Reconceptualizing East German Popular Literature via the Science Fiction Niche

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Over the past several decades, academics in the fields of feminist and cultural studies have increasingly turned to the study of popular culture as a means of rethinking epistemological and disciplinary boundaries. Popular culture provides valuable texts in various media with which to examine the negotiation and transgression of binary categories such as center and periphery, elite and popular, high and low culture, art and non-art. Works by Tony Bennett, Stuart Hall, Tania Modleski, and Janice Radway, among others, theorize the manner in which we "consume" or "read" artifacts ranging from prose to television and create meaning from these textual forms. Such studies operate within a western economic model and assume a clear distinction between what Bourdieu terms the economic, social, or political "capital" of the producer and the position of the consumer grouped according to class, gender, ethnic group, etc. (Bennett and Woollacott 60). In general, these theorists search for instances of what Stuart Hall termed the "oppositional code," referring to moments of subversion of dominant cultural codes by the consumer or reader (138). This model is predicated on the existence of a highly developed consumer society in which market research allows companies to progressively identify and classify oppositional readings hitherto deemed external and liberating and to sell them as "alternative" products to specific target groups (Hebdige 94).

While the above studies are valuable within a western context, the paradigms they establish do not apply well to countries of the former Eastern Bloc. In my research on science fiction in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), I quickly discovered that Anglo-American academic discourse on popular culture is insufficient to describe texts located outside of a free market system with a highly developed consumer economy. Further, such popular culture theory assumes a democratic political system. The authoritarian Socialist Unity Party (SED) formed and governed East Germany's centralized socio-economic structures. This party's oppressive cultural policies as well as the strict censorship practiced at all levels of the publishing process greatly limited the variety and capacity of its science fiction literature to freely explore new possibilities.

Simultaneously, it is important to recognize a variety of forms of dissent in the GDR that ranged from daily methods of "internal dissent" to public critique by authors of the literary
As I have demonstrated elsewhere, science fiction authors in East Germany often used the genre's alternate worlds and times to bypass the censors and to critique the East German system. Moreover, in numerous interviews, many science fiction authors and former fan club members have attested to the frequent practice of "reading between the lines." Readers looked for a critical subplot beneath a plot that complied with censorship restrictions. In some cases, Hall's "oppositional code" certainly existed and has been analyzed by many students of East German literature.

A focus on popular literature in East Germany, however, allows a more complex articulation of the country's ideological and power structures. In his article "Encoding/Decoding" Hall goes beyond such concepts of "dominant" and "oppositional" code by introducing the term "negotiated" code, which "contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements" (137). Thus, Hall outlines three potential ways for the consumer to decode a text. But what of a consumer of culture who is simultaneously a producer? In the case of East Germany, such a person must reconcile the production of the dominant code and its consumption with a desire to produce and receive the oppositional code.

In the GDR, several members of Dresden's Stanislaw Lem science fiction fan club occupied this space, which existed under and due to censorship. My article investigates how these individuals "negotiated" their dual roles as producers and consumers of science fiction in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s. In the end, my analysis of the role of science fiction literature in the GDR presents a more complex and subtle depiction of East German society than the prevailing characterization of the GDR as "state" versus "masses." In order to draw up such a more nuanced picture, I will first examine cultural and academic assumptions surrounding the study of East German popular literature, including East-West differences with regard to the notions of mass culture, of "high" and "low" culture, of center and periphery, and of the meaning of the term "state." I will then link these more theoretical considerations with concrete observations on the niche character of science fiction literature and the development of and within science fiction fan clubs in the GDR.

The notion of popular or mass culture has long been dominated by the study of its "manipulative capacities" produced by a culture industry as defined by Horkheimer and Adorno (148). David Bathrick, however, has described a shift in Western thought away from Horkheimer and Adorno's definition towards a focus on the potential for political activism in mass culture through a Brechtian revolutionary aesthetic in a bourgeois socio-economic structure that is full of gaps and fissures, rife with contradiction and the potential for change (Bathrick, "Reading" 246). Indeed, theories of alternative Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, and Stuart Hall, Richard Hebdige, and Richard Hoggart of the Birmingham school, provided the methodological foundation for many of the recent cultural studies texts of reader agency in popular culture.
Despite the transformation described by Bathrick of the study of Anglo-American popular culture in the free market system, only recently have western scholars begun to address East German popular culture critically.\(^\text{n6}\) Until the mid-nineties, the few existing studies of GDR popular culture assumed it to be a propaganda tool of the SED or to be communist Trivialliteratur.\(^\text{n7}\) Although the state certainly occupied a commanding position in the formation of East German popular culture, the analytical dichotomy of state versus anonymous masses that predominated during the Cold War is inadequate to describe a much more complex and interconnected process of production and reception. This analytical dichotomy assumes a well-oiled political machine, which rationally and methodically implemented official policy.

