

INTRODUCTION

The Surreal without Surrealism



The time will come, if it is not already come, when the surrealist enterprise will be studied and evaluated, in the history of literature, as an adventure of hope.

—Wallace Fowle, *Age of Surrealism*

Indubitably, Surrealism and the GDR are closely connected, and are more closely related to each other than one might think. When, for example, one listens to the recollections and reads the memoirs of those who lived in this country, apparently no other conclusion can be drawn. Life in the East German Communist state had a surrealist disposition, was associated with the grotesque, absurd and irrational. Admittedly, Surrealism did not exist in the GDR. Not only are the insights of Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Peter Bürger on the death of the historical avant-garde convincing and applicable to the GDR;¹ it is also significant that no German artist or writer who considered him- or herself a Surrealist prior to 1945 returned from exile to settle in the SBZ or the GDR. Most of the celebrities of German Surrealism during the Weimar Republic were forced to go into exile or did not return to Germany at all. Max Ernst, for example, remained living in the USA, and then in 1953 moved to his wife's old quarters in Paris; Hans Arp decided to live in Switzerland, and in 1949 chose the USA as his home country. Others who had lived through and survived Hitler's Germany had to face the harsh demands of National Socialist cultural politics that downgraded the avant-garde to the status of *Entartete Kunst*, or degenerate art, and sidelined and even terrorized its representatives. Yvan Goll (a.k.a. Iwan Lassang), the German- and French-speaking poet who was associated with Surrealism, returned from New York to Paris where he died in 1950.

In occupied France, André Breton, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon and other Surrealists had already started the process of loosening the grip of the group in the late 1920s.² They either lived in inner emigration or went into exile and found refuge in the USA, in Spain or in Mexico, where new post-war surrealist movements, linked to the original French movement, emerged. Generally speaking, if traces of surrealist writing and art can be detected in the GDR, this was not based on historical avant-garde movements as, for example, was the case with the Czech and Slovakian Surrealism that later developed into the post-war Surrealism or Nadrealism movement, and continued to impact on cultural politics in Czechoslovakia.³ In East German art and literature, Surrealism was a home-grown product, as it contained traces of the surrealistic antidote to the predominant grip of Socialist Realism.

Before continuing, Surrealism in fictional literature needs to be defined. Generally speaking, Surrealism is meant to be strange and shocking, and to push the envelope in such a way that it forces us out of our comfort zones – so much so that it has even been known to cause riots. While the idea of Surrealism is complex, surrealist literature does share common characteristics. While it has contrasting – indeed jarring – images or ideas, this technique is used to help readers make new connections and expand their understanding of reality. Surrealists borrow Freudian ideas of free association as a way to steer readers away from societal influence and open up the individual's mind. Furthermore, Surrealism uses images and metaphors to compel the reader to think more deeply and to reveal subconscious meaning. Instead of relying on plot, surrealist writers focus on the characters, discovery and imagery to force readers to dig into their unconscious and analyse what they find. Literary Surrealism also uses poetic styles to create dreamlike and fantastic 'stories' that often defy logic. One of these 'stories' relates to what has often been called the 'definition' of Surrealism given by the Uruguay-born French poet Le Comte de Lautréamont (nom de plume of Isidore Lucien Ducasse), in *Chants de Maldoror* (*The Songs of Maldoror*), published in 1868: 'As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table.'⁴ Rather than incorporate normal prosaic, poetic and dramatic structures such as linear plots and structured settings, Surrealism – decades after Lautréamont's introduction of his strange imagery – uses poetic techniques, like leaps in thinking (free association), abstract ideas and nonlinear timelines.⁵

Admittedly, Surrealism was primarily a French product that flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century. It involved membership, a pledge to its manifestos (based on, for example, Sigmund Freud's insight into the unconscious mind) and, most importantly, conformity with the charismatic – others say dictatorial – leadership of Breton.⁶ There is neither a need here to repeat the foundations of and procedures within the French

