

The Movement of Writing Workers in the German Democratic Republic: The Vision of
Cultural Revolution and the Reality of Popular Participation

By

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For my parents,
who made everything possible

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Abstract

This study examines the “Movement of Writing Workers,” a major cultural initiative in East Germany to support amateur writers and integrate cultural activities into the workplace.

Contextualizing the movement historically reveals its unique German pedigree, dispels the widely held belief that it was introduced under Soviet pressure, and shows how it functioned as a field for the reception of competing cultural traditions of SPD and KPD heritage. The coexistence of these traditions within the framework of the larger “folk” arts movement resulted from a power struggle in the early 1960s between the labor unions and the Ministry of Culture. Following the compromises and concessions formalized at the Third Conference of Writing Workers in Schwerin (1963) and the Second Bitterfeld Conference (1964) the main function of cultural centers in the GDR was to satisfy the interests of the general population. Although a new socialist culture was envisioned as unfolding according to a central plan with the “circles of writing workers” as its “brain” or “Herzstück,” central agencies never succeeded in gaining control of the movement, with district and local functionaries largely responsible for circle activities and the plethora of publications. The movement demonstrates the difficulties state planning encountered in implementing its policies and to what extent success in the cultural domain had to rely on individuals’ efforts. Thus it serves as a paradigmatic view of the fraught interaction between “top-down” party directives and “bottom-up” individual initiatives which characterized popular culture more generally in the GDR. A presentation of four circles of writing workers in the district of Halle demonstrates the potentials within the movement for serving both state interests of social integration and personal interests in acquiring a literary education and practicing critical thought.

List of Abbreviations

- AJA Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren (Working Group of Young Authors)
- ASA Archiv schreibender ArbeiterInnen, Berlin-Weißensee (Archive of Writing Workers in Berlin-Weißensee)
- BAG Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft (District Working Group)
- BPRS Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller (League of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers)
- BSA Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter (Movement of Writing Workers)
- CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- DKB Deutscher Kulturbund (German Cultural League)
- DSF Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft (German-Soviet Friendship)
- DSV Deutscher Schriftsteller Verband (German Writers' Union)
- FDGB Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Free German Trade Union Federation)
- FDJ Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth)
- FRG Federal Republic of Germany
- GDR German Democratic Republic
- KPD Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
- LPG Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft (collective farm)
- MDV Mitteldeutscher Verlag
- MTS Maschinen-Traktoren-Station (machine and tractor station)
- NSW Nichtsozialistische Wirtschaftsgebiet (non-socialist economic area)
- NÖS/NÖSPL Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung (new economic system of planning and leadership)
- RAPP Russian Association of Proletarian Writers

- SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
- SBZ Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Occupation Zone)
- SMA Sowjetische Militäradministration (Soviet Military Administration)
- SPD Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands (German Socialist Party)
- SW Sozialistische Wirtschaftsgebiet (socialist economic area)
- VEB Volkseigener Betrieb (Nationally Owned Company)
- ZAG Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft (Central Working Group)
- ZfK Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit (Central House for Cultural Work)
- ZK Zentralkomitee der SED (Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party)
- ZSA Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter (circle of writing workers)

1. Introduction

The First Bitterfeld Conference (1959) marks a watershed in East German cultural history. The presence at the conference of some 300 “writing workers” among the 680 politicians, functionaries, writers, librarians, and members of socialist workers’ brigades highlights the most significant and lasting outcome of the conference: The birth of the Movement of Writing Workers (*Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter*, BSA).¹ As Otto Gotsche later recalled: “Die historische Konferenz, die einen Wendepunkt in unserer kulturellen Arbeit einleitete, begann. Die Geburtsstunde der Zirkel schreibender, malender, musizierender Arbeiter, einer neuen Etappe des künstlerischen Laienschaffens, hatte geschlagen.”² As the centerpiece of what came to be known as the Bitterfeld resolutions (*Bitterfelder Beschlüsse*) and Bitterfeld Path (*Bitterfelder Weg*),³ the BSA was an experiment unique in the history of German literature.⁴ Under the banner “Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Die sozialistische Nationalkultur braucht dich!,” the movement was envisioned as playing a central role creating a new socialist culture as the

¹ *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1958–1962. Teil I* (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung beim Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 1968), 52; Hörnigk terms the BSA the “eigentliches Zentrum der in Bitterfeld gefassten Beschlüsse.” Therese Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz. Programm und Praxis der sozialistischen Kulturrevolution am Ende der Übergangsperiode,” *Literarisches Leben in der DDR 1945 bis 1960. Literaturkonzept und Leseprogramme*, ed. Ingeborg Münz-Koenen, et. al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980), 222; Schiller states the main goal of Bitterfeld was “eine Literatur der schreibenden Arbeiter zu schaffen.” Dieter Schiller, “Kulturdebatten in der DDR nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU,” *Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte* 74 (2001): 27.

² Cited in Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR. 1945–1990* (Köln: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1994), 87.

³ On the ambiguity of these terms see Schiller, “Kulturdebatten in der DDR nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU,” 19.

⁴ Peter Zimmermann, *Industrieliteratur der DDR. Vom Helden der Arbeit zum Planer und Leiter* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 27.

“Herzstück der Volkskunstbewegung.”⁵ As the nexus of the relationship between writers and workers, the BSA occupied a central position in Marxist teleology. An examination of its initial visions and lived realities provides illuminating insights not only into the cultural policies of the East German state but also into the motivations and self-understanding of leading SED functionaries and local actors.

Research on the BSA during its existence was sparse. West German scholars took little notice of the movement,⁶ while in the GDR a literary scholar claimed that by the 1970s the Bitterfeld Path was “scheinbar in Vergessenheit geraten.”⁷ Post-Wall literary studies, typically reflecting Cold War biases, reached erroneous and uncritically recycled conclusions, propagating stereotypes and misunderstandings of life under Soviet rule in the Eastern Zone. In the early 1990s, Günter Rüter proclaimed the movement dead upon arrival for failing to produce a new national literature, summarizing briefly: “Bitterfeld wurde zu keinem zweiten Weimar.”⁸ Manfred Jäger describes the ineffectuality of the Bitterfeld campaign as a “Kampagne, die ins Leere stieß.”⁹ Wolfgang Emmerich’s literary history of the GDR describes

⁵ Hanns Maaßen coined this term at the First Conference of Writing Workers on 8 June 1960 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. Andreas Leichsenring, “Den Werktätigen Stimme geben. Diskussionsbeitrag auf dem Kolloquium ‘25 Jahre ZAG’,” *ich schreibe* 1 (1986): 10.

⁶ For an exception see Gerd Eversberg, “Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter in der DDR,” *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 13 (1973): 36-54.

⁷ Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz,” 196.

⁸ Günter Rüter, “*Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!*” *Schriftsteller, Literatur und Politik in der DDR. 1949–1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1991), 90.

⁹ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR*, 88.

the BSA as an “exotisch anmutende massenkulturelle Initiative.”¹⁰ Others have emphasized the movement’s lack of autonomy, viewing it as a means of “collective” text production firmly embedded within the ruling mechanisms of control,¹¹ and more recent scholarship has raised the question of Soviet influence over the Bitterfeld campaign.¹²

Yet contrary to these offhand dismissals, the Bitterfeld Conference initiated a movement which was alive, “in einer Vielfalt und Stärke, die unsere Erwartungen weit übertrifft.”¹³ Already in 1984 Zimmermann recognized that, despite the authoritarian nature of top-down party directives, the Bitterfeld campaign resulted in anti-bureaucratic dynamics and nascent democratic tendencies.¹⁴ More recently von Richthofen has shown that, despite the dictatorial overtones in cultural life, functionaries successfully mediated between the interests of participants and the demands of the state, concluding that cultural life in the GDR “was subject to grass-root influences and thus developed a high degree of autonomy.”¹⁵ The posited top-down bureaucratic hierarchy was indeed pliable and dependent upon individual actors and local

¹⁰ Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, erweiterte Neuauflage (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), 130.

¹¹ Simone Barck, “‘Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern’?,” *Bitterfelder Nachlese. Ein Kulturpalast, seine Konferenzen und Wirkungen*, eds. Simone Barck and Stefanie Wahl (Berlin: Dietz, 2007), 141-64.

¹² Annette Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb. Gewerkschaftliche Erziehungspraxis in der SBZ/DDR 1946 bis 1970* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 212. See chapter three for a detailed discussion of the question of Soviet influence.

¹³ Karl-Heinz Jakobs cited in Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz,” 196.

¹⁴ Zimmermann, *Industrieliteratur der DDR*, 134.

¹⁵ Esther von Richthofen, “Communication and Compromise: The Prerequisites for Cultural Participation,” *Power and Society in the GDR. The ‘Normalisation of the Rule’?* ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 13.

factors. Although created and nurtured by the state for political purposes, the successes of the BSA relied upon the initiative of its participants, as manifested in its literary productivity. At a colloquium on occasion of the movement's 25th anniversary in 1985 functionaries claimed that more than 200 active circles of writing workers (*Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter*, ZSA) had published over 650 anthologies and that individual writing workers had published some 350 monographs.¹⁶ Research in the 1980s determined that nearly all professional writers in East Germany had at some point in their careers been associated with a circle of writing workers.¹⁷ Examples of prominent writers beginning their careers in a ZSA include Volker Braun in ZSA Schwarze Pumpe,¹⁸ Angela Krauss in ZSA Berlin-Chemie,¹⁹ and Wolfgang Hilbig in ZSA Altenburg.²⁰ Professional writers who mentored circles included Christa and Gerhard Wolf in Wagonbau-Ammendorf,²¹ Brigitte Reimann at Schwarze Pumpe in Hoyerswerda,²² and Peter

¹⁶ Protokoll des Kolloquiums "25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR" 18.-19.10.1985. p. 17. Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 647.

¹⁷ See chapter IV of this study.

¹⁸ A twenty-year-old Volker Braun "schuf ein Kinderlied und ein Gedicht 'Aufnahmeantrag eines Arbeiters in die Partei,'" *Neues Deutschland*, 4. Dez. 1959. SV 27a. Braun also participated in a "Zirkel schreibender Studenten" as a literature student in Leipzig. Rüdiger Bernhardt, "'Greif zur Feder, Kumpell!' Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter," *Reiz und Phänomen: Die Literatur der schreibenden Arbeiter. Ein Diskurs im Spannungsfelder der Erfahrungen von Vision und deutsch-deutscher Realität* (Berlin: Abes Öko-Druck, 1996), 26.

¹⁹ "Teilnehmerliste," Folder Berlin Chemie, Archiv schreibender ArbeiterInnen (ASA).

²⁰ See "Vorgestellt: Wolfgang Hilbig," *ich schreibe* 1 (1966): 6.

²¹ According to a personal letter from Gerhard Wolf in response to a study conducted by the German Department at the Martin Luther University, Christa and Gerhard Wolf led the circle from 1959-1962 [Private archive of Rüdiger Bernhardt]. Previous research, based solely upon Christa Wolf's published diaries, concluded: "Die Leitung des Zirkels schreibender Arbeit [sic] dauerte allerdings nur kurz, weil diese Arbeit literarisch nicht ergiebig war [...]." Dietrich

Hacks providing occasional “künstlerische Betreuung” in the ZSA Berlin-Pankow.²³ The stability, longevity, and influence of the movement extended beyond its 30-year existence, with one source claiming nearly one fifth of all ZSA continued meeting after 1989/1990.²⁴

Understanding the discrepancies between these cursory dismissals of the BSA and its vitality in practice as testified to by participants and documented by primary sources highlights the difficulties of describing the nature of East German state. The master narrative remains contested.²⁵

2. Theoretical Underpinnings: Between Myth and Reality

This dissertation project contributes to a growing body of research on East Germany which seeks to overcome ideologically loaded Cold War perspectives and to describe the complexities of daily life in the socialist dictatorship. Post-reunification research on East Germany in the 1990s was largely informed by theories of totalitarianism which framed the GDR as the “second German dictatorship.” This focus on processes of dedifferentiation (*Entdifferenzierung*), social homogenization, and lack of individual autonomy questioned the existence of a modern society

Löffler, *Buch und Lesen in der DDR. Ein literatursoziologischer Rückblick* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011), 87.

²² For details see section 8.V. of this study.

²³ “Chronik des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter beim Kulturhaus Erich Weinert Pankow,” 4. ASA 97/248.

²⁴ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 28.

²⁵ See for example Konrad H. Jarausch, “Germany 1989: A New Type of Revolution?,” *The German Wall: Fallout in Europe*, ed. Marc Silberman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11-35.

as a legitimate object of academic study.²⁶ In contrast to this static view of East German society as politically “durchgeherrscht,”²⁷ an increasing number of studies in recent years present more differentiated perspectives and alternative approaches in attempts to describe the local factors influencing daily life in GDR.²⁸ British historian Mary Fulbrook has echoed these attempts to undo the Cold War polarities, pleading for a different theoretical approach or a new model to understand the “normal” lives most citizens led in the GDR.²⁹ To avoid the often implicit, politically weighted, and moralistic undertones informing debates, she seeks a more empirical approach focusing on the notion of “normalization,” characterized by the routinization of everyday life that led to the general acceptance and internalization of its structural aspects and cultural discourses.³⁰

Others favor a wide diversity of approaches to GDR social history that can capture the heterogeneity and diversity of possibilities determined by the specificity of local power constellations in micro-historical “close-ups” of situational processes.³¹ As historian Ralph Jessen recognizes, the realities of “real existing socialism” consisted of a complex mixture of

²⁶ See for example Thomas Lindenberger, “Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung,” *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999) 16 ff.; Ralph Jessen, “Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995): 96-110.

²⁷ Jürgen Kocka, “Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft,” *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, eds. Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 547-53.

²⁸ Lindenberger, “Die Diktatur der Grenzen,” 19 f.

²⁹ Mary Fulbrook, “Ein ‘ganz normales Leben’? Neue Forschungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR,” *Das war die DDR. DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Außenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität*, ed. Heiner Timmermann (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 116-34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120 f.

³¹ Lindenberger, “Die Diktatur der Grenzen,” 28 f.

social processes and structures.³² Although the GDR presented itself to the world as a unified state and society, internally it had always been marked by political and cultural conflicts resulting from diverging interpretations of goals among individual actors, differing parties, and mass organizations.³³ Competition among organizations as well as personal animosities frequently influenced the course of events on the ground. As Lindenberger states, comprehending the various tendencies present in East German cultural politics involves tracing the efforts and interests of individual actors. The process of disaggregating a centralized perspective of state, he notes, leads above all to individual biographies.³⁴

Historian Eli Rubin consolidates these various approaches to historicizing the GDR into three schools: the “totalitarian” view, which focuses on top-down party directives and state power; the “Potsdam Group,” which emphasizes the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*); and the “Fulbrookian,” which focuses on the notions of “normalcy” and individual agency.³⁵ But in arguing explicitly against the Fulbrookians’s attempts to understand the normality of life in the GDR, he errs in concluding that these historians posit a “universal standard, or norm, that East Germans were able to match or live up to.”³⁶ As described above, Fulbrook’s plea for more empirical studies is an attempt to grasp how highly relativistic historical contingencies – rather than universal absolutes – contribute to social and cultural

³² Jessen, “Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus,” 100.

³³ Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, et al., *Die Parteien und Organisationen der DDR. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 2002), 134.

³⁴ Lindenberger, “Die Diktatur der Grenzen,” 17.

³⁵ Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism. Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4 ff.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

“normalcy” as internalized and experienced by the individual. Yet this present study concurs with Rubin in one key regard: a confluence of factors did result in the creation of a uniquely East German culture, with a proviso against absolutes – the cultural field in East Germany was highly contested and subject, above all, to the influence of individual actors who often followed competing agendas. This study shows not only the means by which individuals were able to pursue their own interests within the existing state structures but, just as significantly, that individual actors throughout all “levels” of the state were able to influence decisions and events according to their personal motivations and ideological visions – that the course of history and creation of culture was driven primarily by personal biographies formed by the contingencies of historical events.

Indeed, American historian Catherine Epstein has described the importance of individual life stories in creating a “biographical historiography” of East Germany – the “significant but little-noted phenomenon” of exploiting biographies for political ends.³⁷ Not only within the upper echelons of the SED did individual actors pursue differing agendas. The realities of attempts to create a new socialist literature of the working world as a central contribution to the culture, identity, and legitimacy of East Germany remained contingent as well upon individual initiatives and local conditions, i.e., the human factor encountered when implementing party decrees and pursuing utopian visions. Beneath the face of unity required by principles of democratic centralism and demands of party discipline lay a diversity of voices and countless biographies representing differing interests and competing ideals.

³⁷ Catherine Epstein, “The Politics of Biography: The Case of East German Old Communists,” *Daedalus* 128:2 (1999): 1.

Despite the difficulties posed by any attempt to capture a still politically charged juncture of communicative memory and historiography within a theoretical framework,³⁸ this research project has benefited immensely from the work of former East German academic insiders such as Simone Barck, Horst Groschopp, and Dieter Schiller, all of whom have provided invaluable contributions to understanding the politics of culture in the East German state. Most significantly, access to East German files held in the Federal Archives (SAPMO-Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde), documents collected at the “Archiv schreibender ArbeiterInnen” (Berlin-Weissensee; ASA), and personal interviews with movement participants have provided the basis for reconstructing this overlooked yet significant chapter in East German cultural and political history.

3. The Question of Soviet Influence

As the “quintessentially successful communist state,” East Germany was economically the strongest and ideologically the most committed of the Soviet satellite states.³⁹ The term “Sovietization” (*Sowjetisierung*) is commonly employed to describe the process by which the USSR and Soviet occupying forces exercised power and influence over the developments in the SBZ/GDR. This notion, however, developed as a Cold War catch phrase and carries strong undertones of political partisanship, as exemplified in a 1960 West German guide to life in the

³⁸ Communicative memory lasts three generations (80–100 years), whereas, according to Maurice Halbwachs, the father of contemporary memory studies, the historiographer’s work begins only when the past is no longer “occupied” by the memories of living groups. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁹ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship. Inside the GDR 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), vi.

GDR which describes, “die sklavische Anpassung aller Lebensordnungen [in der SBZ/DDR] an das sowjetische Vorbild.”⁴⁰ The term “Sovietization” is generally used synonymously with “Stalinization” in reference to the formative years of Soviet influence in the SBZ/DDR from 1947/48 to 1953/54, the phase of high Stalinism, and refers to the transfer and reception of Soviet structural, institutional, cultural, and ideological models and processes, the resulting centralization of state and society, and the ultimate fusion of party and state.⁴¹ The most important forms of this influence occurred through personal contacts between CPSU and SED leadership and through the Soviet approval of SED plans, orders, memoranda, etc.⁴² Yet access to documents after the GDR’s collapse indicate these relationships were not as close as commonly assumed in West Germany. In 1994, for example, historian Wilfried Loth concluded that Stalin did not want a separate East German state. As he states, “[d]er sozialistische Separatstaat DDR ist in erster Linie ein Produkt des revolutionären Eifers von Walter Ulbricht.”⁴³ The GDR was in fact largely the creation of German communists: the first generation of KPD members, or “old communists,” socialized during the First World War and

⁴⁰ On the term “Sovietization” see Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, “Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung. Eine vergleichende Fragestellung zur deutsch-deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte,” *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland. 1945–1979*, eds. Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1997), 20 f; *SBZ von A bis Z. Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen* (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1960), 7.

⁴¹ *Sowjetisierung und Eigenständigkeit in der SBZ/DDR (1945-1953)*, ed. Michael Lemke (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ Wilfried Loth, *Stalins unbeliebtes Kind. Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte* (Berlin: Rowolt, 1994), 10.

the Weimar Republic.⁴⁴ Yet the view of East German subordination to Soviet demands still informs literary studies in which the role of the writer is viewed as either the dissident defender of a realm of absolute artistic autonomy or as the state servant of a single-party dictatorship charged with reeducating the masses. This polarizing, reductionist perspective generates the history of East German literature as a narrative of resistance and protest against a paternalistic party and the dictates of Soviet decrees.⁴⁵

The recent questioning of Soviet influence over the 1959 Bitterfeld Conference indicates how the nature of the East German dictatorship has been misunderstood and misrepresented. Addressing the question of Soviet influence is significant, for the conference established the main parameters for cultural policy in the GDR during its remaining 30 years. Access to East German files quickly dispels the notion and confirms the BSA as a uniquely East German cultural movement that claimed its heritage in German literary traditions and provided a social and cultural framework for their reception in the GDR.

Shortly after the First Bitterfeld Conference, Soviet officials confirmed that the BSA was not based upon a Soviet model but was an autonomous East German cultural movement. Two discussions between East German and Soviet functionaries display the East Germans' desire to share their experiences of the nascent BSA and Soviet comrades' negative appraisal of the movement based on experiences in the inter-war period. In a monthly activity report to the

⁴⁴ On the significance of "old communists" in founding the East German state see Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries. German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).

⁴⁵ See for example Theo Buck, "Verhinderte Innovation. Die in der DDR ungedruckt gebliebenen Bücher von Uwe Johnson und Hans Joachim Schädlich," *Rückblicke auf die Literatur der DDR*, ed. Hans-Christian Stillmark. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 52 (2002): 11-44.

Central Committee, Lewin reported on Soviet writers touring the GDR in the late fall of 1960. Visiting deputy editor-in-chief of the literary journal *Novy Mir*, Dementjew, had stated in a discussion – “das interessanteste und bedeutungsvollste Gespräch während seines Aufenthalts in der DDR”⁴⁶ – that the Soviet Union had not had good experiences with the BSA in the late 1920s and early 1930s: It had been a creation of the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and displayed “sectarian tendencies” vis-à-vis literature. Noting that this was apparently not the case in the GDR, he reiterated comments of the East German official that the BSA “in erster Linie um eine Kulturbewegung handele mit dem Ziel der gebildeten Nation.”⁴⁷ A second discussion between Soviet and East German officials on the BSA is recorded in a letter dated 6 December 1960 from the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the SED Central Committee.⁴⁸ It reports on a conversation between the secretary of Soviet Writers Union Foreign Committee (*Auslandskommission*), Comrade Surkow, and a GDR embassy representative in Moscow in which Surkow also offered a negative appraisal of literary experiments in the USSR during the 1930s.⁴⁹ Reporting on their conversation to the Central Committee, Seitz conveyed his concerns that Surkow had expressed veiled warnings about the dangers of the BSA. In a troubled tone, the letter notes that the chairman of the Soviet Writers

⁴⁶ The discussion, originally scheduled for one hour, lasted over three hours upon request of the Soviet comrades. Arbeitsbericht für die Zeit Ende Oktober erste Novemberhälfte. Lewin. 16.11.60. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 183-84.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Letter from Seitz, Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten. 6.12.60. An das Zentralkomitee der SED. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.026/90, 60-61.

⁴⁹ After Lenin’s death avant-garde experiments in the USSR were increasingly repressed due to their calls for autonomous self-organization. See David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 88.

Union, Leonid Sobolew, had made similar comments at a forum with members of the East German intelligentsia during the “Ostseewoche.” When asked whether the Soviet Writers Union supported writing workers in communist production brigades, Surkow replied there were no “writing workers” in workers’ brigades in the Soviet Union and that he had already warned Alfred Kurella of the dangers experienced in the USSR in the 1930s.⁵⁰ Attempts to encourage “Udarniki” [shock workers à la Stachanov and Hennecke] to write in production facilities had proven unsuccessful: They had neither become writers nor remained workers. In the Soviet Union, he stated, writers are generally members of the intelligentsia and only rarely former workers. Yet in a second reference to “writing workers” Surkow stated that members of the Soviet Writers’ Union did support various literary circles in unions and clubs by giving advice and support to those with an interest in literature.⁵¹

While these exchanges in late 1960 confirm that the BSA was an East German cultural movement autonomous from Soviet influence (indeed, the Soviet officials had warned against such experiments), they also foreshadow the movement’s development in the GDR. For the letter from the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to “writing workers” in two contexts: Those of the failed RAPP experiments in the 1930s and those who met regularly in literary circles under the tutelage of professional writers. In both the early USSR and the GDR attempts to engage industrial and agricultural workers in literary production as a means of spurring social revolution quickly proved to be illusory: The BSA created neither a new generation of proletarian writers nor a new socialist literature reflecting the means of industrial and agricultural production. Within a few short years, however, East German cultural policy

⁵⁰ Quotation marks in original.

⁵¹ Letter from Seitz, Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten. 6.12.60. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.026/90, 60-61.

adapted the goals of the movement to meet the interests of its participants by providing a framework for cooperation between professional and amateur writers.

Twenty-five years after the collapse of the East German state the question of Soviet influence over cultural policy in the GDR remains unresolved. An exchange between sociologist Annette Schumann and literary critic Ursula Heukenkamp on the Nachterstedt Letter in the pages of the *Weimarer Beiträge* has raised the question of Soviet influence on the impact of the Bitterfeld Path.⁵² While statements by Soviet officials readily dismiss the notion that the Bitterfeld Path was of Soviet origin or influence, a socio-historical contextualization of the Nachterstedt Letter (*Nachterstedter Brief*), the cause célèbre for the scholarly enquiry of this Soviet influence, demonstrates the developments of cultural policy concerning the relationship between writers and workers in the GDR from the mid-1950s to the late-1960s. An examination of the letter's predecessor (the Wismut Letter) and its successors (the Stalinstadt Letter and the Bitterfeld Letter) displays a significant transition from the FDGB's initial attempts to instrumentalize the voice of the worker to its later sanctioning of cooperation between professional writers and amateur authors in literary circles.⁵³ From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the FDGB conceded influence over "mass cultural work" as a means to reeducate the masses at the workplace to the Ministry of Culture, which in turn aimed to provide meaningful free-time activities to the general population in residential areas. While functionaries from the

⁵² Annette Schumann, "Der 'Nachterstedter Brief' (1955). Zur Vorgeschichte und Durchführung einer kulturpolitischen Kampagne des FDGB," *Weimarer Beiträge* 48:3 (2002): 434-57; Ursula Heukenkamp, "Debatten über Arbeiterliteratur und Betriebsroman in den fünfziger Jahren. Kritische Anmerkungen zum 'Nachterstedter Brief' und zu dem Beitrag von Annette Schumann," *Weimarer Beiträge* 49:2 (2003): 283-91.

⁵³ FDGB: Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, the largest mass organization in the GDR and nominal voice of all workers.

FDGB often appropriated the cultural traditions of the League of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers (*Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*, BPRS) in their attempts to inspire a revolutionary ethos among the working classes, the Ministry of Culture more commonly viewed the BSA as a means of contributing to personal development through artistic engagement.

I. The Nachterstedt Letter

The Nachterstedt Letter, signed by 300 “Vertrauensmänner” of the VEB-Nachterstedt, initiated a year-long discussion in a weekly column of the FDGB daily newspaper *Tribüne* before the anticipated Fourth Writers’ Union Conference (1956) as a campaign to pressure professional writers to compose more works about the working world as their contribution to the development of socialism.⁵⁴ Yet reading the Nachterstedt campaign as a typical example of cultural policy and a model for further developments in the GDR is problematic, as Heukenkamp emphasized in her response to Schuhmann’s article. While Schuhmann had shown that the 1955 Nachterstedt Letter followed a Soviet model as a tool to “discipline” writers, Heukenkamp takes Schuhmann to task for failing to contextualize the letter within the history of East German literature, a failure allowing the “umstandslose Delegitimierung aller gesellschaftlich relevanten Ereignisse in der DDR” and causing Heukenkamp to plea for reflection upon the standards of literary research.⁵⁵ Schuhmann concludes her analysis of the

⁵⁴ The column, titled “Arbeiter diskutieren mit Schriftstellern über Literatur,” ran from January 1955 to January 1956. The Fourth DSV Conference, held 9-14 January 1956, was the first conference after death of Stalin and the uprising in the GDR on 17 June 1953, yet preceded the XX. Party Congress of the CPSU in February 1956.

⁵⁵ Heukenkamp, “Debatten über Arbeiterliteratur und Betriebsroman in den fünfziger Jahren,” 290. For a detailed analysis of the blanket delegitimization of socially engaged East German literature see Helmut Peitsch, “‘Vereinigungsfolgen.’ Strategien zur Delegitimierung von

Nachterstedt campaign by stating that the initiative can be seen as an unsuccessful dress rehearsal for the Bitterfeld Path⁵⁶ – claiming unequivocally that the concept for the Bitterfeld Path was based upon a Soviet model,⁵⁷ an assessment uncritically recycled by Kleßmann in his otherwise exhaustive social history of workers in the GDR.⁵⁸

Yet in posing the question of Soviet influence on the Bitterfeld Conference, Schuhmann bases her implied answer upon Rüter's contention that the Nachterstedt Letter provided the "Grundkonzeption" for the Bitterfeld Path:

Daß der "Bitterfelder Weg" eine "eigene" kulturpolitische Bewegung gewesen sei, die zwar den Rahmen des sozialistischen Realismus nicht verlassen habe, aber dennoch keine Kopie sowjetischer Vorbilder gewesen sei, wie Rüter dies behauptet, müßte weiter diskutiert werden. Die Grundkonzeption des "Bitterfelder Weges," diese Rolle schreibt Rüter dem "Nachterstedter" Brief zu, ging jedenfalls nachweislich auf ein sowjetisches Vorbild zurück.⁵⁹

Rüter's analysis, however, published some ten years before Schuhmann's study, is contradictory in stating both that the Nachterstedt Letter provided the basic concept for the

Engagement in Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft der neunziger Jahre," *Weimarer Beiträge* 47:3 (2001): 325-51.

⁵⁶ Schuhmann, "Der 'Nachterstedter Brief' (1955)," 454.

⁵⁷ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 96.

⁵⁸ According to Kleßmann, the Bitterfeld Conference was an "erneuter Anlauf" of the Nachterstedt campaign, whose goals were to discipline writers and mobilize the ranks of functionaries. Christoph Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR. Deutsche Traditionen, sowjetisches Modell, westdeutsches Magnetfeld. 1945 bis 1971* (Bonn: Dietz, 2007), 432.

⁵⁹ Schuhmann, "Der 'Nachterstedter Brief' (1955)," 454.

Bitterfeld Path and that the conference was not based upon a Soviet model.⁶⁰ In raising the question of possible Soviet origins of the Bitterfeld campaign, Schuhmann insinuates the conference was based upon a Soviet model. This lapse of scholarly rigor, as noted by Heukenkamp, is astonishing in the brevity of its offhand conclusion relative to the implications for analyzing cultural developments in the GDR – for the Bitterfeld Conference set the basic framework for cultural politics in the GDR for its remaining 30 years. The Nachterstedt Letter, taken as an isolated example of FDGB attempts to discipline writers, cannot be generalized for further developments in East German cultural policy. An examination of its precursor and successors demonstrates a shift from attempts in the mid-1950s to claim the voice of workers as a means to pressure professional writers to an emphasis in the late 1960s on the BSA and amateur arts as providing opportunities for personal development and self-fulfillment. The BSA, initially envisioned as a means of creating a new socialist literature anchored in industrial and agricultural production, in practice provided a format for amateur writers to develop their literary talents and aesthetic sensibilities.

II. The Wismut Letter

The genealogy of the Nachterstedt Letter is found in a letter dated 16 December 1954 to Herbert Warnke, chairman of the FDGB.⁶¹ After unsuccessful attempts to work with literary circles in the industrial sites of Böhlen and Polysius Dessau to compose a letter to the DSV prior to the

⁶⁰ Rüter, “*Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!*,” 86 f.

⁶¹ Letter from J. Joos to Herbert Warnke. 16.12.1954. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/18904.

Writers Union conference,⁶² FDGB librarian Fischer, having heard of an active literary circle in Wismut, traveled to Johanngeorgenstadt, where circle participants then composed a draft letter to the DSV.⁶³ Contrary to Schuhmann's statement that "[d]er Literaturzirkel der Wismut wurde von den lokalen Mitgliedern des Schriftstellerverbandes so gut betreut, dass die lesenden Arbeiter keine offenen Wünsche an die Schriftsteller des Landes hatten,"⁶⁴ the Wismut Letter was in fact a plea from amateur authors for more support from professional writers in the DSV. Written from the perspective of a circle of amateur writers, it complained about the lack of support they receive from state institutions:

Es kommen zu uns Kumpels mit Poesie und Prosa und legen sie vor und fragen: Was kann man damit machen? An wen muss ich mich wenden, um ein Werturteil zu erhalten? Wer gibt mir weitere Anleitungen, damit ich mich auf diesem Gebiet entwickeln kann?⁶⁵

While the letter does call for more literary works dealing with the lives and problems of workers as a contribution to the socialist cause, it does not mention professional writers as the source of a new literature. Rather, the letter refers to workers who possess the requisite talents to create literature yet lack the necessary institutional support. Citing two active writing Wismut miners who participated in the meetings of the district AJA (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren*, the

⁶² "Dort waren aber keine guten Voraussetzungen dafür vorhanden. In Polysius Dessau bestand z.B. kein Literaturzirkel mehr." Ibid.

⁶³ A small mining town in the Ore Mountains on the border of Saxony and the Czech Republic, Johanngeorgenstadt was the site of "Objekt 1" of Wismut AG, the Soviet-East German mining company, world-wide third largest producer of uranium and main supplier to the Soviet nuclear program. Draft letter from Wismut circle. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/18904.

⁶⁴ Schuhmann, "Der 'Nachterstedter Brief' (1955)," 441-42.

⁶⁵ Draft letter from Wismut circle. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/18904.

youth organization of the DSV) in Karl-Marx-Stadt,⁶⁶ the letter complained that these writers were neither able to provide help for other “schreibenden Kumpel” in their bi-weekly circle meetings, nor did the amateur writers receive appropriate assistance and understanding from the nascent state institutions.⁶⁷ The letter placed a strong emphasis on the need for state organs to support collaboration between workers and writers: Models of successful cooperation between the DSV and amateur writing workers were necessary to foster understanding within the entire bureaucratic apparatus of functionaries involved in the process of “learning the rules,” from the culture department of the SED to the highest echelons of Wismut. The critical approval of the DSV was required to legitimize the cooperation between writing workers and professional writers as a model of success:

Wir brauchen Verständnis der Kulturabtlg. der Partei und aller Organisationen unserer Schächte und übergeordneten Stellen bis hinauf zum Zentralvorstand der Wismut. Dies werden wir aber nur erreichen, wenn eine künstlerische Bewertung unserer Arbeiten vonseiten des DSV vorausgeht.⁶⁸

In 1954, five years before the Bitterfeld Conference, the Wismut Letter expressed the ambitious expectation vis-à-vis the DSV to introduce measures that would improve the work of all literary circles in production facilities in the GDR: “Wir erwarten vom DSV Maßnahmen zur

⁶⁶ Likely Horst Salomon and Martin Viertel, Wismut miners who later attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute in Leipzig and were active in the BSA. Werner Bräunig, author of *the Wismut Roman, Rummelplatz* (2007), had himself never worked as a miner in Wismut. Arrested for dealing on the black market, Bräunig was sent to the Wismut mines as punishment, yet due to his weak physical stature performed only office work.

⁶⁷ “Es fehlt ihnen selbst an der notwendigen Unterstützung und Verständniß [sic] vonseiten der Organisationen und der in Frage kommenden Dienststellen.” Ibid.

⁶⁸ Letter from J. Joos to Herbert Warnke. 16.12.1954. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/18904.

Anleitung der Verbesserung der Literaturzirkel in allen Betrieben der Republik.”⁶⁹ The FDGB, however, was not interested in sanctioning cooperation between workers and writers as a model for state institutions. The stated reason for rejecting the letter was the fact that the circle’s leaders were members of the regional AJA, which also regularly supplied them with instruction:

Von diesem Literaturzirkel [in Wismut] wurde auch ein Brief an den Schriftstellerverband beschlossen. Er entsprach aber nicht dem, was wir brauchen. Auch hier war die Auswahl nicht glücklich, denn der Leiter und der Stellvertreter des Zirkels sind beide Mitglied der bezirklichen Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren des Schriftstellerverbandes und werden regelmäßig von ihm angeleitet.⁷⁰

FDGB functionaries were unwilling to support DSV influence within existing literary circles of writing workers; rather, as demonstrated by the Nachterstedt Letter, they were intent upon claiming the voice of the worker themselves as a means of influencing professional writers in the DSV to become engaged in *their* writing with industrial and agricultural production. The Wismut workers interested in writing poems and stories had already established working relationships with AJA and therefore did not meet their needs. The existing cooperation between writing miners and the AJA did, however, directly anticipate the BSA.

III. The Stalinstadt Letter

Two years after the Bitterfeld Conference, the FDGB again published an open letter in an attempt to exert pressure on writers in preparation for the upcoming Fifth Writers’ Union

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Conference in May 1961. Sanctioned by the FDGB executive committee,⁷¹ this letter from 300 “Vertrauensleute des Eisenhüttenkombinats StalinStadt”⁷² is similar in form and content to the Nachterstedt Brief but with one significant difference: the inclusion of writing workers. Yet writing workers did not supply the FDGB with a voice to pressure writers. The initial addressees of the letter – the intended objects of influence – included both professional writers in the DSV and writing workers:

Um Einflussnahme der Arbeiterklasse auf die Entwicklung unserer Literatur noch stärker zur Geltung zu bringen, ist in der Vorbereitung der Schriftsteller-Konferenz ein Aufruf der Vertrauensleute und Kulturobleute des Eisenhüttenkombinats StalinStadt an unsere Schriftsteller und schreibenden Arbeiter – ähnlich dem Nachterstädter [sic] Brief – zu veröffentlichen.⁷³

This attempt by the FDGB to influence both professional writers and writing workers thereby acknowledged that writing workers were outside of their direct sphere of influence and in need of influence by the 300 FDGB workplace representatives of StalinStadt. Writing workers neither provided a voice for the FDGB to exert pressure over professional writers nor did they possess the desired perspective of the revolutionary working class to produce a new socialist literature. In a further concession, the letter clearly stated that the content of this literature was no longer to concern exclusively the working world; literature’s expressly didactic function of depicting models to inspire emulation now not only presented exemplary workers – the former hat

⁷¹ FDGB Bundesvorstand. Beschluß des Sekretariats von 29.10.60, Nr. S 861/60. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24630.

⁷² Offener Brief der Vertrauensleute des Eisenhüttenkombinats StalinStadt an die Schriftsteller zur Vorbereitung ihres V. Kongresses. *Beilage zur Zeitschrift Tribüne* (1961), 5.

⁷³ Auswertung der Kulturkonferenz 1960 zur weiteren Verbesserung der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit der Gewerkschaften. Berlin, den 21. Juli 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24630.

makers, farmhands, basket weavers, housewives, and construction workers who had become new socialist men and women in the first socialist city in the GDR (Stalinstadt) – but also included representations of social milieus of daily life outside the workplace: family life, sporting events, and vacation:

Wir wünschen aber keineswegs, die Menschen nur bei der Arbeit gestaltet zu sehen. Wir arbeiten, um besser leben zu können. Und dieses sozialistische Leben in der Familie, beim Sport, im Urlaub und wo es auch sein mag, möchten wir gern aufgeschrieben sehen.⁷⁴

Two years after Bitterfeld, these tacit concessions and indirect acknowledgments of the FDGB's limited influence over cultural life implied a compromise: While the FDGB remained intent upon enabling writing workers "sich der wunderbaren Waffe des Wortes zu bedienen" as a contribution to the ongoing class struggle and as a potential source of new literature, they now acknowledged their dependence upon professional writers in the DVS to support these efforts. Although beyond their immediate sphere of influence, the FDGB now recognized writing workers in Stalinstadt and throughout the GDR as a potential source of a new literature and cadre of future writers: "Sind es doch die schreibenden Arbeiter, die zur Bereicherung unserer sozialistischen Literatur beitragen und aus deren Reihen unsere künftigen Schriftsteller hervorgehen."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Offener Brief der Vertrauensleute des Eisenhüttenkombinats Stalinstadt an die Schriftsteller zur Vorbereitung ihres V. Kongresses. *Beilage zur Zeitschrift Tribüne* (1961), 5. See also DY/34/24630.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Yet the limits of FDGB cultural work in production facilities is shown in their dependence upon the DSV to help develop the talents of writing workers. The final paragraphs of the Stalinstadt Letter appeal to the DSV to give their full support to develop writing workers:

Wie in vielen Betrieben unserer Republik, so greifen auch in unserem Kombinat immer mehr Arbeiter zur Feder. [...] Wir richten die Bitte an Ihren Kongreß, daß er für alle Schriftsteller die Orientierung gibt, damit sie noch stärker zur Entwicklung der schreibender Arbeiter beitragen.⁷⁶

The FDGB's stated reliance on the DSV to help develop the talents of writing workers marks a break in their monopoly over *Kulturarbeit* as a means of reeducating the masses through their network of cultural houses and clubs. Although the FDGB nominally represented the voice of the revolutionary proletariat and was initially responsible for all "culture work" as a means of awakening a revolutionary ethos among the working class and anchoring a new socialist culture in material production, by the early 1960s they had conceded the development of a new socialist literature to the DSV and Ministry of Culture, thus marking a significant shift in how culture and literature was to be integrated into the envisioned socialist society and an important step towards normalization (Fulbrook, 2004).

IV. The Bitterfeld Letter

In preparation for the Sixth Writers' Union Conference, held 28–30 May 1969, the FDGB again attempted to exercise influence over the DSV, this time in a letter from over 1,000 union

⁷⁶ Ibid.

representatives from the VEB Chemiekombinat Bitterfeld.⁷⁷ Ten years after the call of Bitterfeld for workers and writers to cooperate in creating a new literature, this letter marks the endpoint of union efforts to encourage a collective approach to composing socialist literature. Although the creation of a new literature – as called for by Walter Ulbricht in 1956 at the Fourth Writers Conference in the wake of the Nachterstedt Campaign – remained essential for state identity and legitimacy, the revolutionary vision of writing workers (unifying base and superstructure) in the socialist cultural revolution had been abandoned by the mid-1960s in favor of the pragmatic goals of the BSA to provide meaningful free-time activities for the general population. The Bitterfeld Letter emphasized foremost the importance of FDGB cultural work as a means of personal enrichment necessary for future, individual social contributions: “Die Persönlichkeit heute zu bereichern und sie zu befähigen, morgen schöpferische Beiträge bei der Lösung der Zukunftsaufgaben leisten zu können, das ist ein Grundmotiv unserer Gewerkschaftsarbeit.”⁷⁸ According to the FDGB, the primary role of the BSA and all amateur arts was to contribute to individual aesthetic development and, only secondarily, to the development of art as propaganda:

[In dem Bitterfeld Brief] werden die mobilisierende Rolle der Literatur und Kunst in der sozialistischen Menschengemeinschaft und die Möglichkeiten der Bewegung

⁷⁷ Brief der Vertrauensleute im Auftrag von 20,000 Bitterfelder Chemiewerkern an den VI. Schriftstellerkongreß. Revolutionäre unserer Tage – im Buch, auf Bühne und Bildschirm. *Tribüne*, Nr. 87. 6 Mai 1969, 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

schreibender Arbeiter und aller anderen Formen des künstlerischen Volksschaffens für die individuelle ästhetische Bildung und gewerkschaftliche Kunstpropaganda betont.⁷⁹

The letter refers to the successful partnerships and creative cooperation between employees of the VEB Chemiekombinat Bitterfeld and professional writers and artists, yet makes no mention of the working world as the desired content of literature. Rather, it pleads for poets to engage less in “abstract philosophizing” and for writers to dedicate more works to the cheerful muse (*heitere Muse*), “da bei uns wie überall gelacht wird,” and places a special emphasis on family life, the problems of raising children, and the relationship between family and society. In place of the exemplary heroic workers of the 1950s (e.g., Hans Garbe) the union representatives now wished to encounter in novels and on stage the “heroes of our time” and “revolutionaries of our days” who stand out through the quality of their personal character rather than their work performance, those who “[...] ihren Witz, ihren Sinn für groteske und komische Situationen, für die Schönheiten des Lebens über alle ‘ernsten Stationen’ ihres Lebens hinweg bewahrt haben.”⁸⁰ Twenty years after the founding of the GDR and ten years after the First Bitterfeld Conference, the Bitterfeld Letter expresses contentment in looking to past successes and finding happiness in the domestic sphere.

While this contextualization of the Nachterstedt Letter exemplifies a shift in cultural policy which helped usher in a period of stability and increasing normalcy in the GDR, it also reflects broader changes in cultural and political developments. From the period of the Nachterstedt Letter to the Bitterfeld Letter (1954 to 1969) a significant shift in cultural policy

⁷⁹ *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens, 1967-1970*. Teil I (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung beim Zentralhaus der Kulturarbeit der DDR), 81.

⁸⁰ Brief der Vertrauensleute im Auftrag von 20,000 Bitterfelder Chemiewerkern an den VI. Schiftstellerkongreß. *Tribüne*, Nr. 87. 6 Mai 1969, 7.

had occurred: The FDGB's attempts in the 1950s to employ *Kulturarbeit* as a means of reeducating the masses were superseded by an acknowledgment in the early 1960s that cultural life took place largely in residential areas and that the Ministry of Culture aimed at satisfying the needs and interests of the general population.⁸¹ This shift, while marking the abandonment of the most revolutionary goals of the socialist cultural revolution and a concession to the existing realities, also signified a compromise among competing factions influenced by differing visions on the role of culture in a new society. The precise role of literature in socialism remained contested.

4. Cultural Heritage and Political Legitimacy

I. Traditions of the KPD and SPD

For many early supporters of the SBZ/GDR, the creation of socialism presented an alternative to the restoration of the pre-war status quo occurring simultaneously in the FRG. Yet beyond the broad goal of eliminating the "Bildungsprivileg" characteristic of class societies, no consensus existed on the path of transformation to a more egalitarian society. In stark contrast to the purported "zero hour" (*Stunde Null*) and a tendency towards existentialism in the arts and letters in the FRG,⁸² in the GDR visions of the social function of literature and art remained firmly rooted in pre-war traditions. These views generally reflected the KPD's (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, German Communist Party) insistence on revolutionary, politically engaged literature and the SPD's (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, German Socialist Party) "Veredelung" concept of fostering social transformation by improving the educational

⁸¹ See section 7.III of this study for a detailed discussion on this policy shift.

⁸² In the late 1950s the "Gruppe Zero" (including Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Günther Uecker, and Yves Klein) initiated the first post-war avant-garde art movement in the FRG.

standards and cultural tastes of the masses. While the FDGB frequently claimed the revolutionary traditions of the KPD and BPRS, the notion of “Persönlichkeitsbildung” more commonly employed by the Ministry for Culture and its Central House for Cultural Work (*Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, ZfK*) reflected more closely the SPD’s long-held ideals of developing well-rounded personalities as a necessary precondition for creating a new, socialist humanism.

Both of these notions originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and contributed to the socialist utopian ideals which provided the models for creating a new social order in the GDR. For a generation of SPD and KPD members whose worldview was formed before the Second World War, the GDR represented the promise of a more just society based upon antifascist, democratic, and humanitarian ideals. The party leadership’s collective memory reached back to the Wilhelminian Empire of the late 1800s. Much of the communist cadre who participated in the SBZ/DDR post-war reconstruction had been born in the late nineteenth century and remained deeply dedicated to the ideals formed through personal experiences in the First World War, Weimar Republic, Spanish Civil War, and rise and fall of National Socialism.⁸³ Many artists and intellectuals who supported the early GDR remained true to the ideals forged in the philosophical debates of the 1920s and 1930s. The SED leadership’s fierce enmity towards free-market capitalism and their undying faith in a planned economy was the direct result of the hunger, unemployment, and homelessness many had experienced during the

⁸³ Günter Benser, “Mit welchen Sozialismusvorstellungen war die SED angetreten? Die Vision und das Hauptinstrument,” *Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte* 60 (1999): 7 ff. See also Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*.

economic crises of the 1920s and early 1930s.⁸⁴ The standard of living they strove to guarantee their citizens derived from the basic needs of a working-class family during the Weimar era.⁸⁵ The mental and emotional worlds of many of the fifty to sixty-year-olds who assumed the reins of power in the SBZ/DDR were heavily influenced by the values, rituals, and symbols of the German workers' movement.⁸⁶ Organized proletarian cultural events in SPD clubs and "Volkshäuser" (sports, music, film), the life-style experiments of the Reform Movement (medicines, food, clothing, education), and the successes of SPD and KPD politicians and parliamentarians in Germany's first attempt at democracy remained living examples of responses to the social disparities of advanced industrialization, the militarization of high imperialism, and the increasing commercialization of mass culture. Commonplace East German institutions such as the "Jugendweihe" and KONSUM shopping centers had their origins in early twentieth-century "Volksbildung" and "Arbeiterbildung" traditions.⁸⁷ Ulbricht's vision of socialist clubs and culture houses as centers of a new culture was a direct reaction to the perceived excesses and distractions of bars and taverns in capitalist societies,⁸⁸ his introduction

⁸⁴ André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan. Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007), 37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 109, 173.

⁸⁶ Benser, "Mit welchen Sozialismusvorstellungen war die SED angetreten?," 8.

⁸⁷ Horst Groschopp, "Überlegungen zur Kontinuität der deutschen Arbeiterbewegungskultur in der DDR," *Arbeiterkultur seit 1945 – Ende oder Veränderung?*, eds. Wolfgang Kaschuba, Gottfried Korff and Bernd Jürgen Warneken (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde e.V., 1991), 124. On the *Jugendweihe* see Barbara Wolbert, "Jugendweihe: Revitalizing a Socialist Coming-of-Age Ceremony in Unified Berlin," *The German Wall. Fallout in Europe*, ed. Marc Silberman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 123-42.

⁸⁸ Horst Groschopp, "Der singende Arbeiter im Klub der Werktätigen," *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 33 (1993): 88 ff.

of the “10 commandments of socialist morality and ethics” (*10 Gebote der sozialistischen Moral und Ethik*) was based specifically on freethinker Adolf Hofmann’s “10-Gebote-Hoffman” (1891).⁸⁹ For the generation of socialists and communists socialized during the Weimar era, East German cultural policies offered a framework for revitalizing the visions and projects interrupted by the National Socialist dictatorship.

II. Stalinization

Not only 13 years of fascist rule and the devastations of war ruptured this cultural lineage, but above all the Stalinization of the SED and state structures in the SBZ/DDR: Establishing “unity and purity” of a Leninist party “neuen Typs” as the avant-garde of the working class, an administrative system of “democratic centralism,” and a strict code of “party discipline”⁹⁰ enforced through waves of show trials and party purges became the true heart of the Stalinist cultural revolution.⁹¹ Yet, as Kleßmann notes, influences of the traditional German workers’ movement remained too strong in the early GDR to speak of a clean break after the Second World War. The ruptures of war, he states, allowed the SED to “neu sortieren [deutsche Traditionsbestände]” according to its own needs and interests, forcing many traditions and

⁸⁹ Groschopp, “Partei der planmässigen Hebung der menschlichen Kultur,” 118.

⁹⁰ See for example Andreas Malycha, *Die SED. Geschichte ihrer Stalinisierung. 1946–1953* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2000); Andreas Malycha, *Partei von Stalins Gnaden? Die Entwicklung der SED zur Partei neuen Typs in den Jahren 1946 bis 1950* (Berlin: Dietz, 1996); Thomas Klein, “Für die Einheit und Reinheit der Partei.” *Die innerparteilichen Kontrollorgane der SED in der Ära Ulbricht* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002).

⁹¹ Jörg Baberowski, *Der rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2008), 122.

institutions to adapt to new milieus and demands.⁹² Further complicating the reception of pre-war cultural traditions in the GDR was the fact that not only did the SPD and KPD have fundamentally differing visions on the role of arts and literature in a socialist society, but both parties were characterized by internal factionalism throughout the Weimar era.⁹³ Against this background of competing interests and myriad historical forces, the SED never established a unified vision on the role of arts and literature in the development of socialism. Beyond the call for proper Cold War partisanship and obedience to party doctrine, there never existed a consensus on the form or content of a socialist culture in the GDR. Committed socialists and communists, however, could draw upon a long history of pre-war traditions to claim as their heritage. Since the 1950s the SED variously fostered, encouraged, and sponsored three otherwise divergent strands of German cultural traditions.