Although the SED's Central Committee formulated official cultural policy based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, the implementation of this policy depended upon its interpretation within the numerous subdivisions that affected the writing and the publication of science fiction literature. The Kuhurministerium controlled the production of science fiction while the Kuhurbund regulated the science fiction clubs. A more detailed breakdown would include the following: (1) Hauptverwaltung für Verlagswesen und Buchhandel, Abteilung Schöne Literatur, the primary censoring body, (2) the Schriftsellerverband on both the national and local levels, (3) a number of publishers including the Verlag Neues Leben and the Verlag Das Neue Berlin each with their own particular interests and agendas, (4) some two hundred authors, and (5) science fiction fans who wrote or published fan magazines. I have provided this long list in order to emphasize the reductive nature of the label "state" and the necessity for a closer look at the interpretation of official cultural policy at each administrative level.

The formulation of cultural policy, in contrast, was more straightforward. The official definition of mass literature in East Germany, including the categories of "high" and "low" were, for the most part, class-based. For instance, Marxist-Leninist theory in East Germany viewed items mass-produced under capitalism to be a type of commodity fetishism. This position was similar to the Horkheimer-Adornian interpretation of products of the "culture industry." Hence, these products neutralized any potential for political consciousness, which pre-bourgeois forms of popular culture had offered in the form of the carnival and folk tale.\(^\text{n8}\) Bourgeois and fascist mass culture became synonymous with Trivialkultur or "low" culture, an interpretation that had existed in the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in the twenties and continued in East Germany (Mallinckrodt 270-71).

However, the Horkheimer-Adornian definition of mass culture and its manifestation in East Germany differed in the SED's embracement of mass production. Horkheimer and Adorno could not find emancipatory power in the mass-produced item as it lost what Benjamin termed the artwork's "aura" (Benjamin 485-69). Conversely, East German cultural officials
perceived mass production to be a revolutionary tool for the greater emancipation of the proletariat when in the hands of the appropriate producers. This process would make culture accessible to everyone through greater distribution and lower price as well. More significantly, a proletarian mass culture, rather than a bourgeois mass culture, could bring about the "German cultural renewal" called for by cultural critic Anton Akermann at the end of World War II.

Through the official literary aesthetic of Socialist Realism, East German cultural officials envisioned the eventual creation of a mass literature written by the proletariat for the proletariat. They intended to dismantle the hierarchy of bourgeois "high" and "low" culture to create a single socialist one. Although not entirely successful, the Bitterfelder Weg endeavored to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the layperson, bringing writers into the factories so that they might have first-hand access to daily experience there. This policy assumed that "workers" would then begin to write of their own experiences, thus creating authentic proletarian material on a mass scale.

At this point in my analysis, the literary and political aspects of the categories of "high" and "low" need to be recognized. George Lukács' formulation of Socialist Realism in Die Zerstörung der Vernunft drew heavily on German Classicism and 19th-century bourgeois realism. According to Lukács, Socialist Realism continued on this revolutionary path begun in the previous century before the development of Romanticism. GDR cultural policy initially termed science fiction "Trivialliteratur," a tool of the ruling class used to placate the worker. Alfred Kurella, one of the earliest staunch proponents of a strict interpretation of Socialist Realism, argued that the need for entertainment literature disappears in a socialist society. Any literary-aesthetic forms besides those of Socialist Realism did not aid in the creation of a socialist state and were thus politically suspect. Yet in 1953, Johannes Becher, the director of the newly founded Ministry of Culture supported the creation of a socialist popular literature.

Officially, this type of literature was presented as a transitional phenomenon towards a fully established socialism and then towards communism at which the high proletarian literature for the masses would dominate. "Diesem Lesestoff von der anderen Seite können wir nicht mit Kritik, mit Aufklärung usw. begegnen, [...] dagegen müssen wir eine eigene Literatur stellen - für Frauen, Jugend, Kinder." In Becher's opinion, socialist versions of politically appropriate genres such as the fairy tale, science fiction, and the detective or spy novel would appeal to women, young adults and children, i.e., the "weaker" readers who required such reading in the transitional phase. Becher's gender bias thus equates "high" socialist literature with masculine interests and "low" socialist literature with feminine interests. Ironically, science fiction was a genre predominantly written for and by men in East Germany.
With the success of Sputnik in 1957 and Walter Ulbricht's declaration of the GDR's Wissenschaftliche-Technische Revolution in 1961, science fiction began to develop what became a significant tradition in East Germany.(n11) Still, science fiction remained a politically marginal literature, a status that contributed to its popularity. As the term "science fiction" was a capitalist genre, it was renamed "utopian literature." In 1973, the East German Writers' Union officially recognized the genre by establishing the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Utopische Literatur. Still, political legitimacy did not lead to narrative freedom, as this new group discussed science fiction within the narrow parameters of SED cultural policy. However, science fiction's fantastic qualities allowed existing and new authors such as Johanna and Günter Braun and Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller to explore subject matter beyond prescribed aesthetic boundaries. It is thus tempting, from a position outside of the GDR, to retain the high-low split politically and read science fiction solely as a subversive literature.