surrealist movements, nor to give an investigation into Breton's mindset, because in both cases there is a broad and fundamental stock of research, as, for example, the acclaimed *International Encyclopedia of Surrealism* (2019) has proven.⁷ When discussing Surrealism and the GDR, it is significant that the movement's credo, reiterated in a book on Surrealism by the GDR art historian Lothar Lang (which, of course, appeared only after German unification), became the greatest fear of the SED cultural functionaries. Lang asserts that surrealist art focuses on disrupting or even overturning logical systems of reference.⁸ This disturbing factor had already become evident for Marxists at the time when Breton, like many Surrealists in the 1930s, became a strident anti-Stalinist and instead flirted with Trotskyism. Surrealism's ideal was to forge together art and life – but given the hostility of Communism towards Surrealism, which led, in 1935, to the withdrawal of Breton's invitation to speak at the Writers' Congress in Paris, the latter was forced to locate the practice of his politics in creative endeavour: politics became embedded in the texture of the work. The foundation of the political in Surrealism was anarchism. In the 1935 publication *Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison* (In the Time That the Surrealists Were Right), the complete break with the Communist Party was announced. The Surrealists accused the Stalinists of threatening to undermine the freedom of expression. The French Communist Party, for their part, openly despised the Surrealists.⁹ In 1938 Breton met Leon Trotsky in Mexico, in the house of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Together they wrote the *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*, which asserts that while the social revolution will be able to change society, true art is revolutionary *im Geistigen* (in spirit). In light of the oppressive practices of both National Socialism and the Soviet Communist regime, they pleaded for the freedom, independence and liberation of art – the birth of the rich Socialist avant-garde to be found in Latin America culture.¹⁰ The organization that followed the *Manifesto*, however, was short lived and had no political effect at all, and the Stalinists did not respond to it.¹¹ Breton's expression of aversion to Stalinism in 1936–37 marked the conclusive end of the previous liaison between Surrealism and Communism.¹² Meanwhile, deliberations on the place of the avant-garde in Marxist aesthetics in the SBZ (as will be discussed in Chapter 1) intensified, and the difficult and tense relationship between Communism and Surrealism continued in the GDR. For this reason, this book's subtitle indicates the continuation of the conflict as an East German, not exclusively GDR-based, cultural issue.

Needless to say, in contrast to the cultural scenes in the SBZ and the GDR, in West Germany a smoother continuation of Surrealism was to be expected. In the early 2000s the journal *Herzattacke* set up the literary archive *Speichen*. There, extensive materials on post-1945 Surrealism in Germany are being

examined and evaluated. They document a dynamic process of transnational exchange and translation.¹³ Indeed, the most important joint production was the yearbook of poetry, also called *Speichen*, that appeared between 1968 and 1971. There, various writers promoted the so-called *Nachkriegssurrealismus* (post-war Surrealism); among them were the writers Richard Anders, Johannes Hübner, Joachim Uhlmann and Lothar Klünner, all of whom began their artistic careers immediately after the Second World War. In their work they juxtaposed traditional and contemporary trends within European Modernism. Before *Speichen*, the first magazines and journals were *Die Fähre* (The Ferry) and *Athena*, licensed by the Western Occupied Powers. It is significant that the resulting new poetry and translations also filtered through into the East and, in spite of the division of Germany after the 1948 *Währungsreform* (currency reform), began to influence fellow writers in the SBZ and the GDR. The optimism of artists and writers following the end of Nazi barbarism gave way to an understanding that the cultural landscape was becoming narrowed by the limitation and ignorance of the artistic avant-garde – in the West, by traditionalism and the increasing aesthetic restriction to the Realism of the American School. Hence, in both parts of post-war Germany, Realism seemed to be a red rag for artists.

The authors of the *Nachkriegssurrealismus* in the West oriented themselves primarily to French literature, and began, in the first post-war years, to translate the work of significant yet still completely unknown poets. Friendships and contacts existed within West Berlin and beyond the sector borders. For example, the bohemians, who had gathered around the poet Günter Bruno Fuchs in the district of Kreuzberg, had productive contacts with GDR writers such as Johannes Bobrowski, Erich Arendt and Manfred Bieler. Important for this mediation was Klaus Völker, who later became a world-renowned scholar of theatre studies and Brecht expert. The international framework also included poets and translators such as Paul Celan, Hans Henny Jahnn and Michael Hamburger. The transnational agenda remains impressive to this day.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that in the 1980s, a similar development occurred: at the same time as the dissident art and literature took root in the Prenzlauer Berg scene in the early 1980s in East Berlin, a Mecca of anarchist culture established itself in West Berlin, albeit with a different cultural and political background. Partly, those East Berlin artists and writers with indefinite entry permits who were able to cross the border freely nourished the countercultural outlook in West Berlin and were the main figures of the exchange: they cross-fertilized the East and West. This was a unique phenomenon. The literary critic Fritz J. Raddatz had already used the occupied term 'Exilliteratur' with reference to what he observed in the 1960s and what would become a major driver in German cultural history, both in the first and final decades of the GDR's existence.¹⁵