III. Revolution versus Gradualism: “Kunst ist Waffe” versus “Persönlichkeitsbildung”

The differing viewpoints on the role of literature in socialism in East Germany generally reflected the KPD’s notion of “Kulturrevolution” and the SPD’s concept of a “Kulturstaat.” For the KPD in the 1920s and 1930s art and literature were expressly political means to awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the working class. Agitprop art and BPRS literature were integral components of their political program. As Clara Zetkin stated: “Die Kommunisten

⁹² Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 112, 19.

⁹³ *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch. 1918 bis 1945*, eds. Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst. Überarbeitet und stark erweiterte Auflage (Berlin: Dietz, 2013), 32 f.

brauchen gar kein besonderes Kulturprogramm, ihre ganze Strategie sei ein solches.”⁹⁴ Social activism and political didacticism involved exploiting new forms of media to broaden the sphere of public discourse: Marxist playwrights and theater directors (e.g., Piscator, Brecht) developed a non-Aristotelian, “epic” theater to educate audiences, awaken political consciousness, and create a proletarian counter-public; worker correspondents (*Arbeiterkorrespondenten*) introduced operative forms of literature (reportages, skits, industrial novels) to spread information on labor strikes, political confrontations with police, and worker solidarity; a first generation of investigative journalists published essays and short stories on topical cultural and political events (Egon Erwin Kisch); and the avant-garde Soviet Proletkult movement experimented with new means of educating the working classes (“speaking” newspapers, didactic theater).

In East Germany, the BSA provided a framework to claim these traditions of socially engaged forms of operative literature. In the wake of the First Bitterfeld Conference, functionaries commonly employed the militant language of Friedrich Wolf’s slogan “Kunst ist Waffe” (1928) to state the movement’s goals. In a speech at the First Conference of Writing Workers in 1961, a functionary commented on the movement’s strength: “Gegenwärtig zählen wir über 300 Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, in denen viele Tausende lernen, sich der scharfen Waffe des Wortes noch besser zu bedienen.”⁹⁵ Functionaries in the GDR who referenced these traditions viewed the works of writing workers in direct lineage to literature written during the

⁹⁴ Woman’s rights activist and co-founder of the Spartacus League, Clara Zetkin was a KPD representative in the German Reichstag from 1920 to 1933. Cited in Groschopp, “Partei der planmässigen Hebung der menschlichen Kultur,” 104.

⁹⁵ Waldemar Pose, Berlin, 13. Juni 1961. Referat. Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 15./16.6.61, Magdeburg. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

revolutionary unrest in the Weimar era and the antifascist resistance during the war; they viewed writing workers as a potentially powerful force in contributing to the ultimate victory of socialism. For according to Marxist teleology, the BSA held a central position in the construction of socialism. Composing operative, socially engaged literature from within the means of material production, writing workers were to provide the link to unify base and superstructure, physical and mental labor, life and art, and to eliminate the distinctions between professional and amateur writers. The BSA was initially envisioned as the source for a new cadre of writers necessary to implement the socialist cultural revolution. As stated at a meeting of the BSA central working group in 1962: “Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter wird zu einem nicht mehr wegzudenkenden Faktor der sozialistischen Kulturrevolution, indem sie wesentlich zur ökonomischen, politischen und kulturellen Umgestaltung unseres Lebens beiträgt.”⁹⁶ According to this vision, writing workers played a central role within a system of interdependent, interrelated parts, its ultimate realization characterized as a unified totality of politics, economics, and culture. As one functionary stated in 1962, the “[w]ichtigste Aufgabe der Zirkel [schreibender Arbeiter] ist es, in ihrer Arbeit die Einheit von Politik, Ökonomie und Kultur zu verwirklichen.”⁹⁷

The alternative to employing arts and literature to spur revolution was the SPD’s gradualist approach of social transformation. Rooted in the cultural heritage of progressive classical humanism, this view predicated social progress on the betterment of the individual through the acquisition of culture and education. By eliminating the mechanisms of capitalist

⁹⁶ Protokoll der ZAG schreibender Arbeiter vom 13./14.1.1962. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

⁹⁷ Edith Bergner – Bericht über die erweiterte Tagung der zentralen Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter in Leipzig am 6./9. Dezember 1962. SV 27.

exploitation, socialism was to create the conditions for the development of a well-rounded personality and a new socialist humanism. A society free of material need would allow the free development of the individual as the precondition for the development of the whole. While providing culture and education for workers had been a central component of the organized workers' movement since the nineteenth century, SPD parliamentarian Gustav Radbruch first formulated his "Kulturlehre des Sozialismus" in 1922, postulating socialism itself as a cultural movement occurring through the "Veredelung" of the masses⁹⁸ – the same year Lenin declared the victory of socialism as dependent upon the development of the well-rounded (intellectual, moral, and physical) individual. Confronted with new forms of commercialized mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s, social democrats viewed themselves as the protectors and progenitors of classical German humanism. Based upon the bourgeois, humanist ideal of a well-rounded education as the prerequisite of the free individual, the SPD espoused a theory of social transformation through the democratization of "high" culture.⁹⁹ Schiller's notion of the theater as a moral institution provided the central didactic model for their ideal state: the "Kulturstaat" was to be responsible for educating the masses.¹⁰⁰ Since its Third Party Congress in 1950, this function of the classical humanist heritage had been anchored in the SED's cultural program.¹⁰¹ The degree of the SED's appropriation of classical humanism is expressed in Walter Ulbricht's vision of the East German state and "the new socialist human being" as the fulfillment of the

⁹⁸ Groschopp, "Partei der planmässigen Hebung der menschlichen Kultur," 117; see also Brigitte Emig, *Die Veredelung des Arbeiters. Sozialdemokratie als Kulturbewegung* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus-Verlag, 1980).

⁹⁹ Groschopp, "Partei der planmässigen Hebung der menschlichen Kultur," 119.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ See Hörnigk, "Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz," 228 ff.

Faust legend: East Germany as Faust III.¹⁰² From this perspective, the GDR – as the first workers’ and farmers’ state on German soil – had created the conditions for the final stages of human development and the “complete human being” (*totaler Mensch*), by which the socialist personality was to emerge in a dialectical relationship to society through the processes of daily work, continual learning, and the refinement of aesthetic sensibilities. These values underlay the strong emphasis on “künstlerische Selbstbetätigung” in the cultural sphere as a contribution to “Persönlichkeitsbildung” – central goals of the BSA.¹⁰³

IV. Traditional “Folk” Arts

Aside from claiming the cultural heritage of both KPD political activism and SPD classical humanism, the SED generously supported a third cultural tradition since the early 1950s: the local folk arts. For the new socialist culture, firmly rooted in the working masses, was by definition a socialist *folk* culture. With no apparent reflection on the historically charged semantics of the term “Volk” under National Socialism nor any concern for potential parallels in its usage, SED functionaries uncritically appropriated the term solely according to its usage in orthodox Marxism and socialist realism.¹⁰⁴ Minister of Culture, Alexander Abusch,

¹⁰² Proclaimed in a speech before the National Council of the National Front in 1962. Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, 254 n10. See also Klaus L. Berghahn, “Den Faust-Mythos zu Ende bringen: Von Volker Brauns *Hans Faust* zu Hinze und Kunze,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 24 (1988): 297-315.

¹⁰³ On the role of the BSA in contributing to “socialist personalities” see Andreas Leichsenring’s 1971 dissertation, *Der schreibende Arbeiter. Die persönlichkeitsbildende Rolle der schöpferischen literarischen Tätigkeit im Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter und die Verantwortung der Leitung* (Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR, 1971).

¹⁰⁴ This study will use the term “folk” in the sense of the “broad, working masses” (Brecht, “Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus,” *Sinn und Form* 4 [1958]) and generally follow SED parlance, whereby the “folk” arts are understood to be synonymous with “amateur” arts.

explained: “Sozialistische Kultur – das ist eine echte Volkskultur, die das Volk selbst zum schöpferischen Gestalter unserer Kultur der neuen sozialistischen Lebensweise macht.”¹⁰⁵ The existence of local amateur art groups provided the state a reservoir of active traditions and local actors for the party to stage its cultural revolution. By one account in 1949 there were 7,905 folk art groups with 330,000 members in the SBZ/GDR.¹⁰⁶ These groups – mostly choral, music, theater, and dance troops – were encouraged to participate in regional and national folk art festivals, competitions, and exhibitions (e.g., Deutsche Festspiele der Volkskunst, Volkskunstwochen).¹⁰⁷ Such shows of mass participation contributed to state legitimacy as evidence of a new socialist culture in which the masses, “das Volk,” were themselves the creators of their own culture. Again, the Bitterfeld Path provided the key as “das Herzstück unseres Kampfes für eine sozialistische Volkskultur,”¹⁰⁸ with the BSA providing the framework for bringing workers and writers into cooperative production, eliminating class antagonisms, and creating a new culture.¹⁰⁹ A “Thesenskizze” on the development of a true “Volksliteratur” describes the BSA’s role in facilitating communication and understanding between the working class and writers:

¹⁰⁵ Arbeiterfestspiele in der DDR – ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung einer sozialistischen deutschen Nationalkultur. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/23885.

¹⁰⁶ Ute Mohrmann, *Engagierte Freizeitkunst. Werdegang und Entwicklungsprobleme des bildnerischen Volksschaffens in der DDR* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1983), 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1952–1957* (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung beim Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 1969), 19 ff.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Abusch, *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ Sektor Literatur, Kunst und Volkskunst, Berlin, den 29.9.1962. Über einige Probleme der Entwicklung der Volkskunst in der DDR und der Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3450.

So wird durch eine von beiden Seiten her sich durchsetzende Bewegung aufeinander zu (Aneignung der Erfahrungen des werktätigen Volkes bei den Autoren – Aneignung der Schätze der Kultur und Entfaltung der rezeptiven wie kritischen Fähigkeiten beim werktätigen Volk) die für die Epoche des Kapitalismus charakteristische Kluft zwischen Kunst und Leben, Kunst und Volk, geschlossen.¹¹⁰

Appropriating Lenin's notion of the party of a "new type" – a party led by a cadre of revolutionaries as the avant-garde of the proletariat – at the 1960 Cultural Conference, Alfred Kurella described the role of a "Volkskultur von neuem Typus" as providing a "großes Reservoir für die Auslese der schnell wachsenden Zahl von Berufskünstlern."¹¹¹ The socialist cultural revolution, by definition, demanded the radical leveling of the antagonistic class discrepancies characteristic of capitalist societies, including the distinctions between professional and amateur arts. As stated in an FDGB report from 1962 on the development of the folk arts:

Bei einigen Künstlern und Funktionäre, die immer noch in zweierlei Künste trenne, ist noch nicht klar, [...] [d]aß es keine zweierlei Künste gibt, weil es im Sozialismus keine antagonistischen Gegensätze mehr zwischen Berufs- und Laienkunst gibt und sie die gleichen politischen, ökonomischen, sozialistischen und ästhetischen Grundlagen und Aufgaben haben.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Die Entwicklung unserer Literatur zur Volksliteratur. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/264, 380-84.

¹¹¹ Alfred Kurella, *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 18 f.

¹¹² *Underlined in original.* Über einige Probleme der Entwicklung der Volkskunst in der DDR und der Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften. Berlin, den 29.9.1962. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3450.

Following the Bitterfeld Conference, DSV secretary and novelist Eduard Klein emphasized that this principle also applied to the distinction between writing workers and professional authors: “[wir] halten [...] es für wichtig, in der Diskussion auf die fließende Übergänge zwischen schreibenden Arbeitern und Schriftstellern hinzuweisen und klarzulegen, daß es nicht zwei Literaturen geben kann, eine von Schriftstellern und eine andere von schreibenden Arbeitern.”¹¹³

5. A Socialist Culture: According to Plan

Yet beyond such programmatic axioms, as Dieter Schiller notes, there never existed an exact definition of a new “folk” culture. Such vague abstractions were merely the party’s projection of its political fantasies upon reality.¹¹⁴ Attempts to unify these otherwise distinct cultural traditions into a new socialist culture often resulted in odd and contradictory mixtures. As described by Stefan Wolle, the communist utopia was the product of a “bunte Mischung ideengeschichtlicher Fragmente.”¹¹⁵ Walter Ulbricht himself acknowledged this difficulty in a speech on the development of a socialist culture at the 1964 Second Bitterfeld Conference: “Das Problem besteht in der Schaffung der Einheit der mit dem Namen Weimar verbundenen humanistischen klassischen Literatur und des Bitterfelder Weges.”¹¹⁶ In fact this “hausgemachte

¹¹³ Letter (without letterhead) from Eduard Klein dated 11 December 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/272, 170-72.

¹¹⁴ Schiller, “Kulturdebatten in der DDR nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU,” 41-42.

¹¹⁵ Stefan Wolle, *Aufbruch nach Utopie. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1961–1971* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011), 410.

¹¹⁶ Walter Ulbricht, “Über die Entwicklung einer volksverbundenen sozialistischen Nationalkultur,” *Zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz 1964. Protokoll der von der Ideologischen Kommission beim Politbüro des ZK der SED und dem Ministerium für Kultur am 24. und 25.*

Erbe,”¹¹⁷ consisting of a “mehrfach gebrochen[e]”¹¹⁸ reception of BPRS traditions and the selective appropriation of the humanist heritage bundled under the roof of the folk arts movement, served above all the SED’s current political line within the broader context of the Cold War. Appropriately termed a “Lagerkultur” rooted in Zhdanov’s two-culture theory pitting realism against formalism and juxtaposing “enlightenment” against “anti-enlightenment” values,¹¹⁹ socialist culture remained broadly defined, often in negative terms of what it was not, i.e., decadent, bourgeois.¹²⁰

According to dogmatic defenders of the laws of scientific Marxism – “the seamless sophistry of Marxist-Leninist theoretical tautologies”¹²¹ – the development of socialism was a historical necessity which would unfold according to plan. As Otto Gotsche, a key initiator of the BSA, wrote shortly after the Bitterfeld Conference: “Im Gegensatz zur Entwicklung im Kapitalismus vollzieht sich unser gesamtes gesellschaftliches Leben planmäßig, wird es

April im Kulturpalast des Elektrochemischen Kombinars Bitterfeld abgehaltenen Konferenz (Berlin: Dietz, 1964), 71.

¹¹⁷ Horst Groschopp, “Ein System der perfekten Kulturverwaltung?,” *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 14:29 (1991): 38.

¹¹⁸ Simone Barck, “Mythos BPRS-Literatur? Zum widersprüchlichen Umgang mit der BPRS-Tradition in der DDR,” *UTOPIE kreativ* 102 (1999): 64.

¹¹⁹ See Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 12; Groschopp, “Ein System der perfekten Kulturverwaltung?,” 38; Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen. Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland. 1945–2000* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), 84-85; Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, 16.

¹²⁰ Already in the 1920s, social democrats defined their vision of “Gemeinschaftssozialismus” largely by means of cultural and moral values in contradistinction to those nurtured by the market-driven mass culture of capitalism: “Kameradschaft (statt Konkurrenz), Gemeinsinn (statt Eigennutz) und Arbeitsfreude (statt Entfremdung).” See Groschopp, “Partei der planmässigen Hebung der menschlichen Kultur,” 116.

¹²¹ Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, 72.

bewusst gestaltet. In ihren Grundzügen kann die Entwicklung für längere Zeit vorausbestimmt werden.”¹²² Culture, as a central component of the envisioned socialist system, was also subject to planned development, a fact which determined the SED’s emphasis on cultural functionaries’ work as “Leitungstätigkeit” and its absolute aversion to any forms of spontaneity.¹²³ Whereas the BSA offered the potential of personal development, for a more dogmatic breed of functionaries the activities of circles of writing workers “verträgt keine Spontanität [sic] und Zufälligkeit.”¹²⁴

This lack of a clear definition of socialist culture created difficulties in formulating concrete examples beyond the abstractions of political slogans; the resulting inability to communicate goals and expectations within and among state organs stymied efforts of functionaries charged with implementing cultural policy. For proponents of a new socialist culture a sore point remained the difficulty of producing original artifacts – the songs, dances, and literature to prove successes and serve as replicable models. While as early as 1949 functionaries had complained of the lack of appropriate songs for demonstrations, rallies, and marches,¹²⁵ Schuhmann notes that among cultural functionaries in the late 1950s “eine ‘gewisse Ratlosigkeit’ herrsche, vor allem in der Frage, was denn nun zur sozialistischen Kultur gehöre

¹²² Otto Gotsche, “Das Leben des Volkes – Quelle der sozialistische Literatur,” *Einheit. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus* 14:8 (1959): 1058.

¹²³ For two generations deeply traumatized by war, the appeal of this promise of stability was certainly powerful.

¹²⁴ Rüdiger Bernhard, *Traditionen und Selbstverständnis der schreibenden Arbeiter im Kampf um den Frieden und bei der Mitgestaltung des geistigen Lebens in unserem Land*, 5. SAPMO-BArch DY/32/5779.

¹²⁵ Letter dated 2. Febr. 1949 to the Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbund – Bundesvorstand Hauptabt. 8. From Abt. Parteischulung, Kultur und Erziehung. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/132, 66.

und was nicht.“¹²⁶ These difficulties remained a thorn in the side of functionaries aware of the watchful eyes in the West. Alfred Kurella referred to the “spöttische Frage [...] Wo sind denn eure Shakespeares und Cervantes, eure Michelangelos und Raffaels?”¹²⁷ Shortly after the Bitterfeld Conference, a newspaper article still complained about the lack of new works:

Leider hat es nach dem V. Parteitag der SED keine ernstern kleineren literarischen oder musikalischen Werke oder Arbeiten bildender Künstler gegeben, die eindrucksvoll das Heranwachsen des neuen Menschen zeigen. Die ersten Lieder usw., die entstanden und zu begrüßen sind, beschränken sich bis jetzt noch auf eine agitatorische Aussage. Wann werden uns die Künstler mehr bieten?¹²⁸

Still four years after Bitterfeld Walter Ulbricht emphasized the importance of creating replicable cultural artifacts unique to socialism: “Das Wichtigste jedoch: Der Sozialismus muß seine eigene Lebenskultur entwickeln – eigene Musik, eigene Lieder, eigene Tänze, eigene Tanzmusik.”¹²⁹

The Bitterfeld Conference was, in fact, an attempt to endow the concept of a socialist culture with practical content.¹³⁰ The BSA was to hold a key position within the folk arts

¹²⁶ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*. 90; See also Schiller, “Kulturdebatten in der DDR nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU,” 11.

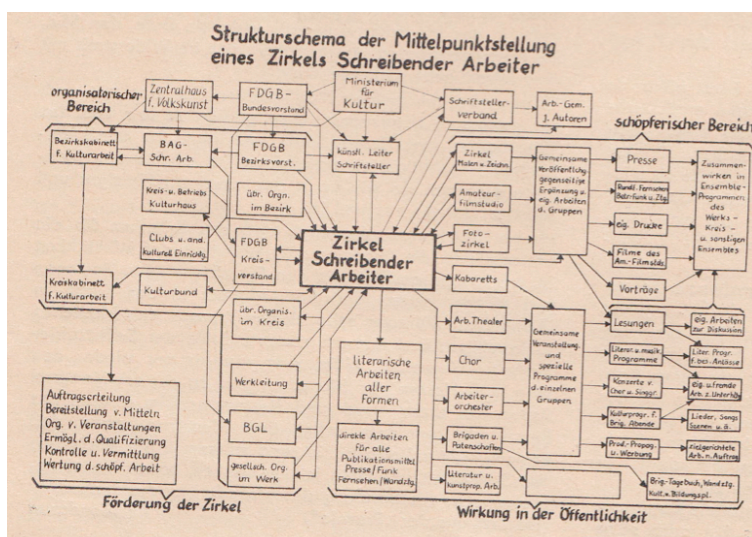
¹²⁷ Alfred Kurella, “Eine neue Etappe unserer Kulturrevolution,” *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 6 (1959): 10 f.

¹²⁸ “Alter Baum in neuem Boden.” SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/259, 33.

¹²⁹ Zur Frage der Kultur auf dem VI. Parteitag der SED (1963). Rede des Genossen Walter Ulbricht. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2418.

¹³⁰ Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz,” 208.

movement as the “Stimulator” for other folk art groups.¹³¹ To affect the “Einschmelzung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter in die grosse Volkskunstbewegung,”¹³² circles of writing workers were to cooperate with and provide texts for other artistic groups. As creative manipulators of the word, writing workers were envisioned as the “brain” or “Kern” of the larger folk arts movement.¹³³ Presented publically, the literature of writing workers would inspire others to actively participate in various social events and festivals, e.g., “Filmzirkeln, Kabarets und Arbeitertheatern, in der Mitwirkung bei Jugendweihe und Betriebsfesten,” and thus contribute to the overall development of a socialist culture.¹³⁴



[Figure 1: “Aufgabe und Arbeitsweise unserer Zirkel,” *ich schreibe* 6 (1969), 16]

¹³¹ Referat zum zentralen Erfahrungsaustausch schreibender Arbeiter am 7.6.1969 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/17148.

¹³² Aktennotiz über eine Aussprache beim Staatssekretär Wendt am 11.6.1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445; also Konzeption für die zentrale Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter. SV 651.

¹³³ Über einige Probleme der Entwicklung der Volkskunst in der DDR und der Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3450; Speech by Peter Czerny at the Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 8. Juni 1960 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

¹³⁴ Speech by Peter Czerny at Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 8. Juni 1960 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

I. The BSA: A Contested Field

The broad nature of these goals and the vague visions of a socialist culture allowed wide latitude in their interpretation and implementation. With writing workers occupying a central role in Marxist teleology and the plan for cultural development, the BSA provided a contested field for competing interests, as confirmed by a former ZfK functionary: “Die Bewegung der schreibenden Arbeiter war zunächst von unterschiedlichen Konzepten und Erwartungshaltungen begleitet.”¹³⁵ These debates on the role and function of the movement were carried out at the highest levels of the DSV, as noted in a July 1960 activity report on the executive committee’s preparations for the upcoming writers union conference:

Zwischen Otto Gotsche und Anna Seghers gab es eine Auseinandersetzung über die Bedeutung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. Dabei stellte Gen. Gotsche fest, dass die Bewegung der schreibenden Arbeiter Ausdruck der führende Rolle der Arbeiterklasse in der Literatur wäre, ebenso, wie es vor 1933 der Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller war.¹³⁶

While no details of their exchange are recorded, the contrast between Seghers and Gotsche could not have been greater. Their positions on the BSA were but a continuation of debates among competing camps of leftist artists and intellectuals during the Weimar era and the years of exile.

¹³⁵ Lothar Zschuckelt, “Langer, kurzer Weg von der Hoffnung zur Illusion,” *Blatt•Form. Magazin für Kultur und Freizeit* 4 (1990): 2.

¹³⁶ Arbeitsbericht. 1.-5. Juli 1960, SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 65.

Otto Gotsche, a KPD member since 1919, was a former miner in the Mansfelder Land. First arrested in 1918 for posting flyers protesting the First World War, he was jailed for fighting police during miners' strikes, blacklisted, and became unemployed. Sent to the Sonnenburg Concentration Camp in 1933, he spent the Hitler era in and out of prisons and concentration camps. A self-taught writer, Gotsche had been active as a "worker correspondent" since the 1920s. His first novel, *Märzstürme* (1933), was confiscated and destroyed by the Gestapo. Embodying a "certain communist mentality,"¹³⁷ he represented an extreme position on the role of literature in socialism. As personal assistant to Walter Ulbricht, Gotsche was instrumental in organizing the Bitterfeld Conference and placed special emphasis on the role of the "writing worker."¹³⁸ He was one of the most convinced representatives of a camp of seasoned communists who saw the BSA as the "Grundstock für eine zukünftige sozialistische Nationalliteratur und eine neue Schriftstellergeneration."¹³⁹ Notes on a discussion with Gotsche in the days before the conference state his position and reflect his own biography: "Der Entwicklungsweg eines sozialistischen Schriftstellers ist anders als der eines bürgerlichen Schriftstellers. Volkskorrespondent, Redakteur, Schriftsteller, neue Talente wachsen über die schreibenden Arbeiter heran."¹⁴⁰ In order to promote a new generation of writers from the working class, Gotsche recommended dissolving the AJA and creating literature circles in

¹³⁷ Barck, "Mythos BPRS-Literatur?" 67.

¹³⁸ Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, "*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer.*" *Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeiten in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 143.

¹³⁹ Horst Groschopp, "Kulturhäuser zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast," *Bitterfelder Nachlese. Ein Kulturpalast, seine Konferenzen und Wirkungen*, eds. Simone Barck and Stefanie Wahl (Berlin: Dietz, 2007), 40.

¹⁴⁰ Aktennotiz über das Aus-sprach mit Gen Gotsche. SAPMO-BArch IV 2/906/259, 24-26.

production facilities. The best writers from these circles were to be delegated to the J. R. Becher Literature Institute in Leipzig and then return to their production facilities.¹⁴¹ As a self-defined revolutionary Marxist, Gotsche viewed the BSA as a means to eliminate the distinction between professional and amateur arts in the creation of a socialist society. Workers writing literature in socialist workers' brigades were to help create a new socialist culture anchored in the means of material production. For this breed of Marxist, writing workers provided a direct means of establishing the primacy of the proletariat vis-à-vis the literary intelligentsia, as stated in an evaluation of the DSV following the Bitterfeld Conference: "Es zeigt sich mit der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter die führende Rolle der Arbeiterklasse auch auf dem Gebiet der Literatur."¹⁴² Following the conference, an article in the FDGB cultural journal, *Kulturelles Leben*, stated this position directly: "Der schreibende Arbeiter muß den Nachwuchs für den Schriftsteller bilden."¹⁴³

Seghers's bourgeois upbringing and educational background provide a stark contrast to Gotsche's proletarian origins and autodidactic literary talents. Jewish by heritage and communist by conviction, Anna Seghers was born the daughter of a successful art dealer in the affluent Frankfurt/Main milieu and completed her doctorate in art history before becoming a founding member of the BPRS. Although her statements on the BSA were not recorded, her position in the 1936/37 "realism debate" expresses her views on the social role of the writer and the very nature of the creative process. Seghers had sided in this debate with Ernst Bloch,

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Die Lage der Literatur. Entwicklung des Schriftstellerverbandes seit der Bitterfelder Konferenz. SAPMO-BArch DY30/IV 2/9.06/264, 306.

¹⁴³ "Neue Impulse aus Bitterfeld," *Kulturelles Leben* 6 (1959): 6.

Bertolt Brecht, Hanns Eisler, and Walter Benjamin in defending modernist experimental forms and a plurality of artistic methods while criticizing the schoolmasterly schematism and dogmatic ideology of Georg Lukács.¹⁴⁴ In an exchange with her friend and former BPRS colleague Lukács, she described the dialectic of the artistic process as a two-step model of first indirectly apprehending reality and then, in an act of creation, making the unconscious conscious.¹⁴⁵ Seghers's understanding of creative production was infinitely more nuanced than Gotsche's frontal approach to employing literature as a type of propaganda, her views more closely aligned with SPD notions of employing literature to foster social transformation, a view of the BSA described by Hans Koch in the literary journal, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, following the Bitterfeld Conference.¹⁴⁶

Otherwise known for his dogmatic defense of socialist realism,¹⁴⁷ cultural historian and Central Committee member Hans Koch described the function of the BSA according to the dialectical developments between the individual and society. Koch had written his dissertation on SPD historian and theoretician Franz Mehring and viewed the cooperation between writers and workers in the BSA as a liminal moment of a longer evolution, the "erste[r] Keim einer Entwicklung,"¹⁴⁸ in which developing the capacity for written expression was an essential aspect of basic cultural literacy and an important step to laying the broad foundation of a true

¹⁴⁴ Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, *Der Streit mit Georg Lukács* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 10.

¹⁴⁵ In Schmitt, *Der Streit mit Georg Lukács*, 268.

¹⁴⁶ Hans Koch, "Der schreibende Arbeiter und der Schriftsteller," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 7:12 (1959): 99-105.

¹⁴⁷ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 52; Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, 192.

¹⁴⁸ Koch, "Der schreibende Arbeiter und der Schriftsteller," 102.

socialist “Volkskultur.”¹⁴⁹ In the immediate wake of Bitterfeld, Koch rejected a narrow view of the BSA as a mass movement capable of producing a new literature and articulated a long-term perspective by which the BSA “wird in der weiteren Entwicklung zwangsläufig zur Erhöhung des ästhetischen Erkenntnis- und Urteilsvermögens breiter Volksschichten führen.”¹⁵⁰ Koch acknowledged the BSA’s historical literary traditions rooted in the revolutionary workers’ movement, yet emphasizes its novelty in the GDR as a seminal moment: “[...] erst unter unseren heutigen gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen konnte die Bewegung des ‘schreibenden Arbeiters’ zu einer Keimform der Überwindung des Gegensatzes und grundlegenden Unterschiedes zwischen körperlicher und geistiger Arbeit werden.”¹⁵¹

These fundamental differences on the nature and function of the movement existed not only among professional writers and party functionaries but also among movement participants. The protocol of the first meeting of the advisory council of the movement (*Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft, ZAG*) relates a dispute between the council’s first chairman, professional writer Hasso Grabner, and ZfK functionary Christa Fischer. Whereas Fischer foresaw the form of socially engaged, collective circle work in Deuben as *the* model for the movement, Grabner vehemently defended the personal autonomy of the writer and ended the dispute by resigning his post, stating, “[n]ach Beschlüssen kann und will ich nicht arbeiten. Schriftstellern muß man [eine] bestimmte Individualität zugestehen.”¹⁵² Fischer emphasized her view on the importance

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 104 f.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Handschriftliches Protokoll über die Sitzung der ZAG vom 17.6.61. Auswertung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6974.

of ZSA working collectively under strong central leadership in her contribution at the 1960 Conference on Writing Workers at the Martin Luther University by noting that many circles at district cultural houses “durch operative Arbeitsgruppen ersetzt werden [konnten].”¹⁵³ Functionaries had criticized Grabner at the meeting for his individualism and disrespect of the collective will: “Grabner missachtet das Kollektiv.”¹⁵⁴ At the next ZAG meeting (30 September to 1 October 1961) the committee accepted Grabner’s resignation and resolved to win Max Zimmering, then director of the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, to accept the chairmanship.¹⁵⁵ Yet the contentious encounter at the first ZAG meeting was concluded with only a recommendation for further discussions: “Allgemeine Empfehlung, Arbeitsgruppe bilden, die Frage klärt.”¹⁵⁶ The postponed discussion however – if it indeed took place – did not resolve the issues. Two years later an FDGB evaluation of the BSA commented on these fundamental differences among participants and the leadership’s inability to impose a unified line:

[Es] traten unterschiedliche [sic] Auffassungen auf, die zu grundsätzlichen Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen Schriftstellern, Zirkelleitern und in den Zirkeln selbst führten. [...] Da Meinungsverschiedenheiten über diese Fragen von Anfang an auch in der Leitung der ZAG auftraten und nicht bereinigt werden konnten

¹⁵³ Christa Fischer, “Diskussion,” *Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter und die Aufgabe der Germanistik. Wissenschaftliche Konferenz des Germanistischen Instituts der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1. und 2. Juli 1960. Referat und Beiträge* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag für Buch- und Bibliothekswesen, 1960), 49.

¹⁵⁴ Handschriftliches Protokoll über die Sitzung der ZAG vom 17.6.61. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6974.

¹⁵⁵ Protokoll der Tagung der Zentralen Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter. 30.9./1.10. 1961 in Leipzig. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3450.

¹⁵⁶ Handschriftliches Protokoll über die Sitzung der ZAG vom 17.6.61. Auswertung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6974.

(Diskussionen mit Hasso Grabner) vermochte es die ZAG nicht, eine einheitliche Zielsetzung konsequent durchzusetzen [...].¹⁵⁷

II. The Case of Hasso Grabner

Notes on Grabner's biography provide insights into the personal motivations of actors in the movement, examples of their literary contributions to the socialist project, and an indication of their potential fate under an increasingly repressive regime. A KPD member since 1930, Grabner had written agitprop literature during the Weimar Republic and spent the Hitler years in Waldheim prison and Buchenwald Concentration Camp.¹⁵⁸ Active in post-war reconstruction, he attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute from 1955 to 1957 and supported the socialist project with numerous literary contributions. In 1959 he penned the choral song "Hände – Köpfe – Herzen"¹⁵⁹ for and wrote a screenplay about the first socialist workers brigade called "Nicolai Mamai" in Bitterfeld.¹⁶⁰ Under his leadership the ZSA at the VEB Leuna-Werke "Walter Ulbricht" published an anthology in 1960, including his poem titled "Der schreibende

¹⁵⁷ Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin. I. Einschätzung der Rolle und Bedeutung der BSA und Bauern als Bestandteil unserer sozialistischen Kulturrevolution sowie der bisherigen Entwicklung. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

¹⁵⁸ *Schriftsteller der DDR*, eds. Günter Albrecht, et al. (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1975), 174-75.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Egon Rentzsch, Sekretär des Bundesvorstandes FDGB to Grabner, Berlin, den 23.2.1959; Letter from Grabner to Bundesvorstand des FDGB Kultur, Leipzig, den 25. Januar 1959. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16638.

¹⁶⁰ Hausmitteilung an den Kollegen Herbert Warnke. Berlin, den 15. Januar 1959. Betr.: Ergebnis der Beratung mit Schriftstellern, Künstlern und Komponisten zur Unterstützung der Bewegung der "Brigaden der sozialistischen Arbeit" am 13.1.1959. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16639.

Arbeiter.”¹⁶¹ In June 1961, after unsuccessful attempts to engage a ZSA to compose a new FDGB union song, the executive committee commissioned Grabner to write the “Lied der Gewerkschaften.” His text was set to music by composer Leo Spies and was to be popularized by the FDGB Berlin choir.¹⁶² Later that year the state security forces (*Ministerium für Staatsicherheit*, “Stasi”) began observing Grabner.¹⁶³ Four months after closing the borders to the FRG, in December 1961, the Stasi began surveillance of a group of writers at the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, including current and former students Grabner, Rudolf Bartsch, Werner Lindemann, Heinz Czechowski, Helmut Richter, and instructor Werner Bräunig.¹⁶⁴ While the party had been particularly fearful of potential “Gruppenbildung” among writers and intellectuals since the Petöfi Circle had helped foment the 1956 uprising in Hungary, they especially feared in Leipzig in 1961 Lindemann’s close contact with Ralph Giordano, a former Literature Institute student who had left the GDR in 1957 and published the highly critical *Die*

¹⁶¹ *Das neue Lied das da beginnt... Arbeiten des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht”* (Klubleitung VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” 1960).

¹⁶² Beschluß des Sekretariats vom 24.4.61 Nr. S 247/61. Stellungnahme zu den vorliegenden Texten für ein neues Gewerkschaftslied. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16637; and Beschluß des Sekretariats vom 5.6.61 Nr. S 349/61. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24630. For a draft of song see DY/34/16637, DY/34/2419.

¹⁶³ During this early phase of Stasi surveillance (1950–1963), the interest in writers remained relatively minor and selective and its influence in the cultural sphere limited. Within the Ministry of Culture, for example, the Stasi had no sources at all until spring 1958. Although writers did not become a main concern for the state security until the Biermann Affair ushered in the high phase of surveillance (1976–1989), quantitatively Stasi personnel covering the literary field remained comparatively small: In 1989/1990 a cadre of 170 officers from total of some 91,000. In both 1968 and 1989 “cultural officers” made up only 0.1% of the total Stasi cadre. See Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur. Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996), 149-50; 177 f.; 182.

¹⁶⁴ Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, 442 f.

Partei hat immer Recht (1961) in the FRG.¹⁶⁵ Although all of these writers were SED members, the Stasi report described the group as consisting of:

in der Mehrzahl [...] Personen [...], die in Beziehungen zum anderen Geschlecht sowie dem Alkohol haltlos sind, die Verbindungen zu den Massen und zur Wirklichkeit verloren haben, deshalb die Politik der SED zum Teil subjektivisch auslegen, arrogant sowie überheblich auftreten und glauben, daß allein ihre Meinungen und Ansichten richtig sind.¹⁶⁶

The report stated that members had expressed revisionist theories and ideas alien to Marxism in both public and in private, yet they were unable to detect any common or unifying ideological concept among the members and suspended their surveillance of writers at the J. R. Becher Literature Institute in July 1963. Although Grabner had been a strong supporter of the movement and made important literary contributions, he never entered the BSA collective memory, with later key players remaining unaware of these events in the movement's history.¹⁶⁷

III. The BSA and Post-War Cultural Reception: The FDGB versus the Ministry of Culture

The differing views on the goals and function of the movement, as exemplified by the conflicts between Anna Seghers and Otto Gotsche on the one hand and Hasso Grabner and Christa Fischer on the other, existed not only among writers and functionaries but also, as Hörnigk

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Werner Lindemann later co-founded the Drispeth artist's colony and fathered Till Lindemann, lead singer of the internationally successful heavy-metal band "Rammstein."

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 445.

¹⁶⁷ Interviews with Rüdiger Bernhardt (15.–16.07.2011) and Ursula Dauderstädt (27.06.2011).

notes, among the institutions responsible for the movement.¹⁶⁸ While Heukenkamp remarks that during the 1950s differing views within and among state organs reflected competing positions on the role of literature and the still unanswered national question,¹⁶⁹ her hypothesis that behind these differences lay a power struggle between the FDGB and DSV/DKB is supported by the public rhetoric employed by the FDGB and the Ministry of Culture and archival material detailing fundamental differences between the Minister of Culture, Hans Bentzien, and FDGB Chairman, Wolfgang Beyreuther.¹⁷⁰ Whereas the FDGB typically employed the militant language of Marxist revolutionaries in claiming the BSA heritage, voices within the Ministry of Culture and ZfK more commonly expressed conciliatory tones in line with the SPD's gradualist approach to social transformation. These differences were already visible in the mid-1950s: Whereas the Ministry of Culture made efforts to bring professional and amateur writers together into forms of productive cooperation, the FDGB emphasized transferring the revolutionary pathos of the Weimar era into the amateur arts in the GDR. The Ministry of Culture's 1954 program on the creation of a folk culture in the GDR recommended that professional authors in the DSV tutor amateur authors in circles:

Die Versuche der Werktätigen, sich schriftstellerisch und kompositorisch zu betätigen, müssen stärker unterstützt werden. Bereits während der Arbeit an solchen Stücken sollte die Anleitung und Beratung einsetzen. Die meist für sich allein arbeitenden Autoren

¹⁶⁸ Hörnigk, "Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz," 225.

¹⁶⁹ Heukenkamp, "Debatten über Arbeiterliteratur und Betriebsroman in den fünfziger Jahren," 284.

¹⁷⁰ For details of this conflict see section 7.III of this study.

sollten in Zirkeln, die vom Deutschen Schriftstellerverband unterstützt werden, zusammengeführt werden.¹⁷¹

Further, a 1957 publication of the Central House for Folk Art (*Zentralhaus für Volkskunst*) recommended that amateur authors be brought together into working groups supported by the AJA, the youth organization of the DSV, as a path to professionalization:

Den Bezirkshäusern und, wo das Bedürfnis vorliegt, den Volkskunstkabinetten wird empfohlen, die Laienautoren zu Arbeitsgruppen zusammenzufassen und sie durch die Hilfe der Arbeitsgemeinschaften Junger Autoren beim Deutschen Schriftstellerverband fachlich und ideologisch zu fördern. [...] Besonders begabte Laienautoren sollten der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren zur Aufnahme empfohlen werden.¹⁷²

During this same period, however, FDGB talking points reflected the views of communists molded in the fight against fascism by placing direct emphasis on maintaining the revolutionary activism of the Weimar era within the GDR. Indeed, into the 1960s all but one secretary of the FDGB cultural department had worked in the communist resistance during the war and spent years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps.¹⁷³ During the high phase of Stalinism in the early 1950s former SPD members had been purged from the ranks of the FDGB and replaced by a new generation of loyal functionaries, typically uneducated members of the

¹⁷¹ “Aus der Programmklärung des Ministeriums für Kultur über den Aufbau einer Volkskultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (12. Oktober 1954),” *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1952–1957*, 202.

¹⁷² “Grundsatzklärung zu Fragen des Laienspiels,” *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1952–1957*, 223 f.

¹⁷³ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 116.

working class with little personal affinity to culture or the arts.¹⁷⁴ In a 1957 speech at a working meeting on questions of folk art, the FDGB secretary for culture, Egon Rentzsch, who had spent most of the Hitler era imprisoned in Bautzen and the concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, never mentioned the role of literature, stating:

Alle Volkskunstgruppen und besonders unsere künstlerischen Agitationsgruppen und politisch-satirischen Kabarets sollten aus den revolutionären Traditionen der Arbeiterklasse aus der Zeit vor 1933 lernen und sie für den gegenwärtigen Kampf um Frieden und Sozialismus auswerten und weiterentwickeln.¹⁷⁵

He criticized the ineffectual work of the Zentralhaus für Volkskunst while emphasizing the need for folk art groups to develop a repertoire based upon local revolutionary traditions: “Unsere Gruppen sollen dabei in ihrem Repertoire besonders die revolutionären Traditionen des Kampfes der Arbeiterklasse ihres eignen Betriebes, Gebietes und Berufszweiges pflegen.”¹⁷⁶ Although Rentzsch opened the conference by citing the quantitative successes of FDBG cultural work – over 4.5 thousand choirs with 120,000 participants, 4 thousand orchestras and music groups with 40,000 workers, nearly 3,000 dance groups with some 35,000 members, and 1.5 thousand drama circles with more than 15,000 participants – and quotes Mao Zedong on the importance of unifying political content and artistic form, he neglected the difficulties of incorporating a revolutionary pathos into the folk arts. While conference participants with first-hand experience in agitprop art forms during the Weimar era lauded the operative genres of art,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Arbeitstagung des FDGB-Bundesvorstandes über Fragen der Volkskunst am 22. und 23. März 1957 in Berlin. Protokoll. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/20526.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

other contributors described the problems of winning over folk art groups for political ends, including the oft-cited argument that the operative art forms from the 1920s and 1930s were no longer relevant to the present needs and conditions.¹⁷⁷

After the 1959 Bitterfeld Conference, the BSA provided a socio-cultural field for claiming these revolutionary traditions in the GDR, most commonly by FDGB functionaries. In preparation for the 1962 Conference of Writing Workers in Weimar, the FDGB maintained its militant tone to state the role of the BSA in establishing a new socialist culture – a culture in contradistinction to the “Unkultur des Westzonenstaates” and the decadent “pseudo-culture” characteristic of imperialism. In order to force the socialist cultural revolution it was necessary to:

sich deshalb konsequent dafür einsetzen, dass das kulturelle Leben der Brigaden und die Tätigkeit der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter die Einheit von Ökonomie, Politik und Kultur verwirklichen. Dabei sind alle Reste der Vorstellung, Arbeit und Freizeit seien Gegensätze, scharf zu bekämpfen. Es muß Klarheit geschaffen werden über die Notwendigkeit der Kulturrevolution für den Sieg des Sozialismus.¹⁷⁸

FDGB chairman Wolfgang Beyreuther identified the central problem of the movement at the First Conference of Writing Workers in 1960: “dass wir im Schaffen unserer Zirkel der schreibenden Arbeiter immer diese untrennbare Einheit von Politik, Ökonomie und Kultur als

¹⁷⁷ Prof. Herbert Gute, Humboldt-University, referred to his experiences with the group “rote Raketen,” while Jan Koppłowicz [sic], an active participant in the BSA, described an impressionable encounter with the “living newspaper” group from Moscow, the “Blaue Blusen.” Arbeitstagung des FDGB-Bundesvorstandes über Fragen der Volkskunst am 22. und 23. März 1957 in Berlin. Protokoll. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/20526. See also Jan Koppłowicz, “Von der Agitpropsszene zum Roman,” *ich schreibe* 2 (1961): 1.

¹⁷⁸ Die Bisherigen Ergebnisse und das Ziel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter! SAPMO-BArch DY/34/562.

Grundprinzip unserer Tätigkeit betrachten.”¹⁷⁹ For Marxist revolutionaries intent upon forcing the socialist cultural revolution the primary goal of writing workers was to contribute to a unified system of interrelated components by eliminating the antagonistic discrepancies between life and art.

During this same period voices within the Ministry of Culture typically pleaded for a more differentiated perspective on the role of literature and arts in socialism, a view in line with the SPD’s “Veredelungskonzept.” In a protocol of the cultural commission shortly before the First Bitterfeld Conference, deputy Minister of Culture, Hans Rodenberg, conceded the revolutionary role of art while begging to blunt its impact as a weapon:

Jetzt sahen wir – wir haben die alte Friedrich-Wolfsche Losung -: Kunst ist Waffe.

Daran ist nicht zu zweifeln, zweifellos ist Kunst Waffe. Aber heute müssen wir selbstverständlich überlegen: Ist Kunst eine Keule, mit der wir uns selbst auf den Kopf schlagen, oder ist Kunst überhaupt eine modernere Waffe als eine Keule? Zweifellos, wenn wir sagen: Kunst ist Waffe, so ist es sicher, dass es die modernste, die beste Waffe sein muß und nicht die primitivste, die altertümlichste Waffe, und wir müssen auch wissen, gegen wen und für wen wir die Waffe anwenden, damit keine Verwechslungen vorkommen.¹⁸⁰

This comment by Rodenberg, as a conciliatory voice in the Ministry of Culture, is significant in pleading for a more progressive, “modern” approach to the function of art, for he was otherwise considered a member of a camp of revolutionaries (including Alexander Abusch and Alfred

¹⁷⁹ Schlusswort des Kollegen Wolfgang Beyreuther auf der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 8.6.1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

¹⁸⁰ Protokoll der Parteiaktivtagung der erweiterten Kulturkommission am 5.2.1959. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.109/2, 56.

Kurella) whose view of a socialist society as a unified and disciplined organization was formed during the 1920s Soviet cultural revolution.¹⁸¹ Reflecting the Ministry of Culture's more differentiated view of the BSA during this period is a 1963 publishers' plan, which indicated the movement's intended sphere of influence as the workplace while also noting the importance of cooperating with other folk art groups and the possibility of publishing works in anthologies and the local press:

Die schreibenden Arbeiter sind vom Zentralhaus für Volkskunst, FDGB, den Arbeitsgemeinschaften darauf orientiert worden, in erster Linie an der Gestaltung von Betriebswandzeitungen, Betriebszeitungen, Brigadetagebüchern, Programmen für die verschiedenen Volkskunstgruppen mitzuarbeiten. Darüber hinaus bestehen Publikationsmöglichkeiten in den Bezirksanthologien und in der Tagespresse.¹⁸²

These differences between the FDGB and Ministry of Culture remained. As stated in preparatory notes for the 1963 Schwerin Conference of Writing Workers, the BSA was to form the direct lineage to these revolutionary traditions:

Durch neue Arbeiten, die die Leser bereichern und beflügeln, setzen die schreibenden Arbeiter und Arbeiterkorrespondenten den Arbeiterschriftsteller aus der Zeit der

¹⁸¹ Horst Groschopp, "Kulturhäuser Zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast," *Bitterfelder Nachlese. Ein Kulturpalast, seine Konferenzen und Wirkungen*, eds. Simone Barck and Stefanie Wahl (Berlin: Dietz, 2007), 40.

¹⁸² Ministerium für Kultur. Abt. Literatur und Buchwesen. Sektor Schöne Literatur. Aug. 1962. Einschätzung der Themenplanung 1963 des Fachgebietes Deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur. SAPMO-BArch DR/1/1239.

erbitterten Klassenkampfes vor 1933 und aus der Zeit des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes bis 1945 fort.¹⁸³

Still in the 1970s the FDGB claimed the revolutionary heritage of the Weimar era as the forerunner of the BSA. According to 1973 FDGB resolutions on their responsibilities for the BSA, the union viewed writing workers as a continuation of the revolutionary traditions of the German workers' movement, worker correspondents, and the BPRS.¹⁸⁴ FDGB chairman, Harald Bühl, laid direct claim to these traditions in a 1974 speech:

Wir sehen im Schaffen der schreibender Arbeiter heute auch die schöpferische Fortführung der Revolutionären kulturellen Tradition der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, wie sie u. a. in der Arbeiterkorrespondenten-Bewegung und im literarischen Bemühen von Arbeitern in der Agit/Prop-Bewegung ihren Ausdruck fanden.¹⁸⁵

Circle participants also expressed this militancy into the 1970s. An article in *ich schreibe* quotes a circle member who juxtaposed traditional SPD clubs (*Vereine*) with circles of writing workers as centers of revolutionary struggle in a thinly veiled anti-intellectualism:

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter sind keine Neuauflage deutscher Vereinsmeierei. Sie sind kein Trostklub verkannter oder noch nicht erkannter Genies. Sie sind kein Treffpunkt

¹⁸³ Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

¹⁸⁴ See Die Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften bei der Förderung der schreibenden Arbeiter. Beschluß des Sekretariats des Bundesvorstandes des FDGB vom 26. September 1973. SAPMO-BArch DY/78/8411; Die Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften bei der Förderung der schreibenden Arbeiter. Beschluß des Sekretariats. S 650/73. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/25201.

¹⁸⁵ Underlined in the original. Referat zum Erfahrungsaustausch schreibender Arbeiter (Genossen Dr. Harald Bühl - FDGB) 25.5.74. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27302.

mehr oder weniger neurotisch veranlagter Dilettanten. Um es mit Majakowski zu sagen: Ihre Feder gehört ins Waffenverzeichnis. Das bedeutet: Klassenkampf.¹⁸⁶

Further promoting these revolutionary traditions as a living heritage, the BSA journal *ich schreibe* published a series in the late 1960s and early 1970s (January 1968 till December 1970) titled “Lebendiges Erbe. Zur Tradition der deutschen proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur.”

And still in the mid-1980s a ZfK study on the development of the BSA claimed the proletarian, revolutionary literary traditions as the movement’s forbearer: “Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter, die sich in einer Traditionslinie mit der proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur begreift, kann inzwischen auf eine mehr als 25jährige eigene Geschichte verweisen.”¹⁸⁷ By the mid-1980s, however, functionaries acknowledged internally the loss of contemporary relevance of these traditions through the growing historical distance and the development of a broad-based, diverse amateur arts movement, admitting that movement participants were themselves often unaware of these historical traditions.

Zwischen den schreibenden Arbeitern aus den 50er und 60er Jahren und denen aus den 80er Jahren gibt es beträchtliche Unterschiede. [...] [Es hat sich] ein breites und differenziertes Volkskunstschaffen entwickelt. [...] Ohne die proletarisch-revolutionäre Literatur, die Arbeiterkorrespondenten, die Prolet. Feuilleton-Korrespondenz, ohne Willi

¹⁸⁶ Klaus Schneider, “Das A und O: Richtige Leitungstätigkeit,” *ich schreibe* 3 (1971): 2-14.

¹⁸⁷ Entwicklungskonzeption der Fachgebiete des künstlerischen Volksschaffens Schreibender Arbeiter. 1986–1990. SAPMO-BArch DY/32/5779.

Bredel, Hans Marchwitza, Anna Seghers, Karl Grünberg, sind die Schreibenden von heute kaum zu denken, auch wenn das dem einzelnen Schreibenden nicht bewusst ist.¹⁸⁸

Yet throughout the life of the movement, parallel to claiming the literary traditions of KPD pedigree as the BSA's forebearers, functionaries also employed the key notion of "individual artistic activity" (*künstlerische Selbstbetätigung*) as a central contribution to "personality development" (*Persönlichkeitsentwicklung*) in describing the goals and benefits of the BSA. Since the Third Conference of Writing Workers in Schwerin (1963) the main goal of the movement was stated as contributing to the education and personal development of its participants.¹⁸⁹ For the official home of all folk arts in the GDR was the ZfK in Leipzig and its district and local cultural houses and clubs which, under direction of the Ministry of Culture, were charged with providing meaningful free-time activities for the general population.