Due in part to Cold War tension, East German Studies in the United States has traditionally focused on instances of subversion when studying the country's culture and politics. Yet, this scholarship's center versus periphery approach to East German literature has become increasingly problematic, particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Adele Marie Barker pointed out in her recent study of Soviet popular culture, such analytical distinctions often depend upon an observer's location within a society or without (20). I would suggest that this is also true for western students of East German literature. Many of them focused on the publications at the "margins of acceptability," thus canonizing those who were critical of the SED and creating an elite of subversive authors. However, the distinction between center and margin became muddled when it was alleged that authors Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller had been informants for the East German secret police.(n12) In addition, these celebrated authors enjoyed many privileges in the GDR.

In light of this development, it is inadequate to apply theoretical approaches to East German popular culture solely with the intent of identifying aspects of political dissent. Bathrick's conceptualization of life, both inside and outside of the East German system, goes beyond this somewhat simplistic understanding of the politics of the public and private spheres. Drawing on Foucault, Bathrick defines the "function of discourse ... as a system of 'exclusion' and 'prohibition,' organized around a dualistic structure by which judgments concerning cultural and societal norms are coded evaluatively -- judgments about what is [...] acceptable or not to be tolerated" (15). According to this model, the SED created a "total discursive system" which did not tolerate the existence of meaning external to its interpretation of approved aesthetic and linguistic codes. Such a "master discourse" shaped the identity of those who lived within the system. Simultaneously, Bathrick observes that the implicit existence of a "counterdiscourse" creates a binary opposition, which provides only a limited understanding of the historical and cultural context at hand.
To this end, he outlines the manner in which the works of both Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller address established codes of the master discourse and at the same time transgress the boundaries of these very codes. As Bathrick demonstrates, Wolf and Müller functioned both inside and outside of the system and were thus able to "rewrite the master code from within the code itself" (19).

While Bathrick focuses on a few select public intellectuals, I argue that his analysis can be applied to a number of individuals involved in the production and/or the reception of science fiction in East Germany. The following section will articulate how these individuals operated within the state cultural apparatus and at the same time were able to integrate their various roles into this system.

East German life was characterized by the constant negotiation of everyday life, both inside and outside of the SED’s Marxist-Leninist ideology (Bathrick, Powers 19-21). The SED reinforced this negotiated approach in the private sphere through its official acceptance of the many niche groups that sprung up in the 1970s. Such niches arose in an effort by members to create a select group of trusted individuals, where discussion was shielded from political scrutiny. Through the toleration of niche groups, the SED avoided displays of dissent in the public sphere. Simultaneously it monitored and disciplined select niche groups through "unofficial informants" who reported back to the East German secret police.

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

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

Not surprisingly, the give and take between country and citizen, characteristic of a civil society, was not present in the GDR. The implementation of a totalizing discourse based on Marxism-Leninism treated the culturally activated subject as the object of cultural policy. Consequently, East Germans developed what Daniela Dahn has termed methods of "internal dissent" (Westwärts 201). Such dissent was practiced in science fiction texts via established codes, which the "culturally educated reader", i.e., the member of a science fiction fan club, could easily interpret. The "average reader" could also derive the "pleasure of culture and knowledge" by recognizing references, particularly to taboo subjects, albeit to a lesser degree than the fan (Bennett and Wollacott 79). Erik Simon, a former science fiction fan club member who remains active in the scene today, attests that censorship only led to a "sharpening of the senses" on the part of the reader. Readers and authors of science fiction developed an atypically close relationship, which often took place between the lines (Simon, Grenzfälle 13).

While and because science fiction boomed in the 1970s and 1980s the genre remained ideologically suspect and its authors and devoted readers politically and culturally marginalized. The presence of the East German secret police or their unofficial informants (IMs) at most fan club meetings coupled with the surveillance of several science fiction authors attests to the state’s distrust of a suspect genre that had grown so popular. Simultaneously, however, the genre found support in Honecker's pledge to increase the availability of consumer items and to educate GDR citizens in areas of science and technology. However, when several authors of "high" literature turned to writing science fiction in the early 1970s, they did not necessarily embrace the science fiction community. For instance, the publication of Christa Wolf's "Selbstversuch" (1975) and Franz Fühmann’s Saiäns-Fiktschen (1985) did not establish these authors as science fiction writers. Rather, the status of "Selbstversuch" as science fiction is only cursorily referred to in the critical reception of this short story in both East and West. While Wolf herself does refer to the story's characters as "wenn man so will -- phantastisch oder futuristisch," its generic form represents solely a means to accomplish her exploration of gender ("Leben oder gelebt werden" 101). To my knowledge she has not written on the subject of science fiction.

