he would have to discontinue his apolitical stance, and with it his working-class affiliation.

With this in mind, we can better understand the stakes of the marriage narrative that frames the plot of Loest's novel. As in the three texts discussed previously, the love plot in *Es geht seinen Gang* figures broader questions of social status and class mobility. Here, however, affective ties do not mediate class but rather constitute it, for if proletarian sensibility entails a refusal of class consciousness (in the Marxist sense), then class becomes an elective affinity, a product of one's attachments and desires, which in turn are conditioned by the circumstances of geography, family,

and education. Thus, after agonizing throughout the novel about his relation to production—should he move up the ladder or down?—Wolfgang finally decides that his real problem is love. When the tension between his apathy and Jutta's ambition becomes too great, they decide to separate. He moves back in with his mother and reacquaints himself with her neighborhood. "I was working class again," he says (215). Now he is in the position to look for a partner who accepts him as he is, rather than as what he might become.

Eventually Wolfgang begins dating Margrid, a clerk at the post office. When he first sees Margrid, he mistakes her for Jutta: "After I few seconds I realized it wasn't Jutta, but a woman of her type; she had eyes like Jutta and a haircut like Jutta, and when she looked up, it was almost Jutta's gaze" (207). Unlike Jutta, however, Margrid is perfectly satisfied with Wolfgang's lack of ambition:

> I said: "And what if I worked as a metal cutter?"
>
> "Do you want to?"
>
> "I mean: Would you mind?"
>
> "As long as I didn't have to cut." Margrid didn't seem to notice what I was driving at; Jutta's way of thinking was alien to her: "As long as you didn't have to work night shifts." (216)

In the final pages of *Es geht seinen Gang,* Wolfgang and Margrid settle into a life corresponding neither to Wolfgang's proletarian origins nor to Jutta's social-climbing aspirations, but rather to a comfortable, middle-class contentment. In an ongoing imaginary conversation with Huppel, the representative both of the revolutionary proletarian tradition and the party line, Wolfgang defends this contentment as a sign not of his own complacency but of socialism's success:

> Huppel, old Huppel, everything was different back in your day, you don't have to tell me. Of course you didn't arrange cold cuts and drink Hemus, but didn't you *long* for meat and wine? Didn't you *fight* for them? Or what were you fighting for? And why do you blame me for being content, isn't contentment the ideal? I do my work—ah, let's drop it, good old Huppel, if you don't get it by now, all the talk in the world won't help. (222)

In its very success, then, socialism seems to have driven a wedge between the party and the people. In this account, the politicization of everyday life demanded by party doctrine would only disturb the well-being of its citizens. Despite its internal tensions and contradictions, East German society seems to have achieved a certain equanimity. It has become postclass, but not in the way envisioned by the architects of East German socialism. Where politicized class-consciousness ought to have rallied the various social groups to the flag of the working class, the masses chose their own standard of differentiation. In the social world of *Es geht seinen Gang*

there are two classes: the political and the apolitical. Within the latter, larger group, minor distinctions of income, status, or schooling do not disrupt the broader solidarity, a group cohesion based on the trials and satisfactions of East Germanness. In this way Wolfgang and Margrid's domestic pleasures—cold cuts and Hemus and a comfortable apartment—become signs of community and belonging, rather than of isolating privilege:

> Margrid brought a bottle from the kitchen: "Would you open this?" It was Hemus. I popped the cork and poured the wine, we made a toast and took a sip and gave each other a kiss, we ate salami and tatar and ham and cheese like thousands of people in Schönefeld and on Oktoberstraße and in Cranzahl and Gormorgsschdodd [Karl-Marx-Stadt] at the same time...
>
> ...
>
> "You—it's nice being with you."
>
> "And with you." (222–24)