In his 1971 dissertation on the role of the BSA in personality development, the first editor of *ich schreibe*, Andreas Leichsenring, stated that the concrete goal of socialism was the creation of the well-rounded "socialist personality."¹⁹⁰ Through work and education the individual develops in a dialectical relationship with society; the full unfolding of human capacities – the creation of the "total human being" – was both the precondition and ultimate goal of socialism.¹⁹¹ A central function of literature and the main goal of cultural work was the personal development of an "aesthetic relationship to reality" and the ability to experience

¹⁸⁸ Rüdiger Bernhardt. Protokoll des Kolloquium "25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR" 18.–19.10.1985, Leipzig. p. 11-12. ZfK, 647.

¹⁸⁹ See chapter seven in this study for a detailed analysis of this policy shift.

¹⁹⁰ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 29.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

pleasure.¹⁹² Leichsenring's successor as editor of *ich schreibe*, Ursula Dauderstädt, described the role of art in developing the faculty of human observation and an openness and sensitivity toward others: "Durch die Kunst kann man Menschenbeobachtung lernen, sich Feingefühligkeit und Aufgeschlossenheit anderen Menschen gegenüber aneignen."¹⁹³

Throughout its thirty-year existence, the BSA provided both a contested field for the reception of these differing traditions and a model of their peaceful coexistence. Although the philosophical differences on the function of literature in developing socialism may appear insignificant compared to the more concrete political and economic challenges the SED faced during the phase of "state-building" through the 1950s, they were nonetheless central to debates which defined the relationship of the individual to society, work, art and free time, and the nature and potential of human expression. As such, these discussions were not only important for those with personal stakes in their claims but were also essential to provide orientation and guidelines for a cadre of functionaries charged with implementing the cultural plan and establishing functioning state bureaucracies. Throughout the 1950s – the "hot" phase of the Cold War – the institutional structures and philosophical tenets yielded the functional framework for the BSA. During this first decade of state building in the GDR functionaries had struggled to gain an overview of activities at the regional and local levels, seriously aggravating their efforts to implement central policy and enforce party ideology.

5. Establishing State Structures and Consolidating Political Power in the 1950s

¹⁹² Andreas Leichsenring, "Schreiben und an sich arbeiten. Zur Persönlichkeitsentwicklung in Zirkeln schreibender Arbeiter," *ich schreibe* 3 (1971): 34-41.

¹⁹³ Ursula Dauderstädt, "Publikationen für schreibende Arbeiter," *ich schreibe* 3 (1973): 6.

The 1959 Bitterfeld Conference was but a consolidation and continuation of previous efforts to bring workers, writers, and artists together in forms of mutual cooperation as a means of fostering social transformation. Already in 1947 the Soviet Military Administration [SMA] Order 234 had dictated the role of artists and writers to improve the general living conditions of the working class by supporting the increased production goals in industrial facilities.¹⁹⁴ In 1948 the SED's first "Kulturtag" set an exclusive focus on the Marxist definition of "Kulturpolitik" with the goal of eliminating the gap between workers and intellectuals.¹⁹⁵ Within the SED's two-year plan of economic development (1949-1950) the work of writers was to take place in factories and local industries with the goal of reeducating the masses and creating a new work ethic.¹⁹⁶ In 1950 the "Kulturverordnung" formally anchored the social, didactic role of writers within the fields of politics, economics, and culture, and the Third FDGB Congress established the union's monopoly over cultural work at the workplace, with culture thereafter an integral part of every economic plan.¹⁹⁷ The FDGB's program to develop "kulturelle Massenarbeit" as a contribution to the first five-year plan (1951–1955) called on functionaries to create "tausende von Zirkeln."¹⁹⁸ The creation of circles in production facilities (including circles for literature,

¹⁹⁴ EntschlieÙung zum Befehl 234. 15.11.1947, SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/132, 5; see also Schumann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 47 f.; Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR*, 286.

¹⁹⁵ Schumann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 72.

¹⁹⁶ Der Schriftsteller in der Betriebs-Kulturarbeit und der Zweijahrplan. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/161, 29.

¹⁹⁷ Schumann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 53 ff; see also http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/rahmen/lexikon_frame.html. Retrieved 7 November 2011.

¹⁹⁸ "Arbeitsprogramm des FDGB zur Entfaltung der kulturellen Massenarbeit," in "Dokumente zur Entfaltung der kulturellen Massenarbeit des FDGB," *Kulturelles Arbeitsprogramm des FDGB. Organisatorische Richtlinie dazu. Arbeitsvereinbarungen des FDGB mit den Massen-*

music, theater, architecture, painting, drawing, hiking, chess, etc.) was to both satisfy individual interests in cultural participation and provide a potential cadre for a new generation of artists.¹⁹⁹ The FDGB directive emphasized the voluntary nature of participation in cultural life and recommended monthly lectures and discussions on important books as well as the creation of literary circles in production facilities.²⁰⁰ At the Second Party Conference in July 1952, Walter Ulbricht proclaimed the “Aufbau des Sozialismus,” including far-reaching reforms to centralize all administrative structures by dissolving the preexisting federal states and replacing them with 14 district administrative units or “Bezirke.” This forced bureaucratic centralization was accompanied by an attempted ideological consolidation in the arts and letters: At the conference Johannes R. Becher drew the consequences of the formalism campaign of 1951 and declared socialist realism as the only possible creative method to contribute to a new socialist art.²⁰¹

Parallel to the formalism campaign’s attack on all forms of modernist experimentation (such as those associated with the historical avant-garde movements of Futurism, Expressionism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Fauvism, etc.) as symptoms of social decay and bourgeois decadence ran efforts to nurture the home-grown folk arts as the “Nährboden der großen Kunst der Nation.”²⁰² Integrating amateur art groups into state structures had been a

und Kulturorganisationen (Berlin: Tribüne, 1951), 15. See also SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/134, 6.

¹⁹⁹ *Kulturarbeit der Gewerkschaften im Rahmen des Fünfjahresplanes* (undated). SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/134, 33 f.

²⁰⁰ “Arbeitsprogramm des FDGB zur Entfaltung der kulturellen Massenarbeit,” 15.

²⁰¹ The formalism campaign marked the cultural “Kahlschlag” during the height of Stalinist SED purges.

²⁰² *Kurze Einschätzung der heutigen Lage im Laienschaffen der bildenden Kunst*. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/158, 90.

concern since 1945 when the SMA founded a department of folk arts within the “Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volkserziehung(-bildung)” in order to register and advise all local amateur art groups. In 1952 the Central House for Amateur Arts (*Zentralhaus für Laienkunst*) was founded in Leipzig as the central administrative organization for all folk arts.²⁰³ In July 1954 the newly created Ministry of Culture ordered the establishment of a comprehensive network of local and regional culture houses and clubs to serve as centers of cultural life and facilitate contacts between local participants and the central house in Leipzig.²⁰⁴ At the end of 1954 the first working groups (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, AGs) for the folk arts were created in Berlin, followed in 1955 and 1956 by local and district AGs and central working groups (*Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, ZAGs) as the leading organizations for all folk art genres.²⁰⁵

Establishing this infrastructure at local and regional levels was not motivated by the simple benevolence of a paternalistic state wishing to nurture a new culture in its own image but was a response to the lack of central oversight over largely autonomous amateur art groups, many with long local traditions.²⁰⁶ Faced with the challenges of establishing functioning state

²⁰³ Originally to be located in Berlin, the “Zentralhaus für Laienkunst” was based upon the Soviet Union’s “N. K. Krupskaya” All Union House in Moscow (Mohrmann, *Engagierte Freizeitkunst*, 30) and was renamed the “Zentralhaus für Volkskunst” in August 1954 and in 1962 the “Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit.” Groschopp, “Der singende Arbeiter im Klub der Werktätigen,” 96. See also “Zur Gründung des Zentralhauses für Laienkunst der DDR” and “Entwurf Arbeitsaufgaben, Struktur- und Stellenplan für das künftige Zentralhaus für Laienkunst,” SAPMO-BArch DY/34/19231.

²⁰⁴ *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1952–1957*, 32.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 35. See chapter six on the creation and responsibilities of the ZAG of the BSA.

²⁰⁶ On the continuity of local traditions see Jeannette Madarász, “Normalisierung im Kontext der Betriebspolitik der sechziger Jahre,” *Das war die DDR. DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Außenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität*, ed. Heiner Timmermann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 327; Mohrmann, *Engagierte Freizeitkunst*, 49; Schumann

structures, central agencies struggled to gain an overview of the countless local cultural groups throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s. A late 1952 Ministry of Education report on the creation of a committee for mass cultural work indicated the degree of existing decentralization and the resulting inability to implement cultural policy at regional and local levels:

[Z]ur Zeit verteilt sich die Verantwortung für die verschiedenen Zweige der kulturellen Aufklärungsarbeit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik auf eine grosse Zahl verschiedener zentraler Stellen. Das hat zur Folge, dass es weder eine einheitliche Planung noch eine einheitliche Anleitung und Kontrolle gibt.²⁰⁷

In establishing departments of cultural work within the smallest administrative units of cities and counties, the committee saw this network of culture houses and institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, zoos, and gardens) as necessary to overcome the “starke Zersplitterung” of responsibilities among various institutions.²⁰⁸ While functionaries publicly touted the high number of folk art groups,²⁰⁹ internal reports described the lack oversight and control over local

Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb, 42 f; Annette Schuhmann, “‘Macht die Betriebe zu Zentren der Kulturarbeit.’ Gewerkschaftlich organisierte Kulturarbeit in den Industriebetrieben der DDR in den fünfziger Jahren: Sozialhistorisches Novum oder Modifizierung betriebspolitischer Tradition?” *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit*, eds. Peter Hübner, Christoph Kleßmann, and Klaus Tenfelde (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 281; Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 284.

²⁰⁷ Entwurf einer Verordnung über die Bildung eines Staatlichen Komitees für kulturelle Massenarbeit. 20. Nov. 1952. SAPMO-BArch DR 2/6053.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ In his contribution at the “Zentrale Delegiertenkonferenz der Deutschen Volkstheater” in Magdeburg 1952, FDGB secretary, Kurt Helbig, boasted of over 10,700 folk art groups in factories, including over 3,500 music groups, 3,200 choirs, nearly 200 dramatic circles, 1800 dance groups in 467 clubs and cultural houses and 5,000 “culture rooms.” *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1952–1957*, 19.

cultural groups by any state organ. On the occasion of the founding of the Central House for Amateur Arts in Leipzig in early 1952 the SED Central Committee noted:

Es gibt weder beim FDGB, den Industriegewerkschaften, beim Verband Bildender Künstler oder den Verwaltungen eine Übersicht der vorhandenen Laienzirkel für bildende Kunst. [...] Zweifellos gibt es eine weitere große Zahl von Gruppen und Einzelschaffenden, die sich ohne systematische und methodische Anleitung zum Zeichnen und Malen zusammenfinden.²¹⁰

These problems were noted by differing agencies throughout the 1950s. A 1953 report from the Ministry of Education complained of the low level of FDGB influence over amateur art groups in rural areas: Overlapping organizational structures brought forth work that was “schwach, unorganisiert, sporadisch und planlos,” with instances of successful cultural work often curtailed by high turnover rates in personnel.²¹¹ In 1956 a report from the head of the German Volkspolizei on folk art groups functioning outside the state fold warned of a lack of overview by any agency in many local districts: “In vielen Kreisen mußte festgestellt werden, daß kein genauer Überblick über die Anzahl und Tätigkeit der Volkskunstgruppen bestand.”²¹²

Functionaries were faced with the task of accounting for cultural activities not only in the major urban centers (Dresden, Leipzig, Halle, Rostock, Magdeburg) – and divided Berlin – but also throughout the newly formed 14 districts. These challenges were indeed considerable,

²¹⁰ Kurze Einschätzung der heutigen Lage im Laienschaffen der bildenden Kunst. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/158, 90.

²¹¹ Über die Kulturarbeit auf dem Lande. Ministerium für Volksbildung 1953. SAPMO-BArch DR/2/6053.

²¹² Info Bericht der Chef des dt. Volkspolizei über Volkskunstgruppen ohne Trägerorganisation. 1956. SAPMO-BArch DR 2/6251.

for according to 1949 DKB estimates there were a total of some 12,000 villages in the SBZ/GDR, of which half had a population of less than 500.²¹³ In a 1956 protocol of a meeting of the Committee for Education and Culture, Chairman Wendt described the difficulties and deficits encountered in the top-down implementation of cultural work in rural areas:

[J]e weiter wir nach unten kommen, um so mehr sind dort Lücken, Mängel [...] auf ganz großen Strecken. [...es gibt] tatsächlich sogenannte objektive Schwierigkeiten, z.B. Wegeverhältnisse in Mecklenburg, auch hier im Bezirk Potsdam, wo der Filmwagen im Sand stecken bleibt.²¹⁴

Not only such “objective difficulties” encountered in regions recovering from the devastations of war impeded functionaries’ efforts to create a coordinated network of local and district cultural centers, but also the “subjective difficulties” of winning over a population to the ideological tenets of a new state system. For many, participation in traditional cultural activities provided a simple means of enjoyment and continuity with members of the local community. Resistance to the overt political instrumentalization by a new system, which until recently had been declared the mortal enemy, was not uncommon, with members typically working within the given structures to satisfy their own interests. While central efforts to gain oversight of local groups and integrate them into state structures increasingly made headway throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these successes remained dependent upon the cooperation of local and regional

²¹³ Kulturbund der DDR. Bundessekretariat. Abteilung Kunst und Literatur. Berlin, den 21. Januar 1949. Materieller Jahresplan für die “Kulturarbeit auf dem Lande.” SAPMO-BArch DY/27/2868.

²¹⁴ Stenografisches Protokoll. Ausschuß für Volksbildung und Kultur. Freitag, 16. März 1956, 11 Uhr. SAPMO-BArch DA/1/549.

actors. A questionnaire from the mid-1950s provides an indication of these difficulties and offers snapshots of cultural life in a handful of rural villages throughout the SBZ/DDR.

I. Realities of Rural Culture: The 1956 DKB Questionnaire

A 1956 survey of cultural activities in 54 villages throughout the GDR conducted by the German Cultural League (*Deutsche Kulturbund*, DKB) offers an indication of the local conditions confronting authorities in attempts to gain an overview of events on the ground.²¹⁵ Responding to the DKB questionnaire, local actors frequently commented on the general neglect of cultural work. The picture is one of large segments of the population in rural areas removed from most forms of central authority and left to their own devices in overcoming the practical difficulties of daily life. The cultural activities listed typically included local initiatives to rebuild schools and sports grounds or to organize traditional festivals (e.g., *Kirmesfeste*); active cultural groups were commonly choirs, brass bands, and mandolin or harmonica orchestras. While many villages did have a local branch of the DKB, their work varied from providing basic education through lectures on practical or technical matters such as sanitation and farming technology, showing motion pictures (weekly “Landfilm”), or organizing trips to regional theaters. Common difficulties impeding cultural developments often resulted from poor infrastructure, such as impassable roads during bad weather, while the stated priorities of “cultural work” included installing basic sanitation (e.g., a sewage system).

Two villages, one in the largely agricultural district of Frankfurt/Oder and one in the more heavily industrialized district of Gera, provide examples of the diversity of problems and

²¹⁵ Kulturbund der DDR. Bundessekretariat. Abteilung Kulturelle Massenarbeit. Zur Analyse der Kulturarbeit in den Dörfern. 1956. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/8347.

the degree of individual initiative among the local population in rural areas. In the district of Frankfurt/Oder, the report on the village of Letschin (population 3,500) referred to the geographical impediments of thinly populated areas with impassable roads, and, although home to one of the largest LPGs (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft*, collective farm) in the GDR, there were no signs of cultural work at the workplace: “Es ist, wie bereits erwähnt, Kulturarbeit nicht zu verzeichnen, so dass eine Auswirkung auf die Erleichterung und Erhöhung der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion illusorisch [sic] ist.” Initial attempts to communicate with the local cultural council had gone unanswered; no local chapter of the FDJ existed, and the sole function of the local Kulturbund’s cultural commission “beschäftigte sich aus eigener Initiative lediglich mit der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Karnivals.” The school teacher Schulz led a dance group and the school choir, and the men’s choir was associated with the local sugar factory.

In contrast, the village of Krölpa in the district of Gera was presented as a relatively good example of cultural work. Described as “ein ausgesprochenes Arbeiterdorf” with 15 farmers, 14 teachers, one artist, one state attorney, and numerous engineers, Krölpa had a working cultural plan to improve “gesamtdeutsche Arbeit” through letter exchanges, hosting West German delegations, and expanding contacts with West German sport and folk art groups. A local chapter of the Kulturbund, with 58 members, organized regular lectures with an average of 100 attendees, and book discussions and lectures on literature at the local dormitory for trainees of the nearby steelworks of Maxhütte. There were numerous amateur cultural groups, such as a men’s choir with a hundred-year tradition whose members included the mayor and the pastor, a woman’s choir, a harmonica group, and a dance group. Local music groups gave evening concerts (Mozart, Schumann, etc.) on their own initiative. The folk art groups worked

primarily under the direction of the school director. Krölpa had a well-kept culture house, yet the poor conditions of the roads prevented events from being well attended; most cultural activities therefore took place in the school's auditorium, which had a stage and had been recently renovated by the teachers through many hours of voluntary work. The local library of some 1600 books was combined with the MTS library. In the neighboring village of Grobengreuth the Kulturbund lectures were well attended, in the village of Daumitsch "singefreudige Bauern" participated in the local choir, and in Rositz, an industry center of 6,000 inhabitants, an old restaurant served as the culture house, "mit Tanzvergnügen und Frauennachmittagen mit Kaffee und Kuchen." Amateur cultural groups at the local nationalized tar processing plant (VEB Teerverarbeitungswerk) included a music orchestra of 30 to 35 participants and a harmonica group with 15 members; the VEB Zuckerraffinerie had a choir with guitar group and a folk dance and a sport group.²¹⁶ The report on these villages closed by mentioning an aspect of cultural life not otherwise covered by the DKB questionnaire.

Zu bemerken wäre vielleicht, dass Krölpa und Zella noch an Hexen glauben. Krölpa hat eine "Hexe," eine alte Frau, die auf keinen Hof und kein Haus gelassen wird, weil sie das Vieh behext und Unglück bringt. In anderen Dörfern unseres Kreises glaubt man, dass ein Bauer einen Drachen hat, den man angeblich auch schon gesehen haben will. Der Aberglaube ist weit verbreitet und sehr fest eingewurzelt. Es müssten mehr aufklärende Vorträge auf diesem Gebiet gehalten werden.²¹⁷

Indeed, the DKB's stated need for more educational lectures served not merely the goals of providing basic knowledge on agriculture, health, and sanitation, but in combating popular

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

superstitions more reminiscent of the pre-Enlightenment era than the cultural degeneracy of advanced capitalism. As implied, in these villages in the district of Gera the revolutionary ethos required to establish a new humanist socialism had less to do with fending off the perceived decadence of high modernism than medieval beliefs in witches and dragons. These discrepancies between the party's vision of a new society and the realities functionaries encountered at the local level were not unique to amateur ensembles in rural areas. Of greater concern for the SED was establishing a committed cadre of professional artists and writers, those who formed the social "superstructure" and whose support was essential for the ultimate success of the socialist project. Here, too, there existed a wide gap between the party's visions and the existing realities.

II. Realities among Writers: The DVS in the 1950s

The actual degree of party influence over professional writers during this period was also negligible, as demonstrated by the contrast between the talking points in internal party documents and actual events at the Fourth Writers Congress in 1956. A party memo from October 1955 on the "ideological preparation" for the up-coming congress cited in clearly Stalinist terms: "Der Schriftsteller hat in unserem Staat eine grosse Aufgabe und grosse Macht als 'Ingenieur der menschlichen Seele' und Miterbauer einer neuen Ordnung. Darum trägt er auch eine grosse Verantwortung."²¹⁸ Yet the congress itself was marked by the "Schematismus Debatte": Hans Mayer and Stefan Heym's open polemics against official literary policy and Bertolt Brecht and Georg Maurer's appeals for experimentation in form and the study of

²¹⁸ Die ideologische Vorbereitung des Schriftsteller-Kongresses. Okt. 55. SAPMO-BArch DY30/IV 2/9.06/264, 196 f.

Expressionism were direct affronts to party authority and the central principles of socialist realism.²¹⁹ Writers in the DSV district chapters appeared no more willing to comply with party demands. A report on the ideological preparation for the 1956 congress noted the reluctance of DSV district members to produce works in accordance with party mandates. Its criticism of the works of regional DVS members reads like a list of core party demands and the central tenets of socialist realism.

Auch in den Mitgliederversammlungen der Bezirksorganisationen fanden Aussprachen über literarische Werke, vor allem die Werke der in den Bezirken lebenden Schriftsteller, statt. Hierbei tauchten folgende Probleme auf: Die Parteilichkeit in der Literatur, die Darstellung des Enthusiasmus beim Aufbau unserer neuen Ordnung, der sozialistische Realismus in der Gegenwartsliteratur, die Erscheinungsformen kleinbürgerlicher Ideologien in der Literatur, die Beziehungen von Kunst und Wirklichkeit, die Darstellung des positiven Helden, die Fragen der künstlerischen Form, die Fragen des Typus des Schriftstellers.²²⁰

Providing a further indication of the reception and acceptance of central directives among professional writers at the regional level, a 1960 letter from Eduard Klein on the activities of DSV district chapters stated: “[I]n einigen Bezirksverbänden [wird] im wesentlichen nur das Material vorgelesen, [...] ohne es konkret auf die örtlichen Bedingungen anzuwenden und ohne

²¹⁹ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR. 1945-1990*, 77 ff.; See also David Bathrick, “Geschichtsbewußtsein als Selbstbewußtsein. Die Literatur der DDR,” *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Jost Hermand (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1979), 288.

²²⁰ Die ideologische Vorbereitung des Schriftsteller-Kongresses. Okt. 55. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/264, 196 f.

Schlussfolgerungen für die eigene Arbeit zu ziehen.”²²¹ For the DSV leadership ultimately had little influence over its members, as DSV secretary Walther Victor states to FDGB chairman Egon Rentzsch in a letter dated 5 December 1957 concerning the union’s support for the coal and energy program:

Selbstverständlich werde auch ich mich gern an allen Unterhaltungen beteiligen, die dem Ziele dienen, diese Sache zu fördern. Ich mache allerdings darauf aufmerksam, daß 1. der Verband eine Kontrolle darüber, was die Kollegen Schriftsteller tun, nicht hat und nicht haben kann, daß 2. auch kein Zwang ausgeübt werden kann, bestimmte Schriftsteller mit bestimmten Arbeiten zu betrauen [sic].²²²

Rentzsch confirmed this assessment some three months later in a letter from 13 March 1958 to Herbert Warnke: “der Schriftstellerverband [kann sich] gegenüber seinen Mitgliedern schwer durchsetzen [...] und alle gemeinsam eingeleiteten Maßnahmen [haben] wenig Erfolg gezeigt.”²²³

Aggravating party attempts to exert influence over writers, district DSV chapters often functioned according to different organizational structures, remaining geographically and ideologically a few steps removed from the central spheres of power in Berlin. While the report of an investigative brigade [described in detail below] from 1958 states, “Die Bezirksverbände

²²¹ Letter (without letterhead) from Eduard Klein. 11 December 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/272, 170.

²²² DSV Letter 5.12.1957. An den Bundesvorstand des FDGB. z.Hd. Kollegen Egon Rentzsch. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16638.

²²³ 13.3.1958 from Egon Rentzsch zu Warnke. Referat für die Arbeitstagung der Schriftsteller zum Kohle- und Energie-Programm. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16639.

arbeiten losgelöst und isoliert vom gewählten Vorstand und besonders vom Sekretariat,²²⁴ a report on the work of the DSV following the Bitterfeld Conference complained of the party's difficulties establishing effectively functioning party cells (*Grundorganisationen*, "basic organizational units") within the district DVS chapters and of the differing modes of operation within and among local party groups:

Es besteht keine grundsätzliche Klarheit über die Notwendigkeit eigener Grundorganisationen in den Bezirksverbänden. Einige Bezirksverbände, wie Berlin, Halle und Dresden, haben eigene Grundorganisationen, andere, wie Karl-Marx-Stadt und Schwerin, haben ihre Mitglieder in anderen Grundorganisationen organisiert. [...] Die Kulturabteilungen der Partei in den Bezirken arbeiten unterschiedlich und nach eigenen Gesichtspunkten mit den Grundorganisationen der Bezirksverbände des DSV.²²⁵

In 1963 an internal DSV report cited the difficulties of drawing general conclusions about the district chapters due to their differing characters and structures: "Da die Bezirksverbände ihrem Charakter und ihrer Struktur nach sehr unterschiedlich sind, genügt es nicht, zwei oder drei Bezirksverbände zu untersuchen, um Verallgemeinerungen für unsere Arbeit herauszufinden."²²⁶ A 1963 Central Committee Culture Department report on cooperation with the DSV after the Bitterfeld Conference commented on the differing levels of development among district chapters. Whereas in Halle, "eine gute massenpolitische Arbeit geleistet wird, die die

²²⁴ Bericht der Brigade zur Ueberprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftsteller Verbandes. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 16 f.

²²⁵ Entwicklung des Schriftstellerverbandes seit der Bitterfelder Konferenz. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/264, 340-41.

²²⁶ Arbeit dem den BV Berlin, den 26.7.1963. Einige Gedanken zur Arbeitsweise mit den Bezirksverbänden. SV 135.

Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter unterstützt,” in other districts, e.g., Cottbus, their work was hindered by personal intrigues and animosities.²²⁷

III. The “Nachwuchs” Problem and the Politburo’s Investigative Brigade

Confronted with these logistical hurdles and the general reluctance of many artists and intellectuals to submit to party demands, in the late 1950s the SED went on the ideological offensive. By 1958 Ulbricht had consolidated power within the party leadership, and, concluding this “transitional period” to socialism, the party was first able to focus on a more comprehensive concept of a socialist culture.²²⁸ From 1957 to 1959 there were more meetings and conferences on artistic and cultural questions in the GDR than at any other time in its history.²²⁹ Together, the FDGB Cultural Conference (1957), the SED’s Cultural Conference and Fifth Party Conference (1958), and the First Bitterfeld Conference (1959) lay the foundation for the long-term developments of cultural life. Culminating pre-Bitterfeld developments in cultural policy, these conferences signaled the beginning of the ideological offensive by introducing the notion of a “socialist cultural revolution,” a revolution which was to contribute to a rapid phase of industrial modernization and social development and to prove the superiority of a socialist culture over the profit-oriented culture of mass entertainment in the West.²³⁰

²²⁷ Die Lage der Literatur. Entwicklung des Schriftstellerverbandes seit der Bitterfelder Konferenz. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/264, 340, 313. See also SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.2026/5, 295 f.

²²⁸ Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz,” 238.

²²⁹ Ibid., 209.

²³⁰ Stephan, et al., *Die Parteien und Organisationen der DDR*, 540; Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses. Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 154; Schumann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 19 f.;

During this same period the SED undertook stark measures to exert control over the DSV. In fall 1957, in the course of cleansing the upper party ranks in response to unrest in Poland and the 1956 uprising in Hungary, the Politburo founded a cultural commission to investigate cultural life in the GDR.²³¹ Led by Alfred Kurella, a first generation communist and representative of Moscow cultural orthodoxy, the commission met from 1958 to 1962. Believing too many issues were settled in individual discussions within the party leadership, Kurella had developed a new working method of forming “working brigades” to investigate special issues.²³² Aware of the influence of writers and intellectuals in the uprisings in Hungary (Petöfi Circle) and Poland – and following the arrest of leading East German literary reformists Erich Loest, Wolfgang Harich, and Walter Janke – an investigative brigade was assigned the task of evaluating the DSV’s ideological and political work in late August and early September 1958, making far-reaching recommendations to the SED Cultural Committee.²³³ The scathing report criticized the DSV’s ineffectuality, called for the immediate selection of a new executive committee, a new statute, new procedural rules, and a cleansing of the ranks of inactive members to be replaced by younger writers. To reform the DSV it recommended changing the charter of the Writers’ Union so that all new members be selected by a central commission

Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 425. Horst Groschopp, “Ein System der perfekter Kulturverwaltung?,” *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 14:29 (1991): 40.

²³¹ Dieter Schiller, “Kurellas Kulturkommission. Auftrag und Scheitern. 1957–1962,” 55 (*Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte*, 1999): 5.

²³² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²³³ Bericht der Genossen in der Brigade zur Überprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes an die den ZK angehörenden Mitglieder des DSV. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 34 f.

rather than through district chapters. The second point called for the “Verbesserung der Nachwuchsarbeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kader aus der Arbeiterklasse und Bauernschaft.”²³⁴

Indeed, establishing a new generation of authors supportive of the socialist cause had been a goal of the SED since before the establishment of the DSV. Already in 1947 a main goal of the “Gewerkschaft Kunst und Schrifttum” in the FDGB – the forerunner of the DSV – to contribute to the fight for an undivided fatherland was stated as the “[e]ntscheidende Mitarbeit bei der Auslese und Ausbildung des Nachwuchses der geistig, künstlerisch und kulturell Schaffenden Berufe.”²³⁵ With the founding of the DSV in 1950 occurred a “Sichtung und Siebung der alten Mitgliederbestände der Gewerkschaft Kunst und Schrifttum,” reducing its membership by fifty percent.²³⁶ Describing the difficulties of establishing a new cadre of committed writers, a 1951 report on the DSV stated that the older generation of bourgeois writers had not yet acquired the requisite social knowledge or were simply too old to produce any substantial works, concluding, “Ihre Lage ist vielfach äusserst schwierig,” while the new generation of writers with the proper social sentiments was hindered by “sehr grosser literarischer Bildungslücken,” concluding “Ihre Lage ist vielfach schwierig.”²³⁷ At the first authors’ conference of the Mitteldeutsche Verlag [MDV] in Halle at the end of 1950 the average

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ EntschlieÙung zur Kulturpolitik. 15.11.47. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/132, 4.

²³⁶ Tätigkeitsbericht des Deutschen Schriftsteller-Verbandes im Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/98.

²³⁷ Analyse der Lage der Schriftsteller in der DDR und in Berlin und Vorschläge zur Verbesserung der Lage. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/98.

age of “young authors” was well over fifty, whereas in 1955 the DSV counted among its 260 young authors only two workers and seven farmers.²³⁸

Despite their awareness of this situation, winning over established writers to support the development of socialism remained a serious problem for the party. Preparatory notes for the 1955 Writers’ Union Congress stated, “Im allgemeinen hat sich der Versuch, namhafte Autoren, vor allem Schriftsteller, zu gewinnen, als beinah aussichtslos erwiesen.”²³⁹ The report praised the success of the Nachterstedt Letter in giving voice to the desires of workers and asked what hindered writers from establishing contact with the working masses: “Was hindert einen Teil unserer Schriftsteller, den notwendigen engen und lebendigen Kontakt mit den werktätigen Massen zu bekommen?”²⁴⁰ Referring to the “eigentlichen Kern der Frage, Verbindung zwischen Schriftstellern und Werktätigen,”²⁴¹ the report complained that many of the generation of older communists and proletarian authors had difficulties establishing connections with the contemporary working world and were therefore unable to produce a new literature. Ludwig Renn, for example, had stated that he could not write about workers and farmers he did not know; Willi Bredel stated that, although he knew the lathe machinists from 1928, he did not know them today; while Stephan Hermlin simply stated that he could no longer write.²⁴²

²³⁸ Barck, et al, “*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*,” 131.

²³⁹ Die ideologische Vorbereitung des Schriftsteller-Kongresses. Okt. 55. SAPMO-BArch DY30/IV 2/9.06/264, 196 f.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Reflecting these difficulties, the investigative brigade's 1958 report expressed concern about the DSV's lack of a concept for fostering a new generation of writers and noted the dearth of young authors from the ranks of workers and farmers.²⁴³ Of the 544 DSV members in 1958, more were over the age of 70 than those who were under 30, while only 190 were from the working class or had once been workers.²⁴⁴ Addressing the problem of cultivating a new generation of writers from the working class, the report stated, "Man geht nicht an die Produktionsstätten, in die Betriebe, MTS, Dörfer und sucht die Talente, die als Korrespondenten, als Mitarbeiter der Betriebs- und Dorfzeitungen und in künstlerischen Agitationsbrigaden mitwirken."²⁴⁵ To ameliorate this situation, the brigade's report suggested forming a commission within the DSV to help promote young authors and stated the necessity of founding a DSV publishing house, specifically suggesting the Mitteldeutsche Verlag.²⁴⁶ Within a year, the annual author's conference of the MDV had been transformed "zu einer

²⁴³ "Es gibt keine ideologische Konzeption für die Nachwuchs-Arbeit. [...] Völlig vernachlässigt wurde der Nachwuchs aus der Arbeiterklasse und der Bauernschaft." Arbeit mit dem Nachwuchs. Bericht der Genossen in der Brigade zur Überprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes an die den ZK angehörenden Mitglieder des DSV. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 50.

²⁴⁴ Bericht der Brigade zur Ueberprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftsteller Verbandes. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 26.

²⁴⁵ Arbeit mit dem Nachwuchs. Bericht der Genossen in der Brigade zur Überprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes an die den ZK angehörenden Mitglieder des DSV. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 51.

²⁴⁶ Bericht der Brigade zur Ueberprüfung der Arbeit des Deutschen Schriftsteller Verbandes. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/57, 16 f; Founded in 1946 as a publishing house for "Behördenliteratur" specializing in address books, forms and administrative literature, the MDV published "Volksmusik, Laienspiele, Musikdramatische Werke, moderne Musik, Belletristik" in the early 1950s and assumed responsibilities for publishing works from Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit in 1952. Aktennotiz. Betr.: Beziehungen des Mitteldeutschen Verlages Halle zum Zentralhaus für Laienkunst, Leipzig. SAPMO-BArch DY30/IV 2/9.06/158.

allgemeinen Kulturkonferenz des ZK”: the First Bitterfelder Conference.²⁴⁷ As Schiller notes, the Bitterfeld Conference was above all driven by one goal:

die lästigen Widerstände vor allem der älteren, gestandenen Künstlergeneration gegen Disziplinierung und Repression des Kulturlebens ausschalten zu können, indem eine neue Generation massiv gefördert und ein Reservoir von Nachwuchskräften aus der Arbeiterklasse erschlossen wurde.²⁴⁸

As Alfred Kurella stated in 1960 on the essence of the Bitterfeld resolutions, the goal of the conference was to search out and promote the “zukünftigen Nachwuchs von Künstlern gerade in den Volksschichten.”²⁴⁹ Conference recommendations for the DSV included working out a plan for the “Entwicklung des literarischen Nachwuchses aus den Reihen der schreibenden Arbeiter, Genossenschaftsbauern, Technikern, Ingenieuren, Lehrern usw. (Mitglieder von Literaturzirkeln),”²⁵⁰ and emphasized the “national importance” of establishing a new system to promote of a new generation of artists and writers: “Das ganze Nachwuchswesen auf kulturellem Gebiet muss neu geordnet werden. Die kommenden Künstler und Schriftsteller sollen sich vor allem aus den Laienzirkeln der Betriebe heraus entwickeln.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Hans Bentzien in Barck, et al., “*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*,” 143.

²⁴⁸ Schiller, “Kurellas Kulturkommission. Auftrag und Scheitern. 1957–1962,” 15.

²⁴⁹ Alfred Kurella, “Das Wesen der Bitterfelder Beschlüsse,” *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 45.

²⁵⁰ Vorschläge zur Auswertung der Bitterfelder Konferenz. SAPMO-BArch IV 2/9.06/259, 53-54.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* Die wichtigsten Schlussfolgerungen, 50.

6. Culture by Decree: The Twelve Point Plan

The ultimate goal of these measures was nothing less than the complete transformation of human life: “Das Ziel muss eine völlig neue Gestaltung des gesamten Lebens der Menschen [...] sein.”²⁵² Yet the successful implementation of conference resolutions depended upon the specific measures taken to bring workers, writers, and artists into a process of mutual education and constructive cooperation. In contradistinction to the uncontrolled spontaneity and decadence characteristic of culture in the imperialist West, the new socialist culture was to unfold according to plan. Only two weeks after the Bitterfeld Conference, the Central Committee charged the Ministry of Culture with the task of drawing up a seven-year plan for the development of a socialist culture as a component of the seven-year plan for the “victory of socialism.”²⁵³ To develop such a plan, the Ministry was given less than four months. In order to develop a new generation of writers from the ranks of circles of writing workers and farmers, the Central Committee initially assigned responsibility – with no irony intended – to the Ministry of Culture’s Fiction Sector (*Sektor Belletristik*), the DSV’s Department for Young Writers (*Nachwuchsabteilung*), the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, and the FDGB Cultural Department.²⁵⁴ In accordance with Central Committee recommendations, in mid-1959 the DSV presented the Ministry of Culture with a twelve-point plan to develop a socialist culture in which the BSA played a central role.²⁵⁵ The plan’s working points emphasized the broad

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Hauptergebnisse [Bitterfeld]. Die wichtigsten Schlussfolgerungen. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/259, 53 f.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Maßnahmeplan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des MDV am 24. April in Bitterfeld (undated). SV 106, 8 f.

educational goals of engaging the working class in cultural activities and stated that the selection and promotion of young artists and writers must occur via the amateur arts. To foster a new generation of writers, the plan recommended that all DSV members and publishing houses cooperate with either a ZSA or a socialist workers' brigade. District DSV chapters, cultural departments, and folk art centers were to found and support ZSAs, mentor writing workers, appraise their manuscripts, and help them establish relationships with publishers and the local press. The plan also included creating a central working group (*Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, ZAG) for the BSA, founded by the Central House for Folk Art in October 1960. This advisory council of voluntary members was charged with developing the movement by coordinating the activities of responsible agencies, promoting the political efficacy of circle work, publishing methodological and theoretical materials, and overseeing the work of the district working groups (*Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaften*, BAGs).²⁵⁶ Further points in the DSV plan included cooperating with the Central House for Folk Art to found a one-year course for ZSA members and leaders at the J. R. Becher Literature Institute and assessing the means and methods of integrating contributions from writing workers into television and radio programming.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ On the responsibilities of the ZAGs see “Anweisung über die Aufgaben und Tätigkeit der Arbeitsgemeinschaften für künstlerisches Volksschaffen,” *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens 1958–1962* (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung beim Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 1968), 279-82; “Zu einigen grundsätzlichen Fragen,” *ich schreibe* 1 (1964): 2; and Arbeitskonzeption für die Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibende Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/20924.

²⁵⁷ Maßnahmeplan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des MDV am 24. April in Bitterfeld. SV 106, 10.

Of lasting importance in implementing the Central Committee recommendations within the seven-year cultural plan was the 1960 Cultural Conference.²⁵⁸ Originally planned by the DKB as a literature conference to promote the movement of reading and writing workers, under sponsorship of the SED Central Committee the conference quickly grew in size and significance.²⁵⁹ With some 1,200 attendees, the conference issued resolutions setting forth the basic principles of socialist culture in the seven-year plan (*Grundsätze sozialistischer Kulturarbeit im Siebenjahrplan*).²⁶⁰ Yet the overlapping competencies of agencies assigned to develop the BSA at this critical juncture reflect the lack of a unified vision of its function and purpose. While conference decrees delegated responsibility to the DSV for developing the talents of writing workers as the future generation of professional writers, overall responsibility for the BSA was to remain in the hands of the FDGB.²⁶¹

At the conference Walter Ulbricht and Alfred Kurella received copies of the joint MDV-Tribüne BSA anthology *ich schreibe* as a symbol of the movement's significance, yet groundwork to establish the BSA had already occurred before the conference.²⁶² In preparation for the conference the Ministry of Culture, the DSV, FDGB, FDJ, and DKB were to create district consultation centers to coordinate developments of the movement. The main

²⁵⁸ Ulbricht promoted the conference's basic tenets throughout the 1960s. Institutional reforms following the conference included, for example, establishing polytechnic secondary schools (*polytechnische Oberschulen*) and the mandatory subjects of civics (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) in schools and Marxism-Leninism at universities. See Groschopp, "Partei der planmäßigen," 123 f.

²⁵⁹ Konzeption der Literaturkonferenz des Deutschen Kulturbundes. 13.8.1959. SV 106.

²⁶⁰ *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 434; See also *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1958–1962*, 26.

²⁶¹ *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 446.

²⁶² *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffens. 1958–1962* (Leipzig, 1968), 26.

responsibility for founding circles fell to the DKB, which was to establish three ZSAs to serve as models: one for tractor drivers and farmers in an MTS (“machine and tractor station”) in the agricultural district of Neubrandenburg; one for workers, librarians, and literary scholars in the steelworks of Maxhütte in the district of Gera; and one for production facility workers and students and instructors of the J. R. Becher Literature Institute in the district of Leipzig.²⁶³

Further landmarks in launching the BSA included the First Conference of Writing Workers, held in Karl-Marx-Stadt on occasion of the Second Arbeiterfestspiele in June 1960, and a two-day conference dedicated the role of German Studies and the BSA held in July 1960 by the Department of German at the Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg.²⁶⁴ Recommendations from the Karl-Marx-Stadt conference, published as general appeals in the inaugural edition of the movement’s journal, *ich schreibe*, included founding a ZSA in every factory in the GDR, employing professional writers as creative consultants for ZSAs, and engaging local and regional folk art centers to coordinate and advise the entire movement.²⁶⁵

While the FDGB and DKB signed a contract in October 1960 in which the DKB pledged to win the support of professional writers, publishers, scholars, and teachers for the

²⁶³ Konzeption der Literaturkonferenz des Deutschen Kulturbundes. SV 106, 24 f.

²⁶⁴ The German Department of the Martin Luther University had numerous associations with the BSA. Aside from hosting the 1960 BSA Conference, it provided a number of ZAG chairmen and circle leaders, e.g., Wolfgang Friedrich, Jürgen Bonk, Rüdiger Bernhardt, Heidi Ritter, and Roland Rittig. See also *Die BSA und die Aufgaben der Germanistik. Wissenschaftliche Konferenz des Germanistischen Instituts der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1. und 2. Juli 1960. Referat und Beiträge* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag für Buch- und Bibliothekswesen, 1960).

²⁶⁵ See *ich schreibe. Zeitschrift für die Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter und Genossenschaftsbauern* 1:1 (1960): 8.

movement,²⁶⁶ of greater importance in giving form to BSA activities and defining its social context was a comprehensive agreement between the FDGB and DSV, signed on December 23, 1960, by Herbert Warnke and Anna Seghers, chairpersons of the FDGB and DSV respectively.²⁶⁷



Cover page *ich schreibe* 6/1961: Anna Seghers and Herbert Warnke sign the DSV and FDGB cooperation agreement.

The contract laid out the organizations' mutual responsibilities for granting writers contracts in production facilities and publishing their works; organizing regular meetings between writers and workers at the workplace; staging regional and national BSA conferences, workshops, and trainings; delegating writing workers to the AJA and J. R. Becher Literature Institute; holding lectures on socialist, classical, and world literature for workers at the workplace; and

²⁶⁶ Beschluß des Sekretariat vom 14.10.60. Nr. P 149/60. Vereinbarung über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbund und dem Deutschen Kulturbund. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24630.

²⁶⁷ Beschluß des Sekretariat vom 23.12.60. Nr. P 187/60. Vereinbarung über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbund und dem Deutschen Schriftstellerverband. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24630.

contributing to cultural events at vacation centers and sanatoriums through readings and lectures.²⁶⁸

I. Impediments to the Plan

While this agreement did initiate individual successes, ineffective coordination among nascent bureaucracies impeded its full implementation. The greatest challenge to fulfilling such cooperative contracts lay in their very nature: they were non-binding and left no clearly delineated spheres of responsibility. At the 1960 Cultural Conference, for example, DSV secretary Eduard Klein publically vented his frustration about this situation: “[d]ie klare Aufgabestellung und damit auch die echte Zusammenarbeit fehlt nicht nur in der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. Das ist allgemeiner Mangel in unserer Kulturarbeit.”²⁶⁹ While emphasizing that most writers actively supported the goals of the Bitterfeld campaign, he stated that the DSV did not have the resources to oversee the BSA and demanded that the FDGB assume its responsibility for the movement, with the DKB, DSV, and district cultural centers serving as ancillary institutions: “Wir verlangen, daß endlich klare Verantwortlichkeiten geschaffen werden.”²⁷⁰ Remarking that the DSV did not wish to assume responsibility for founding circles in all factories in the republic, Klein said they would not follow the example set in Berlin-Treptow, where writers had gone from company to company asking if they could establish circles.²⁷¹ In another early example of poor coordination causing discord among

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Eduard Klein, *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 108.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 112.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

central agencies, the ZAG and ZfK scolded the FDGB for conducting a central competition for writing workers, “Schreib das Lied des Sozialismus,” without their involvement. In 1962 notes from the ZAG meeting complained that at district and local levels functionaries simply did not implement central directives: “[E]s [gibt] richtige Beschlüsse [...], die auf unterster Ebene nicht realisiert werden.”²⁷²

Although such agreements were intended to facilitate the party’s implementation of a unified system of leadership and strengthen their oversight and control throughout the cultural sphere, the ham-fisted approach of SED functionaries was not always constructive or conducive to fostering cooperation. In Suhl and Leipzig, for example, district chapters of the DKB and FDGB signed contracts in 1960 to found ZSAs. The agreement in Suhl assigned the DKB the responsibility of delegating “Künstlern, Journalisten, sowie anderen Kulturschaffenden” to lead a ZSA in each branch of the FDGB (metal/metallurgy; wood/construction; chemistry; trade/nutrition/consumption; land and forestry) as a way to develop cultural life by promoting the BSA.²⁷³ Yet two months later, with no apparent coordination among participating agencies, the SED relegated the council’s district chairman the responsibility of establishing a cultural center – although such a center already existed – and demanded all production facilities and collectivized farms create ZSAs as a means to counteract the hostile, decadent cultural influences from the West.²⁷⁴ The agreement in the district of Leipzig also delegated

²⁷² Aktennotiz über die Sitzung der ZAG “schreibender Arbeiter” am 13./14.1.62 in Leipzig. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/562.

²⁷³ Vereinbarung zwischen der Bezirksleitung des Deutschen Kulturbundes und dem FDGB-Bezirksvorstand Suhl. Juni 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16638.

²⁷⁴ Arbeitsbericht vom 21. Juli bis 6. August 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15.

responsibility for the BSA to the DKB. The allocation of responsibilities, however, remained ambivalent, with the FDGB accountable for organizing the BSA and the DKB simply assigned “an important role.”²⁷⁵

II. The Numbers: Inexact and Incomplete

Unsuccessful attempts to gain an overview of circles of amateur writers demonstrate the party’s limited ability to coordinate and control the efforts of various agencies necessary to implement central directives and establish the BSA as a mass movement. The numbers of recorded circles in the first years after Bitterfeld varied greatly, with published sources claiming anywhere from 350 to 600 ZSA. As recently as 2011, Bernhardt presented a number of initial circles as high as 1200, twice the number from his 1970 article on the history of the BSA, which put the number at around 600.²⁷⁶ According to Bernhard, around half of these circles were short lived, with the number stabilizing and remaining constant at around 300 after 1963/64.²⁷⁷ Yet these estimates differ from a standard East German history of East German literature (1977), which states that 350 ZSA existed in 1960.²⁷⁸ In other sources a 1967 confidential analysis conducted by literature professor Wolfgang Friedrich estimated the number of circles in the early 1960s

²⁷⁵ Bericht über die erste Beratung der Arbeitsgruppe für literarische und künstlerische Fragen der Bezirksleitung Leipzig d. DKB vom 22. März 1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/3019.

²⁷⁶ Rüdiger Bernhardt, “Schreibende Arbeiter der DDR zwischen Arbeiter- und Gesellschaftskultur,” *Culture ouvrière. Arbeiterkultur. Mutations d’une réalité complexe en Allemagne du XIXe au XXIe siècle*, ed. Dominique Herbet (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2011), 136; Rüdiger Bernhardt, “Zur Geschichte der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Halle* 1:19 (1970): 76.

²⁷⁷ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 28.

²⁷⁸ *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur. Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Volk uns Wissen, 1977), 229.

between 300 and 400.²⁷⁹ Andreas Leichsenring's 1971 dissertation on the BSA put the number of active adult circles at approximately 250, while a 1981 unpublished ZfK analysis of the BSA based its count of 216 circles on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education.²⁸⁰ According to this ZfK report, these numbers had remained constant throughout the 1970s. Citing a slightly higher number, the protocol of a 1985 colloquium commemorating the 25th anniversary of the ZAG counted 225 circles.²⁸¹

All these attempts to quantify the movement were forced to rely on estimates because, as internal reports readily admitted, no state organ was able to gain an overview of all ZSAs or their activities throughout the movement's 30-year history. Although the number of recorded circles became increasingly consistent through the 1960s and 1970s, Löffler has recently noted that "[e]in genauer Überblick über den tatsächlichen Umfang [der BSA] fehlt bis heute."²⁸² Yet as Professor Friedrich recognized in 1967, a quantitative overview of the movement will never exist: "Zwar fehlen völlig exakte Angaben (und sie werden auch nie beschafft werden

²⁷⁹ "Der VII. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter." Handwritten note: *Ausgearbeitet von Dr. Wolfgang Friedrich. Ergänzt u. gehalten von Frau Dr. Fried. am 11.11.67 in Freyburg auf dem Lehrgang schreibender Arbeiter 1967. Unterlagen sind Untersuchungen des Germanistischen Inst im Auftrag die nicht veröffentlicht sind u. intern gehalten werden sollen. 1.12.67 Falkenhorst. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.*

²⁸⁰ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 39; Analyse des Fachgebietes Schreibende Arbeiter. Leipzig, den 18. Mai 1981. ZfK 641.

²⁸¹ Protokoll des Kolloquium "25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR," 18.–19.10 1985. p. 15. ZfK 647.

²⁸² Dietrich Löffler, *Buch und Lesen in der DDR. Ein literatursoziologischer Rückblick* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011), 87.

können).²⁸³ A 1962 ZfK report mentioned this lack of oversight and referred to some 500 circles which existed post-Bitterfeld: “Es gibt zur Zeit keinen Überblick darüber, ob die etwa 500 Zirkel, die im ersten Jahr nach Bitterfeld gebildet wurden, noch bestehen.”²⁸⁴ First ZAG chairman Hasso Grabner confirmed this assessment before resigning his post in 1960: “ZH [Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit] hat keinen Überblick über die Bewegung.”²⁸⁵

The difficulties of gaining an overview of circles originated at the local and district levels where functionaries were not able to gather reliable information on many activities outside of state structures. At the 1960 BSA Conference at the Martin Luther University contributors admitted the estimated number of 42 circles in the district of Halle included only those of which the district folk art center was aware. Based upon the city of Halle, where only three of the known seven circles were registered, functionaries suggested the actual number of circles in the district was likely much higher.²⁸⁶ The situation was similar in neighboring Leipzig. In an interview following the 11th Plenum in 1965, the chairman of the Leipzig BSA working group acknowledged the authorities’ limited influence over the movement and their lack of oversight: “Wir haben nicht mal einen vollständigen Überblick über alle Zirkel in der

²⁸³ Die Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Spiegel ihrer kollektiven Publikationen aus den Jahren 1959–1966. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.

²⁸⁴ “Der VI. Parteitag der SED und die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter”, Beilage zu den “Informationen und Nachrichten” Nr. 17 vom 17. Dezember 1962 (Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 1962). SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

²⁸⁵ Handschriftliches Protokoll über die Sitzung der ZAG vom 17.6.61. Auswertung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6974.

²⁸⁶ *Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter und die Aufgabe der Germanistik*, 28.

Stadt Leipzig.”²⁸⁷ In 1966 Friedrich commented frankly on the state’s inability to gain an overview of the movement.