Fühmann similarly declared that he never wanted to write science fiction, but was intrigued by the genre's narrative possibilities after reading Johanna and Günter Braun's Conviva Ludibundus (1980). He praised the genre’s ability to allow him "... eine existentielle Lähmung zu überwinden" where he "fand in jener irrealen Welt und Weise die
nur anders nicht gewinnbare Form, das, was mich quälte, in Worte zu fassen" (book jacket).

Still, Fühmann took great pains to avoid the science fiction label, of which the phonetic spelling of the title Saiäns-Fiktschen is but one indication (5). Fühmann's short story collection certainly falls under the rubric of science fiction, yet to be labeled in this manner at the time threatened Fühmann with the undesirable label of an author of Trivialliteratur.(n14)

The popularity of science fiction literature led to the formation of a number of fan clubs by the late 1960s. At that point in time, very little East German science fiction existed. Possession of western science fiction was illegal due to the association of the genre either with Anglo-American capitalism, or with what William Fischer, in his book on German science fiction, has described as the more "chauvinistic" Zukunftsroman of the Nazi period. Still, there is evidence that a number of readers of science fiction, a popular genre before 1945, continued to read despite admonishments to the contrary by cultural authorities. In 1956, the science fiction club SATURN was founded in Karl-Marx-Stadt. This club maintained close relations with the West German club "Stellaris" primarily for the purposes of obtaining material, which was not available in the East (Both, Neumann, and Scheffler 23). Two of the SATURN club’s members, Werner Thost and Stefan Michalz, developed a small library, set up a club meeting room and published their own fan magazine. The club was also a member of the International Science Fiction Society. In the era of Sputnik, this club, which also enjoyed close relations with the Freundeskreis für Raumfahrt, was no doubt tolerated due to its interest in the Soviet space success. However, when authorities intercepted a package containing western books in 1959, an investigation began which ended in the prohibition of the club and charges of dissemination of Schund- und Schmutzliteratur. Michalz spent five months in jail and paid 75,- M (Both, Neumann, and Scheffler 24).

Such occurrences characterized science fiction fan clubs throughout the existence of the GDR. In 1966, the editors of the popular science magazine, Jugend und Technik, organized a conference on science fiction in East Germany. At issue was the question whether socialist science fiction should be primarily a tool of science and technology or a literary genre. This question led a large number of the magazine’s readers to send in letters in support of socialist science fiction. The opinions ranged from echoes of support in Marxist-Leninist terms to specific suggestions as to a unified expression of a socialist future vision. The letters also demonstrate a very active popular engagement with issues of space exploration, contact with alien life forms, scientific and technological progress, the arms race, and various related issues contained in GDR science fiction and socialist science fiction of the Eastern Bloc. This overwhelming response resulted in a highly successful readership survey to determine which stories the readers desired most of all. Over seven hundred responses were received.(n15)
This show of popular support for science fiction prompted author Carlos Rasch to contact the survey respondents, suggesting that they form science fiction clubs as a means to provide further popular support for the genre in the GDR. The best-known science fiction fan club was the Stanislaw Lem Club (SLC) of Dresden named after the popular Polish author and founded by Ralf Krämer. The SLC operated, according to the model outlined by Bathrick, both inside and outside the SED's "discursive system." Made up of a group of physics students from the Technical University in Dresden, the club was officially founded on June 5, 1969, as the Interessengemeinschaft Wissenschaftlich-phantastische Literatur, part of the Hochschulgruppe Dresden of the German Kuhurbund. Membership in the Kuhurbund became necessary after repeated meetings in Krämer's dorm room aroused suspicion, drawing the attention of the Stasi.

SLC members shared ideas and assembled a library to facilitate greater access to texts. They swapped books in order to work around the restrictive GDR publishing system. Some made typewriter copies of rare science fiction works, including the occasional western author. Member Erik Simon translated new Soviet science fiction titles into German, making an alternate science fiction discourse accessible as well. Fans published newsletters, created slide shows, organized author readings, and sought cautious contact with other GDR science fiction fan clubs through letters and the rare inter-club meeting. By 1972, the SLC counted some 120 members.