In spite of doubts about the revolutionary power of the post-war avant-garde, as formulated by Enzensberger in his essay 'Aporien der Avantgarde' (The Aporias of the Avant-Garde, 1962), the influence of the Surrealists and their impact on post-1945 West German culture has been often emphasized. As Mererid Davies has argued and demonstrated, the playful subversions of the Situationist International movement under Guy Debord, in the tradition of Dada and Surrealism, inspired the actions of Kommune I (the counter-political and cultural group in West Berlin that was linked to the German student movement) in the late 1960s, and were also partly associated with student rebellion in the FRG and West Berlin.¹⁶ At that same time, in the GDR, other, though less obvious, traces of the surreal could be detected in writing. For this reason it is incorrect to assume that in contrast to its neighbours on the east and west side of its borders, the GDR was isolated and bleak in cultural matters, and should be perceived only in shades of grey. On neither side of the Berlin Wall could the death of the avant-garde be proclaimed. On the contrary, in the East, for example, traces of the surreal became tools for those who were in the process of breaking the protective wall which had been erected symbolically long before the construction of the actual Berlin Wall itself. This cultural wall was intended to prevent Western-style Modernism entering the GDR during the 1950s Formalism Campaigns. Consequently, the literary and artistic world of the GDR should be viewed as a more colourful spectrum than has previously been the case.

Aims and Objectives

This book intends to demonstrate a growing awareness among East German writers and artists that Surrealism had the power to contradict and even to resist the predominance of the dogma of *Sozialistischer Realismus* (Socialist Realism) in GDR cultural politics. This counter-discourse to the *Leitdiskurs* (master discourse) of monosemia aimed at rewriting the master code.¹⁷ Thus, while there is no evidence of an 'official' surrealist movement in the GDR, Surrealism as an aesthetic entity was a concept embraced by writers and artists, with which they broadened our assessment of GDR culture. Further, scholars and connoisseurs of art promoted the significance of the absurd and grotesque, beginning with artists and writers who planted traces of artistic resistance in the minds of East German readers. Prominent among these were: Hans Mayer and Stephan Hermlin, in their *Ansichten über einige Bücher und Schriftsteller* (Views on Some Books and Writers, 1947); Erhard Frommhold's introduction to his *Kunst im Widerstand* (Art in Resistance, 1968); the publication of the 1975 monograph *Hieronymus Bosch* by Wilhelm Fraenger;¹⁸ and Karlheinz Barck's anthology *Surrealismus in Paris* (1985). Most of these

significant cultural interventions occurred before the many urban alternative literary and artistic scenes began openly to display a vibrant collection of different applications of post-war Surrealism in the second half of the 1980s, as a kind of cultural apotheosis of GDR existence. In these countercultures it becomes most obvious that – in the tradition of Surrealism – the borders between conventional genres are being dissolved and consequently rendered irrelevant.¹⁹ In other words, throughout the existence of the SBZ and the GDR there was a growing awareness of the significance of another culture, not so much of that on the other side of the Wall, but rather found as patches of the bizarre and irrational in its own literature and art.

The intention of this book is twofold. First and foremost, I focus on analysing the application of surrealist writing in the GDR²⁰, always with reference to the thoughts of other East German intellectuals and artists.²¹ Socialist Realism was the officially sanctioned theory and method of literary composition prevalent in the Soviet Union from 1932 to the mid-1980s. For that period of history this relatively vague term was the sole criterion for measuring literary works. Since Socialist Realism had become the state-endorsed artistic genre around 1950, writers, artists and scholars associated with (historical or neo-) avant-garde aesthetics were subsequently marginalized. Surrealism, on the other hand, is the twentieth-century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind by the irrational juxtaposition of images. These two cultural phenomena could not be further apart. Since there was no space to allow Surrealism to blossom in the GDR, it became the all-embracing term for cultural resistance and deviance; that is, an alternative to the government's rigid and inflexible cultural policies, which frequently, and in whatever disguise it appeared, resulted in censorship. This defiance not only indicated the creation of an artistic identity for the marginalized groups of the East German literary scene; the antidote was also a political statement. It confronted the status quo of GDR cultural politics and indicated – especially to the outside world – that the GDR offered more in cultural terms. In the 1970s and 1980s in particular there was an explosion of a literature that fed on the historical avant-garde, and my hypothesis is that Surrealism was both one of the utopian carriers in the GDR and also, as will be shown in the following chapters, in the decades prior to it. This book will focus on the recycling processes in a political and cultural context in which all traces of Surrealism should have been erased. It is the combination of old elements and new aspirations that allows us to talk about Surrealism in the GDR.