Bekanntlich gibt es gegenwärtig keine Institution, die einen einigermaßen exakten Überblick über die schreibenden Arbeiter in einem der Bezirke der DDR oder gar in der ganzen Republik besitzt. / [E]s hat kein gesellschaftliches Gremium gegeben, dass die Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter ständig exakt registrierte.²⁸⁸

And still in 1981 the ZAG party secretary, Fred Suerdieck, complained: “Es ist unverantwortlich, dass wir 1981 noch keine konkrete Übersicht über unsere Bewegung und alle Tendenzen ihrer Entwicklung besitzen.”²⁸⁹ The most comprehensive analysis of the movement, conducted by the ZfK in 1984–1985, put the total count of circles at 211 yet did not include the district of Frankfurt/Oder: The district office did not respond to the survey.²⁹⁰ Further, these 211 documented circles did not include the numerous circles for children and youth, circles for police officers (*Zirkel schreibender Volkspolizisten*), circles in the armed forces (*Zirkel schreibender Grenzsoldaten*), nor a circle in the Ministry for State Security (*Zirkel schreibender*

²⁸⁷ “Das 11. Plenum und die schreibenden Arbeiter,” *ich schreibe* 2 (1966): 15.

²⁸⁸ Entwicklungsprobleme der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Bezirk Halle. Bericht des Vorsitzenden der Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft “Schreibender Arbeiter,” Dr. Wolfgang Friedrich, auf der Konferenz der schreibender Arbeiter des Bezirkes Halle am 12.6.1966. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303; also found in ZfK 644.

²⁸⁹ Underlined in original. As party secretary of the ZAG, Suerdieck was responsible for reporting on all ZAG activities to the SED Central Committee. Letter from Fred Suerdieck to Axel Oelschlegel. 18.6.1981. ZfK 650.

²⁹⁰ Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 1. ZfK 639.

Tschekisten).²⁹¹ Other circles not included were those for seamen and for Sorbs, the Slavic minority in southeastern Saxony.

Professor Friedrich recognized that the high number of circles commonly cited in the aftermath of the First Bitterfeld Conference was attributable to inflationary reporting. He acknowledged the difficulties of obtaining reliable statistics and, in citing some 270 circles, noted, “[d]iese Ziffer ist jedoch sehr problematisch, wird doch immer wieder von Fachmethodikern, Zirkelleitern, und -mitgliedern versichert, dass die offiziellen Meldungen nicht real wären.”²⁹² As Bernhardt confirmed in 1996, until 1964 many circles existed only on paper, “weil es zum guten Ton in den Betrieben gehörte, einen solchen Zirkel nennen zu können.”²⁹³ Yet the reasons for a factory to falsely claim to support a ZSA were not merely for appearances. Since 1950 a company’s cultural plan – its “Ökulei”²⁹⁴ – had been an integral component of its economic plan. This overly optimistic reporting on ZSAs followed the practice of presenting a falsified picture to superiors to satisfy the often unrealistic demands of a centrally dictated plan, a practice described by Steiner as an “asymmetrische

²⁹¹ On “writing Chekists” see Jochen Hecht, “Die Poesie als Magd des Sicherheitsdienstes,” <http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Archive/Fachbeitraege/poesie.html>. See also *Wir über uns. Reprint einer Anthologie der Kreisarbeitsgemeinschaft “Schreibender Tschekisten.” Gedichte und Linolschnitte von Angehörigen des Ministeriums für Staatsicherheit* (Berlin: Verlag Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, 1990).

²⁹² Der VII. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.

²⁹³ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 36.

²⁹⁴ On “Ökulei” (*ökonomisch- kultureller Leistungsvergleich*) see Horst Groschopp, “Ein System der perfekter Kulturverwaltung?,” *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 14:29 (1991): 44. On the transformation of the FDGB see Schumann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 53 ff.

Informationsverteilung,” which left higher party instances uninformed of the real situation at subordinate levels.²⁹⁵

Internal DSV correspondence from 1960 demonstrates the difficulties of attaining reliable statistics and presents a more modest account of the movement’s early developments. In May 1960 the DSV sent letters to all district cultural departments and offices of the FDGB, FDJ, SED, and DKB in an attempt to gain a “möglichst lückenlosen Überblick” of all literary circles in the GDR.²⁹⁶ Yet a letter dated 7 December 1960 to Eduard Klein, secretary of the DSV, admits: “Die wenigsten Adressaten, an die wir uns Ende Mai mit der Frage nach literarischen Zirkeln und Zirkeln schreibender Arbeiter wandten, haben bis heute geantwortet.”²⁹⁷ The district DSV offices in Neubrandenburg, Potsdam, Rostock, Frankfurt/Oder, and Gera did not respond to the request, while the district offices of the FDGB, FDJ, SED, DKB “haben sich ausgeschwiegen.”²⁹⁸ Relying only upon the available responses, the letter put the number of circles of writing workers in production facilities at 155 with an additional 59 “literary circles,” concluding: “Ob nicht der eine und der andere von den Literaturzirkeln, die meistens der Kulturbund nennt, nicht auch ein Zirkel für schreibende Arbeiter ist, zumindest Arbeiter daran teilnehmen, ist ungewiß.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan*, 13.

²⁹⁶ Letter to Räte der Bezirke, Abt. Kultur, Bezirksleitungen des FDGB, FDJ, SED Bezirkssekretariate des KB, 6. Mai 1960, from Gerhard Baumert and C.E. Matthias. SV 27.

²⁹⁷ Zur Information an Kollegen E. Klein. 12.7.1960 (from Matthias). SV 27.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

III. Further Problems: Lack of Oversight, Undefined Goals, and High Turnover Rates

These difficulties in gaining an overview of the BSA throughout the 1960s reflect the party's challenges of creating a unified system of control throughout a vast complex of bureaucratic instances, many intent on maintaining their autonomy. As Malycha notes in a recent history of the SED, although the party had spent the 1950s establishing its basic personnel and organizational apparatus (the "Nomenklaturkader"), its ability to achieve overall operational effectiveness remained severely hindered by a "schwer zu koordinierenden Komplex von Zuständigkeiten."³⁰⁰ Despite the party's highly centralized power structures, individual representatives within various ministries and bureaus often followed competing agendas, with overlapping competencies among state organs fueling internal power struggles and personal rivalries.³⁰¹ Within the DSV, for example, a monthly Central Committee activity report from February 1961 noted the problems created by the different organizational structures and operating procedures among district DSV chapters, describing the consequences in general terms as members misunderstanding and misrepresenting issues and harboring misconceptions about the BSA.³⁰² District DSV leaders, according to the report, were either unwilling or unable to communicate the party's goals and relate the desired information to their members, thus adversely impacting the execution of central directives at the regional and local levels.

Within the BSA poor coordination among agencies created numerous problems through the 1960s. A 1963 FDGB report, for example, noted that the mass of materials prepared for

³⁰⁰ Andreas Malycha and Jochen Winters, *Geschichte der SED. Von der Gründung bis zur Linkspartei* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2009), 79.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Tätigkeitsbericht. Februar 1961. Gen. Peter Czerny. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 274 f.

writing workers “von keiner Stelle gelenkt wurde, sich z.T. überschritt, z.T. widersprach.”³⁰³ In a letter to Herbert Warnke dated 11 May 1964, DSV secretary Hans Koch addressed the problem of the lack of financial oversight in both central and district FDGB cultural departments, a situation occasionally exploited by authors: “Diese mangelnde Übersicht der Verteilung großer Mittel [...] führte dazu, dass ein junger Autor wie Günter Glante zur gleichen Zeit zwei Betriebsverträge von je DM 600.- abgeschlossen hat und noch für einen Auftrag (Arbeitertheater) DM 4 000.- erhält.”³⁰⁴ Koch further noted the lack of guidelines for contracts between factories and writers, with writers earning anywhere between 60 and 800 DM, and the lack of any discernable relationship between a writer’s qualification and their remuneration for leading a ZSA, with writers paid anywhere between 60 and 200 DM.³⁰⁵ Still in 1970 a report on the first central benchmarking of the BSA (*Leistungsvergleich*) noted the difficulties caused by a lack of cooperation among agencies: “Erschwerend wirkte sich auf die Führung des Leistungsvergleiches aus, dass es zu keinem kooperativen Wirken der Unterzeichner kam.”³⁰⁶ In 1971 Leichsenring stated that the management structures for the BSA were in principle appropriate but in practice ineffective due to poor coordination among sponsoring organizations and misunderstandings of the movement’s mission. The greatest hindrance for effective circle work, he wrote, were the many leaders who did not appreciate the BSA’s political and cultural potentials. Companies commonly provided financial support for a ZSA without practicing

³⁰³ Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

³⁰⁴ Letter from Hans Koch to Herbert Warnke, 11 May 1964. SV 146, 3.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR Abschlußbericht über den I. zentralen Leistungsvergleich schreibender Arbeiter. 25.6.70. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6950.

oversight, allowing circle leaders to do as they please. According to Leichsenring this meant leaders often only offered advice on members' "spontan entstehende Arbeiten."³⁰⁷ For circles that did not follow a political agenda, however, there were no negative consequences – by and large they were left to work according to their own interests, remaining tokens for the sponsoring production facility to fulfill the requirements of their cultural plan.

Circle leaders' tepid support for producing literature according to the political dictates of a cultural plan was symptomatic for the party's larger challenge of establishing ideological clarity of purpose throughout a whole cadre of cultural functionaries – a difficult task given the lack of clear guidelines and concrete objectives. For local actors charged with implementing party directives an ongoing problem was not simply comprehending the historical dialectics of Marxist imperatives but also reconciling them with the daily realities they faced on the ground. A FDGB report from late 1961 on cultural activities at the largest industrial sites in the republic (Schwarze Pumpe, Buna, and Schwedt) clearly stated that the main obstacles to implementing the cultural plan were the lack of coordination and functionaries' inability to present a clear vision of their goals. Aside from the FDGB leadership neither taking responsibility for nor understanding how to put the plan into action, the report complained:

Es gibt keine einheitliche Orientierung für die Struktur und den Aufbau der Kulturarbeit auf einer Grossbaustelle (z.Zt. macht jeder Betrieb das nach seinen eigenen Vorstellung!). Es ist nicht klar, wer auf einer Baustelle als einheitliches staatliches Organ in Fragen der Kultur auftritt.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 98.

³⁰⁸ Kurzinformation über Erfahrungsaustausch über Kulturarbeit auf Grossbaustellen. 29.11.61. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/16637.

An evaluation of the 1960 Cultural Conference in Hoyerswerda stated openly: “Es gibt vom Büro der Kreisleitung sowie vom Staatsapparat noch keine restlose Klarheit über den Konkreten Inhalt des Bitterfelder Wegs.”³⁰⁹ FDGB headquarters in Berlin registered these difficulties. A mid-1960s memo from the FDGB chairman’s office reiterated the importance of implementing the party’s cultural plan according to the principles of scientific Marxism yet recognized the challenges posed by the lack of experience in cultural planning and the difficulties at the regional and local levels of presenting a singular vision of such a plan: “es [gibt] noch keine einheitlichen Vorstellungen, wie die Planung in der kulturellen Massenarbeit erfolgen soll.”³¹⁰

Even in the district of Halle, where the DSV had otherwise claimed its greatest successes in supporting the BSA, internal memos described the problems of launching the movement. At the 1960 Cultural Conference, DVS secretary Klein had boasted that all members in the district of Halle had contact with production facilities: They led a ZSA, performed cultural work in production facilities, or helped with a company newspaper or radio.³¹¹ Klein had also written to Siegfried Wagner, director of the Central Committee’s Cultural Department, that writing workers in Halle dominated the press to such a degree that professional writers were no longer granted a voice. DSV members in the district of Halle, he stated, not only provided the greatest degree of support for the BSA throughout the GDR but clearly understood the movement’s political significance.³¹² Despite these publicly claimed successes and Klein’s

³⁰⁹ Bericht über die Auswertung der Kulturkonferenz im Kreis Hoyerswerda, Bezirk Cottbus. 15. bis 18.8.1960. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 121.

³¹⁰ Untitled five-page “Ablage,” 1964/1965. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³¹¹ Klein, *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 108.

³¹² Letter from Eduard Klein to Genossen Siegfried Wagner. 12.3.60. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/272, 86.

optimistic reports to his superiors, a 1962 internal FDGB memo on the BSA's development in the district of Halle offered a more realistic assessment of the difficulties functionaries faced organizing the movement. The thesis paper complained openly of the movement's stagnation, differing views on its goals, poor coordination among various organs, the state's weak oversight and participants' poor motivation, lack of ideological clarity and the failure of writers to address topical issues in industry and agriculture, the many circles with no state support, and differing degrees of support from various leaders resulting in differentiated developments among circles.³¹³

There was plenty of blame to pass around for the failure to implement the cultural plan and foster cooperation between workers and writers. In 1963 functionaries bemoaned the fact that agreements between the DSV and FDGB both at central and district levels had produced little measurable effects: "Die auf zentraler und Bezirks-ebene abgeschlossenen Freundschaftsverträge tragen meist formalen Charakter und wirken sich praktisch kaum aus."³¹⁴ While in 1964 FDGB functionaries lamented the ineffectuality of contracts with the DSV to produce literature, stating "[d]ie abgeschlossenen Werkverträge erwiesen sich häufig als formal und hatten keinen bzw. nur geringen Einfluß auf die Schaffung bedeutender literarischer Werke,"³¹⁵ in 1970 a report from the DSV district office in Leipzig stated that writers who

³¹³ Thesen zu einigen Problemen der Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Bezirk Halle. Genn. Rechelmann. 24.9.1962. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

³¹⁴ Entwurf, Vertraulich. Berichtsvorlage über "Die Lage in der Literatur und die nächsten Aufgaben des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes", DSV, Sekretariat. 27. November 1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.026/7, 513.

³¹⁵ Grundsatzmaterial über die weitere Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit des FDGB. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2418.

otherwise supported the goals of Bitterfeld lost their enthusiasm and initiative when faced with the “Trägheit und kulturpolitischen Konzeptionslosigkeit der Betriebe.”³¹⁶ As long as a writer did not appear as a representative of a higher party instance:

[Er] stößt [...] überall auf Schwierigkeiten, Einblick in die wesentlichen Probleme zu erhalten oder mit den verantwortlichen Leuten in Kontakt zu kommen. Die Folge: mangelnde Koordinierung, falsche Orientierung, Kräfte- und Zeitverlust für den Schriftsteller.

Into the 1960s a further factor impeding the development of the BSA was the high level of personnel fluctuation in various agencies. After closing the borders to the West and erecting the Berlin Wall in August 1961 had quelled the flood of emigrants to the FRG (approximately 10 percent of the total population in the SBZ/GDR), a main cause for high turnover rates was the rapid degree of professional advancement. For those who accepted the SED’s anti-fascist creed and single party rule, the early GDR offered the highest rates of upward mobility in the Europe.³¹⁷ The *Handbuch für schreibende Arbeiter* (1969) commented on the problems this situation created within the BSA. Addressing not only amateur authors interested in literary instruction but also functionaries engaged in consolidating and stabilizing the movement, the handbook admonished its readers to gain an overview of circles and their activities, noting the complete lack of any oversight in Karl-Marx-Stadt had been due to the frequent personnel changes in all organizations responsible for the movement. Without the knowledge of any state organization, many circles had stopped meeting, newly founded ones remained unaware of the

³¹⁶ Verbindungen Autoren – Betriebe. 1969–1970. Deutscher Schriftstellerverband. Bezirk Leipzig. 20.10.1970, SV 699, Band 2, 7-8.

³¹⁷ Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, et al., *Die Parteien und Organisationen der DDR. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 2002), 133.

existence of any district organizational office and therefore were not registered, while many older circles chose to remain distant from the BAG.³¹⁸

7. Klassenkampf and Volkskunst: Compromises and Concessions in the Early 1960s

I. The Schwerin Conference of Writing Workers and Farmers (1963)

In an attempt to overcome these overwhelming organizational and ideological challenges, the Third Conference of Writing Workers and Farmers in Schwerin in 1963 marked the first central stocktaking of the movement and set the main goals for its nearly 30 remaining years.³¹⁹

Conference preparatory notes commented on the movement's stagnation and fluctuation, on differing opinions about the movement's content and goals, its lack of coordination and orientation in industry and agriculture, and the differing degrees of circle development.³²⁰

Addressing these concerns at a preparatory meeting for the conference, Edith Bergner, who presented the keynote speech at the conference, admitted: "Es stimmt, wir haben die Bewegung nicht in der Hand. Die ZAG ist relativ gelöst von der Bewegung, trotz Annäherungsversuch."³²¹

³¹⁸ *Handbuch für schreibende Arbeiter*, eds. Ursula Steinhaußen, Dieter Faulseit, and Jürgen Bonk (Berlin: Tribüne, 1969), 98.

³¹⁹ Perspektivplan der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. Beilage zu den "Mitteilungen des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR" Nr. 1/1964. ZfK 651.

³²⁰ Aktennotiz über eine Aussprache in der Abteilung Kultur des ZK der SED zur Vorbereitung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 30.11. und 1.12. 1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2418.

³²¹ Aktennotiz über die Aussprache der ZAG schreibender Arbeiter mit dem stellvertretenden Minister für Kultur am 2. Oktober 1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445. For Edith Bergner's speech see "Der VI. Parteitag der SED und die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter", Beilage zu den "Informationen und Nachrichten" Nr. 17. Dezember 1962. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

The conference's significance, however, lay not only in defining the movement's objectives for its remaining years but in initiating a phase of stabilization by abandoning its more revolutionary goals as preparation for the Second Bitterfeld Conference of 1964. The goals set at the conference included establishing socialist realism as the binding aesthetic theory and strengthening the operative nature of the BSA by embedding circle activities within a larger social framework. The degree of a circle's social engagement became a central criterion of its success, as stated in preparatory notes for the conference: "das entscheidende Kriterium für die Qualität volkskünstlerischen Schaffens [stellt] die unmittelbare Wirksamkeit, die operativ verändernde Kraft [dar]."³²² Encouraging writing workers to contribute to cultural life served the goal of social integration. Preventing circles from working in isolation for their own interests was to bring autonomous circles into the state fold. Circles not contributing to social activities were viewed as "narrowing" or reducing their socio-political potential to contribute to the construction of socialism. A preparatory consultation before the conference stated, "[e]s muss verhindert werden, dass die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter allein auf die Zirkel reduziert wird,"³²³ and noted that most circles did not fulfill their social potential but in fact worked according to their own interests: "Die Enge der Zirkel ist zu überwinden und das Schaffen der Arbeiterautoren operativer und wirkungsvoller zu gestalten."³²⁴ A summary of the main results of the Schwerin Conference stated that the BSA should be more closely integrated

³²² Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin (6. Fassung). ASA, folder Carl Zeiss Jena.

³²³ Aktennotiz über eine Beratung am 19. Juni 1963 in Halle zur Vorbereitung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

³²⁴ Konzeption für die zentrale Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter (Als Vorlage für die Leitungssitzung am 15.8.1963). ZfK 651.

within the construction of socialism by incorporating the ZSA as the “brain” of the larger folk arts movement.³²⁵ Writing workers were to provide texts for and collaborate with cabaret groups, workers’ theaters, puppet theaters, folk dance songs, and circles of graphic artists. By writing articles for the press and radio, hosting poetry evenings, participating in literary and musical programs, and contributing to readings and discussions at the workplace, in residential areas, and in cultural clubs, the BSA was to contribute to the overall development of cultural life and appeal to and inspire others to participate in the mass cultural movement.³²⁶

Although encouraging circles to actively participate in the construction of socialism – and thereby fulfilling the movement’s centralizing, integrative function –, the conference marked a significant defeat for those who viewed the movement as key to overcoming the alienation between physical and mental labor (work and art; base and superstructure), for those who saw the “so-called private life” as a remnant of bourgeois society and who viewed the cultural revolution as an essential step in establishing a socialist society. The Schwerin Conference conceded that writing workers were no longer to form the cadre of future professional writers of a new, socialist literature. While the BSA still provided a potential path of professionalization for amateur writers, circle activity was henceforth to serve primarily as a contribution to the educational and personal development of its participants:

[I]n der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter [ist] nicht vordergründig die Forderung von Schriftstellernachwuchs zu sehen [...] sondern den Hauptsinn der Zirkelarbeit [ist] in der persönlichkeitsbildende Wirkung der volkskünstlerischen Tätigkeit. [...] Die

³²⁵ Kurzbericht über die 3. Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 30.11. und 1.12.1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

³²⁶ Aus der EntschlieÙung zur “Perspektive der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter” der Schweriner Konferenz. *Chronik des künstlerischen Volksschaffen. 1963–1966*, 167-68.

Zusammenkunft eines Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern dient in erster Linie der Weiterbildung der Zirkelteilnehmer.³²⁷

Marking the further defeat of the socialist cultural revolution, the Schwerin Conference also formalized the legitimacy of circle activity as a free-time activity occurring in residential areas. A draft resolution passed at the conference included the further dimension of circle activity that, “[d]ie schreibenden Arbeiter helfen mit, den Beschluß des ZK der SED zur Arbeit im Wohngebiet zu verwirklichen.”³²⁸ Yet demonstrating the discrepancies between conceding the importance of satisfying the interests of the general population while maintaining the façade of a Marxist revolutionary idealism, the plan also contends that the “Kern der BSA sind nach wie vor die Zirkel in den Betrieben.”³²⁹ On one hand, residential areas were now considered acceptable venues for cultural events, yet on the other hand, as the party and FDGB drew their legitimacy from the working class, the BSA still provided the promise of creating a truly proletarian culture based in the means of material production: “In Zukunft sollte es keinen grösseren Betrieb in der Republik geben, in dem nicht ein Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter existiert.”³³⁰

³²⁷ Andreas Leichsenring, Protokoll des Kolloquium “25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR” 18.–19.10.1985. Leipzig. ZfK 647; see also: Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin. I. Einschätzung der Rolle und Bedeutung der BSA und Bauern als Bestandteil unserer sozialistischen Kulturrevolution sowie der bisherigen Entwicklung. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

³²⁸ Entwurf einer Arbeitsentschliessung zur Perspektive der BSA angenommen auf der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter in Schwerin vom 30.11. bis 1.12. 1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

³²⁹ Ibid; see also Perspektivplan der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. ZfK 651.

³³⁰ Ibid.

II. The Second Bitterfeld Conference (1964)

In abandoning the most revolutionary goals of the movement and emphasizing the importance of personal development through cultural participation in residential areas, the 1963 Schwerin Conference anticipated the more significant policy changes of the 1964 Second Bitterfeld Conference. As stated in a discussion in the Central Committee's Cultural Department, the 1963 Schwerin Conference of Writing Workers and Farmers was to serve foremost as an exchange of experiences in preparation for the Second Bitterfeld Conference, which would deal with basic principles of cultural policy:

[Die Schweriner Konferenz] soll den Charakter eines Erfahrungsaustausches tragen und keinen Grundsatzkonferenz mit EntschlieÙung sein, da im Frühjahr 1964 eine Grundsatzkulturkonferenz stattfinden wird. Die Schweriner Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter wird darum der Vorbereitung der 2. Bitterfelder Konferenz dienen.³³¹

For the 1964 Second Bitterfeld Conference marked a significant shift from the FDGB's attempts to reeducate the masses through "Kulturarbeit" at the workplace to the Ministry of Culture's emphasis on meeting cultural interests of the general population in residential areas. Although the conference had a significant impact on the course of cultural policy in the GDR, similar to the First Bitterfeld Conference, scholars have been quick to dismiss its significance.

While Emmerich has termed the Second Bitterfeld Conference "ein schlecht verhülltes Begräbnis der Bitterfelder Bewegung," he bases this conclusion on the Bitterfeld Path's failure

³³¹ Aktennotizüber eine Aussprache in der Abteilung Kultur des ZK der SED zur Vorbereitung der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 30.11 und 1.12.1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

to overcome the gap between art and work.³³² Rüter also sees the Bitterfeld Path buried by the new literary perspective of planners and managers promoted at the Second Bitterfeld Conference, terming it: “eine eindeutige Absage an die Tradition der Arbeiterkorrespondenten-Bewegung der Weimarer Zeit.”³³³ Yet as shown in the goals of the Schwerin Conference, the main emphasis of the BSA was now on operative forms of literature of KPD/BPRS lineage. The three main goals of Bitterfeld – for workers to “storm the heights of culture” and develop their own creative talents, for writers and artists to declare their solidarity with the working class and the “new life”, and for the creation of an educated nation³³⁴ – in fact remained intact until 1989/1990.

While both Kleßmann and Schumann describe the pragmatic notion of “meaningful free-time activities” as gradually replacing the ideologically-loaded concept of “kulturelle Massenarbeit” throughout the 1960s,³³⁵ this shift from political and ideological paternalism to the pragmatics of meeting individuals’ cultural interests was both a concession to the existing realities and an acknowledgment of the ineffectuality of FDGB cultural work in the 1950s.³³⁶ For these changes in cultural policy were concurrent with the decentralization of the economic sphere initiated by the NÖS/NÖSPL [*Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung*], a

³³² Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 186 f.

³³³ Rüter, “*Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!*”, 93.

³³⁴ On the main goals of Bitterfeld see, for example, Schiller, “Kurellas Kulturkommission,” 15.

³³⁵ Kleßmann explains this transition as largely the result of resistance from workers in industrial facilities, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 633 f. See also Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 21.

³³⁶ On the weaknesses of FDGB *Kulturarbeit* in the 1950s see Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 101 ff.

set of comprehensive reforms introduced at the SED's Fourth Party Conference in January 1963 which intended to introduce market-based efficiencies into the rigid, centrally planned economy. In both culture and economics these policies allowed greater flexibility in decision making at local and regional levels.³³⁷ Although the SED Central Committee initiated these changes in the cultural sphere, their implementation faced resistance not only within the party leadership but, more significantly, from the FDGB.

III. The FDGB (Wolfgang Beyreuther) versus the Ministry of Culture (Hans Bentzien)

Schuhmann identifies the Central Committee directive "Kulturhäuser müssen Volkshäuser werden" from 14 March 1962 as initiating this policy shift by reducing FDGB influence over cultural work as a means of ideological indoctrination and introducing a more inclusive concept of cultural life with the goal of engaging the general population.³³⁸ Yet implementing this directive, which called for the transfer of FDGB responsibility over cultural centers to local and regional state agencies, did not occur quickly or smoothly because it involved not only competition over financial resources and political influence but also long-standing disagreements over fundamentally different visions of the role of culture in socialism – specifically KPD versus SPD's views on the function of cultural centers.³³⁹

³³⁷ Bauernkämper recognizes the economic liberalizations of the NÖS as providing the context for the FDGB's loss of influence over political engagement through cultural work at the workplace and the Ministry of Culture's emphasis on artistic quality. Arnd Bauernkämper, *Die Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2005), 25.

³³⁸ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 178 f.

³³⁹ See also Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR*, 632-33.

Groschopp identifies this debate as marking an end and turning point in East German cultural politics – never again did such a fundamental controversy occur in the GDR.³⁴⁰ The conflict pitted two party factions against each other. On one hand the Minister of Culture Hans Bentzien and a group of reformers founded their view of East German cultural centers in the tradition of 19th-century SPD “Volkshäuser,” by which their use and function should be determined by the needs and interests of their users. The role of cultural functionaries, they argued, should be to provide attractive offerings for the general population, to discover new talents, and to help establish contacts between amateur and professional artists.³⁴¹ Bentzien squared off directly with the KPD-schooled faction around Alfred Kurella and Alexander Abusch, who viewed Bentzien’s reformist position as traitorous to the ideals of the revolutionary proletariat and the goals of (re-) educating the masses through political “Massenarbeit.”³⁴² Bentzien, however, rejected this paternalistic view of the state, stating unequivocally that the “Terminus, die Menschen ‘erziehen’ zu müssen” should vanish once and for all from the German language and that one should rather speak of organizing cooperation among individuals.³⁴³ Although he faced resistance from hardliners both in the party leadership and the FDGB, Bentzien’s eventual success was guaranteed, for he represented not only the party line as set forth by the Central Committee but also the existing realities on the ground.

³⁴⁰ Groschopp, “Kulturhäuser Zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast,” 42.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 36 f.

³⁴² Ibid., 39; On the factions Kurella versus Bentzien see also Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 179.

³⁴³ Groschopp, “Kulturhäuser Zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast,” 38.

As Schuhmann has shown, the FDGB's cultural work in the 1950s – a hybrid of propaganda encouraging workers to increase productivity, political indoctrination in the basic tenets of Marxist-Leninism, and aesthetic and moral education – had proven largely ineffectual.³⁴⁴ As noted in chapter three of this study, the FDGB ranks had been largely cleansed of former SPD members in the Stalinist purges of the early 1950s, and a young cadre of poorly qualified functionaries with little background in the arts had achieved few successes in implementing an ill-defined vision of a new socialist culture.³⁴⁵ These difficulties had resulted in obvious discrepancies between FDGB goals and the realities functionaries encountered at the workplace.³⁴⁶ The desired mobilizing effects of propaganda to increase production – the core of FDGB's cultural work – had not materialized.³⁴⁷ Their cultural activities had largely failed to engage workers at industrial sites and often found little support or understanding within the ranks of their own leadership.³⁴⁸

A series of exchanges between the FDGB Chairman, Wolfgang Beyreuther, and Bentzien described the issues at stake in addressing these structural imbalances and the need for reforms in cultural policy. An undated memo from the office of Beyreuther summarized the situation:

Seit Monaten bestehen zwischen dem Minister für Kultur und dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB Meinungsverschiedenheiten [...] Alle Vorschläge laufen am Ende darauf hinaus,

³⁴⁴ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 151.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 116 f.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88 f.

die insbesondere in den letzten Jahren gewachsene Verantwortung der betrieblichen Gewerkschaftsleitungen für die kulturelle Massenarbeit und Volkskunstbewegung einzuschränken und faktisch die Volkskunst ihrer materiellen und ideologischen Basis dem Betrieb zu entledigen.³⁴⁹

Beyreuther resisted these reforms as they marked not only a loss of FDGB influence over cultural institutions – thereby severely curtailing their main venue of ideological influence – but they also represented a major blow to the ideals of creating a new culture based upon the laws of Marxist materialism. As he stated, freeing cultural centers and folk art groups from their ideal and material base, registering folk art groups individually, requiring them to keep their own finances, and creating independent management structures “läuft auf die Bildung einer Art Volkskunstverband hinaus.”³⁵⁰ For traditional communist revolutionaries and Marxist ideologues (Abusch and Kurella had joined the KPD in 1918 and 1919 respectively) who viewed unifying the fields of economics, politics, and culture as an “objective necessity” in the construction of the socialism, removing cultural activities from the sphere of material production was a major setback to the immediate goals of the cultural revolution.

Bentzien had been charged with implementing the seemingly paradoxical policy of allowing more autonomy among local cultural groups while simultaneously strengthening the reach of the party through a unified leadership structure, a “straffe, einheitliche staatliche

³⁴⁹ Information über einige grundsätzliche Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen dem Minister für Kultur und dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB im Bereich der kultur-politischen Arbeit. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁵⁰ Wolfgang Beyreuther. Berlin, den 12. März 1964. Sekretariatsvorlage. Betr.: Probleme zur Vorbereitung der Kulturkonferenz der Ideologischen Kommission des ZK der SED und des Ministeriums für Kultur am 24. und 25. April 1964 in Bitterfeld (2. Bitterfelder Konferenz). SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

Leitung”³⁵¹ in all cultural affairs under direction of the Ministry of Culture. In arguing that the NÖS principles of economic efficiency should also be applied to the field of culture, Bentzien stated that it aimed primarily at “eine radikale Vereinfachung der Leitung, d.h. um die Anwendung des Produktionsprinzips auf unsere Bedingungen.”³⁵² Yet establishing centralized structures of authority did not preclude pursuing the ideals of democratic socialism.

Encouraging greater economic flexibility and individual autonomy signaled the simple recognition of the necessity to engage local actors. Only by integrating larger portions of the population within the socialist project, by offering individuals opportunities to personally invest in the socialist experiment, did it stand any realistic chance of success. Yet the party’s demand to establish a unified line of responsibility under direction of the Ministry of Culture involved wresting power and resources from the FDGB.

Some six weeks before the Second Bitterfeld Conference a FDGB memo from the office of Beyreuther described Bentzien’s position: In order to transfer the responsibility for all FDGB cultural centers and folk art groups to local state organs, Bentzien had suggested unifying the available Ministry of Culture funds (550 Million DM) and FDGB cultural funds (650 Million DM) into a single fund for regional and local state organs (*Räte der Bezirke und Kreise*), with the justification: “[d]amit soll vor allem die Kulturarbeit im Wohngebiet gefördert werden, da sich – nach Meinung des Ministers – das kulturelle Leben in der Freizeit, d.h. im Wohngebiet

³⁵¹ Sekretariatsvorlage. Betr.: Probleme zur Vorbereitung der Kulturkonferenz der Ideologischen Kommission des ZK der SED und des Ministeriums für Kultur am 24. und 25. April 1964 in Bitterfeld (2. Bitterfelder Konferenz). Berlin, den 12. März 1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

³⁵² Letter from Bentzien to Beyreuther, 18 March 1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

abspielt.“³⁵³ Complaining of FDGB reticence, Bentzien stated that, compared to the FDGB, city mayors and municipal administrators had limited funds available for cultural activities and referred to an arrangement of the agricultural committee (*Regelung des Landwirtschaftsrates*) by which all collectivized farms had been advised to transfer cultural funds directly to village clubs and local mayors as the most effective way to reach the local populations.³⁵⁴ According to Bentzien, since only ten percent of the artistic works commissioned by the FDGB were of acceptable quality, the future role of FDGB cultural work should be limited to production propaganda, membership meetings in production facilities, and the “Heranführung der Werktätigen an die Kunst und künstlerische Selbstbetätigung, die außerhalb des Betriebes staatlich organisiert wird.“³⁵⁵

Although Beyreuther complained of the union’s loss of influence over the working class through cultural activities, he was aware of the difficulties faced by cultural functionaries charged with integrating culture within the economic plan. In preparatory consultations with regional functionaries before the Second Bitterfeld Conference he had been informed:

dass eine Reihe von Kreiskulturhäusern (von denen ein großer Teil betriebliche Kulturhäuser sind) sich schon jetzt weitgehend von den betrieblichen Problemen der Ökonomie und des wiss.-techn. Fortschritts gelöst haben und sich einseitig auf

³⁵³ Wolfgang Beyreuther. Berlin, den 12. März 1964. Sekretariatsvorlage. Betr.: Probleme zur Vorbereitung der Kulturkonferenz der Ideologischen Kommission des ZK der SED und des Ministeriums für Kultur am 24. und 25. April 1964 in Bitterfeld (2. Bitterfelder Konferenz). SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

³⁵⁴ Information über einige grundsätzliche Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen dem Minister für Kultur und dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB im Bereich der kultur-politischen Arbeit. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

allgemeine Veranstaltungen der Geselligkeit orientieren, daher nur auf allgemeine Freizeitgestaltung.³⁵⁶

As recognized by the Ministry for Culture and admitted by FDGB functionaries in the run-up to the Second Bitterfeld Conference, the majority of participants in FDGB cultural events were in fact not workers from the sponsoring production facilities nor interested in contributing to the construction of socialism through cultural participation.³⁵⁷ To support his case, Bentzien cited negative examples of the Leuna and Buna chemical works, the Mansfelder mines, and the Maxhütte steel works where the workers typically lived scattered about the region and did not have easy access to the FDGB clubs or cultural centers.³⁵⁸ He described the current situation as anachronistic and cited the example of a choir in Kölldeda as typical of FDGB cultural work: While the choir was sponsored by the radio broadcast studio (*Funkwerk*), only few participants were actually employees of the radio. These token members allowed the radio to cover its weaknesses in cultural work by pretending to have its own choir.³⁵⁹ As early as 1960 Beyreuther had recognized himself this situation was also common in the BSA. Describing the results of district literary competitions in a speech at the First Conference of Writing Workers (8 June 1960) in Karl-Marx-Stadt, he complained that most participants in the district of Leipzig did not

³⁵⁶ Sekretariatsvorlage. Betr.: Probleme zur Vorbereitung der Kulturkonferenz der Ideologischen Kommission des ZK der SED und des Ministeriums für Kultur am 24. und 25. April 1964 in Bitterfeld (2. Bitterfelder Konferenz). Berlin, den 12. März 1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

³⁵⁷ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 102 f.

³⁵⁸ Information über einige grundsätzliche Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen dem Minister für Kultur und dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB im Bereich der kultur-politischen Arbeit. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁵⁹ Letter from Bentzien to Beyreuther. 18.3.1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2418; DY/34/24865.

belong to an organized circle nor were many circle members actually workers, but rather housewives and retirees.³⁶⁰ Most submissions, he noted, dealt neither with the problems of constructing socialism nor the “new life” in the GDR.

In the weeks before the Second Bitterfeld Conference, Bentzien attempted to force Beyreuther’s hand, stating in a letter dated 18 March 1964 that if they were unable to resolve the issue: “bin ich für eine öffentliche Polemik auf der [Zweiten Bitterfelder] Konferenz.”³⁶¹ Yet it did not come to open polemics at the conference. In his opening speech Bentzien referred to the 14 March 1962 Central Committee directive and emphasized the expanded responsibility of cultural work in reaching all segments of the population.³⁶² Beyreuther, for lack of time (according to the published proceedings), did not give his speech. Walter Ulbricht, for his part, in concluding the conference with a 70-plus-page speech, also emphasized the importance of developing and improving “künstlerische Selbstbetätigung der Werktätigen [...] in den Wohngebieten” and appealed to the adversaries to resolve their differences:

Für die weitere Verbesserung der Arbeit der Kreiskulturhäuser müssen bei den betriebseigenen Kulturhäuser die Kompetenzstreitigkeiten zwischen dem Ministerium für Kultur und dem FDGB schnell durch eine Vereinbarung aus der Welt geschafft werden.

³⁶⁰ Referat für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 8. Juni 1960 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. Die Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften bei der Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

³⁶¹ Letter from Bentzien to Beyreuther. 18.3.1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2418; DY/34/24865.

³⁶² Hans Bentzien, “Die Ergebnisse und weiteren Aufgaben bei der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nationalkultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” *Zweite Bitterfeld Konferenz 1964*, 53 f.

(*Beifall*) Die Arbeit der Kreiskulturhäuser dient den Interessen der gesamten Bevölkerung.³⁶³

While the agreement called for by Ulbricht led to a rapprochement between Beyreuther and Bentzien, the regional and local ranks of the FDGB remained reluctant to relinquish power and financing with numerous instances of resistance.

In an effort to resolve these differences in the weeks before the Second Bitterfeld Conference, the FDGB had passed a confidential resolution suggesting that the FDGB Executive Committee and the Ministry of Culture discuss the issues before the Central Committee's Ideological Commission and conduct "experiments" in two "circles," the nature of which had not yet been determined.³⁶⁴ Whether such experiments took place is unknown, yet in a later attempt to resolve the issue, the Politburo and National Front charged the People's Chamber with forming a cultural commission to investigate the development of intellectual and cultural life in residential areas in Berlin, Magdeburg, and Görlitz.³⁶⁵ The commission's investigations, conducted before and after the Second Bitterfeld Conference, concluded that "[d]en größten Teil ihrer Freizeit erleben viele Werktätige im Wohngebiet," and thereby strengthened the position of reformers. The report noted that, because most people live far from the cultural centers at production facilities, "unsere Bürger [müssen] für die Gestaltung ihrer

³⁶³ Walter Ulbricht, "Über die Entwicklung einer volksverbundenen sozialistischen Nationalkultur," *Zweite Bitterfeld Konferenz 1964*, 145.

³⁶⁴ Beschluß des Sekretariats vom 3.4.64. Nr. S 183/64. Fragen der Kulturkonferenz. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24865.

³⁶⁵ Bericht über den Einsatz des Ausschusses für Kultur der Volkskammer in Berlin, der Hauptstadt der DDR, in der Zeit von 3.–5. Sept. 1964. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

Freizeit im wesentlichen selbst sorgen”³⁶⁶ and pointed out that the FDGB club and cultural centers did not see it as their responsibility to meet the specific cultural needs of the inhabitants in residential areas, while it commended the efforts of voluntary local committee leaders in areas such as in Bohnsdorf, Spindlersfeld, Johannisthal, etc. who were performing praiseworthy work in directly tying into the interests of the population.

These investigative committees also tried to reconcile the feuding factions. A report on a discussion with commission member Prof. Dr. Budzeslavski noted a conversation between Alfred Kurella, who had led the working group in Berlin-Köpenick, Karl-Heinz Schulmeister, who had led the group in Berlin-Treptow, and Hans Bentzien, who had shown up at the end of the discussion, in which they referred to an agreement between the FDGB Executive Committee and the Ministry of Culture from 11 July 1964 – some ten weeks after the Second Bitterfeld Conference – as a first step towards production facilities providing more funds for cultural work in residential areas.³⁶⁷ Although the participants in these discussions expressed interest in reaching consensus, Bentzien was compelled to cite the authority Ulbricht had bestowed on the Ministry of Culture at the Second Bitterfeld Conference, stating forcefully:

Die Festlegung des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf der 2. Bitterfelder Konferenz, daß das Ministerium für Kultur das oberste zentrale staatliche Leitungsorgan auf dem Gebiet der Kultur sei, müsse in der Praxis durchgesetzt werden. Der Bundesvorstand des FDGB und der Nationalrat müssen das Ministerium als das oberste staatliche Leitungszentrum anerkennen und zur Zusammenarbeit bereit sein.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Aktennotiz über eine Aussprache mit Prof. Dr. Budzeslavski. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

Faced with FDGB recalcitrance in accepting the Ministry of Culture's primacy in the cultural sphere, Bentzien and his colleagues had repeatedly called upon the authority Ulbricht had granted the Ministry at the Second Bitterfeld Conference, while emphasizing the importance of cooperation between the FDGB, Ministry of Culture, and National Council to establish unified structures of leadership.³⁶⁹ The report on Prof. Dr. Budzeslavski noted that the investigations of the People's Chamber Cultural Committee had resulted in few substantial agreements. In consultations with the committee board on 20 October 1964 Budzeslavski, a member of the FDGB fraction, had objected to Bentzien's position.³⁷⁰ The resulting agreement was thus of a general nature. The Ministry of Culture and FDGB Executive Committee had merely agreed in principle to coordinate their work more closely in the future.³⁷¹ Although lacking substance, the agreement signaled a détente and peaceful coexistence among the competing factions in accordance with the demands of party discipline and the interests of party unity.

Achieving workable compromises in practice took time. Although a FDGB memo from 16 December 1964 on problems implementing the New Economic System in the field of culture summarized the first meeting of a working group led by Bentzien by stating that local state organs and the Ministry of Culture were in charge of their own budgets and, in order to motivate

³⁶⁹ Confirming Bentzien's insistence are Ulbricht's public remarks at the Second Bitterfeld Conference, which place the onus on the Ministry of Culture to develop an exact, quantifiable and complete system of planning: "Das Ministerium für Kultur muß als oberstes staatliches Leitungszentrum eine wissenschaftliche Grundlage für seine eigene Tätigkeit ausarbeiten," *Zweite Bitterfeld Konferenz, 1964*, 145; Aktennotiz über eine Aussprache mit Prof. Dr. Budzeslavski. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁷⁰ See also Information über einige grundsätzliche Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen dem Minister für Kultur und dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB im Bereich der kultur-politischen Arbeit. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁷¹ Aktennotiz über eine Aussprache mit Prof. Dr. Budzeslavski. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

the activities of local circles and clubs, these were to be granted the right to earn and administer their own finances, it further noted that representatives of the Central Committee's Cultural Department were present at the meeting in an attempt to address the problem of redistributing funds from factories to residential areas.³⁷² Implementing central directives required the cooperation of local and regional actors intent on defending their own interests and resources. Schuhmann notes that these "heftige Streitigkeiten" in the mid-1960s were also played out at the local level, with local SED party secretaries often forced to mediate between the Ministry of Culture and FDGB.³⁷³ A December 1964 note to Beyreuther about problems encountered implementing the NÖS in the cultural sphere indicated the degree of autonomy exercised by functionaries at district and local levels: Numerous local state organs had refused to recognize the legality of the agreements reached between the Ministry of Culture and FDGB:

Es bestehen Tendenzen, daß die örtlichen Volksvertretungen Beschlüsse fassen, die die gewerkschaftlichen Rechte verletzen. [...] Eine Reihe territorialer Staatsorgane erkennen die gemeinsame Vereinbarung des Ministeriums und des Bundesvorstandes über die betrieblichen Kreiskulturhäuser nicht als gültige Rechtsgrundlage an.³⁷⁴

Schuhmann confirms that the difficulties in implementing these directives lay in the degree of autonomy exerted at the local level and the unwillingness of local actors to cooperate with central agencies in Berlin: "Die vom Bundesvorstand des FDGB und dem Ministerium für

³⁷² Abteilungsleiter Aktennotiz. An den Kollegen Beyreuther. Betr.: Beratung der Arbeitsgruppe des Sekretariats des ZK über Probleme bei der Durchsetzung des neuen ökonomischen Systems im Bereich der Kultur. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁷³ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 104.

³⁷⁴ An Kollegen W. Beyreuther. Von Abt. Kultur. 18.12.1964. Aktennotiz. Betr.: Beratung mit den Bezirkssektretären für Kultur und Bildung. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

Kultur getroffenen Vereinbarungen über die Kreiskulturhäuser würden an der Basis kaum beachtet.”³⁷⁵

Despite the compromises and concessions made at the Third Conference of Writing Workers in Schwerin and the Second Bitterfeld Conference, the FDGB continued to defend its lost territory into the mid-1960s. A report from December 1965 on consultations in the Central Committee’s Cultural Department noted the ongoing differences over the proper social contextualization of cultural activities and criticized Cultural Department functionaries who had published articles in the press in order to influence the debate.³⁷⁶ The report complained that an article in *Einheit*, for example, had defended the false position of the “Theorie der Verlagerung,” a theory that “gegenwärtig bei uns eine räumliche Umschichtung des Freizeitvollzugs, eine Verlagerung in die Wohngebiete [sich vollziehe].”³⁷⁷ Confirming that the dispute primarily concerned the allocation of financial resources, the report concluded: “[n]ach unserer Auffassung entspringt der ‘Theorie der Verlagerung’ auch das Bestreben, finanzielle Mittel der Betriebe unter Leitung der örtlichen Organe konzentriert einzusetzen.”³⁷⁸ The FDGB was loath to relinquish ideological influence and financial resources over cultural activities. The ideological differences between competing factions remained unresolved, with both sides seeking compromise in theory and practice.

³⁷⁵ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 182.

³⁷⁶ E.g., Dieter Heinze and Norbert Mader, “Wie Kulturarbeit planen?,” *Einheit* 2 (1965) and Arno Röder and Gerd Rossow, “Unsere kulturpolitische Aufgaben nach der 2. Bitterfelder Konferenz” in the series *Der Parteiarbeiter*. Information über die Ergebnisse der Beratung in der Abteilung Kultur des ZK zu Problemen, die im Brief des Genossen Warnke an den Genossen Hager vom 25.1.1965 aufgeworfen wurden. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/2419.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

Despite the abrupt end of any hopes for reform and liberalization that marked the 11th Plenary of SED Central Committee in December 1965, the state structures established throughout the 1950s and the basic compromises forged in cultural policy in the early 1960s remained intact for 24 more years. Local and regional cultural centers and clubs remained open for broad-based participation and functionaries were charged with providing opportunities to meet the interests of the general population. As the largest mass organization in the GDR – and official representative of the working class – the FDGB remained a main sponsor and organizer of cultural events; their infrastructure of cultural centers and clubs remained intact with the Ministry of Culture and ZfK primarily responsible for training and qualifying personnel. In practice these compromises and concessions created a “durchaus widersprüchliches Gesamtbild” of cultural life.³⁷⁹ According to party rhetoric, production facilities were to remain the center of cultural life, while opening cultural centers to the larger population was to create a “symbiosis” of entertainment, politics, and general education.³⁸⁰ Within the BSA functionaries continued to claim the literary heritage of both KPD and SPD providence, at one and the same time calling on writing workers to actively contribute to the socialist cause through socially engaged literature while offering means of individual education and personal self-fulfillment.

8. Achieving Successes

I. Top-down Meets Bottom-up

The myriad challenges central organs encountered when trying to establish the BSA and direct its developments disallow the attribution of its ultimate successes and long-term stability to any

³⁷⁹ Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 633.

³⁸⁰ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 179.

top-down approach to planning culture. Bernhardt has described the hundreds of ZSA in the early 1960s as being founded “spontaneously,” thereby emphasizing the agency of local actors in their creation.³⁸¹ Hörnigk, on the other hand, has stated that many of these circles were “in einer Art Stoßaktion entstanden” in order to meet the administrative requirements of the cultural plan and thus underscored the top-down nature of central directives.³⁸² Yet the BSA was neither a grass-roots movement driven only by individual initiative nor solely the product of central decrees or directives. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between, at the confluence of state and individual interests. While central organs encouraged their respective district chapters to sign mutual contracts to foster the movement’s development, establishing functioning circles – the living core of the movement – depended upon the ability of local actors to satisfy the interests of BSA participants. Creating circles, organizing competitions, and leading successful trainings and workshops depended upon the state’s ability to provide support and coordination as well as to motivate and engage local actors.

Although the notion of spontaneity was anathema to functionaries dedicated to developing a planned culture according to the scientific principles Marxist teleology, scholars have noted that the actual successes and broad acceptance of the Bitterfeld Path were in fact the result of cultural functionaries’ spirit of improvisation in response to the lack of central coordination and weaknesses in planning.³⁸³ As Schiller points out, the frequent critique within

³⁸¹ Rüdiger Bernhardt, *Traditionen und Selbstverständnis der schreibenden Arbeiter im Kampf um den Frieden und bei der Mitgestaltung des geistigen Lebens in unserem Land*, 8. SAPMO-BArch DY32/5779.

³⁸² Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz. Programm und Praxis der sozialistischen Kulturrevolution am Ende der Übergangsperiode,” 227.

³⁸³ Barck, et. al., “*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*,” 151.

the upper ranks of the SED of cultural life lagging behind social developments was but a fig-leaf for the self-appointed leaders' ignorance of the actual cultural accomplishments and artistic impulses which existed in the GDR.³⁸⁴ At the 1960 Cultural Conference Alfred Kurella admitted that functionaries were overwhelmed by events unleashed by the Bitterfeld Conference:

[D]ie Bitterfelder Konferenz [hat] eine Bewegung eingeleitet, die uns augenblicklich dadurch zu schaffen macht, daß wir sie kaum noch richtig übersehen können, geschweige denn sie richtig zu fördern und zu lenken imstande sind.³⁸⁵

Confirming the degree of local initiative required to stage events in the cultural sphere, Schuhmann has noted that such successes “hing zum einen sehr vom jeweiligen persönlichen Engagement ab,”³⁸⁶ while von Richthofen has shown that many cultural functionaries in the GDR were “neither fervently loyal, obedient or dependable nor wholly disloyal, in opposition and seeking to destabilize the GDR from within” but were primarily motivated by their own personal interests in cultural activities.³⁸⁷ In organizing cultural life they continually engaged in compromises and exploited networks of personal contacts to satisfy their own interests as well as those of their constituents.³⁸⁸ Historian Mary Fulbrook recognizes a “congruence of interests” or “congruence of aims” among functionaries and the general population by which state agents

³⁸⁴ Schiller, “Kurellas Kulturkommision,” 13.

³⁸⁵ Alfred Kurella, “Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit,” *Kulturkonferenz 1960*, 40.

³⁸⁶ Schuhmann, *Kulturarbeit im sozialistischen Betrieb*, 131.