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

Despite these positive developments, fan club members also experienced political persecution, which members of today's Andymon fan club documented in their publication Berichte aus der Parallelwelt (1998). Along with the Terra Club in Halle, the Lem Club was the most influential and largest East German science fiction fan club of the time. In the early 1970s, they came to function as a de facto center of GDR fandom and, to some extent, as a new center of discourse on science fiction, since the readers and to some extent the authors were exposed to ideas that were not available to non-club members (Simon, "Blütezeit" 44-46). At a 1978 meeting of the Kuhurbund, Adolf Sckerl, an expert on science fiction, observed that the center of discourse on science fiction had moved from the state institutions to the private sphere, and to the increasingly active fan community (Haines 2). This was due in part to the fan clubs' public meetings as well as the sporadic publication of fan magazines and of their own short stories.
Most fan clubs, among them the Stanislaw Lem Club, operated in simultaneous modes of subversion and affirmation. Fans did not focus on the act of subversion. Rather, their intense interest in the genre, in all kinds of science fiction, collided with the intent of official cultural policy to confine this interest within the approved parameters of discussion and thought. Thus, whenever fans desired to read, write or otherwise act in a way external to the established codes of SED cultural policy, either intentionally or unintentionally, they took a step outside of hegemonic ideology. Yet, at the same time, fan club activities could only take place under the auspices of the state's Kuhurbund or in conjunction with the Freie Deutsche Jugend.

An excellent example of the paradoxes that the aforementioned negotiation of the hegemonic ideology entailed was the case of Ralf Krämer, the Lem club's first president, and Rolf Krohn, science fiction fan and author. Official registration with the Kuhurbund and Krämer's attainment of a position on the Dresden city council in 1970 aided in the official acceptance of the fan club (Krämer 41). The club's close association with science fiction writer Günther Krupkat, who was to become head of the subsection for science fiction in the German Writers' Union and also a member of the Central Committee on Literature, contributed to the establishment of the club's political legitimacy as well. Due to the Kuhurbund membership, the organizational structure of the Stanislaw Lem Club of the late 1960s and early 1970s resembled that of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (Krämer 41).

Despite these close connections to official institutions, the club became the victim of denunciation in the Physics Department at the Technical University (TU) in Dresden in the fall of 1972. It began when the party secretary of the Physics department demanded the exmatriculation of club member Rolf Krohn, perhaps due to his habit of asking too many "uncomfortable" questions. This accusation, however, led to the further investigation of Krohn's activities, which included his science fiction stories and his activities as a member of the Stanislaw Lem Club. At the time, an inner circle of club members possessed some western science fiction works available to trusted members only from the fan club library. Interestingly, at first, this activity was not the basis for further charges. Rather, the TU discovered cause in Krohn's writings, finding "anti-sozialistische Tendenzen" in them. Erik Simon today asserts that none of the stories intended to criticize socialism "nicht einmal gegen seine merkwürdige Erscheinungsformen in der DDR" ("Blütezeit" 46). University officials described Krohn's behavior as a "destruktives, politisch-provokatorisches und feindliches Auftreten und Handeln in mehreren Fällen" ("Blütezeit" 49). In 1973, the university expelled Krohn and barred him from study at any institution of higher education in East Germany, greatly limiting his employment chances. The club's founding member, Ralf Krämer, was charged with leading its members to serious political-
ideological mistakes (Both, Neumann and Scheffler 48) and consequently expelled from the TU Dresden.

Despite this expulsion, Rolf Krohn went on to publish the short stories "Cora" and "Das Mädchen von Ninive" in the first anthology of GDR science fiction entitled Der Mann von Anti (1975). While his expulsion would seem to have barred Krohn from such activity, this was not the case. In an interview, editor Ekkehard Redlin explained that he successfully ignored protestations from the Kuhurbund regarding his intention to publish Krohn's stories. Redlin, who maintained a personal interest in the development of the quantity and quality of GDR science fiction, indicated that he wanted to maintain a clear separation between the politics of the Kulturbund and the Verlag Das Neue Berlin (personal interview). This strategy remained successful as demonstrated by the subsequent publication of Begegnung im Licht in 1976, edited by Helmut Fickelscherer. Approximately half of the stories in this anthology were written by original members of the Stanislaw Lem Club, who had since left the club. By this time, former Lem Club member Erik Simon had become an editor at the Verlag Das Neue Berlin under Redlin (Simon, Blütezeit 47).