In this light, *Es geht seinen Gang* becomes a kind of remarriage narrative, one that recaptures the best aspects of Wolfgang's marriage with Jutta while bypassing the frictions—especially the lingering irritant of class difference—that led to its dissolution. For the founders of the East German socialist experiment, with their ideals of social leveling and permanent revolution, this solution would seem a contemptible and dangerous resignation. From the perspective of the GDR's apolitical class, however, it would represent a logical division between useful and futile, controllable and uncontrollable, participation in the social sphere. As Loest explains in an introductory note addressed to "spatially and temporally removed readers," that is, to his Western audience: "The phrase 'Es geht seinen Gang' [It runs its course], which was popular in the early '70s in the GDR, combines both a certainty of the forward march of society and a capitulation before the intensity of its pace" (5).

Returning to the guiding question of this book, we can ask, why does each of the texts examined here turn to a romantic plot to frame its treatment of class mobility? As in the texts and films already examined in chapters 1 and 2, the love stories considered here constitute a response to a vexing impasse within East German ideology: in this case, an aporia concerning the dynamics of socialist social reproduction. According to official theory, a transformed mode of production and greater educational opportunity ought to have elevated the whole working class. Indeed, the proletariat, as we read in the East German government study *Zur Entwicklung der Klassen und Schichten in der DDR* (On the Development of the Classes and Social Strata in the GDR), "is a class with a constantly increasing level of education" (Parteihochschule "Karl Marx," 96). In practice, however, the revolutionization of the educational system simply led to the creation of a new socialist elite, a bourgeoisie of "planners and leaders." Rather than raising their class with them,

those workers who attended university, qualified for higher-status positions, or assumed management roles simply ceased to be working class. By this token, Karl Erp, Karen W., and Paul all find that their proletarian roots have been severed by their upward mobility.

Yet this continuous retrenchment of the working class had less to do with the failure of the party's efforts to elevate the proletariat than with the self-definition of East Germany's workers. As the above discussion of *Es geht seinen Gang* points out, East Germany's proletariat, though relatively disenfranchised for a ruling class, asserted control over the politics of inclusion and exclusion. The lines of in and out were not drawn according to the Marxist blueprint of politicized class-consciousness but rather traced the vague outlines of habit, taste, and tendency. As Wolfgang Engler puts it in the chapter "Eine arbeiterliche Gesellschaft" (A Workerly Society) in his study *Die Ostdeutschen,*

> The East Germans lived in a society in which the workers dominated socially and culturally and more or less "workerized" [*verarbeiterlichten*] the other social groups.
>
> It would be absurd to claim that East German workers wielded the political power. But they held the social scepter in their hand. Outlooks, opinions, social conventions, clothing, and consumption habits and everyday customs conformed to the norms and ideals of the working class. (200)

By ceding the political, Engler claims, the working class seized the reins of social reproduction in the GDR: "The 'vanguard role' of the working class seems to have gone a very different way than the one foretold by [Marxist] ideology—more social and familial than political and organized" (190). To the degree that the *Arbeiterklasse* became the arbiter of class, the legitimacy claims of party and state faltered. In the Workers' and Peasants' State, it seemed, political power was by no means in the hands of the workers and peasants, but rather in those of the scientific, intellectual, and political elite—who, despite their best efforts, remained categorically excluded from the putative ruling class, the workers. Against this backdrop of destabilized legitimacy, the cross-class love affairs examined in this chapter take on a distinct ideological valence. In each of these narratives, a "planner and leader" looks to a representative of the working class to relegitimate his or her proletarian credibility. This love affair then becomes a corrective affinity, a compensatory union that would undo the drift away from his or her class of origin. Karl Erp hopes that a sojourn in Broder's *Hinterhaus* apartment will validate his revolutionary self-image. Karen Waldau seeks rapprochement with Werlich and debates staying in the country with Dieter. After some wavering, Paul forces himself into Paula's life and lineage. Wolfgang Wülff, however, does not need outside legitimation. Although his job would locate him in the management class, he feels like a worker. And this, by the curious logic of class-as-habitus, seems proof enough that he is.