³⁸⁷ von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses*, 65, 49.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 46, 66.

and individual actors worked together to meet common goals, blurring the lines between “state” and “society.”³⁸⁹ Indeed, as Heukenkamp has noted, there existed a broad consensus in the GDR on the educational and cultural goals of the Bitterfeld campaign.³⁹⁰ Despite the challenges of coordinating efforts among state institutions and enforcing a unified ideological vision, functionaries were able to tap into existing tendencies in the general population and exploit the competencies of local actors to meet the interests of both individuals and the state.

Internal reports on the BSA confirm these conclusions. In his 1967 confidential analysis of the movement, Professor Friedrich emphasized the reliance of its development on the initiative of individual actors and institutions:

Man kann aus diesen Beobachtungen schlussfolgern, dass die Entwicklung der BSA von Anfang an weitgehend von der Initiative E i n z e l n e r gesellschaftlicher Organe und Leitungen und e i n z e l n e r interessierter Kulturfunktionäre, Schriftsteller und Literaturwissenschaftler bestimmt wurde.³⁹¹

II. Tapping Existing Tendencies

In order to foster the development of the BSA, functionaries were able to tap into and build upon existing traditions and tendencies. Numerous literary circles existed throughout the SBZ/DDR before 1959, often under the auspices of the DKB, only to assume the appellation

³⁸⁹ Mary Fulbrook, “Ein ‘ganz normales Leben’? Neue Forschungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR,” *Das war die DDR. DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Außenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität*, ed. Heiner Timmermann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 129.

³⁹⁰ Heukenkamp, “Debatten über Arbeiterliteratur und Betriebsroman in den fünfziger Jahren,” 285.

³⁹¹ Die Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Spiegel ihrer kollektiven Publikationen aus den Jahren 1959–1966. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.

“ZSA” after the First Bitterfeld Conference. As an East German history of literature from 1977 states: “die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter entwickelte sich aus Ansätzen, die sich schon Jahre zuvor vereinzelt und meist spontan ausgebildet hatten.”³⁹² A 1962 FDGB analysis of the movement commented on the high degree literary activity in the general population in the SBZ/GDR, while noting that active amateur writers were seldom members of the working class nor interested in politics or the problems of industrial production:

Schon vor der Bitterfelder Konferenz wurde viel geschrieben, aber hauptsächlich Erinnerungsberichte, Erlebnisse privater Art, Werke mit allgemein-politischer Gegenwartsthematik (unkonkret). Die Autoren entstammten zum großen Teil nicht der Arbeiterklasse und hatten kein Interesse an der Gestaltung von Problemen aus der Produktion.³⁹³

Bernhardt also confirmed these developments, remarking that circles of amateur writers in the 1950s served primarily as centers of communication to discuss wartime experiences and record personal memories:

[D]ie Aufforderung, die Schreibinteressierten in Zirkeln zusammenzufassen, [wurde] einem Trend gerecht, der schon in der Mitte der fünfziger Jahre erkennbar war. Viele, die aus Krieg, Gefangenschaft oder Exil gekommen waren, auch ehemalige Angehörige des BPRS, suchten nach Möglichkeiten, sich über ihre Erinnerungen auszutauschen und diese niederzuschreiben.³⁹⁴

³⁹² *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, 229.

³⁹³ Analyse der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. 25. Jan. 1962. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3445.

³⁹⁴ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 31. See also Bernhardt, “Schreibende Arbeiter der DDR zwischen Arbeiter- und Gesellschaftskultur,” 127 f.

According to the East German history of literature, active circles of amateur writers even existed in large industrial production facilities prior to 1959, for example in the Elektrokombinat Bitterfeld, Kunstfaserwerk Schwarze, and Braunkohlenwerk Deuben.³⁹⁵ Other writing groups in production facilities recorded prior to Bitterfeld included the circle “Heinz Rusch” at the VEB Starkstromanlagenbau in Leipzig, founded in 1955.³⁹⁶ Yet an exact account of local literary activities in the early SBZ/DDR will never be possible. Reflecting the difficulties of gathering accurate information in the chaotic post-war era, in the 1980s ZfK functionaries acknowledged their ignorance of events in the pre-Bitterfeld period: “Wir setzten allzu leicht hin den Ausgangspunkt 1. Bitterfelder Konferenz. [...] Leider ist über das Wirken schreibender Arbeiter zwischen 1945 und 1959 im allgemeinen weit weniger bekannt, als über das, was in den 100 Jahren vor 1945 geschah.”³⁹⁷

Testifying to both the individual initiative required to establish circles and the lack of coordination among state organs are conflicting claims for the first ZSA in the GDR. Whereas former BPRS member and BSA activist Jan Koplowitz stated he founded the first ZSA in the Maxhütte steel-works in the district of Gera in 1949,³⁹⁸ the longest continually meeting ZSA in the GDR was the “Maxim Gorki” circle, “der wohl älteste Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter in

³⁹⁵ *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, 229.

³⁹⁶ Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB Starkstromanlagenbau Leipzig (VEM), künstlerischer Leiter: Erich Walter. ZfK 642.

³⁹⁷ Andreas Leichsenring. Protokoll des Kolloquium “25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR” 18.–19.10.1985 Leipzig. ZfK 647.

³⁹⁸ Jan Koplowitz, “Von der Agitprop Szene zum Roman,” *ich schreibe* 2 (1961): 1-3.

unserer Republik,” founded by Walter Radetz on 23 February 1955 as a circle for amateur writers at the Berlin House for Folk Art.³⁹⁹

The history and productivity of the “Maxim Gorki” circle illustrate the party’s limited ability to impose its political will on circle activities and the dependence of a circle’s vitality upon both the leader’s ability to provide a stimulating environment and the participants’ desire to actively engage in meetings. Long-time “Maxim Gorki” circle member, Jürgen Kögel, recently commented on the voluntary nature of participation and the negative effects of state attempts to exert political pressure on BSA activities:

Bekannt ist, dass die Freiwilligkeit eine große Rolle spielte. Bekannt ist weiterhin, dass Zirkel, die einer intensiven ideologischen Einflussnahme seitens der Partei- und Kulturfunktionäre ausgesetzt waren, sich nach relativ kurzer Zeit wieder auflösten. Gute, leistungsfähige, erfolgreiche Zirkel trugen auf ihren Fahnen eben nicht in erster Linie die Ideologische, die Linientreue, die Staats- und Parteiräson.⁴⁰⁰

Under Radetz’s leadership, the circle successfully asserted its independence from political instrumentalization by the party and became one of the most productive circles in the GDR. Following the First Bitterfeld Conference functionaries demanded that its members write exclusively politically engaged literature. When Radetz refused, he lost his contract with the House for Folk Art. After negotiations with the DSV (then led by Erwin Strittmatter) and the local SED Cultural Department, the circle obtained a meeting space in the “Zentralhaus der

³⁹⁹ See “Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter wurde 30,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 25.02.85. SV 27b; Jan Eik, “Schreiben lernen. Über den Literaturzirkel ‘Maxim Gorki’ am Zentralen Haus der DSF in Berlin,” *Weimarer Beiträge* 7 (1979): 145-47. For a detailed circle history see *Wer bleibt, der schreibt. Der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter ‘Maxim Gorki’ im Zentral Haus der DSF. Eine Dokumentation*, eds. Britta Suckow and Jürgen Kögel (Berlin: *SchreibART* e.V., 2013).

⁴⁰⁰ *Wer bleibt, der schreibt*, 44.

Deutsch-Sowjetischen Freundschaft” (DSF) where they could work, “ungehindert und ungestört, im Interesse der Zirkelmitglieder [...]”⁴⁰¹ Radetz continued to lead the circle for nearly 32 years until his death in 1986. By 1964 the circle counted some 400 publications and was considered one of the strongest in the GDR.⁴⁰² Numerous members attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, some became members of the DSV, and one co-founded the West German “Literatur der Arbeitswelt.”⁴⁰³ A recent circle history counts 54 published monographs by circle members (in e.g., MDV, Verlag Neues Leben, Kinderbuchverlag), including detective novels, historic biographies, and adventure stories. Members also wrote cabaret texts, radio plays, television scripts, literary portraits, and sentimental poems. Stories by circle member and children book author, Gerda Rottschalk, were published in up to eight editions and translated into Danish, Dutch, English, and French. Former circle member Jürgen Kögel currently leads a writing workshop at the community education center (*Volkshochschule*) in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg.

As one of the most prolific and the longest continually meeting ZSA in the GDR, the Berlin “Maxim Gorki” circle thus exemplifies the movement’s successes as dependent upon individual initiative and interest. In tapping existing tendencies and granting them space to flourish, the BSA contributed both to state stability and personal self-fulfillment. The diversity of participant’s professional profiles – described in detail below – also illustrates the party’s tacit concessions concerning central issues of state identity and legitimacy: the definition of “worker.”

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 45 f.

⁴⁰² Ibid, 55.

⁴⁰³ Fritz Tost, who lived in West Berlin and crossed into East Berlin for bi-weekly circle meetings. *Wer bleibt, der schreibt*, 148.

III. Of Amateur Writers and Writing Workers: The Semantics of Legitimacy and Identity

In successfully arguing to open cultural centers to the general population, Minister of Culture Bentzien had cited the example of the choir in Köllda, where most members were not employees of the sponsoring company. Indeed, this situation was also typical in the BSA, where functionaries employed a decidedly catholic definition of “worker” from the movement’s inception. Even before the First Bitterfeld Conference the broad category of worker invoked by functionaries included members of the intellectual class (those with a college or university education). The invitation letter sent by the Central Committee’s Cultural Department to district cultural offices requesting workers to be delegated to the conference included the concession that: “[s]elbstverständlich ist der Begriff Arbeiter aus Großbetrieben nicht so eng zu fassen.”⁴⁰⁴ The functionaries in Berlin sought workers to attend the conference, “die der Literatur nahestehen, [...] und möglichst schon literarisch tätig sind,” including engineers and technicians.⁴⁰⁵

Without addressing the implications for political legitimacy or the contradictions between party rhetoric and lived experience, internal reports openly acknowledged that the majority of writing workers were, in fact, not members of the traditional proletarian class. As Friedrich concluded in his 1967 confidential analysis: “Soziologisch oder, genauer gesagt, statistisch gesehen, hat es nie eine Bewegung schreibender ‘Arbeiter’ gegeben. [...] [E]s ist klar,

⁴⁰⁴ Abteilung Kultur beim Zentralkomitee der SED. An die Sekretäre für Kultur der Bezirksleitungen. Berlin, den 13. April 1959. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/259, 9-10.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

dass die Produktionsarbeiter nie mehr als ein Drittel der Zirkelmitglieder ausmachten.”⁴⁰⁶ This estimate of production workers composing a full third of all circle participants was very generous compared with other accounts. According to Bernhard, throughout the 1970s the number of workers in ZSA remained stable between 17 and 15 percent.⁴⁰⁷ The unpublished 1981 ZfK analysis based on Ministry of Education statistics from 1979 reported that 14 percent of all 2,592 members of 216 ZSA were personnel from production facilities.⁴⁰⁸

Although functionaries typically did not have access to such internal analyses, the trend was apparent to all participants and deserving of occasional comment. A report on the first benchmarking of the movement in 1969 acknowledged, “[a]lledings zählen relativ wenige, tatsächlich in der Produktion Tätige zu den Zirkelmitgliedern.”⁴⁰⁹ Simone Barck has noted that already in 1962 among editors at the MDV the narrow definition of writing workers “[wurde] nur noch belächelt.”⁴¹⁰ The new generation of their house writers – Irmtraud Morgner, Heinz Knobloch, Günter de Bruyn, and Werner Heiduczek – had never been workers but were members of the intelligentsia: They had either a university education or previous experience in the publishing industry. In a 1974 speech FDGB board member Harald Bühl complained that not only did many ZSA work isolated from their factories, with “kaum einen Arbeiter aus ihrem

⁴⁰⁶ Die Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Spiegel ihrer kollektiven Publikationen aus den Jahren 1959–1966. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.

⁴⁰⁷ Rüdiger Bernhardt, *Traditionen und Selbstverständnis der schreibenden Arbeiter im Kampf um den Frieden und bei der Mitgestaltung des geistigen Lebens in unserem Land*, 30. SAPMO-BArch DY/32/5779.

⁴⁰⁸ Analyse des Fachgebietes Schreibende Arbeiter. Leipzig, den 18. Mai 1981. p. 2 ff. ZfK 641.

⁴⁰⁹ Bericht über die I. Etappe des ersten zentralen Leistungsvergleiches schreibender Arbeiter. 9.6.1969. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/21136.

⁴¹⁰ Barck, et al., “*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*,” 154.

eigene Betrieb zum Mitglied,” but that members discussed all possible topics at their meetings except those which would help workers identify and solve the ideological questions concerning the construction of socialism.⁴¹¹ Following this admission, Bühl called for a more exact definition of writing worker and stated that the FDGB supported a broadening of the term to include all amateur writers of varying aptitudes and talents.⁴¹²

The political and ideological significance of the term “worker” and the open acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of BSA participants’ professional profiles – the discrepancies between *signifiant* and *signifié* – gave cause for “angestregten definitorischen Nachdenken über werktätige Schreiber/schreibende Werktätige.”⁴¹³ Too timid to directly challenge this central pillar of state legitimacy,⁴¹⁴ by the mid-1980s functionaries couched suggestions to eliminate the term “writing worker” with calls for “scientific studies” conducted by “scientific institutions” to find a more appropriate moniker:⁴¹⁵

Um das literarische Volksschaffen in seiner Vielgestaltigkeit komplex zu entwickeln ist es notwendig, dass sich künftig mehr wissenschaftliche Einrichtungen damit befassen. Anzeichen für diese Notwendigkeit ist u.a., dass im alltäglichen Sprachgebrauch der

⁴¹¹ Aus dem Referat des Genossen Dr. Harald Bühl zum Erfahrungsaustausch schreibender Arbeiter am 25. Mai 1974. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27302; also SAPMO-BArch DY/34/10009.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Simone Barck, “Die Chiffre ‘Bitterfeld’. Eine kulturhistorische Annäherung im Dreierschritt,” *Arbeit – Kultur – Identität*, ed. Hanneliese Palm (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007), 144-45.

⁴¹⁴ In 1988 the working class officially composed 88.3% of the working age population in the GDR. Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 654.

⁴¹⁵ Problemspiegel für die Beratung des Stellvertreters des Ministers für Kultur mit dem ZAG schreibender Arbeiter. Siegfried Wagner. 1984. ZfK 641.

Begriff des “schreibenden Arbeiters” immer mehr eliminiert wird bzw. in Richtung bestimmter Berufe (schreibende Postler) oder bestimmter Genres (Tagebuchschreiber) gebeugt wird. Auch der Begriff der “Bewegung der schreibender Arbeiter” enthält eine soziale Determiniertheit und die Aussage einer bestimmten Kollektivität, die wissenschaftlicher Untersuchung bedarf.⁴¹⁶

Andreas Leichsenring made a more significant admission in his 1971 dissertation. By including all amateur writers in the GDR as members of the movement, regardless of whether they belonged to a ZSA, he surmised that not only were the majority of writing workers not actually workers but also that the overall percentage of amateur writers who participated in organized circles was relatively small. The movement was composed of

eine vielschichtige soziale, berufliche und altermäßige Zusammensetzung, denn zu ihr zählen alle Bürger, die als Laien schriftstellerisch oder journalistisch tätig sind. [...] [S]chreibende Arbeiter, die keinem Kollektiv angehören [...], die sich aus verkehrstechnischen oder anderen Gründen keinem Zirkel anschließen können oder wollen [...], dürfte [...] der weitaus größte sein, während die Zahl der sich systematisch unter Anleitung mit der Literatur sowie mit eigenen literarischen Versuchen beschäftigenden Werktätigen noch relativ klein ist.⁴¹⁷

In his 1977 attempt to define the roll of the BSA within a developed socialist society, Leichsenring further admitted the term writing worker was no more than an “etwas wacklige Arbeitsgrundlage,” and concluded that “[e]s bleibt nichts anderes übrig, als anzuerkennen, dass

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.; see also: Protokoll des Kolloquium “25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR” 18.–19.10.1985. p. 19-20. Leipzig. ZfK 647.

⁴¹⁷ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 38.

die ‘Grenzen’ an sämtlichen Seiten fließend sind.”⁴¹⁸ This admission of the inability to define or describe the contours of the movement’s demographics was significant in acknowledging that the BSA – theoretically the “Herzstück” of a new socialist folk culture, the “brain” of an interrelated, organic whole – did not present a quantifiable entity capable of being led or directed according to plan. If indeed the BSA was a mass movement, it existed largely beyond state control.

In the late 1980s this all-inclusive definition of writing worker was expanded even further. A ZfK working draft on the development of the movement broadened its membership base beyond participants in ZSA and “Einzel-schaffenden” to include all organizational forms and venues provided for amateur writers in the GDR:

Die BSA umfasst die in den Zirkeln organisierten schreibenden Arbeitern, Werktätigen aller Schichten und Studenten, die jungen Poeten, die schreibenden Schüler, die Brigadetagebuchschreiber und Ortschronisten, die Volkskorrespondenten, die Liedermacher und Texter, die in den verschiedensten Volkskunstkollektiven wirken ebenso wie die vielen nicht organisierten Schreiber.⁴¹⁹

This attempt to bring all organized groups of amateur writers into the fold of the BSA met with resistance. Reflecting the differences between agencies and individuals on the correct social positioning of the movement, a position paper from FDJ functionary, Uwe Stelbrink, took issue with categorizing the FDJ’s “Poetenbewegung” as a subcomponent of the larger movement,

⁴¹⁸ Andreas Leichsenring, “Versuch, in Form von Thesen Platz und Rolle der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im kulturellen Leben der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft und in der Gesamtheit des künstlerischen Volksschaffens der DDR zu bestimmen,” 27. Februar 1977. ZfK 651.

⁴¹⁹ Entwurf als Arbeitsmaterial. Konzeption zur Entwicklung der BSA nach dem X. Parteitag der SED. 9.9.1981. SAPMO-BArch DY24/21124.

stating: “Richtig wäre statt dessen, vom Schreiben als Freizeitbeschäftigung, die in allen Alters- und sozialen Gruppen verwurzelt ist, auszugehen.”⁴²⁰ The increasing acceptance in the 1980s of attempts to provide a more differentiated definition of the BSA offers an indication of the degree to which officials were able to acknowledge the contradictions between party parlance and the realities of real, existing socialism.

IV. Professional Profiles of Circle Participants

The stated professions of BSA circle participants present a highly heterogeneous picture of the movement’s demographics. Circle membership was often multi-generational with participants practicing a wide spectrum of occupations. In his autobiographical memoirs Heiner Müller described a ZSA he once visited:

[E]r bestand aus schreibenden Sekretärinnen, schreibenden Buchhaltern und zwei Renommierarbeitern. Der Zirkel wurde von einer älteren Lyrikerin angeleitet, die brachte denen bei, wie man Naturgedichte schreibt.⁴²¹

While this description captures the provincialness of many circles, it belies the very nature and purpose of the BSA to provide meaningful free-time opportunities to anyone with an interest in writing. A cursory glance at the occupations of members in other circles reveals the movement’s broad social appeal. Members of the ZSA “Maxim Gorki” Berlin, for example, included an unskilled worker, a lithographer, a policeman, a messenger, an elevator operator, a bus conductor, a kindergarten teacher, a gymnastics teacher, a speech therapist, and housewives

⁴²⁰ Standpunkt zum “Positionspapier zur Leitungsverantwortung der BSA” zur Volkskunstkonferenz. Berlin, 14.8.1984. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/20924.

⁴²¹ Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), 153.

and retirees.⁴²² Listed professions of contributors to a central FDGB poetry anthology, *Das uns Gemäße* (1970), included members of the intelligentsia (teachers, librarians, engineers, and a psychologist), the legislative and political class (a judge, lawyer, and village mayor), skilled workers (a baker, a welder, and gas tank and synthetic fiber technicians), creative professionals (a photographer and a fashion designer), craftsmen (an organ builder and a painter), and other professions common to a now by-gone era (a chimney sweep and a telephone operator). Anthology contributors who had attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute included a locomotive engineer, a tractor driver, a lathe operator, and a farmer.⁴²³

ZSA anthologies often provided short biographical profiles of their contributors. Documenting their paths of personal and professional development testified to the social transformations under socialism and thereby fulfilled a representative function for both individual and state. The three volume series, *Arbeiter greifen zur Feder*, from the district of Potsdam [1960–1962?], listed contributors' biographies including their parents' former occupations as, for example, farm hands, household servants, and textile workers. Representing the first two generations of East German citizens, all the amateur writers were born between 1899 and 1941, including the son of a smithy who became a mechanic, the son of a manual laborer who worked at the post office, the son of a tool maker who became a technologist, the daughter of a day laborer employed at a "HO" (*Handelsorganisation*), a former textile worker who became a district judge, and a former POW employed as manager of an oil tank storage

⁴²² Walter Radatz, *Zirkelgeschichte*, ASA 95/79.

⁴²³ *Das uns Gemäße* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1970), 157-71.

facility.⁴²⁴ The 1959 ZfK anthology *Greif zur Feder, Kumpel* provided further portraits of an older generation born at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.⁴²⁵ Many contributors had begun writing in their youth before the war, such as a former secretary born in 1917 in East Prussia and a dairy farmer born in 1919 who both had written poetry as schoolchildren. Other contributors included a miner born in 1913 who wrote poems in his Thuringian dialect; a former saddle maker and First World War veteran born in 1890 who led an amateur theater group in Wismut; a supervisor in the Rübeland lime works born in 1899 who wrote poems and songs about his home in the Harz mountains; a tailor born in 1903 who contributed a poem about the Buchenwald concentration camp memorial; a filling station attendant born in 1898 who had published prose and poems in the communist press in the 1920s and wrote cabaret and agitprop texts; a former plumber and BPRS member born in 1907 who had published in the KPD organ, *Rote Fahne*; a former farm hand, soldier, and tractor driver born in 1919 who published poems and satire in the local press; and a forester born in 1937 who wrote poems and plays for the amateur theater group in his home village.

A 1970 anthology from the Prenzlauer Berg literature circle offers a more diverse picture of generational cohorts, with participants' ages ranging from 25 to 70. Circle members included a 39-year-old actress who wrote ironic prose and drama, a 42-year-old journalist who wrote children songs, a 63-year-old party veteran who wrote nature poems and epigrams, a 70-year-old retiree who had fought in the 1919 counterrevolution and wrote children songs, a 33-year-old traffic technician who wrote satire and grotesque glosses for a company newspaper, a

⁴²⁴ *Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Schreibende Arbeiter aus dem Bezirk Potsdam erzählen von unserem Leben. Bände 1-3*, eds. Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Bezirk Potsdam Rat des Bezirks Potsdam, Deutscher Schriftstellerverband, Bezirk Potsdam.

⁴²⁵ *Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Gedichte von Laienautoren* (Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Volkskunst, 1959).

35-year-old actress who was working on an autobiographical novel, and a 48-year-old clerk in the coal trade who composed poetry about the landscape of Berlin.⁴²⁶

These examples of the diversity of participant's professions and their literary interests document the movement's successes in creating opportunities for amateur writers to fulfill their personal literary ambitions. Circle members expressed themselves in all literary genres (poetry, prose, drama) on a wide range of topics for a variety of social contexts (press, cabaret, chorus). While circle meetings provided a format to bring together individuals of diverse backgrounds and provide opportunities for social interaction – and thereby served an integrative function which contributed to social stability – the open admission that movement participants were not members of the traditional proletariat tacitly acknowledged the discrepancies between its theoretical Marxist underpinnings and its lived realities.

V. Circles in Factories: The Realities

As an acknowledgment of the movement's failure to fulfill its revolutionary goals and a concession to existing realities, functionaries also openly admitted that writing workers and ZSA often had no association with industrial production facilities or collectivized farms. Those circles sponsored by factories were seldom granted insight into the actual means of production or problems at the workplace. The goal of establishing a ZSA in every factory in the republic had proven to be a blatant failure. By the mid-1980s internal studies confirmed what for most participants was common knowledge: Factories sponsored only about half of all ZSA in the GDR. According to a 1981 unpublished ZfK analysis, of the 216 reported circles, production facilities supported 97, cultural centers 50, state institutions 32, colleges or universities 7, an

⁴²⁶ *Aller Liebe Unruh* (Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg: Kreiskulturhaus "Erich Franz", 1970), 5-7. ASA 93/48.

agriculture and forestry department 1, while one circled existed with no state support.⁴²⁷ An analysis conducted in 1984/85 by the ZfK recorded a total of 211 circles with 112 sponsored by production facilities, 70 by cultural institutions, 13 by scientific institutions (colleges or universities), and 13 by other (e.g., city councils).⁴²⁸

Functionaries acknowledged the movement's failure to bring writers and workers into dialogue on the realities of the working world and the construction of socialism yet, while pointing out deficiencies, fell short of noting the implications for state legitimacy and identity. Numerous reports admitted that the vision of ZSA creating cultural synergies in the sphere of labor had proven illusory. An undated report from the late 1970s on the problems of developing the BSA in production facilities recorded 130 ZSA with 1,300 to 1,500 members associated with a factory – the lowest participation rate of all folk art genres – and stated that many circles were not sufficiently integrated into the cultural life of their sponsoring factories nor adequately informed of their production problems or relevant ideological issues.⁴²⁹ Local and regional authorities had made little effort to found new circles in the most important production facilities.⁴³⁰ A 1972 report on developments in the districts of Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt also remarked that the FDGB leadership had shown little initiative in supporting the BSA. The report counted only 16 factories with ZSA and cited the example of Karl-Marx-Stadt,

⁴²⁷ Fachgebiet schreibende Arbeiter. Handwritten note: Material wurde in der Aussage noch bearbeitet, aber nicht veröffentlicht. Die wesentlichen Tendenzen der Analyse sind in diesem Material erfasst. Alex Oelschlegel. 21.12.1981. ZfK 641.

⁴²⁸ Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 2 f. ZfK 639.

⁴²⁹ Entwurf! Einschätzung und Probleme der Entwicklung der schreibenden Arbeiter in den Betrieben (undated). SAPMO-BArch DY/78/8411; also in SAPMO-BArch DY/34/25201.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

where, despite numerous warnings, still no circles existed in production facilities. The report further complained that the existing circles were not involved in the political and ideological activities of the sponsoring factories nor given any concrete tasks or direction from company management, causing more and more colleagues to gather in circles in outlying areas.⁴³¹ A 1972 report from the Leipzig FDGB to the Executive Committee counted a total of 27 ZSA in the district of Leipzig, with 15 in factories, yet admitted that, while numerous workers displayed literary talent, one could not speak of a broad movement: Only one or two members of each circle were factory employees, severely limiting their potential influence at the workplace.⁴³² The report noted that, although past literary competitions had shown there were amateur writers with considerable promise in the district, most contributions were not from production workers but from teachers, students, office workers, and housewives. Still in the mid-1980s a note in the DSV on writers relationships with factories attributed the torpid developments to the lack of initiative among institutions:

Ein weiterer Grund, dass manche Kombinatverbindungen schwer anlaufen, mag auch darin liegen, dass keine Institution Leitungsführend [sic] verantwortlich ist, so dass jeder (Kombinat, Verband, Autor, Bezirksleitung) auf die Initiative des anderen wartet.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Beschluß des Präsidiums vom 4.10.72. Nr. S 804/72. Vertraulich. Berichte der Bezirksvorstände des FDGB Karl-Marx-Stadt und Leipzig über die Entwicklung der Literaturpropaganda, der Bewegung lesender und schreibender Arbeiter und der Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken nach dem 8. FDGB-Kongreß. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24994.

⁴³² Bericht über die Entwicklung der Literaturpropaganda, der Bewegung lesender und schreibender Arbeiter und der Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken. Leipzig, den 26.9.72. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/24994.

⁴³³ Stand der Kombinatverbindungen. 25.9.85. SV 819, 151 f.

Commenting on the status of relationships between writers and production facilities in the district of Cottbus, a 1986 DSV meeting protocol noted that, “[b]ei weit mehr Betrieben gibt es nicht einmal die Perspektive einer solchen Beziehung,” and that fewer and fewer workers’ collectives invited writers to read them their works.⁴³⁴ The protocol cited the example of writer Klaus Gerisch, who, despite his 20-year relationship with Schwarze Pumpe, still did not have a company identification card, had met only once with the general director, and had been granted no insights into the actual production processes. Company management did not view his literary work as important for their facility – first and foremost, “der Betrieb nutzt ihn [...] als Aushängeschild oder für statistische Erfüllungsmeldungen (z.B. seine Zirkelarbeit).”⁴³⁵

As the largest investment project of the second five-year plan and symbol of the GDR’s energy policy based on brown coal,⁴³⁶ Schwarze Pumpe offers telling examples of the hurdles to integrating literature and culture into the economic plan. As the setting and inspiration for Brigitte Reimann’s *Ankunft im Alltag* (1961), it also offers personal insights into a ZSA of historical significance. While a DKB report stated their local chapter had founded ZSA in both Hoyerswerda and Schwarze Pumpe shortly after the First Bitterfeld Conference, with both circles led by Brigitte Reimann and her husband Siegfried Pitschmann,⁴³⁷ FDGB files recorded the testimony of machinist Rolf Gozell, who had participated in the Schwarze Pumpe circle and

⁴³⁴ Schriftstellerverband der DDR Bezirk Cottbus. PE 21.4.86. Protokoll der Tagung vom 10.4.86. SV 819, 121.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Rainer Karlsch, “‘Weltniveau’. Spitzenleistung in Technik und Produktion?” *Friedensstaat, Leseland, Sportnation? DDR-Legenden auf dem Prüfstand* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009), 31.

⁴³⁷ Beispiele für die Unterstützung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter durch den Deutschen Kulturbund seit der Bitterfelder Konferenz (1960). Aus der Arbeit in den Bezirken. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/6581.

stated it was founded in February 1960 and led by “Schriftstellerehepaar Brigitte Reimann und Siegfried Pietzschmann [sic],” both of whom enjoyed their work: “Es macht ihnen Freude, unsere Arbeitsgemeinschaft zu betreuen.”⁴³⁸ In his autobiographical memoirs, however, Pitschmann relates another story. He and Reimann had been charged with not only founding a writing circle but assigned other responsibilities: “Darüber hinaus versuchten sie, uns zu Multi-Kulturfunktionären zu machen, die nur noch auf langweiligen Sitzungen herumhängen.”⁴³⁹ After overcoming the initial mistrust of local functionaries, they began to develop personal relationships with members of the local community, one of which led to calamity in the ZSA: Reimann began an affair with a circle participant, resulting in a “merkwürdiges Dreieckverhältnis,” “eine abgründige Geschichte,” which eventually led to divorce and Reimann’s departure from Hoyerswerda.⁴⁴⁰

The protocol of a meeting of the Politbüro’s Commission for Questions of Culture from November 1960 described further difficulties of integrating culture into the sphere of labor in Schwarze Pumpe during this phase of rapid transformation with high personnel turnover rates. Speaking about writing workers at the meeting, Comrade Köhler described the importance of a young colleague, Fritz Wengler, in developing cultural life in Schwarze Pumpe: “Er war der Motor der Brigade, der die ganze kulturelle Entwicklung der Brigade beeinflusst hat [...]”⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Diskussion Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter am 8. Juni 1960 in Karl-Marx-Stadt. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3557.

⁴³⁹ Siegfried Pitschmann, *Verlustanzeige. Erinnerungen* (Weimar: Wartburg Verlag, 2004), 81 f.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Stenographische Niederschrift der Beratung der Kommission für Fragen der Kultur beim Politbüro im Hause des Zentralkomitees, Zimmer 3003, am Sonnabend, dem 26. November 1960 (Beginn: 9.10 Uhr). SAPMO-BArch DY30/IV 2/2/026/5, 369.

Putting an end to his influence over cultural life, Wenger was “torn from” his work and “stuck into” a routine desk job as an editorial assistant at the *Junge Welt*, the daily paper of the FDJ. Köhler noted this was not a singular example and described a similar case in which a young writing worker at Schwarze Pumpe was hired by the FDGB publisher, *Tribüne*, and later studied philosophy in Leipzig. Remarking that the young colleague had displayed exceptional literary talents and “sehr starke intellektuelle Momente,” Köhler believed his true place of personal and professional development should have remained his workplace in the sphere of material production: “wenn er in der Schwarzen Pumpe geblieben wäre, wäre sicher aus ihm etwas geworden.”⁴⁴²

VI. Professional Writers and the BSA: The Realities

Like the protagonists in *Ankunft im Alltag* searching for their place in socialism in the milieu of a large-scale industrial project, the young Reimann and Pitschmann had accepted their placement in Hoyerswerda looking for personal and professional fulfillment. Many writers, however, were not willing to support party directives with their literary works, viewed the Bitterfeld Campaign as political propaganda, and did not wish to be associated with the BSA.⁴⁴³ A personal letter from Andreas Leichsenring commented on the frequent disdain professional writers expressed for the movement:

Zur Erklärung der Abneigung arrivierter Schriftsteller und des SV gegen die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter könnte ich Stoff für einen Roman liefern. Vereinfacht: Solange

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Interview with ZSA circle leader, DSV member, and MDV editor Manfred Jendryschik, 27 June 2011.

sich die Mehrheit der Zirkel und überhaupt der künstlerisch ambitionierten schreibenden Arbeiter in Dilettantismus übt, will man damit nichts zu tun haben. Es ist auch niemandem, der etwas von Literatur versteht, zuzumuten, sich der Blamage auszusetzen.⁴⁴⁴

Yet the dictates of a cultural plan guided by the historical necessity of writers and workers joining ranks assured that the call of Bitterfeld resonated far and wide. The dimensions of the movement were broad enough, the opportunities so plentiful, that it was nearly impossible for professional writers to escape the social contexts in which it was embedded. A research group at the Martin Luther University concluded in 1987 that “es kaum einen Lebenslauf [eines DDR-Schriftstellers] gab, in dem Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter nicht erwähnt werden mußten,”⁴⁴⁵ a conclusion confirmed by Barck:

Bei einem genaueren Blick auf die Biographien von DDR-Schriftstellern wird man kaum einen Autor finden, bei dem nicht die Tätigkeit oder die Mitarbeit in einem Zirkel schreibende Arbeiter, wenn auch in dem meisten Fällen als ein Durchgangsstadium, vermerkt ist.⁴⁴⁶

Enough professional writers established contacts with industrial production facilities and had developed relationships with their personnel for Barck to comment: “[V]ielfältig ist zu belegen, dass ein beachtliches Netzwerk zwischen Betrieben und Autoren – über die Jahre hin entstanden

⁴⁴⁴ Personal letter from Andreas Leichsenring to Dr. Morgenstern. 1.8.1982. Zu: Wege zur weiteren praktischen Durchsetzung der Konzeption zur Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter nach dem X. Parteitag der SED. ZfK 641.

⁴⁴⁵ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 28.

⁴⁴⁶ Simone Barck, “‘Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus’ Anno 1970. Anmerkungen zu sozialen Irritationen und kulturellen Diffusionen am Beispiel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter (BSA) in der DDR,” *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* 28:29 (2003): 71.

– bis zum Ende der DDR bestehen blieb.“⁴⁴⁷ As one of the few scholars to publish on the BSA in the post-Wende era, Barck again emphasized the movement’s lasting impact in 2006: “Es gab langjährige Beziehungen von Berufsautoren und Zirkeln schreibenden Arbeiter, und bis zum Ende der DDR existierte in den einzelnen Regionen ein unterschiedlich intensives Netzwerk zwischen Großbetrieben und Schriftstellern.“⁴⁴⁸ Emphasizing the importance of these personal relationships and their social contexts as products of the Bitterfeld campaign for a yet unwritten history of East German literature, Barck has further claimed:

[E]ine noch neu zu schreibende Geschichte der DDR-Literatur [wird] bei der Analyse ihres [Bitterfelder Weges] starken sozialen Gehalts an dem über vierzig Jahre gewachsenen, sich natürlich verändernden Netzwerk zwischen Betrieben und Autoren, viele als langjährige Leiter von Zirkeln schreibender Arbeiter, nicht vorbeikommen [...].⁴⁴⁹

The nature of a relationship between company workers and a writer varied according to the type of contract. Aside from leading a ZSA, factories contracted with writers to give readings and engage employees in discussions at their workplace, to enter “Patenschaften” with workers’ brigades, and to give advice on worker brigade diaries (*Brigadetagebücher*).⁴⁵⁰ Such contracts often lasted years or even decades, with writers and workers at times strengthening personal

⁴⁴⁷ Barck, “‘Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern’?,” 159-60.

⁴⁴⁸ Simone Barck, “Bitterfeld und die Folgen: Zur Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter in der DDR,” *Argonautenschiff. Jahrbuch der Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft Berlin und Mainz e.V.* 15 (2006): 118-19.

⁴⁴⁹ Barck, “Die Chiffre ‘Bitterfeld’. Eine kulturhistorische Annäherung im Dreierschritt,” 141.

⁴⁵⁰ On *Brigadetagebücher* see Jörg Roesler, “Das Brigadetagebuch – betriebliches Rapportbuch, Chronik des Brigadelebens oder Erziehungsfibel?,” *Befremdlich anders. Leben in der DDR*, ed. Evemarie Badstübner (Berlin: Dietz, 2000), 151-66.

bonds through other social activities, such as pub visits or competing together in soccer matches.⁴⁵¹ Although such examples of cooperation between writers with workers fell short of the revolutionary goal of totally transforming human life, they offered measurable successes in contributing to social stability and a distinctly East German culture. Reconstructing the details and dimensions of such relationships would entail further research, above all in district archives and company records, much of which was lost during the phase of rapid social and economic transformation in the early 1990s.

The existing records of these relationships are occasionally optimistic, often contradictory, and always incomplete. Demonstrating support for the party's ideological and political goals, a report on the development of the DSV after the First Bitterfeld Conference claimed that of 300 active writers 200 had established solid relationships with socialist factories, farms, brigades, or circles of writing workers and that 42 had participated in the "sozialistischen Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft" in the spring of 1960 during the final wave of forced agricultural collectivization.⁴⁵² A DSV survey from early 1962 expressed this optimism more directly, stating that of 480 mainly young authors 220 had regular contacts with industrial production facilities or collective farms and proclaimed: "Die 'Kluft' zwischen Schriftstellern und Arbeitern ist weitgehend überbrückt."⁴⁵³ Notes from the Leipzig DSV in the late 1960s claimed that 35 percent of its members had "more of less" continual and stable relationships

⁴⁵¹ Personal interviews with DSV members and BSA participants Manfred Jendryschik and Jürgen Kögel.

⁴⁵² Die Lage der Literatur. Entwicklung des Schriftstellerverbandes seit der Bitterfelder Konferenz. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/264, 304-5.

⁴⁵³ Entwurf. Vertraulich. Die Lage in der Literatur und die nächsten Aufgaben des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes. DSV, Sekretariat. 27. November 1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/2.026/7, 512.

with factories, ranging from informal contacts with workers' brigades to leading a ZSA or writing factory chronicles.⁴⁵⁴ For the year 1970 Barck reported that in the Berlin chapter of the DSV of 334 total members 55 led 64 circles (i.e., some led more than one circle).⁴⁵⁵ A 1974 ZfK analysis of the BSA stated that DSV members led approximately 80 of a total of 244 ZSA.⁴⁵⁶ For the mid-1980s Barck reports that from a total 859 writers 161 had reported they had "ständigen Verbindungen" with production facilities,⁴⁵⁷ while a 1984–1986 DSV report stated that 85 members and candidates led a total of 96 literary circles, often over many years.⁴⁵⁸

Aside from noting that the BSA did in fact create a broad network of contacts between workers and writers it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions on the nature or extent of these relationships based upon such varying statistics with so few details. The most comprehensive analysis of the BSA, a 57-page confidential report conducted by the ZfK in the mid-1980s, presents a highly differentiated picture of circles and their leaders.⁴⁵⁹ While many professional writers did work with a ZSA, the majority of circle leaders had other professions. Since the 1963 Schwerin Conference, individual districts had been responsible for the training and certification of circle leaders, guaranteeing a high degree of overall differentiation among

⁴⁵⁴ An das Sekretariat des Zentralvorstandes. Über den Stand der Verbindung mit Schrittmachern. 20.10.1969. SV 699, Bd. 2, 7 f.

⁴⁵⁵ Barck, "“Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern”?,“ 159.

⁴⁵⁶ Arbeitsmaterial. Einschätzung des Entwicklungsstandes schreibender Arbeiter 30.1.1974. ZfK 641.

⁴⁵⁷ Barck, "“Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern”?,“ 159.

⁴⁵⁸ Bericht über einen Erfahrungsaustausch mit Mitgliedern und Kandidaten, die einen literarischen Zirkel leiten (1984–1986). SV 467, 22 f.

⁴⁵⁹ Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. ZfK 639.

circles. Concerning circle leaders' competencies, preparatory notes for the conference confirmed: "Die BAGen sind [...] verantwortlich für die Qualifizierung der Zirkelleiter."⁴⁶⁰

That central agencies should grant district authorities the rights and responsibilities for certifying circle leaders was not unusual. In the larger folk art movement the Ministry of Culture had recommended in 1960 that the districts assume responsibility for training all circle leaders. A letter from the ministry to all district councils (*Räte der Bezirke*) stated that, given the dimensions of the cultural plan laid forth at the 1960 Cultural Conference, central organs did not have sufficient personnel to conduct the trainings; local instructors were advised to tailor their trainings according to the participants' interests and available resources. As appropriate venues for such trainings the letter recommended, "eigentlich überall dort, wo Platz zum Spielen, Singen oder Tanzen ist," and noted that youth hostels were especially well-suited for weekend workshops since the participants could spend the night there.⁴⁶¹

The 1984/1985 ZfK analysis confirmed there were no standardized requirements for the certification of circle leaders in the BSA: "Es gibt derzeit kein methodisches Modell für eine Zirkelleiterqualifizierung [...]."⁴⁶² The criteria for circle leaders' competence it describes as: "im weitesten Sinne – literarische gebildete Persönlichkeiten."⁴⁶³ Confirming von Richthofen's conclusion that cultural functionaries were often motivated primarily by their own interests in creative activities, the majority of ZSA leaders worked "day jobs" and conducted weekly or bi-

⁴⁶⁰ Konzeption für die Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern im November 1963 in Schwerin. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

⁴⁶¹ Entwurf eines Briefes des Ministeriums für Kultur an alle Räte der Kreise. SAPMO-BArch DY/27/6581.

⁴⁶² Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 4. ZfK 639.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

weekly circle sessions in the evening. The ZfK report provides an overview of circle leaders' qualifications and their professions. Of the 211 recorded circles, 72 were led by professional writers, including 57 members of the DSV. In percentages, writers led slightly over one third (34%) of all recorded ZSA. Further qualifications listed for circle leaders included: 46 graduates of the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, 12 graduates of a special school for leaders of folk art circles, 21 teachers, 11 German scholars, 6 journalists, and 6 librarians. On average one circle leader per district had no formal certification. Of the seven circles listed in the district of Gera, a turbine mechanic who had completed a special training for circle leaders led the ZSA Carl Zeiss in Saalfeld. In the district of Halle, a "Melkermeister" and science fiction author who had attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute led the ZSA Zschornowitz at the "Klubhaus Aktivist."⁴⁶⁴ The 19 circles in the district of Magdeburg included the ZSA at the Kreiskulturhaus Osterburg led by a shepherd who had attended the J. R. Becher Literature Institute and was a candidate of the DSV. Of the 14 circles in the district of Potsdam, a detective and graduate of the Literature Institute led the ZSA at the Kulturhaus "Hans Marchwitza," a gardener and DSV candidate led the ZSA at Kulturhaus "Herbert Ritter" in Babelsberg, and a tailor led the ZSA VEB Obertrikotagenbetrieb "Ernst Lück." Circles listed with no leaders included, in the district of Schwerin, the ZSA VEB-Lederwarenwerke and the circle at the VEB Klement-Gottwald-Werk, whose five members the local SED had commissioned to write a history of their factory. Other circles listed with no leader were the "Zirkel schreibender Arbeiterveteranen" in the district of Dresden and the "Zirkel schreibender Veteranen" in the

⁴⁶⁴ On *Melkermeister* Wachmann see also *An der steilen, breiten Strasse* (ASA 93/606). Born in 1941, Wachmann had been a member of the ZSA since 1975 and published in widely distributed journals such as *Sonntag, Freiheit, Bauernecho*.

district of Halle.⁴⁶⁵ While this 1984/1985 ZfK analysis provides an overview of the variety of circles and their leaders, a closer examination of four well-known circles in the district of Halle offers insights into the varied possibilities of actual circle work.

8. The District of Halle: Cradle of the BSA

The district of Halle – home to the First and Second Bitterfeld Conferences, the Mitteldeutscher Verlag, the Martin Luther University, and the largest number of circles of writing workers and BSA publications in the GDR – formed the cradle of the BSA.⁴⁶⁶ As the historical seat of industry in central Germany, the district’s large-scale chemical production facilities in Bitterfeld/Wolfen, Leuna/Buna, and Schkopau and a large number of small and medium-sized tool and die plants underlay its great economic and political importance. With its large working class population, the region of Merseburg-Halle was a stronghold of KPD support and “working-class radicalism” during the Weimar era.⁴⁶⁷ Confirming DSV secretary Klein’s comments on the strength of the BSA in the district of Halle, Thomas Kupfer has noted the district chapter of the DSV “war geprägt durch das Image und das Selbstbild als proletarisch-

⁴⁶⁵ Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung scheidender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 38 ff. ZfK 639.

⁴⁶⁶ Further, Bernhardt stated that benchmarking (*Leistungsvergleich*) in the district of Halle in 1966/67 first enabled an overview of the movement, allowing the planning and coordination of circle work. *Vom Sein und von Werden. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Leuna-Werke* “Walter Ulbricht,” ed. R. Bernhardt (Klubhaus der Werktätigen VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” 1968), 117 f.

⁴⁶⁷ Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990. From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1997), 64 f.

revolutionärer Schriftsteller und Zentrum der Literatur im Zeichen des Bitterfelder Wegs.”⁴⁶⁸

Yet it was also in Halle, Kupfer continues, where “Desintegrationsentwicklungen” within the DSV appeared more strongly than in other districts. The “schwindende Attraktivität bzw. das Scheitern dieses Programms [des Bitterfeld Weges]” in the early 1970s and the loss of leading writers to the West or their withdrawal from DSV life significantly weakened the district Writers’ Union.⁴⁶⁹

Individual BSA participants and their relationships in Halle reflected the differing visions of the function of literature and the ongoing tensions between the goals of either fulfilling a political mandate through social engagement or an individual’s personal interest in self-expression. The district was home to leading circles whose work strove to integrate the individual into the socialist collective and also to well-known circles whose goal was the education of the individual through the training of self-expression and critical thought. Four of the most prominent circles in the district of Halle provide snapshots of these tendencies in the movement and exemplify the degree to which individual leaders determined a circle’s profile. The best-known circles in the district included the “Majakowski” ZSA in Dessau led by Werner Steinberg (1960–1970); the ZSA at the VEB Brown Coal Works, “Erich Weinert”, in Deuben led by Edith Bergner (1960–1970 [?]); the ZSA at the VEB Chemical Works, Buna-Schkopau led by Dr. Friedrich Döppe (1960–1980); and the ZSA at the VEB Leuna Works, “Walter Ulbricht”, led by Dr. Rüdiger Bernhardt (1966–1990).

⁴⁶⁸ *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung. Friedrich Döppe und die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren. 1969–1983*, eds. Thomas Kupfer and Wilhelm Bartsch (Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, Martin-Luther-Universität, Zeit-Geschichte(n) e.V. Verein für erlebte Geschichte. HALMA-Sonderband, 2000), 93-94.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

I. Werner Steinberg and the Dessau “Majakowski” ZSA

Werner Steinberg (1913–1992) was a novelist whose books published in the GDR Bathrick has described as “best-sellers very much in the tradition of adventure or detective novels.”⁴⁷⁰ During the Weimar era Steinberg worked as a “MASCH” functionary (*Marxistische Arbeiterschule*) and spent three years in prison in the 1930s for leading an anti-fascist resistance group in Breslau. After the war he experienced difficulties publishing a novel about Heinrich Heine in the FRG and moved from Düsseldorf to Leipzig in 1956. Promised work and an apartment, he moved to Dessau in 1960 where he took over the leadership of the ZSA at the DSF Majakowski House.⁴⁷¹

Initially the circle had difficulties finding a reliable sponsor. Failing to obtain a contract from the DSF or the DSV, Steinberg sought advice from the county SED administration (*Kreisleitung*), which arranged a contract with the VEB Gärungschemie. Company management, however, proved uncooperative; they neither permitted members to visit production facilities nor provided assistance in organizing events. The circle then found state support at the county cultural center (*Kreiskulturhaus*), where in 1965 Steinberg again lost his contract. Finally the county FDGB assumed financial sponsorship of the circle while allowing them to maintain the status of a city circle.⁴⁷² Indicating the difficulties of dealing with state

⁴⁷⁰ Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, 39.

⁴⁷¹ *Schriftsteller der DDR*, 536. See also Werner Steinberg, “Wer Ohren hat zu hören...” *Poetische Werkstatt. Erzählungen und Gedichte des Dessauer Stadtzirkels W. Majakowski*, ed. Werner Steinberg (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1960), 5-22; 229 ff.

⁴⁷² Christa Borchert, *Von zwanzig Uhr bis Mitternacht. Eine Monographie des Stadtzirkels schreibende Arbeiter “W. Majakowski” Dessau*. (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit, 1967), 59 ff. On the circle history see also Werner Steinberg, “Aus der Werkstatt. Notizen zur Zirkelarbeit,” *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 10 (1965): 123-50.

institutions while trying to gain support for their endeavors, circle member Ursula Hörig vented her frustration:

Die Vertreter der Institutionen müssen sich darüber klar sein, daß die künstlerischen Leiter nicht mit ziellosen Besprechungen überfordert werden dürfen, und daß die Zirkelmitglieder Laienschaffende in freiwilliger Verpflichtung sind.⁴⁷³

The quality of the Majakowski circle work was considered exceptional. Steinberg assumed a basic knowledge of Proust and Joyce on the part of participants, and his circle turned out enough professional writers to be termed a miniature literature institute.⁴⁷⁴ Circle member Manfred Jendryschik wrote that he had received half his education under Steinberg before studying literature and art history at the Wilhelm Pieck University in Rostock and later becoming an editor at the MDV and member of the DSV and PEN Club.⁴⁷⁵

Emphasizing the importance of the role of the circle leader, Borchert described Steinberg's working methods as based upon theoretical presentations, practical exercises, and collective discussions.⁴⁷⁶ To broaden the instructional format of circle meetings Steinberg occasionally invited guest lecturers: a psychologist to speak on mental disorders, an advisor from the Dessau theater to address questions of drama, a publishing house editor to discuss literary reportages, and literary scholars from the Martin Luther University to analyze lyrical

⁴⁷³ Borchert, *Von zwanzig Uhr bis Mitternacht*, 64.

⁴⁷⁴ Manfred Jendryschik, "Bitterfelder Wege. Illusion, Propaganda, Blickerweiterung," *Vorspiele Nachspiele: Deutsche Herbst*, ed. Manfred Jendryschik (Halle: Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2011), 316 f.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Borchert, *Von zwanzig Uhr bis Mitternacht*, 11; 23-32.

verse.⁴⁷⁷ From doctor and machine mechanic to housewife and student, one interest united all circle members: “sich literarisch zu bilden und mit der Sprache umgehen zu lernen.”⁴⁷⁸

Steinberg stated his goal as a circle leader: “die Grundlage für ein fundiertes literarisches Urteilsvermögen zu schaffen,”⁴⁷⁹ and described his pedagogic impulse as the desire to facilitate “unmittelbare literarische Einsichten” and an “Erweiterung der Allgemeinbildung.”⁴⁸⁰ Through group discussions and mutual critique, “wurde das logische und schnellere Denken geschult.”⁴⁸¹

By 1967 the circle was confident enough to publish a volume intended as a “Lehrbeispiel für alle Zirkel.”⁴⁸² Its didacticism lay in presenting circle methodology, meeting protocols, and descriptions of their public activities (readings, competitions, publications) to serve as models of success and inspiration for other circles.⁴⁸³ It included a short circle history, selections of members’ works, and ten pages of “calling cards” (*Visitenkarten*), introducing seventeen circle members and their literary interests. This presentation of circle members, methods, and its literary products served both participants’ interests in seeing their works published and, according to its intended multiplier effect, state interests in providing models for emulation by other circles. The work’s self-reflexivity – its demonstrative “work-in-progress” nature – emphasized critique as the central means to self-improvement. This practice of

⁴⁷⁷ Steinberg, *Poetische Werkstatt*, 241-42.