This study also has an additional driving force in proposing the hypothesis that, paradoxically, some of the surreal fictional accounts of strange events in the GDR should be defined as realistic representations. The constant oscillation between the real and the surreal was to become a characteristic of GDR

fiction. Indeed, in many texts the contours of what is fact and what is fiction are often deliberately blurred. This becomes apparent when, for example, two different, sometimes even contradictory, text types clash and a dialogue between them emerges – a carnivalesque presentation of reality is staged. Some writers fought the discourse of monosemia by dissolving into a state of nebulosity. Instead of supplying the required clear-cut definitions of social and political life, more challenging, multifaceted views were presented. For the functionaries of GDR cultural politics, these artefacts were unequivocal evidence of bourgeois indoctrination. The result is a surreal effect. On another, but similar, level is the application of official slogans in fictional literature, such as those used by GDR officials in trying to surpass the Federal Republic of Germany in ideology. During the Cold War, the GDR gradually isolated itself from the West, and its officials were ridiculed, not least because of the nonsense of some of their statements. Hence, paradoxically, the perception of everyday real life could turn into a surreal record. In some tongue-in-cheek slogans it is hard to decide whether the text is on the side of reality or the surreal. When platitudes such as ‘überholen, ohne einzuholen’ (overtaking without running out) or ‘Die Lehre von Marx ist allmächtig, weil sie wahr ist’ (Marx’s doctrine is almighty because it is true) become part of the narrative, the literary world tends towards satire and outright travesty. Finally, in hindsight, in the events of the countercultural scene in the East Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg, the surreal was at its peak when in the hotchpot of bohemian ambition, genuine supporters and mentors were joined by spies and traitors. This created a truly hybrid and grotesque world. The surreal prospered in the GDR.²²

Indeed, no post-war avant-garde movement established itself in East Germany; no manifestos were written, nor was the avant-garde considered an authorized cultural-political term featuring in official GDR cultural history. And, in that spirit of dogmatism, movements such as Surrealism and Dadaism were neglected or characterized negatively in the official *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch* (Cultural Political Dictionary), published by the SED in 1970.²³ But surrealist aesthetics and poetics were genuine homemade cultural products in the GDR, born out of frustration with existing cultural-political directives and practices, and intended to radically change the direction of the GDR through resisting the dogma of Socialist Realism, particularly during the Formalism Campaigns of the 1950s. After 1945, there was not only the urge to question any kind of dogmatism, there was also a challenge to the version of reality as presented by the SED. This implied a subtle and ironic alienation of the concepts of time and space. The doctrine of Socialist Realism was eventually denounced officially during the last Congress of Visual Artists in November 1988 under the slogan ‘Kunst im Sozialismus’ (Art in Socialism), but it had long before been ignored by

the majority of artists and writers who adopted Modernist techniques and topics in Marxist East Germany.²⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s, discussions began in (mainly West) Germany on the best way of assessing the historical avant-garde. These were initiated by Enzensberger's essay 'Aporien der Avantgarde', and subsequently reinforced by Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* (*Theory of the Avant-Garde*) (1974, English 1984).²⁵ For many fellow scholars in the West, these discussions were considered irrelevant and redundant at a time when progressive students were trying to revolutionize culture. Departure from the past was also an incentive for East German academia. In the GDR, the recycling of Modernism and the avant-garde became relevant in the 1980s, initiated, among others, by Karlheinz Barck and Dieter Schlenstedt.²⁶ The avant-garde was a phenomenon that linked several ideological camps, since the mutual enemy was National Socialism with its vilification of avant-garde movements in Modernism. The GDR was facing a dilemma: that of condemning Hitler's cultural policies while at the same time embracing the rejection of the historical avant-garde by the fanatics of Socialist Realism in the 1950s and 1960s.