Following the Lem Club affair, the SED made several attempts to reincorporate science fiction discourse into state cultural institutions, both on the level of fan and of author. For instance, the Kuhurbund stepped in and reorganized the Stanislaw Lem Club in October 1973. The new club head, Dr. Alder, an expert on Soviet literature of the fantastic, organized club activities in accordance with the Kuhurbund intent to stress a kritische Auseinandersetzung mit späbügerlichem Gedankengut, wie es besonders in der westlichen Science-Fiction-Literatur zum Ausdruck kommt, und klare Abgrenzung von technizistischen und antihumanistischen Produkten dieses Literaturzweiges (Both, Neumann and Scheffler 54)

However, in the end, attempts by the new leadership to maintain the semblance of the old club while under new political guidance failed. Most members of the original club left either out of fear or disappointment in the Kuhurbund’s increased supervision of the club. The club disbanded in 1977 (Hutschenreuther, "Leben" 55).

Besides the political streamlining of GDR science fiction clubs, new efforts were underway to integrate science fiction authors into the German Writers' Union. In 1973, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Utopische Literatur came into being. Science fiction writer Günter Krupkat headed this subsection of the German Writers' Union charged with the development and support of socialist science fiction. However, the discourse present in this organization was greatly limited to the - specific benefit of science fiction as a means of furthering socialism in Marxist-Leninist terms specific to East Germany. Science fiction
authors requested the formation of the circle in order to gain official recognition for the genre. In the end, the most practical function of the committee was the approval of travel visas to international conventions. Meanwhile, meaningful science fiction discourse had moved elsewhere in the 1980s.

In that time period, the discursive centers of science fiction lay with various editors, newly developed academic circles, the newly published science fiction almanac Lichtjahr, and in a new generation of fan clubs, among others. In academic circles, Adolf Sckerl’s dissertation on "Wissenschaftlich-phantastische Literatur" in 1977 represented a solid literary theorization of socialist science fiction in East Germany. While Sckerl’s study provided a theoretical basis for much discussion in the Committee on Utopian Literature of the German Writers' Union, his dissertation remained limited in its scope and importance, due to its narrow ideological paradigm. In contrast, an academic project on "entertainment literature," led by Gustav Schröder at the Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam, included an informative, relatively apolitical history of GDR science fiction. Schröder went on to support several dissertations on GDR science fiction in the 1980s, also relatively free of Parteilichkeit. Topics included children's science fiction (Vollprecht), the portrayal of women (Blume), the portrayal of the alien (Breitenfeld), elements of utopia and dystopia (Kruschel) and a survey of GDR science fiction in the eighties (Hartung).(n17)

Upon closer examination, a high degree of overlap existed between fans, authors, editors and, in one case, academics. For instance, the above-mentioned science fiction dissertator, Karsten Kruschel, was also a fan and wrote a number of science fiction stories. Fan Michael Szameit later went on to become an external reviewer, editor at the Verlag Neues Leben as well as the author of Copyworld, a manuscript written before 1989, but unpublished until 1997. Perhaps the more significant integration of the fan into the state publishing apparatus took place at the Verlag Das Neue Berlin, which, under Ekkehard Redlin's guidance, became the premier source of critical and satirical science fiction in the GDR. It was here that Erik Simon, a former member of the Lem club, had become an influential editor of science fiction. Both he and Olaf Spittel, also a former fan, became instrumental in the creation of the first science fiction journal: the aforementioned almanac Lichtjahr, which first appeared in 1980. The almanac sought to improve access to a variety of science fiction. It provided a larger public forum in which authors and fledgling writers could publish and discuss their work. Short stories and excerpts of longer works by authors from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and other Eastern Bloc countries often appeared here and nowhere else. Similarly, secondary material from the GDR and other Eastern Bloc countries found its way into Lichtjahr through the skillful analysis and political justifications of its editors. The almanac also made forays into the realm of western science fiction deemed to be socialist. In volume five, one finds Ursula LeGuin's
short stories "Things" and "Darkness Box." Volume six is devoted to science fiction fantasy, the first example of this Anglo-American subgenre in the GDR.

Certainly Redlin, Simon, and Spittel among others were central figures in the establishment of science fiction as a viable genre in East Germany. Their editorial efforts on behalf of their readers led to the increased quality of discourse on and the professionalization of the genre in East Germany. Still, it must be remembered that the position of editor also signified involvement in the state cultural apparatus. Following the author's self-censorship, the editor functioned as the first official level of the GDR's highly developed censorship apparatus, choosing texts, which would pass the censors with the least trouble. The almanac Lichtjahr still remained under the influence of the censor through its publisher, the Verlag Das Neue Berlin. This institution was more independent than the Verlag Neues Leben, which answered directly to the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ). Still, the Verlag Das Neue Berlin submitted applications for publication to the same censorship office and was subject to the same general policy recommendations of the Ministry of Culture. It was the skillful editor who learned how to justify a publication in terms of censorship codes, while ignoring the more satirical or what otherwise would be considered politically objectionable subjects that were displaced onto another planet or into another time.