⁴⁷⁸ Borchert, *Von zwanzig Uhr bis Mitternacht*, 5.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 41.

publishing extracts of circle work intended as didactic material for other circles found its fullest fruition in the publications of the ZSA in Dueben led by Edith Bergner.

II. Edith Bergner and the Deubener Circle

Edith Bergner (1917–1998), an author of children’s books, radio plays for children (*Kinderhörspiele*), and puppet theater scripts, led the most highly lauded ZSA in the history of the BSA. Her circle at the Deuben brown coal works southeast of Weißenfels was recipient of the “Preis für künstlerisches Volksschaffen,” the “Kunstpries Bezirk Halle,” and was said to demonstrate the “große nationale Bedeutung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter.”⁴⁸⁴ As a model of socially engaged circle work, Bergner’s ZSA was declared “richtungsweisend für die BSA.”⁴⁸⁵

Identified by Hörnigk as the most important of the countless BSA anthologies published in the 1960s and 1970s,⁴⁸⁶ the three volumes of *Deubener Blätter* (1961, 1964, 1966) were each awarded the FDGB Literature Prize and praised as a new type of literature. Their novelty lay in their intended didacticism of combined form and function: The work’s contents documented circle methodology and were to serve as a guide for circle leaders and cultural functionaries throughout the GDR. In various forms of operative literature, the anthology contributions reflected the social contexts of their production, thereby demonstrating the possibilities of integrating cultural activities into the working world and providing models of social

⁴⁸⁴ Die BSA und die Wissenschaft. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 5.

⁴⁸⁵ I. Etappe der I. Leistungsvergleich. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/21136.

⁴⁸⁶ Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz Programm und Praxis der sozialistischen Kulturrevolution am Ende der Übergangsperiode,” 231.

engagement. Through this combination of form and function, as Barck describes, “vermittelt die Lektüre etwas Prozesshaftes.”⁴⁸⁷ This process-oriented approach allowed the publisher’s appraisal to describe the books as: “eine erste Chronik der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter.”⁴⁸⁸ Yet the works primarily chronicled the political and ideological integrative function of literature, a function described by Hörnigk as “Hilfe für einen notwendigen Erkenntnis- und Selbstverständigungsprozeß [...]”⁴⁸⁹ According to this state-desired model, circle work served primarily to integrate the individual into the socialist collective by engaging them in predetermined parameters of historical discourse.

The first volume of the *Deubener Blätter* expresses this process-oriented didacticism by presenting drafts of poems and stories; extracts from letters, meeting protocols, and worker brigade diaries; lists of recommended readings and circle publications; excerpts from drama and puppet theater scripts; contributions to company newspapers; song texts and musical notations; and contributions from a graphic arts circle. A section titled “Entwicklungsmerkmale” presents brief biographies of circle participants as members of the previously uneducated working class, while first-person autobiographical narratives relate the personal hardships endured by the writers and their experiences of war. All anthology contributions were to demonstrate the

⁴⁸⁷ Barck, “‘Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern’?,” 153.

⁴⁸⁸ Verlagsgutachten Dr. Martin Reso (für den Mitteldeutschen Verlag) vom 13.1.1961. SAPMO-BArch Dr 1/5115. Cited in Barck, “‘Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern’?,” 153n. 30.

⁴⁸⁹ Hörnigk, “Die erste Bitterfelder Konferenz Programm und Praxis der sozialistischen Kulturrevolution am Ende der Übergangsperiode,” 231.

possibilities of socially engaged cultural activities through a self-reflexive approach to the circle's core didactic mission of contributing to both social and personal transformation.⁴⁹⁰

Deubener Blätter volume two made a specific documentary claim in citing the circle's plan to contribute to their company's historiography by cooperating with the Commission on the Study of the German Workers' Movement and the Historical Institute at the Martin Luther University.⁴⁹¹ Bernhardt praised the work as "maßstabsetzend für alle anderen Zirkel," stating it showed that writing workers had realized their own powers and assumed the role of the creative conscience of society.⁴⁹² Writing workers in Deuben, he wrote, were: "in völliger Harmonie mit der Gesellschaft, zu deren künstlerischem Gewissen sie werden."⁴⁹³ The work's subtitle, "Mittel und Möglichkeiten der kulturellen Massenarbeit," indicated its intended purpose as a guide for cultural functionaries, a point emphasized by Leo Sladczyk: "Die Lektüre dieses Buches wird den Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre viele praktische Hinweise geben."⁴⁹⁴ To serve as models, the anthology included samples of ZSA writings, material from other cultural circles, and numerous documentary sources including: extracts from workers' brigade diaries; radio broadcasts; notes from a librarian; protocolled discussions with cultural functionaries; circle working plans; impressions recorded on a visit to an art exhibition; first-person biographical portraits (including

⁴⁹⁰ *Deubener Blätter. Arbeitsmaterialien des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter BKW "Erich Weiner" Deuben, Kreis Hohenmölsen* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1961).

⁴⁹¹ *Deubener Blätter. Band II. Mittel und Möglichkeiten in der kulturellen Massenarbeit.* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1964), 9.

⁴⁹² Bernhardt, "Zur Geschichte der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter," 88.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁴⁹⁴ Leo Sladczyk, *Zu einigen Problemen der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter in den Betrieben. Studienanleitung* (Institut Kulturarbeit der Gewerkschaften an der Hochschule der Deutschen Gewerkschaften "Fritz Heckert," 1965), 5.

school children); a graphic representation of the circle's activities (e.g., nine public readings, fourteen contributions to other cultural groups, eleven articles in the district press, and nine spots for the company radio); a list of the circle's further activities (including 263 individual publications); script excerpts from a documentary film, a puppet theater, and a cabaret group; stories and drawings from employees' children; literary portraits of exemplary workers; fliers encouraging support for the company's production plan; and graphs of the plant's personnel development plan. The volume also includes drawings, woodcuts, photographs, song lyrics, musical notation, and a schedule of events and topics from other folk art circles. The last pages present theoretical reflections on the social efficacy of and future prospects for writing workers. Demonstrating the role of the BSA in fostering personal and social development, a list of the volume's 36 contributors (aged 16 to 63) briefly described their professional paths and their parents' former occupations: 24 members stated simply "Vater war Arbeiter," while two were children of farmers, and one the son of a shoemaker.

The third volume of *Deubener Blätter* is much more modest in content and form.⁴⁹⁵ Although it maintains the claim to document the revolutionary transformations of socialism in the GDR, gone are the facts, figures, charts, statistics, and diversity of voices and perspectives reflected in socially engaged literature of the previous volumes (letters, protocols, diaries, etc.). From the 26 sections of volume two only two remain, "Abraumbewegung" and "Kohleveredlung," with 27 literary contributions. The stated intent to serve as a model for other circle leaders and functionaries is also gone; the work now claims that writing workers had assumed the perspective of planners and managers as called for at the 1964 Second Bitterfeld Conference – a claim substantiated only by brief statements on the plant's history and future

⁴⁹⁵ *Deubener Blätter. Band III* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1965).

production perspectives. The contributions' integrative function occurs only through their common content: All literary portraits, reportages, and poems by writing workers and all sketches, woodcuts, and paintings from other folk art circles take the open-pit lignite mines and coal briquette factories as their subject. For the Deubener plants and mines are the stated "Heimat" of the 5,000 employees; the anthology's intended audience is the writing workers' colleagues and comrades. The book itself was to be integrated into their living spaces as an artifact of daily life: "Wir schreiben dieses Buch für die Fünftausend unseres Werkes. Es wird in Wohnräumen liegen, in Werkbaracken, in Kantinen und Versammlungsräumen."⁴⁹⁶ The acknowledged importance of free-time activities and opening of cultural venues for the general population under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and ZfK had not found acceptance by the FDGB functionaries at Deuben plants or the works' publisher, the FDGB Tribüne Verlag. The December 1966 edition of *ich schreibe*, dedicated to the third edition of *Deubener Blätter*, included a six-page review by the thirty-year leader of the ZSA "Bertolt Brecht" in Karl-Marx-Stadt, Olaf Badstübner, who stated that the ZSA in Deuben had become an equal partner in planning and management and had set a positive example by members overcoming their "unfruchtbare 'Hobbydenken.'"⁴⁹⁷

The successor to the three volumes of *Deubener Blätter* was the *Buch unserer Tage* (1970), a history of the VEB "Erich Weinert" brown coal works written as collaborative project between the ZSA and the Commission on Plant History.⁴⁹⁸ Sponsored by the company's SED

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁹⁷ Olaf Badstübner, "Perspektiven, nicht nur für Deuben," *ich schreibe* 12 (1966): 2.

⁴⁹⁸ *Buch unserer Tage. Beiträge zur Betriebsgeschichte des VEB Braunkohlenwerk "Erich Weinert" Deuben 1956–1968. Gemeinschaftsarbeit der Kommission für Betriebsgeschichte und des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter*, ed. Betriebsparteiorganisation (Berlin: Tribüne, 1970).

leadership on the occasion of the GDR's 20th anniversary, it demonstrates the transformation of the *Deubener Blätter* as a product of Edith Bergner's participant-oriented didacticism to the party's instrumentalization of the BSA as a means to establish the historical narrative of the factory and mines by purportedly making the workers the subject of history. As an all-inclusive research project it involved the participation of 5,000 plant employees and over 150 "worker historians" (*Arbeiterhistoriker*), writing workers, photographers, and graphic artists.⁴⁹⁹ As stated in 1970 after the first central BSA *Leistungsvergleich*, the anthology's cultural and political effectiveness lay above all in its goal: "viele Menschen in diese Arbeit einzubeziehen, sie an den Prozeß des Schreibens, an die künstlerische Selbstbestätigung auf diesem Gebiet heranzuführen."⁵⁰⁰

The project required strict planning. Cooperating with company management, a collective created working groups to popularize the project and developed a three-phase working plan to collect, classify, and evaluate material, including first-hand reports and interviews, workers' brigade diaries, press publications, company documents, party resolutions, and protocols.⁵⁰¹ Similar to the second volume of the *Deubener Blätter*, the work includes numerous charts, graphs, and tables documenting, for example, production goals and improvement plans. The potpourri of poems, photos, and paintings, however, served rather to intersperse the longer contributions by the research groups on various aspects of the plant's

⁴⁹⁹ *Buch unserer Tage*, 8.

⁵⁰⁰ Abschlußbericht über den I. zentralen Leistungsvergleich schreibender Arbeiter. 25.6.70. p. 16-17. AdK 639.

⁵⁰¹ Rüdiger Bernhardt, "Schreibende Arbeiter und gesellschaftlicher Auftrag," *ich schreibe 2* (1976): 9-14.

history. The working group on the plant's "geistig-kulturelle Entwicklung," for example, reported on the history and development of cultural activities at the plant. Noting that Edith Bergner had signed her first contract with the company in 1953, it records further artistic and cultural groups including a photography circle, dance, drama, accordion, and stringed instrument groups (*Schrammelgruppen*), two choirs and an orchestra.⁵⁰² Providing examples of past encounters between workers, writers, and artists, the group's research recounted a festival held in Deuben in February 1959 in honor of Lion Feuchtwanger's 75th birthday attended by members of the Academy of Arts, the DSV, and the Berliner Ensemble, at which Wieland Herzfelde held the main address. The report emphasized the importance of creating an educated working class and recalled the plant librarian's efforts to encourage workers to read through

Buchlesungen, Buchbesprechungen, Literaturdiskussionen mit Schriftstellern, Buch- und Verkaufsausstellungen, Versorgung der Bibliotheksaußenstellen mit Literatur, Gespräche in Frühstückspausen mit Brigaden, zahllose Einzelberatungen in den Ausleihstunden.⁵⁰³

Reporting on the successful cooperation among the numerous amateur art circles, the working group noted that the ZSA occupied an "operative Schlüsselstellung" in the process of achieving political clarity and creating collective understanding.⁵⁰⁴ For the welders, electricians, fitters, boiler operators, and metal workers had themselves struggled, "das Wort zur Waffe zu

⁵⁰² *Buch unserer Tage*, 102.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

schmieden.”⁵⁰⁵ Yet the report also commented openly on the difficulties of winning new members for politicized folk art:

Es gab auch Stimmen, die der Unverbindlichkeit von Kunst und Kultur das Wort redeten und äußerten, daß die Arbeit in den Volkskunstgruppen und Zirkeln “zu politisch würde.” Neue Mitglieder für die Volkskunstkollektive kamen trotz intensiver Werbung nur zögernd.⁵⁰⁶

New recruits were not only hard won but many older circle members resisted attempts to introduce ideological content into their repertoire and stopped attending circle gatherings. When the local dance group, which had previously only performed traditional folk dances (e.g., *Schuhplattler* and *Pott mit Bohnen*), tried to develop new dances: “[e]ine Reihe von Kriterien aber machten [sic] sich bemerkbar; die durch altersmäßige Zusammensetzung der Gruppe bedingte Fluktuation nahm zu.”⁵⁰⁷

A final chapter, including a schematic “network plan” on organizational measures undertaken to write the plant’s history, provided a reflection on the history of the historiography (*Die Geschichte vom Schreiben der Geschichte*). As contributions to a new type of Marxist historiography, however, the works only nominally granted a voice to writing workers. Not only were most of the ZSA texts included in the volume reprints from previous anthologies, but it also contained no autobiographical narratives actually giving voice to the proletariat. In contrast to its stated goal, party leadership had prevented any true history “from below.” As the culmination of the most highly praised works in the history of the BSA, the volume thus

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 116.

displayed the fate of one of the greatest promises inherent in the movement: The overriding demands for political partisanship stymied any potential within the BSA to bring forth a new generation of proletarian autobiographies in the lineage of Carl Fischer and Adelheid Popp who could make authentic contributions to state identity and legitimacy.⁵⁰⁸ As former MDV editor Manfred Jendryschik writes:

Wer allerdings glaubt, dieser einzigartige Fundus [von proletarischen Autobiographien] wäre in der DDR gesehen worden, auch im Zusammenhang mit dem Bitterfelder Weg, als eine lebendig zu haltende Tradition, sieht sich getäuscht.⁵⁰⁹

Although *Buch unserer Tage* fulfilled a socially integrative function by incorporating as many actors as possible into a single, unifying purpose, it was no longer the product of Bergner's leadership of the Deubener ZSA. Recognizing the circle's successes, the party had appropriated its grass-roots educational initiatives and authentic operative impulses to establish the parameters of historical discourse and the primacy of party leadership. In stifling the circle's potential to contribute to and document historical transformations, the party squelched its intended function of contributing to the construction of socialism. In 1981 functionaries still identified Edith Bergner's Deubener circle as the prototype of socially engaged circle work yet admitted that its intended effect as a motor of cultural proliferation had not materialized.

Referring to the few circles which had followed Bergner's model, the ZfK report noted: "Sie

⁵⁰⁸ On the history of proletarian autobiographies in Germany see *Proletarische Lebensläufe. Autobiographische Dokumente zur Entstehung der Zweiten Kultur in Deutschland. Band 1: Anfänge bis 1914. Band 2: 1914 bis 1945*, ed. Wolfgang Emmerich (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1974–75).

⁵⁰⁹ Jendryschik, "Bitterfelder Wege. Illusion, Propaganda, Blickerweiterung," 324.

fanden jedoch nur wenige Nachfolger, so dass Zirkel dieser Art die seltensten Ausnahmen bleiben.“⁵¹⁰

The Deuben circle remained active into the 1980s under Roland Rittig, literature scholar at the Martin Luther University, publishing the 1982 anthology *Preisen will ich*.⁵¹¹ Bergner continued to play a role in the BSA into the 1980s as leader of youth and children circles in Halle-Neustadt. Under Bergner’s direction the “Zirkel schreibender Schüler” at the Third Polytechnic Secondary School published an anthology of children’s writing for children, *Stimmen aus unserer Stadt*, in 1972.⁵¹² The circle also published in the local press, wrote scripts for the clubhouse puppet theater, participated in literary and musical programs at Leuna plant festivals, and won a gold medal at the 13th Arbeiterfestspiele.

Following the political changes in 1989/1990 Bergner was de-masked as Stasi informant “Barbara Seidel.” Her cooperation with the state security had begun in 1963 when she was deputy chairman of the Halle DSV under Erick Neutsch. In her function – “zur Absicherung des Schriftstellerbandes Halle und Aufklärung von Konzentrationen der gegnerischen Elemente im Schriftstellerverband” – she proved to be one of the Stasi’s most valuable assets in the Halle

⁵¹⁰ Fachgebiet schreibende Arbeiter. Handwritten note: Material wurde in der Aussage noch bearbeitet, aber nicht veröffentlicht. Die wesentlichen Tendenzen der Analyse sind in diesem Material erfasst. Alex Oelschlegel. 21.12.1981. ZfK 641.

⁵¹¹ *Preisen will ich. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter* (Kulturhaus des BKW “Erich Weinert.” Deuben, 1982). ASA, 93/326.

⁵¹² *Stimmen aus unserer Stadt. Kinder schreiben für Kinder* (Kreisvorstand IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik, VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” 1972). ASA: 93/320.

DSV, her oral and written reports described by her case officer as “sehr ausführlich und initiativreich.”⁵¹³

III. Dr. Friedrich Döppe and the Buna Circle

An important figure in the Halle literary scene was Dr. Friedrich (“Fritz”) Döppe (1922–1987). Returning at war’s end to Halle after serving on the eastern front, Döppe studied art history, German literature, philosophy, and classical archeology at the Martin Luther University, where he earned his doctorate in 1952. He began his professional career as an editor at the Bibliographical Institute in Leipzig and from 1960 on worked as a free-lance writer. From the mid-1950s he served as chairman of the Halle DSV and remained on its board until 1980.⁵¹⁴ Primarily a novelist, he also authored oratorios and radio plays and edited works of Jean Paul, Schiller, and Herder at the Reclam (Leipzig) and Aufbau publishing houses. As leader of both the ZSA-Buna and the district AJA, Döppe was instrumental in mentoring a young generation of writers in Halle, his influence comparable to Stephan Hermlin in Berlin. Writer Dietrich Allert noted:

⁵¹³ Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur* (1996), 745-47. See also Peter Winzer, *Das Bezirksliteraturzentrum Halle oder wie ein Staat glaubte, Kunst in seinem Sinne zu formen und das Gegenteil erreichte* (Landesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR Sachsen-Anhalt, 1997).

⁵¹⁴ *Schriftsteller der DDR*, 121. See also *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung. Friedrich Döppe und die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren. 1969–1983*, 92-93. Private correspondence with Konrad Pottoff.

[Döppe] war in unserem Bezirk sozusagen das, was Hermlin zentral war – eine nicht allzuviel selbst schreibende, aber dafür auf andere Leute ungeheuer wirkende graue Eminenz mit weitreichenden Verbindungen.⁵¹⁵

Stasi informant “Barbara Seidel” (Edith Bergner) also commented on Döppe’s connections within the party leadership, publishing industry, and literary intelligentsia:

Er verfügt über ausgezeichnete Informationen aus Regierungs- und ZK-Kreisen, vermutlich und teilweise nach seinen Aussagen durch die wöchentlich gepflegten Verbindungen zu Lektoren und Autoren des Aufbau-Verlages. Seine Hauptverbindung besteht zu Hermlin.⁵¹⁶

Döppe’s contacts within central spheres of power in Berlin insured that he was attuned to the nuances and fluctuations of cultural policy in the volatile Cold War climate. His network of informal connections and familiarity with the rules of party discourse allowed him the confidence needed to set the discursive parameters of circle meetings.

Under Döppe’s guidance circle gatherings opened spaces for young writers to engage in a process of literary education and critical reflection. Former Buna circle and DSV member, Konrad Pottoff, described Döppe’s influence in creating an atmosphere of tolerance and trust in which circle participants sharpened their intellects by practicing critique as a blood sport.⁵¹⁷ In countless undocumented debates and discussions members honed their skills of independent inquiry and self-expression. Döppe encouraged criticism, yet only of the texts recited by participants, never of the reciting person, and “freilich ohne Häme, Zynismus, Zorn, ohne

⁵¹⁵ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 93.

⁵¹⁶ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 97.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Konrad Pottoff, 28.02.2011.

‘Parteilichkeit’ oder gar unbegründet.”⁵¹⁸ DSV and PEN Club member Wilhelm Bartsch compared circle meetings under Döppe’s tutelage to the West German “Gruppe 47”:

Ich merkte schnell, daß es in diesem Kreis nach ähnlichen Prinzipien wie in der Gruppe 47 zuging: Etwa: Wer ‘dran’ war mit dem Vortragen eigener Texte, war ‘rechtlos’, er/sie hatte – bis auf weiteres, oder auf Nachfrage hin – nichts zu sagen, durfte sich nicht verteidigen, nichts erläutern, ergänzen.⁵¹⁹

Döppe was a staunch proponent of European modernism who opened new worlds to young writers through literature. One former participant stated: “Wichtig war für uns seine unmerkliche, aber vehemente Bildungsarbeit – die Vermittlung der westlichen Moderne.”⁵²⁰ A protocolled statement by Stasi informer “Günter,” who had attended the circle for young authors in 1977, remarked that Döppe rejected “critical realism” as old-fashioned and “unmodern” in favor of portraying psychological depth: “er ist dafür, den Seelenschmerz des Helden möglichst auszubreiten.”⁵²¹ The report described Döppe’s typical reaction to literary representations of proletarian problems and milieus in socialism. According to Döppe these had had their place in the period of class struggle following the war but were no longer relevant:

In diesen Szenen ging es um Planerfüllung, um Entwicklung eines neuen Verfahrens und die Sorgen, die sich der Held darum macht, weil es auch betriebliche Widerstände gibt, weil er zu Hause familiäre Schwierigkeiten hat und das nun alles in seinem Kopfe

⁵¹⁸ *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 11.

⁵¹⁹ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 11.

⁵²⁰ Jörg Kowalski in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 32.

⁵²¹ Tonbandabschrift. Halle, den 19.5.1977. Einschätzung zum Auftreten von Dr. Friedrich Döppe, Leiter der Nachwuchsgruppe im Bezirksverband der Schriftsteller, Bezirk Halle. Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 161-62.

wälzt und sieht, wie er mit seiner Aufgabe fertig werden soll. [...] Dr. Döppe erklärte daraufhin, daß es sich um abgedroschene Gegenstände handelt, die in der Literatur schon zichmal [sic] behandelt wurden, die man eigentlich nicht mehr wünsche und die auch eine breite Leserschaft sicherlich nicht mehr interessiere. Er vertritt die Auffassung, daß solche Literatur in den unmittelbaren Jahren nach 1945, als es noch wirklichen Klassenkampf gegeben hätte, angebracht gewesen sei. Heute wären die Probleme in Wirklichkeit viel komplizierter und vielschichtiger und es gehe darum, sie psychologisch darzustellen.⁵²²

In stark contrast to the failure of Edith Bergner's Deubener circle to spur cultural developments by encouraging emulation, the influence of Döppe's didactic methods reached beyond his own circle. Inspired by Döppe's teachings, participant Joachim Sailer founded circles for young writers at the Halle Volkspark and in the town of Möllmerswende in the Harz Mountains. Sailer, who became BAG chairman and was the last sitting chairman of the ZAG, stated of Döppe's influence in encouraging intellectual autonomy: "Döppe hat uns beigebracht, wie man eigenständig denkt und wie man eigenständig seine Meinung vertritt, auch literarisch."⁵²³ Although Sailer himself supported the long-term goals of socialism, in his circles participants neither wrote nor discussed political texts. Critical discussions remained focused on their literary works. He viewed circle meetings as semi-public spheres which allowed intellectual exploration and encouraged self-expression.

The tensions between defenders of a socially engaged realism and proponents of literary modernism also impacted personal relationships in the Halle DSV. Döppe nurtured relations not

⁵²² Ibid., 161-62.

⁵²³ Interview with Dr. Joachim Sailer, 16 July 2011.

only with young authors but also befriended writers who had fallen from party favor, as Stasi informant “Barbara Seidel” (Edith Bergner) reported: “Er nahm sich in mehreren Fällen derjenigen Verbandsmitgliedern an, die aus politischen Gründen in Auseinandersetzungen verwickelt waren, sowie derjenigen, die in der Folge aus dem Verband ausgeschlossen werden mußten.”⁵²⁴ Confirming Lokatis’s comment on literary life in the GDR as often being the product of “verborgenen Kräftespiel[e],”⁵²⁵ Pottoff described Döppe’s role in the Halle literary scene as the “Gegenspieler von [linientreuem Erik] Neutsch.” Upon publication of Neutsch’s canonical *Spur der Steine* (1964), Döppe criticized him as a propagandist – a “Zeitungsschreiber” – for which Neutsch never forgave him, using every opportunity, including his connections in the party and Stasi, to exact revenge: “wenn Neutsch nur leise maulte, sprangen alle die im Schatten stehenden und kümmerten sich.”⁵²⁶

Although he was no enemy of the state, Döppe’s influence over young writers in Halle proved too strong for the party, as Pottoff remarked: “[unter Döppe’s großer Toleranz] entwickelte sich einen Kreis, der dann doch ein Selbstbewusstsein allmählich in einer Richtung entwickelte, die dem Staat sicherlich nicht angenehm [war].”⁵²⁷ While he initially viewed the BSA as a contribution to the socialist project,⁵²⁸ he was later reluctant to state his political views in public, as “Barbara Seidel” commented to her Stasi case officer: “Bei Tagungen äußerte er

⁵²⁴ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 97.

⁵²⁵ Sigfried Lokatis, “Im Reiche Baron Hagers oder Wie modern war die Buchzensur in der DDR?,” *Kulturnation. Online Journal für Kultur, Wissenschaft und Politik* 2 (2004).

⁵²⁶ Interview with Konrad Pottoff, 28 February 2011.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ See for example *Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter* (VEB Chemische Werke Buna, 1964). ASA, 93/41.

sich fast ausschließlich nur zu literaturtheoretischen Problemen.”⁵²⁹ Pottoff remembered Döppe’s indifference towards the political agenda of the party and his actual intent: “Döppe war alles ziemlich Wurst, was an Staatsinteressen vorhanden war; er versuchte uns zu guten Autoren zu machen.”⁵³⁰ Despite his exclusive focus on literature in circle meetings and his guarded political stance in public, Döppe nonetheless represented a potential threat to the friend-or-foe mentality of Cold War warriors. In an attempt to curtail his influence over young writers in Halle the Stasi dissolved the district AJA in 1981. Their report noted their hard-won successes as strict disciplinarians of a paternalistic state:

Auf der Grundlage langfristiger komplexer politisch-operativer Maßnahmen konnte die Zielstellung der OPK erreicht werden, indem negativ-feindliche Handlungen vorbeugend verhindert und der D. zu gesellschaftsgemäßigem Verhalten erzogen wurde.⁵³¹

Although the state security agents had achieved their goal, Kupfer notes that upon perusal of Döppe’s extensive Stasi files one becomes skeptical of their reported successes. Their strategies of “politisch-operative Maßnahmen” Kupfer describes as resembling “zuweilen eher einem Spiegelgefecht gegen selbstproduzierte ‘Feinde,’” and their motivations as often based upon “abstruse Verschwörungstheorien.”⁵³² Indeed, Stasi attempts to influence young writers in Halle ultimately proved negligible. Although they shuttered the district AJA and maintained influence over the promotion of professional authors, they were unable to prevent or control the continued

⁵²⁹ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 97.

⁵³⁰ Interview with Konrad Pottoff, 28 February 2011.

⁵³¹ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 110.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 111.

development of a literary scene beyond state structures, “sei es in Form von Hauskreisen, Privatlesungen, Kleinpublikationen oder literarischen Stammtischrunden.”⁵³³ Döppe’s declining influence in the 1980s was not only attributable to Stasi measures to marginalize him but above all to his deteriorating health. On 20 November 1987 he succumbed to a long illness. In Döppe’s funeral eulogy Pottoff described his influence on his young disciples, those of the generation born and raised in East Germany, in opening intellectual horizons beyond the provincial confines imposed by party dogma, public censorship, and strict travel restrictions.

Doch ehe es vergessen wird, ein wichtiges Ergebnis hatte sein Weg schon: Ein paar in die Gräben hinein geborene Kinder schauten ihm staunend hinterher. Sie bekamen durch ihn eine Ahnung, dass es noch etwas anderes geben könnte als das bisher erlebte. [...] Unser Meister hat vielen von uns ein Haus gegeben, wir sind nicht unbehaust, wir werden ihn weiter den Meister nennen.⁵³⁴

According to his wife, Döppe’s commitment to developing young literary talents had been “eine zentrale Aufgabe seines Lebens.”⁵³⁵ Not the SED’s collectively constructed “house” of socialism became home to his disciples but each individual unto her or himself as an autonomous agent forged through their own powers of intellectual inquiry and candid critique.

IV. Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Bernhardt and the Leuna Circle

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Konrad Pottoff. Private email from 23 March 2014. *Am Ende schwängert Gottfried den Tod!* Forthcoming.

⁵³⁵ Cited in *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 100.

Following the heyday of Edith Bergner's ZSA in Deuben in the 1960s, the most outspoken proponent of socially engaged circle work was Rüdiger Bernhardt. An assistant to Hans Mayer in Leipzig in the early 1960s, Bernhardt became a full professor of German literature at Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg in 1984 and was active in the BSA for over 25 years. From 1966 till 1989 he led the ZSA Leuna, from 1968 was chairman of the BAG, and from 1981 to 1987 chairman of the ZAG. A prolific scholar, he wrote a first history of the BSA in 1970, contributed so frequently to *ich schreibe* that he occasionally published under the pseudonym "D. Erbe," and has published on the BSA as recently as 2011.⁵³⁶ Under his leadership the ZSA in Leuna was awarded the "Preis für künstlerisches Volksschaffen" and the title "Hervorragendes Volkskunstkollektiv." The circle published anthologies, performed regularly at Arbeiterfestspiele, and was considered a "bilderbuchmässig" example of operative circle work.⁵³⁷ Testifying to the active engagement of circle participants and their sense of group solidarity, members of the ZSA Leuna continued to meet regularly as the "Literarische Werkstatt Leuna" after the dissolution of the East German state.

Son of a high-ranking Nazi officer, Bernhardt was a convinced communist who viewed the BSA as occupying an intermediary position between base and superstructure: The sole measure of a circle's success was its efficacy in contributing to the development of socialism.⁵³⁸

In a 1969 written evaluation of the Rostock ZSA he described the intended function of the BSA

⁵³⁶ Bernhardt, "Zur Geschichte der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter"; Bernhardt, "Schreibende Arbeiter der DDR zwischen Arbeiter- und Gesellschaftskultur."

⁵³⁷ Personal interview with Konrad Pottoff, 28 February 2011.

⁵³⁸ See for example Rüdiger Bernhardt, "Referenteninformation und Vorschläge für einen URANIA-Kursus. Der Bitterfelder Weg – gestern – heute und morgen (dargestellt an Arbeiten schreibender Arbeiter und an der Rolle des gesellschaftlichen Auftraggebers)." 20.10.1969. ASA (unmarked).

in the socialist project. While complementing the circle's productivity, he stated that in order to achieve its full social impact it was necessary for the circle to create "thematic centers" allowing "den Zirkel an das Teilsystem Kultur des sozialistischen Gesamtsystems einzuordnen und ihn ideologische Erziehungsaufgaben bei der Durchsetzung der Führungsrolle zu übertragen."⁵³⁹ According to this view, involving members in collective literary projects was a means to focus individual attention, provide ideological orientation, and assimilate any autonomous cultural initiatives into the socialist system. Operative literature engaging individuals in a larger social field served the goal of social integration and, by setting the topics and discursive parameters of historical reflection, sought to forge a kind of collective consciousness through "insight into the historical necessity" of the socialist cause. Bernhardt described a socialist society as a complex system of interrelated parts, which, as an experiment, needed to protect itself from autonomous developments:

[D]ieses gesamt gesellschaftliche System [war] aufgebaut, [...] alles miteinander zu verzahnen. [Um] keine Sonderentwicklungen innerhalb dieses Systems zu erlauben, musste ein völlig neues System vorsichtig sein. [Um] sich [...] zu schützen, wurden alle neu entstehenden Organisationsformen und Initiativen in dieses System integriert.⁵⁴⁰

Three Leuna ZSA anthologies published under Bernhardt's direction demonstrate the circle's evolution from a group of amateur writers who composed primarily poetry inspired by personal interests to its integration into the political and industrial spheres as a sub-field of culture. In *Vom Sein und vom Werden*, published on occasion of the 10th Arbeiterfestspiele in

⁵³⁹ Gutachten an Dr. habil. Werner. Sektion Germanistik und Kunstwissenschaften.Halle, am 8.3.69. ASA folder Rostock Schiffselektronik.

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with Rüdiger Bernhardt, 19 November 2010.

1969, a 27-year-old Bernhardt described how he assumed circle leadership in 1966 as a young assistant in the German Department at the Martin Luther University.⁵⁴¹ Building upon the experiences of former BAG chairman and German literature professor Wolfgang Friedrich, Bernhardt convinced circle participants to set collective goals and write operative forms of literature, including texts for bulletin boards (*Wandzeitungen*), reportages, skits, portraits, and letters. Socially active circle work also involved members holding readings and discussions in the workplace and giving public performances. Yet aside from affirmative verse (“Unser Leunawerk,” “Lied der Leuna-Jugend”) and depictions of production problems (“Rohrbruch nach Feierabend”), the anthology also includes vignettes set in the domestic sphere (“Jeder Wurf ein Treffer”), numerous sentimental and nature poems (“Sehnsucht,” “Frühling”), and vacation impressions (“Aus dem Reisetagebuch”). Beyond this accent on the personal and a focus on the sphere of industrial production, yet unremarked by Bernhardt, the anthology also fulfilled the important function of bestowing on the party historical legitimacy through the authenticity of autobiographical narratives. Included is a first-hand account of the war’s end in spring 1945 (“Erinnerung. Frühjahr 1945!”) and a literary portrait, “ein Stück deutscher Geschichte,” of writing worker and engineer Robert Meier, who relates events of the turbulent Weimar years as a former member of the Communist Youth Organization.⁵⁴²

In the second Leuna circle anthology, *Und die Quellen wurden fündig* (1971), published in honor of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the SED, Bernhardt attributed the circle’s successes (e.g., 1970 “Preis für künstlerisches Volksschaffen”) to their focus on giving form to

⁵⁴¹ *Vom Sein und vom Werden. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht”* (Klubhaus der Werktätigen VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” 1968).

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 123.

the socialist “Menschenbild.”⁵⁴³ The defining characteristics of this human image were its “Parteilichkeit und bewußte Übereinstimmung mit dem politischen, ökonomischen und kulturellen Leben.”⁵⁴⁴ The essential element of all circle work Bernhardt described as the human relationship to the political, economic, and cultural fields and their interrelationships within the developed socialist system.⁵⁴⁵ All circle activities served the central goal of integrating the individual into this system. To provide orientation for their works, circle members read their compositions in socialist collectives and discussed production issues with exemplary workers. According to Bernhardt, the proper understanding of the objective course of history informed the collection’s most inspired subjective literary statements. This success allowed Bernhardt to elevate the act of portraying the “new human being” from the profane sphere of material production into the realm of the sacred. He discovered the meaning of life in actively contributing to the development of socialism by depicting the individual in complete harmony with the social environment: “Die Gestaltung des sozialistischen Menschenbildes in vorliegender Zusammenstellung hat grundsätzlich bereits die Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Sinn des Lebens gegeben.”⁵⁴⁶ By aligning the permissible parameters of human depiction with the divine, Bernhardt thereby relegates any transgressions or autonomous tendencies to damnation and inflates the function of literature to an act of creation by giving form to the new socialist human being at the workplace.

⁵⁴³ *Und die Quellen wurden fündig. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Leuna-Werk “Walter Ulbricht”* (Klubhaus der Werktätigen VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” Leuna, 1971).

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

With the stated intent of increasing an awareness among workers that the new socialist human being was the owner of the means of material production, all anthology contributions take the Leuna Works and workers as their subject. Beyond the texts focusing on various aspects of the workplace (“Lied auf den Vertrauensmann,” “Die grosse Initiative”), the anthology also provided an important contribution to state legitimacy and identity through autobiographical memory narratives. Included are a communist’s personal memories of the outbreak of the First World War and the October Revolution (“Zeitgenosse Lenins”), reflections of a former POW in the USSR (“Die Partei und ich”), and a literary portrait of Willy Schnauß, a “resettler” or refugee from Pomerania who compensated his feeling of loss with the solidarity experienced among his comrades in rebuilding the Leuna Works after the destruction of war.⁵⁴⁷ The anthology’s social inclusiveness is multigenerational, with numerous works by “schreibende Pioniere,” including a poem by ten-year-old Kerstin Pötzsch, “Schule – Betrieb – Partei.”

A third Leuna ZSA anthology, *Für Leuna unterwegs* (1974), was commissioned by the district FDGB as a contribution to the “großen Geburtstagstisch” for the GDR’s 25th anniversary.⁵⁴⁸ Subtitled *Geschichte um das Dederon*, it presents a collective attempt to portray the technology and people involved in the production of caprolactam, the chemical substance used to produce Dederon, a synthetic fiber similar to nylon. Circle member and caprolactam plant production worker Ernst Zöber described the party’s commission for the anthology as a breakthrough which allowed the circle to set a three-year, “genau abgestimmten” plan.⁵⁴⁹ This

⁵⁴⁷ Ernst Zöber, “Einer von uns!,” *Und die Quellen wurden fündig*, 16.

⁵⁴⁸ *Für Leuna unterwegs. Geschichte um das Dederon* (Leuna, 1974).

⁵⁴⁹ Ernst Zöber, “Effektivität durch Auftragserteilung,” *ich schreibe 3* (1974): 15.

long-term planning served the work's integrative function by helping the group to gain the cooperation and coordinate the efforts of otherwise disparate and independent entities both in the plant and in Leuna's bedroom community of Halle-Neustadt.

The basic working principle for the anthology was group collaboration on a collective project – individual contributions aimed to represent a common standpoint. No longer was a personal muse required to write literature but the will of the collective: “Nicht mehr der private Anlaß zum Schreiben stand im Vordergrund, sondern der vom Kollektiv gegebene Auftrag.”⁵⁵⁰ Literary portraits of individuals were intended to represent the 30,000 plant workers: “ihr Leben sollte als unser Leben erkennbar sein.”⁵⁵¹ Supported by a “strong party group,” the anthology set out to portray the plant's departments, personalities, and problems in order to develop circle members' writing skills and their understanding of the production of Dederon.

Describing the circle's previous literary topics and working methods as too private, Bernhardt stated that their goal was to present a new type of anthology which allowed the reading public to partake in the book's developmental process.⁵⁵² Zöber described their intent to create literature, “auf deren Entstehungsprozeß Arbeiter, Kulturfunktionäre und auch die Öffentlichkeit innerhalb unseres unmittelbaren Wirkungsbereich Einfluß nehmen konnten.”⁵⁵³ The anthology was the final product of 97 circle meetings with a total of 71 members and guests, 147 consultations between circle members and the circle leader, and 37 public

⁵⁵⁰ Rüdiger Bernhardt, “Notwendige Lehren,” *Für Leuna unterwegs*, 125.

⁵⁵¹ *Für Leuna unterwegs*, 5.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁵³ Zöber, “Effektivität durch Auftragserteilung,” 14-15.

readings.⁵⁵⁴ Members read drafts of their works to production brigades and to the public in Halle-Neustadt to “test” their effectiveness. The ensuing discussions provided members advice to improve their works and gave them the feeling of “having set something in motion.”⁵⁵⁵ By-products of the circle anthology included a text written for a cantata for the Merseburg Music School, cooperation with a “circle of writing pioneers” on two children books, and two circle members being nominated to study at the J. R. Becher Literature Institute. Yet aside from citing their accomplishments, Bernhardt also acknowledged the limits and failures of their efforts: the countless writers who had offered advice yet did not belong to organized circles and were thus unable to contribute to the demands of the Eighth Party Congress, “den kulturellen Alltag in den Kreisen, Städten und Gemeinden zu bereichern,”⁵⁵⁶ and the one circle member who had left the collective after refusing to partake in the necessary political and ideological clarification process.⁵⁵⁷

As a collection of writings by amateur authors the anthology laid no claim to being “große Literatur”; its purpose was to include all circle members in the group effort – each according to his or her abilities. Included are protocolled reportages (“Wie man sich kennenlernt”), poems (“Der Traum vom Gold”) – including some by children (“Auf dem Spielplatz”) –, portraits of workers (“Dr. Pester – ein Bericht”), extracts from a brigade diary (“Das Brigadetagebuch”), descriptions of work processes (“Reise in die ‘Tropen’: Notizen von einer Kesselreinigung”), biographical narratives (“Die Helden von damals”), and graphics by

⁵⁵⁴ Bernhardt, “Notwendige Lehren,” *Für Leuna unterwegs*, 128.

⁵⁵⁵ Zöber, “Effektivität durch Auftragserteilung,” 16.

⁵⁵⁶ Bernhardt, “Notwendige Lehren,” 128.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

members of the “Zirkel für bildnerisches Volksschaffen des Klubhauses der Werktätigen.”

Despite the anthology’s stated goal of focusing exclusively on the people and problems of the Leuna Works it still included a sentimental nature poem (“Frühlingsurlaub”). Nor was the portrayal of workers by any means limited to depicting the challenges of socialist production or the glorification of past deeds. Within the sphere of labor the writer’s eye was still allowed to pursue its own personal pleasures:

Ginka, die eigentlich Gislinde Kühnlein heißt, ist nicht nur ein superblondes, sondern auch superschönes Mädchen, was mir auch aufgefallen wäre, wenn sie die weiße Bluse nicht getragen hätte. Eine weiße Bluse mit Rüschen, die am Hals noch weit auseinanderlagen und sich erst in Nabelhöhe im spitzen Winkel vereinigten. Dazwischen lag es wohlgerundet und samtig, reine Natur, keine Chemie.⁵⁵⁸

The goals of the collective project did not prohibit writers from following their own interests or inspirations, for the circles’ achievements relied on the active engagement of circle members. Its social efficacy and productivity, however, also depended on successfully partnering with company and state agencies, which was not a granted fact. As SED secretary of the German Department at the Martin Luther University, Bernhardt provided the ideological orientation and literary advice for the circle, yet he still relied upon the cooperation of plant administrators and state functionaries to support his initiatives. Ernst Zöber closed his three-page article on the 1974 anthology in *ich schreibe* with a plea for more support. The circle’s future plans, he stated – to increase their effectiveness by attaining more commissions, staging more readings for workers’ brigades, and holding extra advisory sessions for writers who did not belong to organized circles – were dependent upon the assistance from state institutions, which “während

⁵⁵⁸ Alfred Salamon, “Ginka, Wasserdampf und Säure,” *Für Leuna unterwegs*, 6-7.

unserer bisherigen Arbeit nicht in Erscheinung getreten sind,” and upon company management giving the circle more consideration in their planning.⁵⁵⁹

Although praised as exemplary, the works of Bernhardt’s Leuna circle did not meet unanimous approval within the larger BSA. In her review of *Für Leuna unterwegs*, Ursula Dauderstädt commended the anthology’s aim to portray plant workers in their social context yet criticized most contributions as superficial reflections of external processes and for their failure to represent the human element by penetrating the inner life – the wishes and worries – of the workers.⁵⁶⁰ Dauderstädt further recognized the brigade diary extracts as fictitious and suggested appropriate types of operative literature which could have been included in such an anthology:

[F]ür eine Anthologie, die man als Zeichen und Beweis des lebendigen Wirkens eines Zirkels in seinem Betrieb begreifen möchte, wäre – beispielsweise – die Aufnahme von Tagebuchauszügen, von Dokumenten, durchaus denkbar gewesen.⁵⁶¹

This criticism of Bernhardt’s circle was not unique within the BSA leadership. Not all functionaries wished to see the real-world problems of real existing socialism glossed over by amateur writers. The environmental degradation caused by an unregulated chemical industry based on low-grade lignite and the often labor intensive and hazardous working conditions with pre-war technologies were realities of daily life for the some 30,000 workers at the Leuna Works. By the 1980s measured critique of ecological problems in the GDR was considered acceptable. One year after the publication of Monika Maron’s highly critical *Flugasche* (1981)

⁵⁵⁹ Zöber, “Effektivität durch Auftragserteilung,” 16.

⁵⁶⁰ Ursula Dauderstädt, “Für Leuna unterwegs,” *ich schreibe* 4 (1975): 8-13.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

in West Germany,⁵⁶² jurists at the prestigious “Week of Writing Workers” in Neustrelitz awarded a gold medal to the ZSA Großbaustelle Kraftwerk Jänschwalde and the Cottbus College of Engineering for their *Lieder, Geschichten und Gedichte um eine Landschaft*, which framed their literary contributions with technical data highlighting the long-term environmental impact of strip mining in the Lausitz region of eastern Saxony.⁵⁶³ At the 1988 Arbeiterfestspiele in the district of Frankfurt/Oder jury members criticized the Leuna circle’s literary and musical program for not taking up challenging topics. The jury’s report, while noting that no contributions had displayed tendencies contrary to the ideals of socialism or the politics of the SED, also commented on their paucity of pathos and lack of fantasy: “Von dialektischem Denken, wirklich erregenden, aufregenden Begebenheiten, von aktivierenden Gefühlen merkte man nicht viel.”⁵⁶⁴ Jury member Joachim Sailer commented on the Leuna circle’s whitewashing of the obvious ecological problems and poor work conditions: “kein Mensch hat verlangt, die Chemie zu besingen.”⁵⁶⁵ Jurists at the festival reserved their highest praise not for writing workers but for a circle of young poets and musicians within the state security apparatus:

Eine Ausnahme bildete das Programm “Anderer Augen” von der Kreisarbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Tschekisten im MfS und der Dzierzinsky-Liederbühne, in dem mit hohem künstlerischem und auch mit philosophischem

⁵⁶² Set in Bitterfeld, Maron’s novel addresses the issues of environmental pollution and literary censorship in the GDR.

⁵⁶³ “Wo die Freundlichkeit wohnt, läßt sich der Kranich nieder,” *ich schreibe* 1 (1983): 30-53.

⁵⁶⁴ 22. Arbeiterfestspiele. Abschlußberichte der Beratergruppen. Berlin, den 20. Okt. 1988. Einschätzung zum Zentrum der Literatur und der Bibliotheksarbeit und der Leistungen der Schreibender Arbeiter zu den 22. Arbeiterfestspielen der DDR. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27262.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with Dr. Joachim Sailer, 16 July 2011.

Anspruch aktuelle Fragen unserer Zeit, vor allem des Friedenskampfes behandelt und gestaltet wurden.⁵⁶⁶

Following the peaceful revolution of 1989/1990 Bernhardt was revealed as Stasi informant “Doktor Faustus,” his cooperation described as “remarkably productive.”⁵⁶⁷ Included in his files are 14 typed literary evaluations, 41 audiotape transcripts, 49 oral reports, and 60 reports on meetings with his case officer. While in the 1970s he was involved in operations against individual writers (for example, Rainer Kirsch), in the 1980s he primarily wrote literary evaluations. Claiming his status as one of the foremost experts on German literature in the GDR, he viewed his cooperation with the state security as a matter of course and expressed no contrition, only disappointment that his reports on literary developments had apparently been neglected, his efforts in vain.⁵⁶⁸

While these four circles in the district of Halle offer an indication of the diversity of circle work throughout the GDR, they should not be taken as typical. Rather, they are extreme expressions along the spectrum of the BSA’s inherent potential to fulfill both the state-desired goal of integrating the individual into the socialist collective and an individual’s personal desire to engage in critical discourse and self-expression. Although these four circles seemingly embody two distinct literary traditions (political activism through operative literature of KPD/BPRS heritage; individual empowerment through critical self-reflexivity of classical

⁵⁶⁶ 22. Arbeiterfestspiele. Abschlußberichte der Beratergruppen. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27262.

⁵⁶⁷ Upon signing a cooperation agreement with the Stasi, informants were free to choose their own alias. On Bernhardt’s cooperation with the Stasi see Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, 582-83.

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Rüdiger Bernhardt, 19 November 2010.

humanism and SPD lineage), a much more complex mixture of motivations and incentives often determined the realities of circle work, where operative and modern literature could live comfortably side-by-side. In the Leuna circle, for example, full-time nurse Maria Krieger wrote works to draw attention to deficiencies at her workplace while biology student Dietmar Sievers considered Kafka a classic and was a fan of Thomas Pynchon and Arno Schmidt.⁵⁶⁹ Bernhardt himself was an active supporter of a grassroots environmental movement and had suffered personally and professionally from disciplinary measures within the party (*Parteiverfahren*). Yet aside from the highly heterogeneous mixture of personal interests and literary abilities which characterized many circles, all shared an essential function: they served as centers of communication.

9. On the Nature of Circle Work

I. Socialist Literary Salons?

To describe the communicative atmosphere of circle meetings, Bernhardt borrowed the term for 18th and 19th-century bourgeois literary salons. Circles of writing workers, he believed, were best described as “socialist literary salons.”⁵⁷⁰ At a colloquium held on the 25th anniversary of the BSA he described ZSA as the socialist equivalent of these historical, private social gatherings typically hosted by liberally minded woman in which guests discussed literature, recited poetry, performed music, and debated topical issues. As gatherings where participants

⁵⁶⁹ Interviews with Maria Krieger, 12 January 2011, and Dietmar Sievers, 7 February 2011.

⁵⁷⁰ Barck identifies Bernhardt as the originator this term: “‘Ein ganzes Heer von schreibenden Arbeitern’?,” 148n. 19.

conversed on art and philosophy, he stated, circles of writing workers made an important contribution to public discourse about life in socialism and the development of socialist culture:

[D]ie Zirkel sind für die Arbeiterklasse eigentlich das, was – wenn der Vergleich auch etwas kühn erscheinen mag – dem Bürgertum jene “Salons” war, in denen Kunst und Philosophie zu den Gesprächsgegenständen gehörten. [Sie sind] Stätten der Kommunikation der herrschenden Klasse von heute; hier vollzieht sich ein wichtiger Teil der öffentlichen Diskussion über unser Leben und die Entwicklung unserer sozialistischen Kultur.⁵⁷¹

In a 1996 article Bernhardt again emphasized the social function of circles by describing them as centers of creative and cultural of life:

Es entstanden jene Zentren des künstlerisch-kulturellen Lebens, für die der Begriff des Salons angewendet werden kann. Sie führten regelmäßig Lesungen durch und hatten ein festes Publikum, es gab Absprachen mit Zeitungen, Zeitschriften und Verlagen; sie bewährten sich als Gesprächszentren.⁵⁷²

While Bernhardt admitted this comparison may appear somewhat bold, it is not unreasonable if one considers that bourgeois literary salons in the 18th and 19th centuries themselves only indirectly contributed to any nascent spheres of public discourse within otherwise pre-modern, absolutist states.⁵⁷³ In an interview Bernhardt stated he coined the term because he found the

⁵⁷¹ Protokoll des Kolloquium “25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR.” 18.–19.10.1985. Leipzig. p. 13-14. ZfK 647.

⁵⁷² Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 36.