Surreal Post-1945 Germany

But before hostile cultural politics forged the echoes of Surrealism into a weapon, the surreal had already been present in the country. At the end of the Second World War, huge swathes of Europe had been reduced to ruins after the Allied bombing missions and the progress of the forces of the Soviet Union across Eastern Europe. The images of what was left of major German cities such as Dresden, Berlin, Cologne and Chemnitz, the ghostlike street views and shattered architecture, resemble the iconographic images of apocalyptic devastation we have become familiar with in the work of Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró, among others. Photographs by the Irish war photographer Cecil F.S. Newman and the Russian Yevgeny Khaldei from ruined Berlin had a similar impact on the German public and the world's imagination after they were published.²⁷ In December 1948, Roberto Rossellini's film *Germania anno zero* (*Germany, Year Zero*) was released. He filmed on location in Berlin and intended to convey the reality in Germany three years after its near-total destruction at the end of the Second World War. The film contains dramatic images of a bombed-out Berlin.²⁸ The first paintings of the destroyed and surreal-like city of Dresden by Karl Hofer, Werner Heldt, Wilhelm Lachnit and Wilhelm Rudolph were exhibited during the *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (General German Exhibition) in Dresden in 1946, and combined realistic and surreal imagery.²⁹ The art historian Lang chooses his words carefully in his seminal

Malerei und Graphik in der DDR (Painting and Graphic Arts in the GDR) when he writes that Rudolph's representation of Dresden's destruction is 'nearly a landscape of Surrealism'.³⁰ When Lang wrote and published this statement in the early 1980s, the use of the word 'Surrealism' was controversial, and it may be for this reason that Lang modified it with the adverb 'nearly'. In 1965, the painter Ralf Winkler (better known as A.R. Penck) presented his representation of the devastation of his hometown, entitled *Umsturz* (Coup d'Etat), by applying celebrated primitive-style imagery, recalling cave art, and reflecting the harsh realities of the Second World War and, later, the Cold War. Here, the beautiful landscape is replaced by an aggressive battle between two ideologies against a red background, represented by two images of unrecognizable leaders. Winkler seems to support the official interpretation of what the Second World War was really about: not an attempt to liberate Germans but rather to substitute ideologies, as indicated by the confrontation of both totems in the painting.³¹

Another more subdued but similarly bizarre imagery made its way into GDR cultural history in the poetry of the early 1960s. The Dresden writer Heinz Czechowski had survived the bombings as a 10-year-old child, and wrote in the first line of his poem 'An der Elbe', in which the picturesque landscape of what was known as 'Elbflorenz' (Florence on the Elbe) had suddenly changed into a macabre and inhuman setting, that 'Sanft gehen wie Tiere die Berge neben dem Fluß' (softly like animals the mountains move next to the river).³² It has been reported that during the bombing of Dresden people left their destroyed houses and moved along the river – some burning, others jumping into the water.

And in the predominantly realistic narrative of his diary, the Romanist Victor Klemperer (1881–1960) noticed a surreal part of the city of Dresden after its destruction. On 22 February 1945 he remembers:

Wir gingen langsam, denn ich trug nun beide Taschen, und die Glieder schmerzten, das Ufer entlang bis über die Vogelwiese hinaus. ... Hier unten am Fluß, wo sich viele Menschen bewegten oder hingelagert hatten, staken im durchwühlten Boden massenhaft die leeren, eckigen Hülsen der Stabbrandbomben. Aus vielen Häusern der Straße oben schlugen immer noch Flammen. Bisweilen lagen, klein und im wesentlichen ein Kleiderbündel, Tote auf den Weg gestreut. Einem war der Schädel weggerissen, der Kopf war oben eine dunkelrote Schale. Einmal lag ein Arm da mit einer bleichen, nicht unschönen Hand, wie man ein Stück in Friseurschaufenstern aus Wachs geformt sieht.³³

We walked slowly, for I was now carrying both bags, and my limbs hurt, along the river-bank. ... Down here by the river, where many people were moving along or resting on the ground, masses of the empty, rectangular cases of the

stick incendiary bombs stuck out of the churned-up earth. Fires were still burning in many of the buildings on the road above. At times, small and no more than a bundle of clothes, the dead were scattered across our path. The skull of one had been torn away, the top of the head was a red bowl. Once an arm lay there with a pale, quite fine hand, like a model made of wax such as one sees in barber's shop windows.

The blend of the abominable destruction of this city and images of a surreal nature has been immortalized by Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (1969). The book combines science fiction with historical facts, notably Vonnegut's own experience as a prisoner of war during the Allied firebombing. The juxtaposition of the 135,000 killed, the unrealistic element and the grotesque highlights the absurdity of the novel, which was translated into German in 1970, and published for the first time in the GDR by Volk und Welt in 1972. This excerpt should illustrate the proximity to the surreal:

... Billy and five other American prisoners were riding in a coffin-shaped green wagon, which they had found abandoned complete with two horses, in a suburb of Dresden

Billy opened his eyes. A middle-aged man and wife were crooning to the horses. They were noticing what the Americans had not noticed – that the horses' mouths were bleeding, gashed by the bits, that the horses' hooves were broken, so that every step meant agony, that the horses were insane with thirst. The Americans had treated their form of transportation as though it were no more sensitive than a six-cylinder Chevrolet.