In my extensive research into a variety of applications for publication in the 1970s and 1980s, I found many examples of this practice by editors at the Verlag Das Neue Berlin. Michael Szameit, who became an editor at the Verlag Neues Leben in 1980, confirmed this observation in a personal interview with me. This strategy allowed such individuals to rewrite the code from the inside out to justify the appearance of new material and simultaneously to integrate counterdiscourses on science fiction into the GDR official discourse on the genre.(n18)

By the 1980s, science fiction fan clubs had cautiously rebuilt the contacts with each other and the West that had been severed after the Lem Club Affair in 1973-74. Each club contributed in its own unique way to a growing and diverse science fiction discourse during and after the political crackdown in 1976. For instance, the tiny Sonderhäuser Kreis quietly published nine issues of its fan magazine UFO/Galaxy between 1978 and 1980. Most participants wrote under pseudonyms and the club forbade the exchange of the newsletter lest it fall into the wrong hands (Both, Neumann, and Scheffler 70). In contrast, the club AG Phantopia Ilmenau enjoyed greater contacts to more visible figures in the science fiction community. Both Ekkehard Redlin and Erik Simon participated in their occasional meetings. Due in part to these more influential contacts, this club was one of the very few which managed to continue meeting after the Lem Club Affair. Together, these examples demonstrate the existence of a center and periphery within the science fiction niche itself.
By 1985, there was a resurgence in the number of fan clubs. In part this growth demonstrated new tolerance for such organizations, but it also occurred as a result of increased reader interest. New fans, attracted to science fiction by western television programming and film, were energized by the presence of East Germany’s first cosmonaut, Sigmund Jähn, and formed several clubs. These included the Berlin Club Andymon, the revival of Phantopia, as well as the Freundeskreis SF Leipzig to name a few. Many fans from Berlin, Ilmenau and Leipzig attended the Eighth Eurocon in Budapest in 1988 where they had the opportunity to see the Terminator, Dune and Blade Runner and to hear Erich von Daniken speak. Anonymous updates on GDR science fiction in the West German publication Science Fiction Times in the 1970s and early 1980s turned into full-scale articles acknowledged by eastern contributors. Increased contact with the other GDR fan clubs and the West granted a perspective to participants of science fiction niches (both fan and authorial), which resulted in a vibrant discourse in this location when compared to the creative stagnation present in the committee on science fiction in the German Writers' Union.

My account of the continual integration of the consumer, represented here by fan clubs, into science fiction production illustrates the increasing influence that its most involved readers had on the shape of the genre both in printed form and in the social activities surrounding it. While complying with and/or supporting the hegemonic ideological stance of Marxism-Leninism, devoted readers were also able to operate within and even to manipulate the established ideological codes, albeit to a limited extent.

Cultural and theoretical assumptions made by academics outside of East Germany have greatly limited the type of GDR literature studied up until the last ten years. The equation of subversion with "high" art led to a highly developed yet narrow view of cultural discourse in East Germany. This limited focus precluded the study of "low" artistic forms and obscured the complicity of its cultural heroes such as Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller in the state cultural apparatus. Now that scholars have greater access to the archives and popular cultural publications of East Germany, the scope of study is gaining in breadth and depth.

Despite the harsh political nature of the GDR regime, it is important to the Germany of today to understand how East German society functioned and identify its strengths, weaknesses, and contradictions more fully. This process is vital particularly in light of the continued friction between Germany's eastern and western halves. In an effort to shed light on the more complicated relations that shaped the production and reception of popular literature in East Germany, this study of science fiction has focused on a variety of analytical dichotomies: high and low, center and periphery, state and masses, author, editor and fan. Assumptions surrounding these categories, formed within the western system of a
democratic free-market, do not easily apply to the East German context. Instead, various elements such as different power relations, economic structure, and cultural definitions determined the reality that was "real-existing socialism." In order to assess how the above dichotomies operated in East Germany it is necessary for the western academic to operate not only from without but also from within an approximation of this alternate system.

I would like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Department of German, Scandinavian and Dutch at the University of Minnesota for the financial support, which enabled research for this article. I would also like to thank Jack Zipes, Arlene Teraoka and John Mowitt for their valuable comments. In addition, I owe a great deal to the members of the Andymon fan club in Berlin.

Notes

(n2) Daniela Dahn describes the practice of "internal dissent" in her book Westwärts und nicht vergessen 201.

(n3) See my extensive study of science fiction literature as a method of societal critique in East Germany in my dissertation.