⁵⁷³ Sigrid Meuschel opened a debate in the early 1990s on the relative modernity of East Germany. See *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft. Zur Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR. 1945–1989* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

moniker “BSA” cumbersome, unappealing, inaccurate, and “salon” more appropriate – even if party members intent on the movement playing an active role in the ongoing class struggle found it ill-fitting.⁵⁷⁴

Not only the oral testimony of numerous participants but also the documented testimony of circle leaders confirms the importance of circle gatherings as centers communication. A letter from former ZSA leader and professional writer, Horst Deichfuß, gives insight into the spectrum of possible discussion topics at circle meetings. As an indicator of the breadth of conversational content and of the circle’s social function it is worth quoting in length. Responding to a 1984 invitation to an exchange of experiences among DSV members who led circles, Deichfuß wrote:

Liebe Dr. Monika Hummel,

an der Zusammenkunft [...] kann ich nicht teilnehmen.

Außerdem leite ich seit zwölf, dreizehn Jahren keinen Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter mehr. Dafür bin ich seit nahezu zehn Jahren Leiter des Zirkels “Literatur – Politik – Persönlichkeit” bei den halleschen Pumpenwerken. Wir diskutieren (auch) über Literatur, aber die Zirkelmitglieder schreiben selbst nicht. Es handelt sich vielmehr um einen Diskussionszirkel mit faktisch unbegrenztem thematischen Bereich. Gesprochen wird über Außen- und Innenpolitik ebenso wie über z.B. den Tod aus philosophischer oder medizinischer Sicht, über Kunst, das Phänomen Faschismus, Probleme sozialistischer Leitungstätigkeit, den Heimat-Begriff, das Engagement des Bürgers in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft, über den Frieden, kulturhistorische Themen, die Arbeit imperialistischer Geheimdienste, die Drogen-Szene in der BRD, in der DDR erschienene

⁵⁷⁴ Interview with Dr. Rüdiger Bernhardt, 16 July 2011.

Bücher von Exil-Chilenen, über Yoga (mit praktischen Übungen), über Paläontologie, den Welthandel, das sozialistische Menschenbild, die Verhaltensforschung, die Weltwunder der Antike, Finanzprobleme im SW und NSW, die Entwicklung der Computer, die Verteidigungsbereitschaft und die Wehrmotivation, über Vertrauen und Risiko, Hypothesen von Geo-Physikern, das Erziehungsziel in der sozialistischen Schule der DDR, aber auch über Eheprobleme der Zirkelmitglieder, über Erziehungsprobleme bei den eigenen Kindern usw. usw. Der Zirkel besucht Kunstaussstellungen oder unternimmt naturwissenschaftliche Exkursionen, der pflegt Gastlichkeit (Zirkelmitglieder laden in ihre Wohnung ein). Und natürlich wird über Neuerscheinungen der DDR-Gegenwartsliteratur wie auch über Werke aus dem Ausland gesprochen. Ich zähle das nur deshalb auf, weil vom Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit mal jemand sagte, dieser Zirkel tue alles das, was man den Zirkeln Schreibender a u c h leisten müsse – sich in Beziehung zu setzen zur Welt und den Fragen der Gegenwart, zu arbeiten an einem weit gefassten Weltbild in marxistischer Sicht. Vielleicht bringe ich damit in Eure Beratung wenigsten einen Gedanken ein?⁵⁷⁵

Describing the content of discussions held in his “Maxim Gorki” circle in Berlin, leader Walter Radetz listed a similarly broad range of topics:

Politökonomie, Philosophie, Psychologie, Religion, Recht, Kriminalität, Technik, Weltraumforschung, Kybernetik, Sexualität, Kinder- und Jugenderziehung, Liebe, Ehe, Scheidung, Charakterbildung und Charaktereigenschaften, Geiz, Mut, Feigheit,

⁵⁷⁵ Undated letter from Horst Deichfuß, 4020 Halle. Halle Pumpenwerk, SV 467, 32.

Großzügigkeit usw. usw. bis hin zu den kleinsten unbedeutendsten Fragen des Alltags, das alles war Thema...⁵⁷⁶

While some may identify Deichfuß's statement that circle discussions helped to form a Marxist worldview as a clear indication of their contribution to a system of "repressive tolerance" or, as described by historian Konrad Jarausch, the creation of a "socialist mentality," as subtle – perhaps insidious – forms of repression, these views neglect fundamental issues of human agency and autonomy.⁵⁷⁷ Even Jarausch recognizes that the "reluctant loyalty" of many East German citizens towards their state resulted from a process of learning the rules and curbing critique while not completely giving up their own beliefs.⁵⁷⁸ Engaging in circle discussions which broadened one's intellectual horizons from a Marxist perspective was no measure of one's support for SED politics, was no indicator of one's attitude towards the East German state, nor altered any of the essential facts of life as an East German citizen – with one important exception: the possibility to engage in critical discourse and the process of self-improvement through literary education.

In order to satisfy personal interests within the given confines – the historically determined political, economic, and social structures – BSA participants often consciously engaged in a "Janus-headed" game of striking compromises between state and individual

⁵⁷⁶ Walter Radatz, *Zirkelgeschichte*, ASA 95/79.

⁵⁷⁷ Bathrick applies the notion of "repressive tolerance" as "a coercive system [which] only apparently 'liberalizes' itself in order to extend its dominion" to capitalist societies, *The Powers of Speech*, 5; Konrad H. Jarausch, "Care and Coercion. The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," *Dictatorship as Experience. Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1997), 61 f.

⁵⁷⁸ Jarausch, "Care and Coercion," 62.

interests.⁵⁷⁹ A former member of the “Zirkel schreibender Werktätigen” in Meiningen noted the possibility to create personal spaces within the established structures: “Man musste [die Spielräume] nur ausloten.”⁵⁸⁰ Bernhardt described this compromise in 1996: Satisfying the demands of the leadership by writing texts for official events (state celebrations, historical anniversaries) opened spaces for individuals to pursue their own interests:

So standen sich die offizielle Struktur und die tatsächliche Wirksamkeit widersprüchlich gegenüber. Das führte aber dazu, daß die Mitglieder der Zirkel ihre persönlichen Interessen umsetzen konnten und die Zirkel als Freiräume betrachteten. Die Kompromisse bestanden darin, daß für offizielle Gelegenheiten – Festveranstaltungen, Jubiläen, aber auch Arbeiterfestspiele – Programme und Texte geschrieben wurden, die den Ansprüchen der Leitungen gerecht zu werden versuchten.⁵⁸¹

The ability to negotiate personal niches within state structures (Günter Gauss) ultimately depended upon the communicative capacities and personal initiative of individual participants. While successful participation in any social system or context depends upon acting in accordance with established norms, the politicization of daily life in the GDR and the ever-present comparison to conditions in West Germany created a heightened individual awareness of the often unspoken rules of public discourse. Within the quasi-public spheres of a circle format these rules and norms varied greatly according to individual circle leaders and participants, with circle leaders playing a mitigating role in setting the acceptable parameters of

⁵⁷⁹ On the “Janus-headed” nature of circle participation see Holger Uske, “Der Autor – der bessere Arbeiter. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter – Ein Stück Januskopf des real-existierenden Sozialismus,” *Kritische Ausgabe – Zeitschrift für Germanistik & Literatur* 2 (2003), 25-27.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁸¹ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 32.

discussions. Their various talents and personalities influenced the differing profiles and reputations of circles.⁵⁸² Leaders and participants often reported that there existed a common knowledge of taboo topics, that self-censorship resulted from the desire to maintain group harmony, and that circle meetings were not the format to address difficult political issues. As one circle member stated, interlocutors did not want to “step on each others’ feet.”⁵⁸³ While participants commonly reported about a general awareness that circle meetings were potentially subject to Stasi surveillance, this was the case in any public or semi-public sphere in the GDR. In circle meetings, however, Stasi informants likely found little beyond the prosaic and pedestrian to report to their case officers: By all accounts ZSA were not centers of dissent, resistance, or opposition. As circle leader Joachim Sailer said: “wir [haben] nicht am Stuhle der DDR gesägt.”⁵⁸⁴ By avoiding controversial topics and signaling general support for the long-term goals of socialism, circle participants were able to create their own discursive spaces within the given state structures.

II. Education and Integration

As the state’s main venue to provide amateur writers educational and cultural opportunities, the BSA must also be seen within its larger social context. For the successes and legacy of the Bitterfeld Path should be measured according to its stated goal of establishing a broad-based cultural movement as a central means to create an educated nation. The first ZAG meeting in 1961 laid forth the first basic principle of the BSA: “Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter ist

⁵⁸² Uske, “Der Autor – der bessere Arbeiter,” 25-26.

⁵⁸³ Interview with Dietmar Sievers, 7 February 2011.

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with Joachim Sailer, 16 July 2011.

ein Teil der Bemühungen aller Werktätigen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik auf dem Wege zur gebildeten Nation.”⁵⁸⁵ At the 1963 Schwerin Conference functionaries cited the vision of J. R. Becher, to which the BSA would provide an important contribution to creating – in the not too distant future – a “Literaturgesellschaft,” a society in which the vast majority of the population was literate and it would be commonplace for workers to write poetry.⁵⁸⁶ In over 200 ZSA the breadth of educational opportunities available to the general population ranged from basic literacy skills to advanced literary studies. For the talented and ambitious the BSA offered the prospect of becoming a professional author through nomination to the J. R. Becher Literature Institute as a direct student or through a three-year distance program.⁵⁸⁷ Educational opportunities, which provided the “sozialer Kitt,” the social glue of East Germany’s social contract, were plentiful within the BSA.⁵⁸⁸

Beyond circle work, the BSA offered numerous venues for individuals to improve their literary talents, including workshops with members from other circles. Noting the frequency of workshops, “[d]ie Arbeit mit Werkstätten für Schreibende ist ziemlich ausgeprägt,” the 1984/1985 ZfK analysis of the BSA stated that each district conducted on average either two

⁵⁸⁵ Arbeitsplan ZAG 1961. Grundprinzipien der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/272.

⁵⁸⁶ Arbeitsentschliessung zur Perspektive der BSA angenommen auf der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter in Schwerin vom 30.11. bis 1.12. 1963. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/3446.

⁵⁸⁷ In 1969 the J. R. Becher Literature Institute began a three-year correspondence course for writing workers and in 1971 an “Elementarschulung schreibender Arbeiter.” See Andreas Leichsenring, “Den Werktätigen Stimmen geben,” *ich schreibe* 1 (1986): 8; Klaus Gysi, “Anweisung zur Durchführung des Fernstudiums am Institut für Literatur ‘Johannes R. Becher,’ Leipzig,” *ich schreibe* 9 (1970): 6-7.

⁵⁸⁸ On educational opportunities as the “sozialer Kitt” see Alexander von Plato, “Arbeiter Selbstbilder in der DDR,” *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR*, eds. Peter Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde (Essen: Klartext, 1999), 875.

weekend workshops or one weeklong workshop annually.⁵⁸⁹ Participation typically entailed a paid retreat to a FDGB vacation home or a youth hostel, granting one the leisure to compose texts in the company of acquaintances and friends. Increasing the potential for social interaction, the report stated that the tendency had developed for the BSA to cooperate with other folk art genres in conducting workshops. In Potsdam, for example, a satire workshop was held with the district amateur cabaret, while in Berlin cabaret artists worked together with writing workers in a “writers’ exchange” (*Texterbörse*). Other workshops in Berlin dealt with political poems, short stories, and reviewing of cultural events. Leipzig held a workshop for singer-songwriters.⁵⁹⁰ While such workshops offered individuals opportunities to engage in their chosen leisure pursuit and contributed to the overall integrative tendencies of cultural life, they were not components of an overall plan or a larger design. The report stated that most workshops took place “randomly” (*zufällig*) in preparation for the Arbeiterfestspiele according to the offerings of individual instructors. It further commented on the logistical difficulties functionaries faced in organizing such events caused by poor transportation infrastructure and limited lodging opportunities.

Aside from workshops, other venues existed for amateur writers to participate in broader social contexts. BSA members could take part in a variety of cultural festivals and literary competitions. State efforts since the late 1940s to establish a broad-based “folk” culture had resulted in abundant opportunities for popular cultural participation. Supported by the local and district FDGB, factories and companies commonly hosted festivals for employees and family

⁵⁸⁹ Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. Point 5. Werkstätten für Schreibende. p. 53. ZfK 639.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

members. For 1976 Kleßmann recorded 2,903 company festivals in the GDR with nearly eight million participants.⁵⁹¹ The ZfK claimed that in 1983 480,000 employees from over 8,000 companies were artistically active in nearly 3,700 company festivals.⁵⁹² In a West German public radio broadcast Manfred Jäger, author of the influential *Kultur und Politik in der DDR* (1994), counted over 3,000 company festivals for the year 1984.⁵⁹³ The frequent folk festivals and state celebrations had helped foster a broad network of active circles at FDGB and state cultural centers. A ZfK internal publication from 1985 counted a total of 48,000 folk art collectives in the GDR, about half of which were active in small towns and communities.⁵⁹⁴ Testifying to this high degree of local participation, the report recorded 700 village festivals (*Dorffestspiele*) just in the district of Magdeburg. At the national level the 1982 FDGB Arbeitfestspiele cited 462 events with 10,000 amateur and professional artists and 1.2 million visitors; for 1984 the festival recorded 600 events of 14,500 amateur and professional artists with over 2 million visitors.⁵⁹⁵

As the national showcase for amateur arts, the Arbeitfestspiele presented a prestigious and potentially lucrative venue for writing workers. Aside from competing in groups for medals awarded to literary and musical programs, individual writers could submit their works to the

⁵⁹¹ Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR*, 447.

⁵⁹² Informationen des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR. Nur für den Dienstgebrauch. Nr. 32 Ausgabe Dez. 1984. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/21124.

⁵⁹³ Manfred Jäger. Radio Broadcast. Arbeiterfestspiel in Gera. Staatl. Komitee für Rundfunk. Redaktion Monitor, DLF 5.05 h v. 24.6.84. 20. SV 27b.

⁵⁹⁴ Informationen des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR. Nr. 32 Ausgabe Dez. 1984. Zu einigen Ergebnissen der Entwicklung des künstlerischen Volksschaffens seit dem X. Parteitag der SED. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/21124.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

central BSA competition held on the occasion of the festival, “Ein gutes Wort zur guten Tat.” The financial incentives to participate were generous. In the early 1980s the competition offered cash prizes totaling 26,000 Marks, including two main prizes for 1,500 M each, four first prizes for 1,000 M, seven second prizes for 750 M, 23 third prizes for 500 M each, and further cash awards for honorable mentions, including 23 awards for 150 M.⁵⁹⁶ Offering a further incentive to amateur writers, prize-winning entries at this competition were candidates for publication in a FDGB anthology.

While participating in the national FDGB Arbeiterfestspiele depended upon selection by a local and regional jury, a number of districts also hosted their own competitions for amateur writers. Karl-Marx-Stadt, for example, held the Kuba-Wettbewerb, the district of Potsdam the Marchwitza-Wettbewerb, and the district of Neubrandenburg hosted the literary competition titled “Hier bei uns zu Haus.” Participation in such events was high. In 1984 both the Marchwitza and Kuba competitions registered 1,200 submissions of primarily prose and lyric respectively.⁵⁹⁷

The incentives and venues created to engage amateur writers within state structures were even more numerous than such workshops and competitions. Starting in 1961 circles of writing workers were eligible for the prestigious FDGB Literature Prize, placing them on the same pedestal as writers such as Hans Marchwitza, Anna Seghers, and Brigitte Reimann. Honorifics for active circles were awarded generously. In 1974 the ZfK reported that 56 of 244 ZSA had

⁵⁹⁶ Beschluß des Präsidiums vom 13.6.1984. Vertrauliche Dienstsache. Auszeichnung schreibender Arbeiter im literarischen Wettbewerb “Ein gutes Wort zum guten Tat” 1982/84. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/25465.

⁵⁹⁷ Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. Point 7. Bezirkliche Wettbewerbe. p. 54. ZfK 639.

been bestowed the title “Hervorragendes Volkskunstkollektiv.”⁵⁹⁸ A report from the late 1980s described the increasing number of partners available for amateur writers aside from the FDGB and state-supported circles. For a younger generation these included the FDJ’s “Singebewegung” and “Poetenbewegung,” for amateur historians the DKB sponsored associations of local and “homeland” history (*Orts- und Heimatgeschichte*), and amateur reporters could work as “peoples’ correspondents” (*Volkskorrespondenten*) within the Association of Journalists. Aside from these central organizations, district DSV chapters and district and local cultural centers (*Bezirks- und Kreiskabinette für Kulturarbeit*) sponsored other activities for amateur writers.⁵⁹⁹ In the district of Rostock, for example, in the early 1980s the DSV strategies to deal with amateur writers included establishing a support group (*Förderklasse*) for young authors and conducting a weeklong workshop for talented ZSA members and young poets, providing them the opportunity to interact with DSV members and potentially become a guest at their meetings.⁶⁰⁰

III. Constructing Socialism and the Dangers of Autonomy

All such efforts were designed to contribute to the creation of a socialist society – only through mass participation, through bringing all citizens on board, was socialism a viable project. A central attribute of the envisioned system was therefore its integrative tendency, its desire to incorporate all autonomous entities and tendencies, its will for all citizens to participate in

⁵⁹⁸ Arbeitsmaterial. Einschätzung des Entwicklungsstandes schreibender Arbeiter. 30.1.1974. p. 3. ZfK 641.

⁵⁹⁹ Konzeption zur Entwicklung der BSA nach dem X. Parteitag der SED. Leipzig, den 9.9.1981. SAPMO-BArch DY/24/21124.

⁶⁰⁰ Ulrich Völkel. Zu Schreibende Arbeiter. SV 467, 16.

building the “house” of socialism. For those intent upon writing workers providing an essential contribution to this project, the BSA also embodied a potential danger. Left to their own devices, they feared, amateur writers would retreat into private niches and become detached from their social mandate. As Leichsenring wrote in 1971: “Den Laien schreiben zu lassen, was er will, ist ein von vielen Zirkeln beschrittener Weg. [...] [Er] birgt jedoch nicht unbeträchtliche Gefahren für das einzelne Mitglied und für den gesamten Zirkel.”⁶⁰¹ From the Marxist perspective of revolutionary class struggle, writing workers were to serve a clear political function; the pursuit of personal pleasures was considered a remnant of bourgeois society under capitalism. Already at the first Arbeiterfestspiele in 1960 Egon Rentzsch, a communist since 1930, expressed this view when confronted with the movement’s realities. A poorly attended performance of the “spießbürgerlich geführten” ZSA from the Rostock Neptune Shipyards was in his eyes a “Fehlschlag,” and allowing writers to compose kitsch poetry was a remnant of capitalist, class society and a danger to be weeded out:

Hier wurde die Gefahr des Abgleitens der Gedanken des schreibenden Arbeiters in kitschige Sentimentalität. [...] Manches eingereichte Gedicht gehöre nicht in die Rubrik “schreibender Arbeiter und Gegenwartsliteratur”, sondern sei “Familienlyrik,” wie sie 1910 üblich war. Das muß man aussortieren.”⁶⁰²

During this period the FDGB’s cultural journal, *Kulturelles Leben*, also criticized the misconceptions, the “falsche Auffassung,” of circle members who stated they were not first and foremost interested in political agitation but rather in growing and maturing as individuals.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 73-74.

⁶⁰² Cited in Barck, et al., “*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*,” 153.

⁶⁰³ *Kulturelles Leben* 9 (1961): 20, cited in Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 439.

Even within the DSV voices initially leveled critique at the ZfK for neglecting the orientation given at the Bitterfeld Conference to engage writers in the spheres of material production.

Noting the BSA's lack of a concept for the upcoming Arbeiterfestspiele, a 1960 internal DSV memo clearly stated the danger of neglecting the intended operative role of the movement – to produce politically partisan texts for dance groups, choirs, puppet and amateur theater groups – was that it would become removed from its larger social field and degenerate into a miscellaneous mish-mash of the individual folk arts.

Sonst bleibt es bei dem alten Sammelsurium der Volkskunst, ja die Gefahr tritt ein, dass die Bewegung der schreibenden Arbeiter entartet und erdrückt wird. Es ginge um eine operative Literatur – nicht um Gelegenheitsdichtung und Liebhaberei in der Freizeit und am Feierabend, bestenfalls zur “kulturellen Umrahmung”!⁶⁰⁴

In 1971 Leichsenring described the result of circles working only according to their own interests: Detached from the pressing issues of the day, they become introverted, introspective and trivial:

[E]in Zirkel [kann] leicht zu einem ‘literarischen Kränzchen’ werden [...], in dem zwar eine ‘literarische Atmosphäre’ herrscht, das aber weitab von den Lebensfragen unserer Zeit ein beschaulich-bescheidenes Innenleben führt [...].⁶⁰⁵

From a strictly Marxist perspective the goal of the movement remained for amateur writers to engage with their immediate social environment and actively contribute to the construction of socialism. Writing texts based solely upon a personal muse was considered bourgeois and

⁶⁰⁴ Hausmitteilung 30.9.60. betr.: Bewegung der schreibenden Arbeiter beim Zentralhaus für Volkskunst, Leipzig. SV 27.

⁶⁰⁵ Leichsenring, *Der schreibende Arbeiter*, 61.

trivial. Yet for many professional writers, explicit expressions of politically partisan viewpoints did not belong to the realm of literature; encouraging amateur authors to blend politics and aesthetics only posed a danger to literature.

10. The BSA Between Social Revolution and Popular Participation

I. Literary Standards

Confirming professional writers' early concerns that the BSA endangered the standards of literary quality by promoting works based solely on their political standpoint, functionaries frequently bemoaned the poor quality of writing workers' literary texts.⁶⁰⁶ Many professional writers never took the Bitterfeld line seriously, believing it promoted journalism, not literature. Yet robbed of its capacity to level meaningful critique of the deficiencies of a planned economy and the dogma of party ideology, the operative instincts of socially engaged literature – to make the opaque transparent, to reveal hidden relationships, to spur social change through personal insight – were degraded to cliché slogans of partisanship and formalistic phrases of optimism and affirmation. The remaining realms of public self-expression were often limited to the prosaic, the quotidian, the familiar. Clipped of any revolutionary – or counterrevolutionary – potential, the real danger of the BSA was that its partisan pathos could degenerate to sentimental poetry and “housewife kitsch.” Internal memos expressed these concerns.

⁶⁰⁶ Hans Mayer and Stephan Hermlin believed fostering “writing workers” endangered the quality of literature by promoting dilettantism. Schiller, “Kurellas Kulturkommission. Auftrag und Scheitern. 1957–1962,” 27. See also SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 217-18. Arbeitsbericht für Januar/Februar 1961. 16.11.60. Lewin: “Von Prof. Mayer, Hermlin, Hauser, Cremer, Kretschmar wird bezweifelt, dass die Bitterfelder Linie künstlerische Qualität ermögliche.”

Such comments were consistent through the years. Already at the First Conference of Writing Workers in 1961 Otto Gotsche described eighty percent of the contributions to the cultural sections of company newspapers as “übelste Gartenlaube” and asked: “sind denn da nicht die Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter mit schuld? Ich meine ja.”⁶⁰⁷ A monthly activity report from the Central Committee’s Cultural Department stated in 1961 that the poor quality of published BSA works had discredited the movement.⁶⁰⁸ In 1973 Ursula Dauderstädt wrote that many circle leaders had not thoroughly thought through the relationships between individual personality and the social role of circle work, resulting in circles functioning as “Literaturkränzchen.”⁶⁰⁹ In a personal interview she stated that many BSA works were “nicht zu gebrauchen,” including much “Hausfrauenlyrik.”⁶¹⁰ A FDGB report on submissions to the national competition “Ein gutes Wort zur guten Tat” in 1974 commented on the “größtenteils schwache literarische Qualität” of the contributions.⁶¹¹ Dauderstädt also acknowledged in retrospect that the competition generated “relativ viel langweiliges Zeug.” This situation, she said, was “vorprogrammiert” due to its prescriptive theme: “Klar, ein ‘Gutes Wort zur Guten Tat’ ist doch langweilig!”⁶¹² In the post-Wende era Bernhardt also acknowledged the often

⁶⁰⁷ Schlusswort des Genossen Otto Gotsche auf der Konferenz schreibender Arbeiter anlässlich der 3. Arbeiterfestspiele in Magdeburg. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/6974.

⁶⁰⁸ SED ZK Abt. Kultur - Tätigkeitsbericht Februar 1961 Gen. Peter Czerny. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV 2/9.06/15, 274 ff.

⁶⁰⁹ “Publikationen für schreibende Arbeiter,” *ich schreibe* 3 (1973): 5.

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Ursula Dauderstädt, 27 June 2011.

⁶¹¹ Aktennotiz. 23.8.1974. Einschätzung des Standes des Wettbewerbes “Ein gutes Wort zur guten Tat.” SAPMO-BArch DY/34/10009.

⁶¹² Interview with Ursula Dauderstädt, 27 June 2011.

provincial nature of many BSA works, which “auf triviale Weise mit bewährten Versatzstücken Landschaften und Natur, Gefühle und Eindrücke beschrieben [wurden].”⁶¹³ Over five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall he attributed the trivial nature of such texts to the fact they were not to be understood as literature but as personal documents. A circle’s failure to fulfill its social mandate adversely impacted the works’ quality, he stated, and placed the blame in the hands of circle leaders.⁶¹⁴

An unpublished ZfK report from 1981 provides a more detailed explanation for the poor quality of many works from a Marxist perspective. Exercising harsh critique of BSA participants and their literary products, the author attributed the low quality to most writers’ lack of talent, their failure to understand of the movement’s main principles, and their poor grasp of historical dialectics, noting that they “[stehen] [d]er Klassenauseinandersetzung zwischen Sozialismus und Imperialismus und damit den gegenwärtigen Lebensfragen der Menschheit [...] ziemlich hilflos gegenüber.”⁶¹⁵ The report stated that aside from “plakativ wirkende Verse” many writers took up nearly unlimited variations of the same basic situations from the Second World War: the Soviet officer who asks about Heinrich Heine, the life-saving Soviet doctor, or the piece of bread given to a Soviet POW. The representation of fascists and antifascists had “[erstartt] zum Klischee.” The report’s author places the blame for these results on the circle leaders who lacked the requisite theoretical and methodological knowledge to bring forth meaningful works. It considered the problem – that members of the DSV were automatically certified to lead a circle and that non-experts granted certification to leaders at the

⁶¹³ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 35.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Analyse des Fachgebietes Schreibende Arbeiter. Leipzig, den 18. Mai 1981. p. 9. ZfK 641.

local level – could not be changed. The report called for a complete transformation of the accreditation procedures for circle leaders, yet noted the further difficulty that many of the responsible functionaries in the district cultural centers were themselves completely unqualified (i.e., incompetent).⁶¹⁶ A section of the report dedicated to the BSA's fundamental problems described the challenges of finding effective fields of activity and concluded that most circle members did not have the basic knowledge of literature required to produce good results or the capacity to discover and give literary form to the conflicts and discrepancies of daily life. According to the report, many writers remained “stuck” in the emotional, private sphere and did not recognize literature's potential to take a stand on important social issues. Because amateur writers did not understand the laws of social developments and literature “entsteht sehr oft von kleinbürgerlicher Denkweise geprägter Dilettantismus.” The main reasons for this, the report goes on, is that ZSA were not gatherings of individuals interested in being politically active through literature as, for example, workers in the SPD before the First World War, the BPRS of the KPD during the Weimar era, or even writers in the West German “Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt.” Compared with these literary movements, “Die in den Zirkeln schreibenden Arbeiter Mitwirkenden sind dagegen meistens literarisch Beflissene; sie wollen aufschreiben, was sie selbst bewegt (und nicht, was sie bewegen müsste).” Their works therefore produce “keine gültigen literarischen Aussagen.” The main reason for these conditions the report again identified in the circle leaders themselves who were poorly or not at all trained for the specific goals of the BSA. Such circle leaders, who give no thought to the meaning and goals of the BSA, “oft mehr verderben als nützen.”⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

This blistering critique of the movements' participants and their works reveals an arrogance towards those who ostensibly lacked the intellectual capacities to achieve insight into the historical necessity of socialism and produce the corresponding literature. Its dogmatic Marxist perspective measures success and failure solely according to a work's contribution to the ongoing class struggle and the construction of socialism. The otherwise accepted notions of the movement that could provide meaningful free-time activities, allowing individuals to pursue their own pleasures and interests and work on their own personal development, carried no currency with the author. Yet it should have been little cause for consternation that many of the works published in circle anthologies did not meet the expected standards of professional quality. The BSA was, after all, by definition a movement of and for amateur writers. For the vast majority of participants circle meetings provided a format to present their writings and get feedback from a group of peers and perhaps a professional writer. According to an American observer in the 1980s, circles were best characterized as a type of evening writing workshop.⁶¹⁸

II. Circle Anthologies and “Welfare Dictatorship”

For many amateur writers an incentive to participate in BSA activities was the various venues it offered to present their works to a larger audience, either within circle meetings, through public readings, or through a publication in the local press or a circle anthology. For many aspiring writers a personal goal is to see their work in print. Most typically on the occasion of state celebrations or historical anniversaries circles were able to garner the necessary institutional support to publish anthologies. A circle could view a published anthology as the crowning

⁶¹⁸ As reported by Bernhardt, “Schreibende Arbeiter der DDR zwischen Arbeiter- und Gesellschaftskultur,” 131.

achievement of their efforts. Yet over the years so many anthologies were published that functionaries sometimes discouraged them and occasionally questioned their purpose. The plethora of published works is therefore symptomatic for the tensions and ambiguities between individual and state interests in East Germany.

Noting that traditional theories of totalitarianism (Hannah Arendt) fail to account for the complex dynamics and often chaotic practices of daily life in the GDR, Jarausich has coined the term “welfare dictatorship” to characterize the nature of the East German state.⁶¹⁹ This view of the GDR as a “radicalized welfare state” is helpful in attempting to capture the ambiguities between the party’s intent to create a new, egalitarian society and its dictatorial, coercive nature.⁶²⁰ The BSA may rightfully be seen as an expression of the ambivalences inherent in this “repressive solicitude.”⁶²¹ Functionaries themselves unwittingly expressed these contradictions by pursuing the goal of creating an all-inclusive society while also decrying the lack of any objective need or demand for the publication of circle anthologies, thereby blurring the delineations between incentive and critique, carrot and stick. A ZfK evaluation of the BSA in the early 1980s confirms Jarausich’s model of “care and coercion” by stating that many functionaries saw the BSA as a kind of service provider or, above all, as a source of emotional counseling. Concluding that the differing criteria for judging the artistic quality and political efficacy of the movement made any final assessment difficult, the report notes that many functionaries did not view the BSA within its social dialectic but had a more narrow understanding of the movement, ranging from “Dienstleistungseinrichtungen für ‘die Arbeiter’

⁶¹⁹ Jarausich, “Care and Coercion. The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” 47-69.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

bis hin zu ihrem Verständnis vor allem als Möglichkeiten einer Seelsorge.”⁶²² While some recognized the care the movement provided in placating the population, others saw the publication of anthologies as superfluous. Expressing the position of the central FDGB in Berlin in 1969, chairman of the Cultural Department, Harald Bühl, stated in a letter to the director of the local FDGB office in Neuruppin: “Es ist unseres Erachtens nicht sinnvoll, wenn sich die Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter das Ziel stellen, Anthologien zu veröffentlichen, zumal es inzwischen sehr viele Zirkel gibt.”⁶²³ Not wishing to encourage the publication of further anthologies, Bühl passed responsibility down to the district level. Since the quality of many circle publications was poor and the lack of demand did not justify their sale in bookstores, he encouraged circles to combine their efforts and publish at the district level:

Das beginnt mit dem Problem des Vertriebs solcher Anthologien, die in der Regel verschenkt werden, weil sie keinen echten Bedarf decken, also für den Buchhandel nicht in Frage kommen. Das ist begründet in der Tatsache, dass die Potenzen eines Zirkels oft nicht ausreichen, allein eine Anthologie mit wertvollen und wirksamen Texten zu füllen. Deshalb schlagen wir immer wieder vor, dass solche Veröffentlichungen von mehreren Zirkeln, z.B. auf der Ebene des Bezirkes, gestaltet und vertrieben werden.⁶²⁴

Yet also at the district level BSA leaders occasionally recognized the lack of demand for and poor quality of circle anthologies. In a 1966 letter to editors at the *Tribüne* publishing house, the leader of the ZSA “Bertolt Brecht” in Karl-Marx-Stadt suggested publishing only the best circle

⁶²² Probleme bei der weiteren Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter nach dem X. Parteitag der SED. ZfK 641.

⁶²³ Letter from FDGB Cultural Department Chairman Dr. Harald Bühl to Gerhard Thiessenhusen. 27.1.1969. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/17148.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

anthologies at one or two publishers as a means to increase their quality: “Die bisherige Anthologien-Literatur der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter, die mir zu einem großen Teil bekannt ist, trifft längst nicht immer die Bedürfnisse unserer Leser und entbehrt oft der einfachsten Ansprüchen an die Qualität.”⁶²⁵ In fact the number of publications at the local and district level was so high that central authorities also tried to dampen local initiatives. ZAG party secretary Leo Sladczyk prefaced his evaluation of the FDGB anthology *Bitterfelder Ernte*, a collection of BSA works from the district of Halle published on occasion of the 10th anniversary of the First Bitterfeld Conference and the 10th Arbeiterfestspiele, with the question of whether the large number of “überflüssigen Anthologien schreibender Arbeiter” deserved yet another copy.⁶²⁶ In the same year the *Handbuch für schreibende Arbeiter* asked directly “Warum so viele Anthologien?” and referred to “eine[r] gewisse[n] Anthologieschwemme” in an attempt to quell circles’ ambitions to publish anthologies that “nachweislich kaum gelesen [werden].”⁶²⁷ The successor to the handbook, *Vom Handwerk des Schreibens*, also stated that even before 1960 there existed “eine Fülle von Anthologien.”⁶²⁸

III. The Literary Yield

⁶²⁵ Letter from Olaf Badstübner den 20. August 1966. An den Tribüne-Verlag Lektorat. SAPMO-BArch DY/78/3534/1.

⁶²⁶ Gutachten von Koll. Sladczyk. “Bitterfelder Ernte” – Eine Anthologie der schreibender Arbeiter des Bezirkes Halle. SAPMO-BArch DY/78/3486.

⁶²⁷ *Handbuch für schreibende Arbeiter*, eds. Urula Steinhaußen, Dieter Faulseit, Jürgen Bonk (Berlin: Tribüne, 1969), 87.

⁶²⁸ *Vom Handwerk des Schreibens* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1976), 297.

The number of published ZSA anthologies can only be estimated. Functionaries who attempted to gain an overview of BSA publications in the mid-1960s admitted the impossibility of collecting all titles: No central agency had been responsible for recording BSA publications nor had many anthologies been properly registered. A report from 1966 provided details on early efforts to gain an overview of them. In preparation for the upcoming Seventh Party Congress, the Ministry of Culture's Department of Clubs and Cultural Centers (*Abteilung Klub- und Kulturhäuser*) had assigned a collective of literary scholars at the Martin Luther University the task of analyzing the development of the BSA based on its publications. The collective's report expressed consternation upon discovering that, contrary to their expectations, neither the ZAG nor the Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit had collected such works. Faced with this unexpected challenge, the report admitted: "Die bibliographische Feststellung der genannten Veröffentlichungen war wesentlich schwieriger, als anfangs angenommen worden war."⁶²⁹ A main difficulty the collective faced in collecting BSA works was that not all printers or publishers had followed the legal norms in registering their works with the German National Library (*Deutsche Bücherei*):

Es zeigt sich nämlich, dass ein nicht geringer Teil dieser Publikationen in den Verzeichnissen der "Deutschen Bücherei" nicht erfasst ist – ein Beweis dafür, dass der gesetzlich geregelten Ablieferungspflicht keineswegs von allen Druckereibetrieben und Herausgeberinstitutionen nachgekommen wird. Deswegen war auch die Beschaffung der in der folgenden Analyse untersuchten Arbeiten durchaus nicht einfach.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Die Entwicklung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter im Spiegel ihrer kollektiven Publikationen aus den Jahren 1959–1966. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/27303.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

Such difficulties were not unusual and, similar to the problems of gaining an overview of active circles, resulted from a lack of cooperation and coordination between central and local agencies. The report referred to similar challenges the Institute for Research on Folk Art (*Institute für Volkskunstforschung*) had also faced in trying to compile a bibliography. In an attempt to gather more complete information the collective had requested district cultural centers and individual circle leaders to supply them with BSA works published independently in their respective districts. Yet only seven of the fifteen district centers responded (Dresden, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Cottbus, Rostock, Halle, Leipzig, and Gera). The report therefore made the assumption that the functionaries who did not respond did not know what works had been published in their districts and acknowledged that those centers which did comply had themselves only a small portion of the published works available. The numbers, therefore, could only be estimated. Based upon the 179 available titles, the report placed the total number of publications between 250 and 300:

Es ist also anzunehmen, dass die übrigen Bezirkskabinette [...] nicht richtig wissen, was seit 1959 von den schreibenden Arbeitern ihres Bezirkes an selbständigen Veröffentlichungen vorgelegt wurde. Im Prinzip gilt das freilich auch für die Bezirkskabinette, die antworteten. Auch sie besitzen nur einen Bruchteil der in ihrem Bezirk herausgekommenen Arbeiten.⁶³¹

Faced with these difficulties the report noted the urgency of compiling a bibliography of all available BSA publications and stated that the leader of the collective had already begun preparations on such a work. Although the result of these preparations is unknown, in 1975 the

⁶³¹ Ibid.

Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit published a three-volume *Bibliographie für schreibende Arbeiter*, edited by Monika Fischer.⁶³²

As implied by this 1966 report and confirmed by the 1975 bibliography, local and district authorities were in fact responsible for publishing the overwhelming majority of ZSA anthologies. This fact testifies to the local efforts and individual agency – rather than the top-down dictates of central decrees – which formed the living core of BSA activities. Of the 286 anthologies listed in the bibliography, central publishing houses (e.g., Aufbau, Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Tribüne, Neues Leben) were responsible for only 32 titles, the National Peoples' Army (NVA) published 8, while 25 anthologies are listed with no publisher or bibliographic information. The over 200 remaining works were self-published by local or district FDGB chapters and state cultural organizations (e.g., *Kreiskulturkabinett*, *Kreiskulturhaus*, *FDGB-Kreisvorstand*, *Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit*, *Abteilung Kultur beim Rat des Kreises*). The sparse information provided in an early anthology from the district of Gera exemplifies the cooperative efforts between numerous local agencies involved in its publication:

Arbeiter, Genossenschaftsbauern greifen zur Feder. Eine Anthologie aus dem Bezirk Gera. Im Auftrag des Bezirkskulturzentrum, herausgegeben von: Bezirksleitung Deutscher Kulturbund, Bezirksvorstand FDGB, Bezirkshaus für Volkskunst und Bezirksbibliothek (Gera), 1961.

Aside from this 1975 bibliography no comprehensive source exists on BSA publications. Despite dissuading tones of functionaries who tried to discourage the publication of anthologies, later estimates indicate the number of published works continued to grow steadily. At a colloquium held on occasion of the BSA's 25th anniversary in the mid-1980s functionaries

⁶³² *Bibliographie für schreibende Arbeiter. Teile 1-3*, ed. Monika Fischer (Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR, 1975).

claimed a total of 650 ZSA anthologies and some 350 monographs by individual writing workers.⁶³³ In the mid-1990s Bernhardt offered a revised number of BSA monographs: “nach grober Übersicht sind von schreibenden Arbeitern etwa 250 Romane, Erzählungen, Kinderbücher usw. erschienen.”⁶³⁴ Unknown is whether these estimates include works of DSV members associated with the movement or titles from a Tribüne Verlag series dedicated to publishing monographs of writing workers since the early 1980s titled “Angebot.”⁶³⁵ Although inexact, these numbers nonetheless provide an indication of the overall degree of publishing activity and the relative support for the BSA activities from central agencies compared to local and regional instances. While central agencies were keen to showcase local talents when fitting for representative state functions, they often remained unaware of activities occurring at the county and districts levels. (For a bibliography of 239 circle anthology titles collected in the course of this research project, see Appendix A.)

Yet these estimated numbers of anthologies and monographs provide only one barometer of circle activity; they offer no indication of works of writing workers published in the local or regional press and media. For an active circle these numbers could easily reach into the hundreds.⁶³⁶ Further, the published works represent only the public face of the movement. An actual publication was typically the final result of countless circle discussions and the compromises struck between individual and state interests on appropriate language and content. Not subject to the demands of a free-market economy, the publication process typically

⁶³³ Protokoll des Kolloquium “25 Jahre Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit der DDR” 18.–19.10 1985. p. 15. ZfK 647.

⁶³⁴ Bernhardt, “‘Greif zur Feder, Kumpel!’ Die Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter,” 26.

⁶³⁵ See notes in Tribüne files: 7. Dez. 1982. DY/78/8322.

⁶³⁶ See for example the ZSA “Maxim Gorki,” chapter 8.II.

occurred through systems of personal patronage and informal networks involved in everything from gaining institutional approval to acquiring the allocation of paper for printing. Nor were all texts intended for publication. Much that was written was not published. Many amateur writers wrote for the “desk drawer” (“für die Schublade geschrieben”), never intending to present their works to a larger public.

11. “Unorganized” Amateur Writers Outside the State Fold

Despite extensive efforts to bring all amateur writers into the state fold and control cultural developments according to a plan, most writers remained “unorganized” and did not participate in state events. Spaces for creative activities outside of established structures were plentiful, although difficult – if not impossible – to document. In 2007 Kleßmann recognized that the spectrum of BSA activities was much broader and more diverse than often assumed both in West Germany and by many functionaries in the GDR.⁶³⁷ From the BSA’s beginnings internal statements indicated functionaries were aware that the majority of amateur writers in the GDR did not participate in state-sponsored circles. At the 1962 meeting of the ZAG officials noted that the BSA “um ein vielfaches umfangreicher als die Zirkelarbeit [sei].”⁶³⁸ And in 1977 Leichsenring recognized that the movement had failed to achieve its goal of integrating all amateur writers into state structures. His report referred to the broad definition of the BSA as including all non-professional writers in the GDR and concluded that since only a small portion

⁶³⁷ Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im “Arbeiterstaat” DDR*, 441.

⁶³⁸ Berlin, den 15. Januar 1962. Aktennotizüber die Sitzung der ZAG “schreibender Arbeiter” am 13./14.1.62 in Leipzig. SAPMO-BArch DY/34/562.

of all amateur writers participated regularly in organized circles, the movement existed largely beyond the controlling reach of state agencies:

Die Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter in diesem weit gefassten Sinne entzieht sich weitgehend einer einheitlichen zentralen Lenkung. [...] Nur ein kleiner Teil der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter ist relativ beständig in Zirkeln schreibender Arbeiter organisiert und verhältnismäßig unmittelbar über die anleitenden Organe der Bewegung (Zentralhaus, Bezirks- und Kreiskabinette und deren Arbeitsgemeinschaften) zu lenken.⁶³⁹

Because many amateur writers did not participate in state-sponsored events, functionaries could only estimate their numbers. Comparing writing workers to other folk arts genres, a 1981 ZfK analysis explained that amateur authors typically worked on their texts in the privacy of the homes and attended circle meetings only for support and suggestions, creating a unique situation: “Aus dieser Spezifik erwächst ein relativ hoher Anteil Schreibender, die keinem Zirkel angehören.”⁶⁴⁰ In an attempt to project the possible numbers of “unorganized” writers, the report utilized statistics from the J. R. Becher Literature Institute, where only about 40 percent of correspondence course participants belonged to circles:

⁶³⁹ Leichsenring. Versuch, in Form von Thesen Platz und Rolle der Bewegung schreibenden Arbeiter im kulturellen Leben der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft und in der Gesamtheit des künstlerischen Volksschaffens der DDR zu bestimmen. 27. Februar 1977. p. 3. ZfK 651.

⁶⁴⁰ Analyse des Fachgebietes Schreibende Arbeiter. Leipzig, den 18. Mai 1981. p. 5. ZfK 641.

Die Relationen sind allerdings nur zu schätzen. Einen gewissen Anhaltspunkt bietet die Immatrikulation der Fernstudenten am Institut für Literatur. Seit Jahren beträgt dort der Anteil der Zirkelmitglieder etwa 40%.⁶⁴¹

The conclusion thus acknowledged that less than half of the state's targeted population had been reached, with functionaries remaining admittedly ignorant of the real numbers.

By the 1980s not only was the East German state economically bankrupt, but for many of the younger generation official cultural life also had lost its currency. This growing lack of interest in state-sponsored events went hand in hand with a flowering of underground cultural life. Thomas Kupfer has noted that by the late 1970s a new generation of writers in East Germany had established a very heterogeneous literary scene which paid no heed to the party's political agenda and, since members did not wish to be integrated into any institutional structures, was "faktisch nicht präsent [...] in der literarischen Öffentlichkeit der DDR."⁶⁴² A mid-1980s confidential ZfK report commented on the considerable loss of interest among youth in organized events in the district of Karl-Marx-Stadt:

So ist ein erheblicher Rückgang des Interesses Jugendlicher an den genannten Veranstaltungen [Werkstätten, Leistungsvergleiche, vielgestaltige Möglichkeiten für Lesungen...] und am literarischen Wettbewerb zu verzeichnen.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² *Zwischen Staatsmacht und Selbstverwirklichung*, 85.

⁶⁴³ Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 29. ZfK 639.

Uske recognizes the failure of the BSA to create a new socialist literature and expresses more directly the lack of interest among ambitious young writers to participate in state activities at the beginning of the 1980s:

Anfang der 80-er zeigte sich für die SED, dass die Bewegung der schreibenden Arbeiter in der genannten Weise mehr schlecht als recht funktionierte. Die neue Nationalliteratur der DDR war nicht entstanden. Und neu aufstrebende Schreibtalente scherten sich einen Dreck um irgendwelche Strukturen, die Kulturpolitiker mühsam aufgebaut hatten. Sie machten einfach ihr Ding.⁶⁴⁴

Commenting on this situation in the district of Leipzig in the early 1980s, the 1985 ZfK report credited the fact that the vast majority of amateur writers did not participate in organized circles to the plentiful opportunities offered by various local institutions:

Durch das Institut für Literatur, die Universität, durch andere Kunsthochschulen und künstlerische Einrichtungen, sowie durch die Konzentration von Verlagen ist insbesondere um das Literaturzentrum (Zentrum im besten Sinne des Wortes) herum ein beachtliches Angebot von den verschiedensten Veranstaltungen und Förderungen für Schreibende entstanden. Dem ist zu schulden, dass die übergroße Zahl der Schreibenden sich nicht in Zirkeln organisieren.⁶⁴⁵

Referring to the problem of amateur writers working outside of state structures, the report stated that especially in densely populated urban areas the number of “nichtorganisierten Schreibenden” had increased considerably in recent years. In tandem with this noted lack of

⁶⁴⁴ Uske, “Der Autor – der bessere Arbeiter,” 26.

⁶⁴⁵ Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. 31.8.85. p. 32. ZfK 639.

interest in officially sponsored activities the report commented on the high number of artistic programs organized by young people which had gone unregistered by state organs. The exact degree, therefore, remained unknown:

Es gibt jedoch in zunehmendem Masse Programme von jungen Leuten – Liedermachern, Musikanten aller Art, Pantomimen, Amateurschauspielern u.a., die nach eigenen Vorstellungen und oft mit eigenen Texten Programme entwickeln. [...] Diese Tendenz ist von den Trägern und Organisatoren der Volkskunst überhaupt noch nicht reflektiert worden. Die Zahl dieser Programme der kleinen Form ist schwer zu schätzen, aber sie dürfte mit 300 nicht zu gering angegeben sein.⁶⁴⁶

The editor of *ich schreibe*, Ursula Dauderstädt, confirmed this analysis in a personal interview. According to her, functionaries were aware of the fact that the number of writers who did not belong to any state-sponsored circle was much larger than those who did. Real literary talents, she said, were not interested in participating in organized circles: “[D]ie wirklichen literarischen Begabungen haben nicht in Zirkeln geschrieben [sondern] für sich geschrieben.”⁶⁴⁷ Despite the state security’s increased efforts in the early 1980s to incorporate young writers into the state fold through the creation district literature centers (*Literaturzentren*),⁶⁴⁸ many talented young writers remained distant from all forms of state-sponsored events, preferring private and semi-private spheres of their own creation. As Kupfer indicates, the well-known Prenzlauer-Berg scene in Berlin was but the best-known example of gatherings of youth eager to explore new

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with Ursula Dauderstädt and Manfred Jendryschik. 27 June 2011.

⁶⁴⁸ Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, 111 f.; see also Vorschläge für Maßnahmen zur Arbeit mit jungen schreibenden und anderen am Schreiben interessierten Bürgern. Berlin, den 29. 9. 1981. SAPMO-BArch DY/30/22247.

forms of creative expression. By the late 1980s, encouraged by the reforms introduced in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev and increasingly disaffected by the unwillingness and inability of the party's sclerotic gerontocracy to introduce meaningful reforms at home, ever-increasing numbers of the general population found the courage to express themselves in public and record their thoughts and experiences in writing. As stated in a 1989 report on writing workers in the district of Erfurt: "Man hat den Eindruck, gegenwärtig schreibt die Hälfte der DDR-Bevölkerung."⁶⁴⁹

12. Future Research on the BSA

This study on the Movement of Writing Workers has demonstrated the differing visions of the role of literature in a socialist society; the BSA provided a contested field for the reception of both KPD and SPD cultural traditions in East Germany. As the cornerstone of the Bitterfeld Path, the movement provides a paradigmatic view of the discrepancies between the ideals motivating cultural policies in the GDR and their lived realities by revealing how party directives emanating within highly centralized power structures were counterbalanced by a decentralization of regional and local organs and actors whose cooperative efforts served to strike compromises between state and individual interests.

With few exceptions to date the BSA has remained neglected in the field of German Studies, which can be understood as a more general symptom of still polarized views of East German literature. Future studies interested in overcoming these dichotomies (writers as either "state scribes" or defenders of autonomous realms of creativity) would benefit from analyzing

⁶⁴⁹ Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft. Schreibende Arbeiter-Erfurt. Rechenschaftsbericht für das Jahr 1989. 05.12.89. ZfK 778.

not only the literary works produced in the movement but circle activities embedded within their socio-historical field; snap-shots of historical moments could reveal the mechanisms of power and compromise which characterized the authoritarian state and contributed to social stability. A diachronic study of the BSA based upon close-up analyses would display political and social developments, from the initial visions and early abandonment of the socialist cultural revolution, to the movement's contribution to a unique East German culture, to the final loss of state legitimacy for a younger generation of East German citizens.

The most pressing interests of future research should focus on collecting the oral testimonies of an older generation of BSA participants who will soon no longer be among us – the voices neglected and marginalized by history. The holdings at the Archive of Writing Workers in Berlin-Weissensee, which has struggled on a shoe-string budget since its founding in the early 1990s, enjoys virtually no scholarly attention, with the exceptions of Dr. Maria Brosig at the University of Potsdam and Ph.D. candidate Anna Sokoll at the Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf. The materials held in this archive provide an untapped wealth for future research on East Germany, from the fields of literary and cultural studies to sociology and history:

Das Archiv umfasst Romane, Erzählbände, Gedichtbände, Anthologien, Sekundärliteratur, Fachbücher und Zeitschriften zum Thema Literatur und Schreiben (z.B. Die Zeitschriften "Ich schreibe", "Neue Deutsche Literatur"), vor allem aber Unikate von unveröffentlichten Lyrik- und Prosamanuskripten, Zirkeltagebüchern, aufschlussreiche Sammlungen der Literaturzirkel aus Großbetrieben wie bspw. VEB

Carl Zeiß Jena oder Schiffselektronik Rostock, Korrespondenzen und viele andere Dokumente.⁶⁵⁰

As a mass movement purportedly granting voice to the workers and contributing to a Marxist historiography “from below,” research informed by theories of memory studies would show how the writings of the BSA exceeded the limits of what was considered officially acceptable autobiographical and historical discourse and provide a demarcation of the contours of an East German collective memory. Preliminary results – not included in this present study – dispel the notion that the SED successfully imposed a silence over the past by censoring and controlling all forms of historical discourse. Texts held in this archive provide case studies of the contrasting ideals inherent in the movement at the interface of the otherwise distinct domains of collective memory and historiography. For example socially engaged circle work of the ZSA VEB Starkstrom-Anlagenbau/Schiffselektronik in Rostock, under the leadership for nearly 30 years of the self-taught writer and economist Hans Schulmeister, portrays the “der neue Mensch” and the memory transfer of war suffering as a central means of establishing state identity and legitimacy; and prolific writer Johanna Bliemel of the ZSA Postamt Schwerin, who wrote as a means of personal therapy, produced published and unpublished works that fill in “white spots” in GDR historiography concerning Kristallnacht, the war’s end from the perspective of a “resettler” from Pomerania, and encounters with the Stasi.