... When Billy saw the condition of his means of transportation, he burst into tears. He hadn't cried about anything else in the war.³⁴

On 13 February 1947 in the Western Zone, Wolfgang Borchert's radio play *Draussen vor der Tür* (*The Man Outside*) documented another war experience. It was broadcast for the first time on North West German Radio. The premiere of the play in the Hamburger Kammerspiele was on 21 November of that same year. A prose version was published later. The terrible mental state of the protagonist, Private Beckmann, when returning from the front as a Wehrmacht soldier to his hometown Hamburg, was characterized as a *gesamtdeutsches* (pan-German) phenomenon, not merely related to the West Germany of which the writer was a citizen. The play, later turned into a novel, is a recording of dream sequences, and in the reparative and expressionist narrative, surreal imagery becomes obvious when in the dream the grotesque clashes with reality, as when, for example, Beckmann reveals his nightmare to his former commanding officer:

Da steht ein Mann und spielt Xylophon. Er spielt einen rasenden Rhythmus. Und dabei schwitzt er, der Mann, denn er ist außergewöhnlich fett. Und er spielt auf einem Riesenxylophon. Und weil es so groß ist, muß er bei jedem Schlag vor dem Xylophon hin und her sausen. Und dabei schwitzt er, denn er ist tatsächlich sehr fett. Und er schwitzt gar keinen Schweiß, das ist das Sonderbare. Er schwitzt Blut, dampfendes, dunkles Blut. ... Es muß ein alter Schlachtenerprobter General sein, denn er hat beide Arme verloren. Ja, er spielt mit langen dünnen Prothesen, die wie Handgranatenstiele aussehen, hölzern und mit einem Metallring. Es muß ein ganz fremdartiger Musiker sein, der General, denn die Hölzer seines riesigen Xylophons sind gar nicht aus Holz. Nein, glauben Sie mir, Herr Oberst, glauben Sie mir, sie sind aus Knochen. Glauben Sie mir das, Herr Oberst, aus Knochen!³⁵

There's a man playing the xylophone. He plays incredibly fast. And he sweats, this man, because he's extraordinarily fat. And his xylophone's gigantic. And because it's so big he has to dash up and down with every stroke. And he sweats, because he's really very fat. But it's not sweat what he sweats, that's the odd thing. He sweats blood, steaming dark blood. ... He must be a real old campaigner, this general, for he lost both arms. Yes, he plays with long thin artificial arms that look like grenade throwers, wooden with metal rings. He must be a very strange sort of musician, this general, because the woods of his xylophone are not made of wood. No! Believe me, sir, believe me, they're made of bones. Believe me, sir, bones!

In the GDR, Borchert's stage play was turned into a TV play, directed by Fritz Bornemann, and broadcast on 20 November 1960. The novel was published in the same year by Insel Verlag in Leipzig. Its huge popularity was diminished in 1972 when the SED decided that Borchert's drama could only be classified as West German, and no longer as an expression of a pan-German phenomenon. In the eyes of the Communist ideologues the play was too pessimistic, too pacifist and not sufficiently anti-fascist.³⁶ Borchert's interpretation of Hitler did not fit well into their parameters.

East Germany's cultural market had opened to Surrealism and the historical avant-garde, in different ways, shortly after the Third Reich ceased to exist. After 1945 the entire German cultural scene experienced a *Nachholbedarf* – the need to catch up after twelve years of dictatorship and disconnection from Modernism and the avant-garde, a textual and visual art that had been labelled *entartet* by the National Socialist regime. In contrast to popular belief, particularly in the West during the high tides of the Cold War, those responsible for cultural matters in the first four years after 1945 were open-minded, thus allowing non-realistic and non-socialist art and literature in the SBZ. This meant that experimental innovations were acceptable and even promoted by the Western and Eastern Zones. In his study of cultural politics

in East Germany, Manfred Jäger refers to the first years in the SBZ as ‘Storm and Stress’ years, a cultural idyll, in which innovation and pluralism flourished; an application of Lenin’s thought, following the successful Bolshevik Revolution, that former bourgeois artists and writers needed time to adjust to the new aesthetic framework.³⁷ This attracted many artists sympathetic to Marxism. In this comparative cultural paradise for Marxists between 1945 and 1949, not only were new projects initiated, but books and journals on and by Surrealists also appeared in the Western zones. Before the *Währungsreform*, or currency reform in 1948, they were at everyone’s disposal and therefore also available in the East.³⁸