(n4) Although East Germany was a centralized economy, its model can still be analyzed in terms of "producer" and "consumer." As Adele Marie Barker stresses in her discussion of Soviet popular culture, despite its centralized economy, the description of the Soviet citizen as consumer is still viable in a system "predicated on the relationship between those who produced the goods - in this case the ideology- and those for whom that ideology was intended" (Barker 27). Without conflating the Soviet Union and East Germany, I suggest that East Germans also were consumers. They purchased price-controlled goods with the East German Mark. In the official "Intershops" they paid with hard currency. Particularly under Erich Honecker, who promised an increase in the production of household durable goods and the general standard of living, the East German economy became increasingly consumer-based. Despite evidence of limited market research in the seventies and eighties, however, ideological goals and a planned economy overwhelmingly determined the nature of consumer goods, rather than the laws of supply and demand.

(n5) See Buck-Morss, Bennett and Woollacott, and Jameson among numerous others.

(n6) See, for instance, Gemünden and Soldovieri.

(n7) See Jorgensen. Henning equates GDR mass culture with propaganda in his article. Studies of West German science fiction approached the topic from the perspective of Trivialliteratur
and did not address East Germany. See Reinhold Krämer as well as Pehlke and Lingfeld. Sociologist Walter Nutz has only recently begun to reassess his perception of Trivialliteratur.

(n8) See also Swingewood 44.

(n9) As quoted in Schubbe 471. This statement echoes the general prejudice against popular literature, which betrays a gulf between "high" and "low" culture that was to cause further problems in the future of GDR politics. Science fiction was often discussed in terms of utopian literature. In his 1964 article, Krauss predicts the imminent end of the utopia, as it had lost "ihre eigentliche Dimension" in a socialist society (16). Krauss also comments that the existing form of GDR science fiction is an "ungünstige" prognosis that does not differentiate itself from the utopia.

(n10) See Schubbe 223. In 1947, an article in the Börsenbtatt (Leipzig) argued along similar lines, in view of the necessity to reeducate the German people, that mass literature could be a useful tool with which to influence the "worker." See Lange 234-35.

(n11) Over three hundred science fiction novels appeared in East Germany, in addition to many short stories, comic books, and films. See Steinmüller 10. See also the one thousand-page bibliography of all German and international science fiction published in East Germany that recently appeared by former East German science fiction fan Hans-Peter Neumann.

(n12) The degree of Wolf and Müller's individual involvement with the East German secret police (the Staats sicherheitsdienst) differed. Müller was a registered "unofficial informant" (IM) under two separate code names and also admitted to speaking with the Stasi. However, no IM file has been found on Müller. Christa Wolf's IM file primarily contains records of conversations that took place between 1959 and 1962. At the time, she was a committed member of the SED and was moving swiftly up in the party ranks. Three years later, she broke with the party. By 1968, the Stasi had begun to observe her. Neither Wolf's nor Müller's involvement with the Stasi compares to the allegations made against Prenzlauer Berg poets Sascha Ande rson and Reiner Schedlinski. However, it threw into question assumptions regarding the role of the GDR public intellectual as dissident. See Bathrick Powers, 21-22, 221-25.

(n13) Here, it could be argued that Fühmann meant western science fiction when referring to "science fiction." However, by the 1980s it was not uncommon for the term science fiction, which officially designated the bourgeois form of the genre, to refer to East German publications as well.
It is interesting to note that Fühmann's short story collection Saiäs-Fiktschen is listed at number 57 of the Andymon fan club's list of East German science fiction stories of all time. Christa Wolf did not make either list.

See the articles "Grünes Licht der Utopie," "Zu unserem Beitrag 'Grünes Licht der Utopie" and readers' comments in the section "Zur Feder gegriffen" in Jugend und Technik. This magazine is a problematic source of reader voice, as it is impossible to ascertain how large a role censorship played in the selection of the letters. The results of this survey can be found in Hein and Ludwig 31-34.

Former club member Erik Simon believes that this party secretary hoped to advance her career through the denunciation. What role gender played in this case is uncertain. See Simon, "Blütezeit" 46.

Several were published after 1989.

This phenomenon has been documented in Bathrick's book Powers of Speech (19) as well as in Carol Anne Constabile-Heming's article "Rezensur: A Case Study of Censorship and Programmatic Reception in the GDR," here 59-64.

I would like to thank Andymon member Ingolf Vonau for pointing this out to me. See also Both, Neumann, and Scheffler 10, 82.

Erich von Daniken has published a number of books of which the best known is Chariot of the Gods (1968). His most recent title is Odyssey of the Gods (2000). Von Daniken is best known for his highly controversial belief that extraterrestrials landed on Earth during prehistoric times and influenced the development of humanity. His theory has affected science fiction, the New Age culture, and Scientology.

This move is evident, for instance, in Emmerich's two editions of his Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR. His revised edition, which appeared in 1996, included references to the contributions of science fiction to GDR literary history (279).

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