Other works held in the archive include unpublished memoirs, for example the 158-page autobiography of ZSA Kreiskulturhaus Treptow member Hans-Joachim Grimm, titled simply “Woran ich mich noch erinnern kann (Autobiographie: 1932–1961),” in which he recalls his abusive mother, his encounters with American troops on the Elbe, and his experiences as a

⁶⁵⁰ Rundbrief. Wir sind wieder da! *SchreibART* e.V. (www.schreibartev.de)

translator in Moscow for Politburo member Heinrich Rau;⁶⁵¹ and a collection of autobiographical essays and diary entries by Susanne Felke, an expellee from the Czech Republic (“Nun will ich von unserer Aussiedlung erzählen.”)⁶⁵² As representatives of the first generation of East Germans, these members were bound as a cohort by their shared memories of the historical experiences which shape personality and form group identity. As such, their writings offer potential case studies for understanding the “Regelwerk” or “Psycho-Logik” (e.g., pride and shame, guilt and suffering) which forms the “grammar” of individual and collective memory.⁶⁵³ A closer examination of such works would provide a measure of the possible permeation of the “floating gap” or “grey zone” between communicative and cultural memory in East Germany and, thereby, the actual contours of an East German collective memory. Future research in this field may prove valuable in understanding the social cohesion which granted stability to the East German state and, with a new generation of “Hineingeborenen,” its ultimate dissolution. The BSA also provides a paradigmatic view of this “blockiertes Generationswechsel” in the GDR and its contribution to the state’s loss of legitimacy.⁶⁵⁴ In the 1980s the movement offered a limited voice for youth to express dissatisfactions. It provided not only venues for publishing the works of young authors such as Steffen Mensching,⁶⁵⁵ but

⁶⁵¹ ASA 93/210; 93/211.

⁶⁵² Folder Susanne Felke. ASA.

⁶⁵³ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: Beck, 2006), 62 ff.

⁶⁵⁴ Konrad H. Jarausch, *Die unverhoffte Einheit. 1989–1990* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 72.

⁶⁵⁵ Steffen Mensching, “Lied für meine Freunde,” *ich schreibe* 1 (1986): 27; Steffen Mensching and Hans-Eckardt Wenzel performed the cabaret “Karls Enkel” in East Berlin in the 1980s and

also a first stage for “Baggerfahrer” and cult rock-star Gerhard “Gundi” Gundermann, whose performance with a group of young workers in a literary and musical program at the 20th Arbeiterfestspiele in 1984 exemplifies the compromises between state and individual interests.⁶⁵⁶

As called for by Simone Barck, a future history of East German literature should account for the “bottom-up” efforts of the general population in contributing to East German culture and their intersections with state interests and instances.⁶⁵⁷ Not only were state agencies and functionaries acutely aware of the importance of satisfying the interests of the general population but, as Fulbrook has noted, individual actors striving to meet both personal and party interests blurred the lines between individual and state.⁶⁵⁸ An examination of the literary journal for youth “Temperamente. Blätter für junge Literatur,” for example, would reveal that avant-garde literary experiments best known from the Prenzlauer Berg scene were not limited to underground samizdat publications. Especially within the field of culture established state structures did allow varying degrees of self-determination, with individuals continually probing the limits of accepted public discourse. As former cultural historian at the Humboldt University Horst Groshopp has recognized, with an estimated 100,000 people employed in some 4,580 cultural institutions in 1988:

have since remained artistically active. See David Robb, *Zwei Clowns im Lande des verlorenen Lachens. Das Liedertheater Wenzel & Mensching* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998).

⁶⁵⁶ “Danach hab ich so ne Sehnsuch... Gespräch mit dem Liedermacher und Baggerfahrer Gerhard Gundermann,” *Blatt•Form. Magazin für Kultur und Freizeit* 4 (1990): 48-52.

⁶⁵⁷ Barck, “Die Chiffre ‘Bitterfeld’. Eine kulturhistorische Annäherung im Dreierschritt,” 141.

⁶⁵⁸ See page seven of this study.

Der Kulturbereich [gestattete] wie kein anderer in der DDR freie Entfaltung persönlicher Lebenspläne. [...] Nirgendwo sonst waren die (auch politischen) Anstellungsvoraussetzungen so ungenau definiert.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁹ Horst Groschopp, "Zwischen Klub- und Kulturwissenschaft. Aus- und Fortbildung für Kulturberufe in der DDR," *Aus- und Fortbildung für kulturelle Praxisfelder* (Hagen: Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V., 1995), 164.

Appendix A

Bibliographic Autopsy of ZSA Anthologies

This bibliography of anthologies of writing workers is based upon material examined during this research project and is compiled from material held in the Archive of Writing Workers, Berlin-Weissensee (*Archiv schreibender ArbeiterInnen*), the library of the German Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin-Lichterfelde, and the State Library, Berlin (*Staatsbibliothek*).

Aller Liebe Unruh. Werkstattbuch des Literaturzirkels Prenzlauer Berg. Hrsg. Kreiskulturhaus

“Erich Franz.” Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, 1970.

Alltag. Anthologie der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Maschinenbau Burg, des VEB

ZRAW Gommern, der Stadt Möckern. Burg: Abteilung des Rates des Kreises Burg und Sekretariat des FDGB-Kreisvorstandes, 1974.

Alltägliche Helden. Alltägliche Träume. Porträts verdienter Persönlichkeiten des Kreises

Sebnitz und lyrische Versuche. Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Kombinat Fortschritt Landmaschinen: Neustadt in Sachsen, 1976.

Alltägliches, nicht alltäglich. Anthologie des Zirkels Schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB

Kabelwerk Oberspree “Wilhelm Pieck”, 1987.

An der steilen, breiten Straße. Überreicht zu Ehren des 30. Jahrestages der DDR vom Zirkel

schreibender Arbeiter und dem Zirkel des bildnerischen Volkskunstschaffens des BKK Bitterfeld am “Klubhaus Aktivist,” Zschornowitz [1979?].

Anders ist der neue Tag. Eine Anthologie schreibender Arbeiter. Redaktion: Werner Bräunig.

Leipzig: Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit im Zusammenarbeit mit dem Institut für Literatur “J. R. Becher,” 1962.

Annäherungen an ein Thema. Zentralvorstand der Gesellschaft für DSF, Zentralhaus für

Kulturarbeit der DDR, 1988.

Annäherungen. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels Schreibender des Stahl- und Walzwerkes

Brandenburg. Hrsg. Stahl- und Walzwerkes Brandenburg.

Anthologie 84. Lyrik/Prosa Schreibender Werktätiger des Bezirkes Schwerin. Hrsg.

Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Schwerin, Bezirksvorstand des FDGB Schwerin, 1984.

Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter. VEB Chemische Werke Buna, 1964.

Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Studenten an der Technischen Hochschule "Otto von

Guericke" in Magdeburg. Aus Anlass der X. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten

herausgegeben als eine Art Rechenschaftslegung über drei Jahre gemeinsames

Schaffens, 1973.

Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Werktätiger. Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit Güstrow, 1974.

Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Schreibende Arbeiter aus dem Bezirk Potsdam erzählen von

unserem Leben. Band 1. Hrsg. Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Bezirk Potsdam

Rat des Bezirks Potsdam, Deutscher Schriftstellerverband, Bezirk Potsdam [1960?].

Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Schreibende Arbeiter aus dem Bezirk Potsdam erzählen von

unserem Leben. Band 2. Potsdam: Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft Schreibende Arbeiter,

Bezirkshaus für Volkskunst [1961?].

Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Schreibende Arbeiter aus dem Bezirk Potsdam erzählen von

unserem Leben. Band 3. Hrsg. Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft Schreibende Arbeiter

Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit [1962?].

Arbeiter sehen die V. deutsche Kunstausstellung 1962. Erarbeitet vom Zirkel schreibender

Arbeiter und dem Zirkel für bildnerisches Volksschaffen des VEB Braunkohlenwerk

"Erich Weinert" Deuben in Zusammenhang mit dem Bez.-Kab. für Kulturarbeit, Halle,

1963.

Arbeiter und Bauern greifen zur Feder. Eine Anthologie aus dem Bezirk Gera. Im Auftrag des Bezirkskulturzentrums. Hrsg. Bezirksleitung Deutscher Kulturbund Bezirksvorstand FDGB, Bezirkshaus für Volkskunst und Bezirksbibliothek, 1961.

Aus dem Volke geboren. Zweite Anthologie des Zirkels Schreibender Volkspolizisten. Potsdam: BDVP, 1973.

Aus dem Volke geboren. Vierte Anthologie des Zirkels Schreibender Volkspolizisten. Potsdam: BDVP, 1979.

Aus heissem Herzen. Eine Sammlung von Gedichten und Erzählungen schreibender Arbeiter. Hochschule der Deutschen Gewerkschaften "Fritz Heckert," 1962.

Ausguck Nr. 1. Zirkel schreibender Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter des Kombines Seeverkehr und Hafenwirtschaft. Hrsg. Kreisvorstand IG Transport und Nachrichtenwesen Seeverkehr und Hafenwirtschaft, Zirkel "Schreibende Seeleute," 1980.

Ausguck Nr. 2. Hrsg. Rostock Zirkel "Schreibende Seeleute" des VEB Kombinat Seeverkehr und Hafenwirtschaft-Deutfracht/Seereederei, 1982.

Auschwitzer Tagebuch. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Schüler Bad Freienwalde. Hrsg. Rat des Kreises Bad Freienwalde, Abteilung Kultur. Verantwortlich: Hildegard und Siegfried Schumacher.

Auswahl 67. Porträt des Zirkels schreibender Volkspolizisten des Bezirkes Dresden. Hrsg. Bezirkskonsultationsstelle für Kulturarbeit Dresden in Verbindung mit dem Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Dresden, der Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter Dresden und dem FDGB-Bezirksvorstand, [1967?].

Banner Magazin. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter [1967?].

Begegnungen. Anthologie des Zirkels "Schreibende Werktätige" des Kreises Strausberg. Hrsg. Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit im Auftrag des Rates des Kreises Strausberg, 1985.

Begegnungen am Stechlin. Vom Bau des 1. Atomkraftwerkes unserer Republik. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter und Grafikzirkel des VEB Kombinat Kernenergetik Berlin. Betriebsteil Atomkraftwerk Rheinsberg. Potsdam: FDGB-Bezirksvorstand, 1967.

Begegnungen im dritten Jahrzehnt. 2. Anthologie der Zentralen Arbeitsgemeinschaft "Schreibende Soldaten" der Politorgane im Ministerium für Nationale Verteidigung. Hrsg. Politorgan beim Stellvertreter des Ministers und Chef der Rückwärtigen Dienste der NVA.

Beiderseits vom Stralsund. Insel im Morgenwind. Band 2. Gemeinschaftsarbeit der Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter Saßnitz – Bergen – Stralsund, des Fotoklubs Binz und des Fotozirkels der Volkswerft sowie der Volkskunstschaftenden der Musik aus den Kreisen Stralsund und Rügen anlässlich der 12. Arbeiterfestspiele der DDR 1970 im Bezirk Rostock, 1970.

Berge versetzen. Literarisch-musikalisches Programm der Schreibenden Arbeiter der Wismut. Karl-Marx-Stadt: Gebietskabinett für Kulturarbeit, 1982.

Berlin Alexanderplatz und anderswo... Lyrik und Prosa des Zirkels Schreibender Arbeiter am Kreiskulturhaus "Erich Weinert."

Berlstedter Geschichten. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter und Genossenschaftsbauern Berlstedt. Hrsg. Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter und Genossenschaftsbauern Berlstedt, 1980.

Bernburger Salz. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter "Heinrich Heine." Bernburg, 1975.

Bilanz. Anthologie des Zirkels "Schreibende Jugendliche." Stadtbezirksleitung Leipzig-Mitte des Kulturbundes der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Herausgegeben aus Anlaß des IX. Parteitages der SED, 1976.

Bitterfelder Erkundungen II. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Chemiekombinat Bitterfeld, 1986.

Bitterfelder Ernte. Eine Anthologie schreibender Arbeiter des Bezirkes Halle 1959–1967. Hrsg. Bezirksvorstand des FDGB Halle und vom Rat des Bezirkes Halle. Berlin: Tribüne, 1968.

Blätter aus dem Baumbachhaus. Arbeiten des Zirkels Schreibender Werktätiger. Meiningen: Staatliches Museen, 1985.

Buch unserer Tage. Beiträge zur Betriebsgeschichte des VEB Braukohlenwerk "Erich Weinert" Deuben 1956–1968. Gemeinschaftsarbeit der Kommission für Betriebsgeschichte und des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter. Hrsg. Betriebsparteiorganisation. Berlin: Tribüne, 1970.

Bunte Blätter 2. Texte aus der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der "Schreibenden Pioniere." Berlin: Pionierpalast "Ernst Thälmann," 1981.

Burger. Ansichten. Dialoge. Begegnungen. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Maschinenbau, Burg. FDGB-Kreisvorstand, Burg, 1976.

Dabei. Aus der Arbeit des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Uhren- und Maschinenkombinat Ruhla, 1973.

...damit ein guter Mensch gedeih. Texte schreibender Arbeiter des Bezirkes Halle. Hrsg. Bezirksvorstand Halle des FDGB Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit, Halle, 1984.

...darum lebe ich gern. Gedichte und Geschichten vom Zirkel schreibender Schüler beim Haus der Pioniere Zittau, Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kulturbund der DDR, Kries Zittau, 1986.

dass kein Feuer fällt vom Himmel... Texte schreibender Werktätiger des Bezirkes Halle.
Bezirksvorstand des FDGB Halle, Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit, 1982.

...denn unsere Schiffe tragen den Frieden hinaus. Anthologie gewidmet dem 40. Jahrestag des VEB Warnowwerft Warnemünde 1986 von den Zirkeln Schreibende Arbeiter und Grafik/Druckgrafik des Kulturhauses "Kurt Barthel," 1986.

Dessauer Porträts. Hrsg. Rat der Stadt, Abt. Kultur, 1988.

Deubner Blätter. Arbeitsmaterialien des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter BKW "Erich Weinert"
Deuben, Kreis Hohenmölsen. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1961.

Deubner Blätter. Band II. Mittel und Möglichkeiten in der kulturellen Massenarbeit. Ed. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter BKW Erich Weinert, Deuben, Kreis Hohenmölsen. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1964.

Deubner Blätter. Band III. Berlin: Tribüne, 1965.

Donnerstag in meiner Landschaft. Prosa und Lyrik. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Studenten und Mitarbeiter an der Technischen Universität Karl-Marx-Stadt. Hrsg. TU Karl-Marx-Stadt, Abteilung Kultur, 1986.

Du begegnest Dir. Zu Ehren des 25. Jahrestages der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Eine Auswahl von Gedichten des Zirkels "Schota Rusthaweli" schreibender Werktätiger vom Stahl- und Walzwerk "Wilhelm Florin" Hennigsdorf, 1975.

Durch die Fenster hat der Tag gelacht. Werkproben aus der Arbeit Jenaer Volkskunstkollektive im VEB Carl Zeiss, Jena. Kulturhaus Volkshaus VEB Carl Zeiss Jena im Selbstverlag, 1974.

Entdeckungen. Eine Anthologie mit Werken schreibender Arbeiter. Hrsg. Jürgen Bonk und Hans Thomas. Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR, 1968.

Erlebt – Durchdacht – Geschrieben. Neue Arbeiten der Mitglieder des Literaturzirkels im Kulturhaus “Ernst Thälmann” der IG Wismut Aue. Kreisvorstand der IG Wismut Aue, Abteilung APK. Hrsg. Wolfgang Schaarschmidt, 1962.

Erlebt – Erdacht – Gestaltet. Poesie und Prosa heute. 2. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Schwermaschinenbau “Georgi Dimitroff” Magdeburg-Buckau. Magdeburg-Buckau: BGL und Klubhaus im VEB Schwermaschinenbau “Georgi Dimitroff,” 1977.

Erlebt, Gehört, Geschrieben. Kreisarbeitsgemeinschaft der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Berlin-Treptow, 1965.

Erste Prüfung. Anthologie der Zirkel “Schreibender Arbeiter” Neuruppin/Pritzwalk. Neuruppin: FDGB-Kreisvorstand, 1964.

Erste Schritte. Schüler schreiben für Schüler. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Pioniere der Karl-Liebknecht-Oberschule Teuchern. Kulturhaus Deuben des BKK “Erich Weinert,” [1977?].

Die ersten Früchte. Erzählungen, Skizzen und Gedichte aus dem Rudolstädter Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter. Hrsg. Deutschen Kulturbund und vom Rat des Kreises Rudolstadt anlässlich der Woche des Buches, 1960.

Es schwimmt der Harz im fernen Nebeldunst... Der Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger

Molmerswende stellt sich vor. Hrsg. Dorfklub Molmerswende, 1981.

Es treibt ein Ton... Anthologie schreibender Pädagogen des Bezirks Erfurt. Hrsg.

Bezirksvorstand der Gewerkschaft Unterricht und Erziehung, 1983.

Euch zgedacht! Erste Ergebnisse des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Thüringisches

Kunstfaserwerk "Wilhelm Pieck" Rudolstadt-Schwarze. 13. November 1960.

Die Fahne des alten Kowalkow. Anthologie der schreibenden Schüler des Kreises Bad

Freienwalde. Bad Freienwalde: Rat des Kreises, Abteilung Kultur, 1978.

Ferien im Schwarzatal. Zirkel lesender und schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Berlin-Chemie,

1982.

Ferne und Nähe. Neue kurze Prosa des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Optima, Erfurt.

Band 2. Erfurt: Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung des VEB Robotron Optima

Büromaschinewerk, 1979.

Feuer gefangen. Anthologie des Zirkels Schreibende Lehrer im Klub der Berliner Pädagogen

"F. A. W. Diesterweg." Berlin: Haus des Lehrers, 1974.

Fortsetzung folgt. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter im KWG. Hrsg. Klubhaus

"Erich Weinert" des VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree "Wilhelm Pieck," 1988.

Freier Jugend Blaue Fahnen. Eine Textauswahl aus Hans-Marchwiza-Wettbewerben der

schreibenden Arbeiter des Bezirkes Potsdam. Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit, Potsdam.

Freitag ist Zirkel. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Reichsbahnausbesserungswerkes "Helmut

Scholz" Meiningen. 2. Zwischenbericht aus Anlaß des zwanzigjährigen

Arbeitsjubiläums, 1980.

Freundesgrüsse. Zum 50. Jahrestag der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution. 4.

thematischen Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des FDGB Neustrelitz –
Brigade der Deutsch-Sowjetischen Freundschaft. Neustrelitz: FDGB-Kreisvorstand,
1967.

Freundschaft! Дружба! Eine Anthologie des Zirkels der schreibenden Pioniere und FDJler

“Friedrich Wolf” Bad Frankenhausen. Hrsg. Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit, Artern.
Graphiken: Arbeitsgemeinschaft “Malen und Zeichnen,” 1976.

Freundschaftsblätter. Hrsg. Klubhaus der Werktätigen VEB Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,”
1977.

Für euch geschrieben... Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Chemische
Werke Buna, 1960.

Für Fest- und Fei ergestaltung. Arbeiten schreibender Arbeiter zum Vortrag. Leipzig:
Zentralhaus-Publikation, 1980.

Für Leuna unterwegs. Geschichte um das Dederon. Die Autoren schufen dieses Werk im
Auftrag des Bezirksvorstandes des FDGB Halle. Sie arbeiteten eng mit dem
Kreisvorstand der IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik Leuna zusammen. Leuna, 1974.

Ganz in den Tag gefügt... Lyrik und Prosa des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter am
Kreiskulturhaus “Erich Weinert.” Berlin-Pankow, 1979.

Geborgenheit atmen wo ich geh... Gedichte, Lieder, Chansons. Programm des Zirkels
schreibender Arbeiter zu den 17. Arbeiterfestspielen im Bezirk Suhl. Hrsg. VEB
Weimar-Werke, Weimar, Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, 1978.

Geburtstagsblätter. Hrsg. Klubhaus und Kreisvorstand IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik VEB
Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht,” 1974.

Gedanken im Licht. Ein Stück unseres Lebens. Lyrik, Prosa und Fotografie. Bischofswerda:
Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskulturhaus "Bertolt Brecht," 1981.

*Gedanken Unterwegs. Anthologie schreibender Arbeiter und Genossenschaftsbauern aus dem
Bezirk Neubrandenburg.* Neubrandenburg: Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit und
Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter, 1964.

Gedanken zur Freundschaft. Eine Sammlung von Erlebnissen. Zusammengestellt vom Zirkel
schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Narva, Berliner Glühlampenwerk unter Leitung von
Manfred Hinrich und der Klubleitung des VEB NARVA/BGW.

Geliebte Republik. Aus dem Schaffen unserer schreibenden Arbeiter. Herausgegeben aus Anlaß
der 2. Arbeiterfestspiele 1960 der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Hrsg.
Bezirksvorstand des FDGB Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1960.

Gemeinsamkeit – erlebt und empfunden. Anthologie mit Beiträgen schreibender Werktätiger
zum Thema "Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft" und "Erlebte Sowjetunion." Berlin:
Zentralvorstand der Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft, 1983.

Geschichte in Geschichten. Vom Werden eines Kombinats. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im
VEB Kombinat Fortschritt, Neustadt in Sachsen, 1979.

Geschichten aus zwanzig Jahren. Anthologie des Zirkels lesender und schreibender Arbeiter im
VEB Berlin-Chemie, 1980.

Gesund und sauber, das ist wichtig! Von Schülern – für Schüler. Geschrieben und gestaltet vom
Zirkel "Schreibender Schüler" des Klubhauses des VEB BKK "Erich Weinert" Deuben
und der Karl-Liebkecht-Oberschule Teuchern. Kreiskomitee für Gesundheitserziehung
des Rates des Kreises Hohenmölsen, [1977?].

Glück des befreiten Menschen. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter am
Kreiskulturhaus Pößneck, [1976?].

Glück wächst aus unseren Händen. Anthologie der Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter "Louis
Fürnberg," Bildnerisches Volksschaffen und Gestaltende Fotografie des VEB Robotron-
Büromaschinenwerk Sömmerda. Hrsg. Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung des VEB
Robotron-Büromaschinenwerk Sömmerda. Erfurt, 1978.

Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Halle: VEB (K) Druck, 1960.

Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Aus den Diskussionsreden auf der Bezirkskonferenz schreibender
Arbeiter des Deutschen Kulturbundes am 9. April 1960 in der Maxhütte
Unterwellenborn. Berlin: Deutscher Kulturbund, 1960.

Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Gedichte von Laienautoren. Leipzig: Zentralhaus für Volkskunst,
1959.

Güstrower Notizen. Zirkel schreibende Werktätige des Kreiskabinetts für Kulturarbeit Güstrow,
1979.

Guten Tag, Herr Böttger. Lyrik und Prosa. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im gewerkschaftlichen
Klubhaus "Carl von Ossietzky" des VEB Staatliche Porzellanmanufaktur, Meißen,
1982.

*Ein gutes Wort zur guten Tat. Texte zum Wettbewerb schreibender Arbeiter aus dem Bezirk
Leipzig.* Hrsg. FDGB-Bezirksvorstand Leipzig und Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit,
Leipzig, 1976.

Ein gutes Wort zur guten Tat. 25 Jahre Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter. Heft 1, 2.
Bundesvorstand des FDGB Abteilung Kultur, 1984.

Der Händedruck-Symbol und Schwur für's neue Leben. Anthologie schreibender Schüler des Bezirks Frankfurt (Oder) zum 25. Jahrestag der SED. Hrsg. Rat des Bezirkes Frankfurt (Oder), Abteilung Volksbildung, 1971.

Eine handvolle Worte. Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger, Bützow, [1979?].

“Heute haben die Steine gesungen.” Anthologie schreibender Schüler des Kreises Bad Freienwalde. Hrsg. Rat des Kreises Bad Freienwalde, Abteilung Kultur.

Horizonte will ich bauen. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter des Grafischen Großbetriebs Völkerfreundschaft, Dresden, 1980.

Ich fand eine freundliche Tür. Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Studenten und Mitarbeiter an der Technischen Universität Karl-Marx-Stadt. Hrsg. TU Karl-Marx-Stadt, Abteilung Kultur, 1978.

Ich hab's gewagt... Aus dem Schaffen des Zirkels “Schreibende Arbeiter”, unter Mitwirkung des Plastik-, Graphik- und Fotozirkels im Deutschen Kulturbund Rathenow. Hrsg. Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Kreisvorstand Rathenow, 1961.

Ich lerne, Freude zu fühlen. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Zirkel Malen und Zeichnen. VEB Kombinat Halbleiterwerk. Hrsg. Frankfurt-Information im Auftrage des Rates der Stadt Frankfurt (Oder), 1975.

Ich sage ja zu diesem Leben. Texte schreibender Arbeiter und Schüler. VEB Petrolchemisches Kombinat Schwedt, 1988.

Ich schreibe... Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Gemeinschaftsarbeit Berlin-Treptow: Tribüne, Halle/S.: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1960.

Ich schreibe... Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Band II. Gemeinschaftsarbeit Berlin-Treptow: Tribüne, Halle/S.: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1961.

Ich schreibe... Arbeiter greifen zur Feder. Band III. Gemeinschaftsarbeit Berlin-Treptow:

Tribüne, Halle/S.: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1962.

Ich wuchs mit meiner Republik. Lyrik und Prosa schreibender Arbeiter des Kreises Bad

Langensalza. VEB Druckerei "Thomas Müntzer." Bad Langensalza: Kreiskabinett für
Kulturarbeit, 1979.

Ich wünsch mir einen Sommertag. Gedichte aus dem Zirkel der schreibenden Werktätigen des

VEB Schuhkombinat "Paul Schäfer" Erfurt als Geburtstagstrauß zum Zwanzigsten der
Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1969.

Ihr erster Wagen. Eine Auswahl von Geschichten und Gedichten aus unserem Leben. Potsdam:

Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft Schreibender Werktätiger und das Bezirkskabinett für
Kulturarbeit, 1966.

Im Schritt unserer Zeit. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Kombinat Schwarze Pumpe. Freier

Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Kreisvorstand Schwarze Pumpe, 1961.

Im Sternbild des Krans. Lyrik und Prosa aus dem Bezirk Halle. Halle (S): Bezirkskabinett für

Kulturarbeit, 1974.

Immer uns selbst überholend. Gedichte und Lieder. Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

"Hervorragendes Volkskunstkollektiv" VEB Weimar-Kombinat-Landmaschinen Betrieb
I: Weimar-Werk. Programm zu den 12. Arbeiterfestspielen in Rostock. Hrsg. Ständige
Kommission für Kultur bei der Stadtverordnetenversammlung Weimar und Ständige
Kommission für Kultur beim Kreistag Weimar-Land, [1970?].

In eigener Sache. Eine Anthologie des Zirkels schreibender Arbeiter "Hans Marchwitza" im

VEB Robotron-Elektronik Zella-Mehlis in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Zirkel für Malerei
und Grafik des Kreiskabinetts für Kulturarbeit Suhl/Land, 1978.

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Appendix B Compiled List of Circles of Writing Workers

This list of 314 circles of amateur writers in the GDR is compiled from two sources: an analysis conducted by the *Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter* (ZAG) and the *Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit* (ZfK) in 1984/1985 and a list compiled by archivists at the Archiv schreibender ArbeiterInnen, Weissensee-Berlin from 1996 (indicated with an asterisks [*]).⁶⁶⁰

The 1984/1985 ZAG/ZfK list is based upon responses to a questionnaire sent to district offices and is incomplete on two accounts: The district of Frankfurt/Oder did not respond to the central survey, and the analysis, now held in the archives of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, is missing page 37 with information on circles in the district of Neubrandenburg.

The circles are listed according to district. The names reflect the information given in these two sources. When provided, the name of the circle is followed by the circle's sponsor.

BERLIN (24)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren Berlin *

Arbeitskreis für Laienautoren im Berliner Haus der Volkskunst *

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Literatur des Zentralhauses der Jungen Pioniere "German Titow" *

Literaturzirkel des Kreiskulturhauses "Erich Franz" in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg *

Zirkel im Literaturzentrum Berlin, Haus der jungen Talente *

Zirkel lesender und schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Chemie *

VEB Berlin Chemie

Zirkel schreibender Lehrer

Haus des Lehrers, Alexanderplatz

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Schloßinsel Köpenick

⁶⁶⁰ Vertrauliches Arbeitsmaterial. Zu wesentlichen Tendenzen bei der kulturpolitischen Führung der Bewegung schreibender Arbeiter der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. Aussagen auf der Basis einer Analyse der Zentralen Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter, geführt durch das Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR. Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 639; Zirkel Schreibender (nach bisherigen Recherchen der Archivadokument; ASA, 1996).

Schloßinsel Köpenick

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Funkwerk Köpenick Berlin *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Berlin-Pankow

Kreiskulturhaus "Erich Weinert"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Berlin Prenzlauer Berg *

Kreiskulturhaus "Prater"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter KWO "Wilhelm Pieck"

Klubhaus "Erich Weinert"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Kreiskulturhaus Lichtenberg *

Kreiskulturhaus Lichtenberg

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Druckerei Neues Deutschland *

Druckerei Neues Deutschland

Zirkel Betriebsschule Rudi Arndt *

Bildungsstätte der Druckerei Neues Deutschland, Berlin

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, "Maxim Gorki"

Zentrales Haus der DSF

Zirkel schreibender und lesender Arbeiter an der Hochschule für Ökonomie

Hochschule für Ökonomie

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Kreiskulturkabinett Berlin Marzahn

Kreiskulturkabinett Berlin Marzahn

Zirkel schreibender Jugendlicher

Kreiskulturkabinett Marzahn

Lyrikklub Pankow *

Kreiskulturhaus "Erich Weinert"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Kreiskulturhaus "Erich Weinert" Berlin-Pankow *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree "Wilhelm Pieck" Berlin

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, VEB Kombinat Tiefbau Berlin *

VEB Kombinat Tiefbau Berlin

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB NARVA "Rosa Luxemburg" Berliner

Glühlampenwerk

COTTBUS (11)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Kulturzentrums Boxberg (Sitz: Weißwasser)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des BKW Cottbus (Sitz Lübbenau)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kulturkabinett Cottbus *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Stadt Cottbus *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Chemiefaserwerke Guben

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Gaskombinates Schwarze Pumpe, Hoyerswerde *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Großbaustelle KW Jänschwalde (Sitz Cottbus)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Feretor Tuchfabriken

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Rates der Stadt Liebenwerde

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Rates des Kreises Senftenberg

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Braukohlenkombinates Welzow

DRESDEN (33)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren, Dresden *

Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Volkspolizisten *

Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei

Gruppe "Binkel"

Stadtbezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Dresden-Süd *

Literaturzirkel des Deutschen Schriftsteller-Verbandes, Dresden *

Zentraler Literaturzirkel des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes, Dresden *

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger beim Kreiskulturhaus Bautzen *

Kreiskulturhaus Bautzen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskulturhaus Bischofswerde *

Kreiskulturhaus "Bertold Brecht"

Zirkelschreibender Arbeiter beim Grafischen Großbetrieb "Völkerfreundschaft" *

Grafischen Großbetrieb "Völkerfreundschaft"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Transformatoren- und Röntgenwerk (Röhrenwerk *)

"Hermann Matern"

VEB Transformatoren- und Röntgenwerk "Hermann Matern"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB Meßelektronik "Otto Schön" *

VEB Meßelektronik "Otto Schön"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiterveteranen *

Klub der Volkssolidarität

Zirkel schreibender Volkspolizisten Dresden *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Freital *

Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kulturbund, Görlitz *

Kulturbund der DDR

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskulturhaus Kamenz *

Kreiskulturhaus Kamenz

Zirkel sorbischer schreibender Arbeiter, Rosenthal *

Haus für sorbische Volkskunst

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Staatl. Porzellanmanufaktur

VEB Staatliche Porzellanmanufaktur

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Kunstseidenwerk Pirna

VEB Sächsisches Kunstseidenwerk "Siegfried Räder"

Zirkel schreibender sorbischer Arbeiter im Kunstseidenwerk Pirna *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Rohrkombinat Riesa

Klubhaus der Gewerkschaften "Juliot Curie," VEB Rohrkombinat

Zirkel schreibender Schüler beim Rohrkombinat Riese (Klubhaus der Gewerkschaften

"Juliot Curie," VEB Rohrkombinat) *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Fortschritt-Kombinat, Dresden-Neustadt *

VEB Kombinat "Fortschritt" Landmaschinen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter "Konstatin Fedin" (Zittau *)

VEB Robur-Werke

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Kulturbund Zittau *

Kulturbund der DDR, Kreisleitung Zittau

Zirkel schreibender Schüler, Haus der Pioniere, Zittau *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler Pionierpalast, Dresden *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB Uhrenwerk, Glashütte *

VEB Uhrenwerk

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Löbau *

Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit Löbau

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger Luckenwalde *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Dresden-Land *

Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit Dresden-Land

Zirkel schreibender Offiziere

Nationale Volksarmee, Offiziershochschule "Franz Mehring"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Gewerkschaftlichen Klubhaus "Carl von Ossietzky" des VEB

Staatliche Porzellanmanufaktur, Meißen *

ERFURT (22)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren, Weimar *

AG schreibender Studenten an der PH Erfurt

Literarischer Arbeitskreis "L. Fünberg" beim Kulturbund Mühlhausen

Literarischer Arbeitskreis des Kulturbund Mühlhausen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Chemieanlagenbau

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Laborchemie Apolda

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Automobilwerkes Eisenach *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Petkus Wutha-Kreis Eisenach

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB UMK Ruhla – Kreis Eisenach

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Kraftfahrzeugwerkes Gotha

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Druckerie, "Th. Müntzer" Bad Langensalza *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB ZentronikSömmerde

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit Sondershausen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim VEB Optima Erfurt

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Umformtechnik Erfurt

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Weimar-Werkes, Weimar *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter und Genossenschaftsbauern bei der Kreisbibliothek Weimar-Land *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter und Bauern des Gemeindeverbandes Berlstedt, Kreis

Weimar-Land

Zirkel schreibender und lesender Arbeiter des VEB Kombinat Kali Sondershausen

Zirkel AG schreibender Soldaten am Haus der Armee Erfurt

Zirkel "Schreibende Arbeiter" des VEB Kombinat Umformtechnik "Herbert Warnke" *

Zirkel schreibende Arbeiter des VEB Funkwerk Erfurt *

GERA (12)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren Gera *

Zirkel WEMA Union Gera

VEB WEMA Union

Zirkel KWH Hermsdorf

VEB Keramische Werke Hermsdorf

Zirkel Carl Zeiss, Jena

VEB Carl Zeiss Jena

Zirkel Möbelkombinat Zeulenroda

VEB Möbelkombinat Zeutrie, Stammbetrieb

Zirkel Greika Greiz

VEB Greika Greiz

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Papierfabrik Greiz *

Zirkel Carl Zeiss Saalfeld

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB PWS Schmölln

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Eisfeld, VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, Betrieb Eisfeld *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Bergarbeiter-Klubhaus Gera (Wismut) *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Kreiskulturhaus Pößneck *

HALLE (50)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Junger Autoren, Halle *

Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Soldaten, Halle *

Schreibende Arbeiter am Zentralen Klubhaus der Gewerkschaften "Hermann Duncker" *

Schreibende Arbeiter am Jugendklubhaus "Philipp Müller"

Klubhaus/FDJ

Schreibende Arbeiter am Klubhaus "Volkspark"

Schreibende Volkspolizisten der BdVP Halle *

Zirkel schreibender Pioniere, Bad Dürrenberg *

Zirkel schreibender Pioniere und FDJler "Friedrich Wolf" Bad Frankenhausen *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Kali- und Steinsalzwerk Bernburg

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Kulturhaus Bitterfeld

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter CKB Bitterfeld *

CKB Bitterfeld

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Buna *

VEB Chemische Werke Buna

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Maschinenfabrik und Eisengießerei Dessau *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter "W. Majakowski" Dessau

VEB Junkalor Dessau

Zentralzirkel schreibender Arbeiter in Dessau *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Abus Dessau *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler im VEB Maschinenfabrik und Eisengießerei Dessau *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Zementanlagenbau Dessau

VEB Zementanlagenbau Dessau

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter "Wassili Schukschin," Dessau

VEB ABUS, Dessau

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Deuben *

BKW (Kulturhaus) "Erich Weinert" Deuben

Zirkel junger Poeten, Eisleben *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Kulturhauses der Mansfelder Bergarbeiter, Eisleben *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Friedersdorf

Rat der Gemeinde Friedersdorf

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Puschkinhaus Halle

Klubhaus/DSF

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Halle-Neustadt

VEB Vorfertigung Halle-Neustadt

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Maschinenfabrik Halle *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Klubhaus der Walzwerker Hettstädt

Klubhaus der Walzwerkers VEB Walzwerk Hettstädt

Literaturzirkel der EOS Köthen *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler beim Kreiskulturhaus Köthen *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Leuna-Werke "Walter Ulbricht" *

VEB Leuna-Werke, Klubhaus

Zirkel schreibender Schüler der Außenstelle des Klubhauses des VEB Leuna-Werke

"Walter Ulbricht" *

Kreisarbeitsgemeinschaft Merseburg *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Klub der Werktätigen, Merseburg *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler beim Haus der Jungen Pioniere "Ernst Thälmann," Merseburg *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Kulturhaus "Wilhelm Pieck" Piesteritz

VEB Kombinat Agrochemie Piesteritz, Stammbetrieb VEB Stickstoffwerk

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Düngemittelkombinats VEB Stickstoffwerk Piesteritz *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Schwelerei Profen *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Rodleben-Roßlau

VEB Hydrierwerk Rodleben-Roßlau

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Roßlau *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Harz (Molmerswende)

Dorfklub Molmerswende

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger, Molmersewende *

Zirkel schreibender Studenten an der Agraringenieurschule Neugattersleben *

Zirkel schreibender Veteranen, Roßlau

Volkssolidarität

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Thomas-Münzer-Schachtes, Sangerhausen *

Zirkel schreibender Pioniere der Karl-Liebknecht-Oberschule, Teuchern *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter "Banner des Friedens" *

VEB Banner des Friedens, Weißenfels

Zirkel schreibender Veteranen, Wittenberg

Kreisvorstand Volkssolidarität

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Filmfabrik Wolfen

VEB Filmfabrik Wolfen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Wolfen Nord

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Hydrierwerk Zeitz *

VEB Hydrierwerk Zeitz

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Zschornewitz *

BKK Bitterfeld, Klubhaus "Aktivist" Zschornewitz

KARL-MARX-STADT (21)

Annaberg

KKH "Erzhammer" Annaberg

Aue

VEB Damastweberei Aue

Freiberg

Bergakademie Freiberg

Glauchau

VEB Dampfkesselbau Mesrane u. KL KB/DDR Glauchau

Stollberg

KH "Hans Marchwitza" Oelnitz/Erzgeb.

Hainichen

KKH Hainichen

Schwarzenberg

EOS "B. Brecht" Schwarzenberg

Marienberg

VEB VERO Olbernhau u. KL KB/DDR Obernhau

"Bertolt Brecht" Karl-Marx-Stadt

JKH "Fritz Heckert" Karl-Marx-Stadt

"WBK Karl-Marx-Stadt"

VEB Wohnungsbaukombinat W. Pieck Karl-Marx-Stadt

"Fritz Heckert"

VEB "Fritz Heckert" Karl-Marx-Stadt

Modul/Karl-Marx-Stadt

VEB Modul/Karl-Marx-Stadt

"TH-Karl-Marx-Stadt"

TH-Karl-Marx-Stadt

Zirkel Schreibender Studenten und Mitarbeiter an der Technischen Universität Karl-Marx-

Stadt *

Haus des Lehrers Karl-Marx-Stadt - Zirkel schreibender Pädagogen

FDGB Bezirksvorstand

Schreibende Volkspolizisten Karl-Marx-Stadt

BdVP Karl-Marx-Stadt

Stadtbezirkskabinett Mitte-Nord, Karl-Marx-Stadt

Rat d. Stadt

Plauen/St.

VEB Kombinat Musikwaren Plauen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter ESDA Thalheim *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Zschopau *

Zwickau/St.

Päd. Institut "Ernst Schneller" Zwickau

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Sachsenring, Zwickau *

LEIPZIG (27)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter am Kulturhaus der Eisenbahner Altenburg

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Delitzsch *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Döbeln des VEB DBM Döbeln

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im Kombinat Espenhain *

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren Leipzig *

Bezirkspoetenclub der FDJ, Leipzig *

Literarischer Zirkel, Leipzig *

Literaturzirkel des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes, Leipzig *

Literaturzirkel

Jugendklubhaus "W. Barth"

Stadtfördergruppe

Stadtkabinett f. KA

Zirkel schreibender Postler "Heinrich Heine"

Bezirksdirektion Deutsche Post

Zirkel Schreibende beim BSV

Blinden- u. Sehschwachenverband/Bezirksvorstand Leipzig

Zirkel für Manuskriptlesungen und Literaturdiskussionen "J. R. Becher"

Kabinett für Kulturarbeit

Zirkel schreibender Jugendlicher

Stadtbezirk Südost (Rat)

Zirkel schreibender und literaturinteressierter Pädagogen

Haus d. Lehrer/Gew. Unterricht u. Erziehung

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB GG Interdruck

Zirkel schreibender Eisenbahner

KH d. Eisenbahner "7. November"

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger

Haus der Volkskunst

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB VTA/KH "Heinrich Budde"

Zirkel schreibender Jugendlicher

JKH "Jörgen Schmidtchen"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB I.W. Rackwitz

VEB LK Rackwitz

Zirkel "Schreibende Jugendliche" der Stadtbezirksleitung Leipzig-Mitte des Kulturbundes der
DDR *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Leipzig-Land *

Zirkel schreibender Soldaten, Leipzig *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Leipziger Eisen- und Stahlwerke *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Oschatz

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Kreiskabinettes für Kulturarbeit Wurzen

MAGDEBURG (22)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Klubhaus der Eisenbahner Blankenburg (Krs. Wernigerode)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Staatlicher Forstwirtschaftsbetrieb Flechtingen (Kr. Haldensleben)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB Zuckerfabrik Genthin

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit Halberstadt

Literaturklub '74

VEB Getränkekombinat Magdeburg/Kulturhaus

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB Schwermaschinenbaubetrieb "Georgi Dimitroff" Magdeburg/Kulturhaus

Zirkel schreibender Studenten

Technische Hochschule "Otto von Guericke" Magdeburg

Fördergruppe "Schreibende"

Bezirkskabinett f. Kulturarbeit Magdeburg

Zirkel schreibender Studenten an der Technischen Hochschule "Otto von Guericke" in

Magdeburg *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Klubhaus Möckern (Kr. Burg)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kreiskulturhaus Oschersleben

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kreiskulturhaus Osterburg

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kulturbund der DDR-Kreisleitung Salzwedel

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB Traktorwerk Schönebeck

Zirkel schreibender Eisenbahnlehrlinge

VEB Zentrales Reichsbahnausbesserungswerk Stendal

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Institut für Lehrerbildung Staßfurt

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Fernsehgeräte, Staßfurt *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kreiskabinett f. Kulturarbeit Wanzleben

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

VEB Elektromotorenwerk Wernigerode

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter

Kulturhaus Zerbst (Klubhaus d. Werktätigen)

NEUBRANDENBURG (10)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Möbelwerke, Anklam *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler, Ferdinandshof *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Sirokko-Gerätewerk / HKB Neubrandenburg *

Jugendzirkel Neustrelitz *

Pionierzirkel Neustrelitz *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Elektro-Anlagebau / FDGB-Kreisvorstand Neustrelitz *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter GROPA Pasewalk *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler Pasewalk *

Zirkel schreibender Schüler, Teterow *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Gießerei Ueckermünde *

SUHL (13)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kaltwalzwerk Bad-Salungen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter v. VEB Carl-Zeiss-Jena Eisenfels

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Ilmenau (Ilmglass u. TH)

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Reichsbahnausbesserungswerkes "Helmut Scholz" Meiningen

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger beim Kreiskulturhaus "Artur Becker" Meiningen

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter WKS Schmalkalden

Zirkel schreibender Werktätiger am Haus der jungen Talente in Suhl

Arbeitskreis Mundartdichtung beim Kulturbund Suhl

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren, Suhl *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter im VEB Werkzeugkombinat Schmalkalden *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Kunstfaserwerkes "Wilhelm Pieck" in Schwarza *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Klubhauses der Werktätigen Tambach-Dietharz *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter "Hans Marchwitza" d. VEB Robotron Zella-Mehlis

FRANKFURT/ODER (2)

Zirkel schreibende Arbeiter des VEB Kombinat Halbleiterwerk Frankfurt/Oder *

Zirkel schreibender Werktätige des Kreises Strausberg *

POTSDAM (30)

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren, Potsdam *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Brandenburg/Havel *

Kreis Brandenburg/Stadt

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter VEB Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg *

Kreis Gransee

VEB Mikroelektronik "Bruno Baum," BGL

Kreis Jüterbog

Kulturbund der DDR, Kreiskulturleitung Jüterbog

Kreis Königs-Wusterhausen

Klubleitung

Zirkel "Schreibender Arbeiter" Kyritz *

Kreis Neuruppin

VEB Feuerlöschgerätewerk, BGL

Zirkel "Schreibender Arbeiter" Neuruppin *

Kreis Oranienburg / Henningsdorf *

"Schota Rustaweli" VEB Stahl- und Walzwerk "Wilhelm Florin," Klubleitung

Bezirksarbeitsgemeinschaft "Schreibender Arbeiter" Potsdam *

Bezirksförderklasse Schreibende Arbeiter, Potsdam *

Zirkel "Schreibende" beim Kulturhaus Hans Marchwitza Potsdam *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Potsdam *

Zirkel "Schreibender Arbeiter" Pritzwalk *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Rathenow *

Kreis Potsdam/Stadt

Staatl. Kulturhäuser, Kulturhaus "Hans Marchwitza"

Potsdam-Babelsberg

Staatl. Kulturhäuser, Kulturhaus "Herbert Ritter"

Gruppe "Leben-Liebe-Zukunft" am Kulturhaus "Herbert Ritter" Potsdam *

Volkspolizei

Bezirksbehörde der Volkspolizei der DDR, Polit. Abt.

Kreis Potsdam/Land

VEB Geräte- und Reglerwerke, Stammbetrieb "Wilhelm Pieck," Kulturabteilung

Kreis Rathenow

Chemiefaserwerk "Friedrich Engels" Klubleitung

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter, Rathenow *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter VEB Schwermaschinenbau "Heinrich Rau" Wildau, * Kreis

Wittsock

VEB Obertrikotagenbetrieb "Ernst Lück"

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter VEB Isolierwerk Zehdenick *

Kreis Zirkelossen

Rat der Stadt Zirkelossen

Zirkel "Junge Poeten" bei der Station Junger Techniker und Naturforscher des Kreises Zossen *

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Schreibender Pionier Georgi-Dimitroff-Oberschule Mahlow, Kreis Zossen *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit, Zossen *

ROSTOCK (20)

Kreiszirkel, Bergen (im Kreiskulturhaus) *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kernkraftwerk "Bruno Leuschner"

VEB Kombinat Kernkraftwerke "Bruno Leuschner" Greifswald

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Kreiskulturhaus Greifswald *

Arbeitsgemeinschaft junger Autoren, Rostock *

Literaturzirkel der Warnow-Werft in Rostock *

Schreibende Studenten, Rostock *

Zirkel der Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei, Rostock *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter VEB Fischkombinat, Rostock *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Schiffswerft Neptun

VEB Schiffswerft Neptun Rostock

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter VEB Schiffselektronik *

Zirkel schreibender Seeleute *

Kombinat Seeverkehr und Hafenwirtschaft

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter d. VEB Fischfang, Saßnitz *

VEB Fischfang Saßnitz

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der LTA Sievershagen

LTA Sievershagen

Kooperationsgemeinschaft schreibender Arbeiter Rügen-Stralsund *

Literaturklub junger Pioniere (Oberschule Tribseer Vorstadt Stralsund) *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter beim Stadtkabinett, Stralsund *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Volkswerft, Stralsund *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Warnow-Werft

VEB Warnow-Werft Warnemünde

Zirkel Schreibende Arbeiter des Kulturhauses "Kurt Barthel" des VEB Warnowwerft

Warnemünde *

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter d. Mathias-Thesen-Werft

VEB Mathias-Thesen-Werft Wismar

Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB Peene-Werft, Wolgast *

SCHWERIN (17)

Arbeitsensemble des Industriekomplexes Schwerin-Süd

Deutsche Post, Hauptpostamt Schwerin

Haus der Lehrer "Marianne Grunthal"

Volkssolidarität Schwerin

Kreisvorstand FDGB Bützow

Kreiskabinett f. Kulturarbeit Güstrow

Kreiskabinett Gadebusch

Kreiskulturhaus Hagenow

Kreiskulturhaus Perleberg

Kreiskulturhaus Perchim

VEB Klement-Gottwald-Werk Schwerin

VEB Plastverarbeitungswerk Schwerin

VEB Feinpapierwerke Neu Kaliß

VEB-Lederwarenwerke Schwerin/BGL

Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Schreibende Grenzsoldaten der Grenztruppen der DDR *

Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft schreibender Matrosen der Volksarmee *

Zentrale Arbeitsgemeinschaft "Schreibende Soldaten" der Politorgane im Ministerium für

Nationale Verteidigung *

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BArch-SAPMO (Bundesarchiv Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen)

DA 1 Volkskammer der DDR
 DC 20 Ministerrat der DDR
 DC 9 Presseamt beim Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates
 DE 1 Staatliche Plankommission
 DR 1 Ministerium für Kultur
 DR 2 Ministerium für Volksbildung
 DY 24 Zentralrat der FDJ
 DY 27 Kulturbund der DDR
 DY 30 Zentralkomitee der DDR
 DY 30-IV 2/2.026 Zentralkomitee der SED, Büro Alfred Kurella
 DY 30-IV 2/2.039 Zentralkomitee der SED, Büro Egon Krenz
 DY 30-IV 2/2.109 Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitee der SED
 DY 30-IV 2/904 Abteilung Wissenschaft des Zentralkomitee der SED
 DY 30-IV 2/906 Abteilung Kultur des Zentralkomitee der SED
 DY 32 Gesellschaft für Deutsch- Sowjetische Freundschaft
 DY 34 Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
 DY 78 Tribüne Verlag

SV (Deutsche Schriftsteller Verband, Akademie der Künste)

ZfK (Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, Akademie der Künste)

Interviews:

Rüdiger Bernhardt, November 2010, July 2011
 Ursula Dauderstädt, June 2011
 Maria Krieger, January 2011
 Manfred Jendryschik, June 2011
 Dietmar Sievers, February 2011
 Dr. Heidi Ritter, November 2010, April 2011
 Dr. Joachim Sailer, July 2011
 Konrad Pottoff, February 2011
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