The German-speaking journals, which featured French Surrealism and other historical avant-garde movements and were available in the French Occupied Zone after 1945, were *Athena*, *Meta*, *profile*, *Das Lot* and *Lancelot, der Bote aus Frankreich*.³⁹ In the second issue of its second year of appearance, *Athena* featured André Breton’s article ‘Surrealismus und Marxismus’,⁴⁰ an essential read for experimental artists and writers living in the SBZ, and at the same time an affront to dogmatists. In the opening of his article Breton refers to himself in the third person, ‘Während er auf politischen und sozialen Gebiet den Marxismus anerkennt, lehnt er den ‘sozialistischen Realismus’ in der Kunst, der damals wie heute von vielen Marxisten vertreten wurde, uneingeschränkt ab’ (Although he accepts Marxism politically and socially, he unconditionally rejects Socialist Realism in the arts, which many Marxists represent in the past and present).⁴¹ Breton defines Surrealism as ‘gesprengter Rationalismus’ (busted rationalism) and ‘gesprengter Realismus’ (busted realism), a dangerous anarchist mixture of magic, the unconscious and anarchy.⁴²

Socialist Realism had become a fearsome doctrine in the cultural politics of the GDR in the 1950s and 1960s – a protective wall that was threatened by the destabilizing power of, for example, Surrealism. One of the perceived threats to the cultural doctrine was suspected in the translations into German of texts by French Surrealists and the invitations of those associated with this avant-garde movement. The greatest threat, however, came from within the cultural scene of the GDR, that is, the publications of prose, poetry and theatre, and beyond this the scholarly effort to promote and popularize Surrealism. All these endeavours will be discussed in this book. After a short reminder of the 1950s Formalism Campaigns and the significance of the concepts of Georg Lukács in the early GDR (Chapter 1), the book will turn to Brecht’s attempts to introduce the lost avant-garde to East Germany (Chapter 2). In the 1960s, the productive reception of Franz Kafka is discussed in the context of the International Kafka Conference in Liblice in 1963, and will be interpreted as a significant move towards infiltrating the East German culture scenes (Chapter 3). The application of surreal

motives and registers is particularly evident in the poetry of, for example, Uwe Greßmann, Karl Mickel, Wolf Biermann, Richard Leising and Adolf Endler (Chapter 4). Endler will be characterized as the representative of the nerve centre of Surrealism in the GDR, since he has been most outspoken about the reception of Surrealism and at the same time about his quest to portray the GDR as a surreal country (Chapter 5). The fantastic, absurd and grotesque are also investigated in the prose of Wolfgang Hilbig, after an examination of the non-realism of Irmtraud Morgner, Fritz Rudolf Fries, and Heiner Müller (Chapter 6). In the 1980s, multiple underground scenes are observed and become key engines in the alternative to realist, that is, conventional, art. In both the following chapters, the focus will be on examining in detail two of the female representatives of these underground scenes who promoted surrealist art and writing in the 1980s in different urban centres in the GDR. What has become obvious is the so-called ‘double discrimination’ of these neo-avant-gardists. We will focus on the work of Elke Erb (Chapter 7) and Gabriele Stötzer (Chapter 8), also investigating their dealings with the Stasi.⁴³ In the final chapter, advocates of Surrealism in the GDR will be introduced – intellectuals whose marketing efforts for this avant-garde culture were to be prevented. These supporters were Hans Mayer, Ernst Bloch, Stephan Hermlin, Lothar Lang, Diether Schmidt, Erhard Frommhold and Karlheinz Barck (Chapter 9). In the Conclusion, the energetic drive of Barck and Endler will be emphasized. These two individuals cemented Surrealism in the cultural makeup of the GDR and made sure this historical avant-garde movement prevailed.

There is much more to discover in the almost forty-five years of East Germany’s existence between the end of the Third Reich and the fall of Communism in Europe and Russia. In particular, the GDR’s difficulties in dealing with Europe’s most important cultural achievement in the twentieth century, Modernism, is a significant way of defining the German Democratic Republic. In the eyes of the English historian Timothy Garton Ash, this was merely a footnote in world history, albeit one that offers ‘a case study in the way literature, film and culture responded to the challenges of an authoritarian regime, so often staking out the territories beyond what was permitted and, to borrow a phrase from Christa Wolf, “stretching the boundaries of the sayable”’.⁴⁴ In this book the focus is on those artists, writers and academics who searched for and found alternatives to the doctrine of Socialist Realism, and expanded the zones of the ‘sayable’. Their dissident status within the GDR is accompanied by their urge to be directly linked to the European cultural heritage of Modernism. This book should therefore not be misunderstood as a contribution to the currently immense popular research on Surrealism per se, but rather as an analysis of GDR cultural politics.

Nothing is what it seems, and most contours are blurred; sometimes the ways we see the GDR, and in particular our prejudices, must be changed. This book draws a picture of the rumblings in Cold War cultural politics in the Eastern part of Germany, and will eventually shed new light on how GDR literature is to be assessed. Both the SED and the West aspired to present their particular assessments of GDR literature, each undermining the view of the other. This book should enable the reader to question stereotypes, free his or her perception from ideological overkill and appreciate a side of East German and GDR literature respectively that has been unrepresented in German cultural history – that of East German fictional *Nachkriegssurrealismus* (post-war Surrealism).

Notes

1. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Aporien der Avantgarde'. In: *Einzelheiten II. Poesie und Politik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964, 5–80; and Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974.
2. See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*. Boston: Black Widow Press, 2008; and Dawn Ades et al. (eds), *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism*, 3 vols. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
3. Ludwig Richtig, 'Vom Surrealismus und von der Katholischen Moderne zum Sozialistischen Realismus in der slowakischen Lyrik'. In: Alfrun Kliems et al. (eds), *Sozialistischer Realismus*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2006, 129–50 (129). Cf. Anja Trippner, *Die permanente Avantgarde? Surrealismus in Prag*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2009.
4. Comte de Lautréamont, *The Songs of Maldoror*, trans. R.J. Dent. With illustrations by Salvador Dalí. Washington, DC: Solar Books, 2011 (Canto VI, Verse 3). In German: 'Die zufällige Begegnung von Nähmaschine und Regenschirm auf einem Seziertisch.' This was quoted for the first time in the GDR in the translation of Max Ernst's essay 'Was ist Surrealismus' by Rainer Schlesier. See Karlheinz Barck (ed.), *Surrealismus in Paris 1919–1939. Ein Lesebuch*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1985, 610–13 (611).
5. See endnote 3.
6. Cf. Tessel Bauduin, *Occultism and Western Esotericism: Work and Movement of André Breton*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2014.
7. See also Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005; and Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
8. 'Die Verrückung und die vollständige Aushebung logische Bezugssysteme.' ('The dislocation and complete excavation of logical reference systems.') All translations, if not otherwise indicated, are by Paul Clements. See Lothar Lang, *Surrealismus und Buchkunst*. Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1993, 14.
9. Uwe M. Schneede, *Die Kunst des Surrealismus. Malerei, Skulptur, Fotografie, Film*. Munich: Beck, 2006, 80.
10. Cf. Mari Carmen Ramirez and Héctor Olea, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.
11. Schneede, *Die Kunst des Surrealismus*, 80.
12. *Ibid.*, 81. See also the Conclusion of this book.

13. See <http://herzattacke.net/historie> (assessed on 27 September 2019).
14. Johann Thun, 'Der Kreis um das Jahrbuch *Speichen* als Vermittler des Surrealismus in Deutschland'. In: Karina Schuller and Isabel Fischer (eds), *Der Surrealismus in Deutschland (?)*. *Interdisziplinäre Studien*. Münster: Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WUU Münster, 2016, 219–36.
15. Fritz J. Raddatz, 'Zur Entwicklung der Literatur in der DDR'. In: Manfred Durzak (ed.), *Die deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart. Aspekte und Tendenzen*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971, 337–65.
16. Mererid Pw Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The Textual Revolution*. London: imlr books, 2016, 105–38.
17. David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 19–21 (19). I use the term 'monosemia', introduced as 'Monosemie' by Peter V. Zima in 'Der Mythos der Monosemie. Parteilichkeit und künstlerischer Standpunkt'. In: Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (ed.), *Einführung in Theorie und Funktion der DDR-Literatur*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975, 77–107.
18. The Dutch painter and the modern Surrealists have a lot in common: a similar visual expression and narrative. But was Bosch the predecessor or even the 'grandfather' of Surrealism, as is often stated? André Breton did not mention him in the 1924 *First Surrealist Manifesto*. Other Surrealists, like Max Ernst and René Magritte, saw Bosch and Breughel as their inspiration. See Gerta Moray, 'Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting', *The Burlington Magazine* 113 (1971) 820: 387–91; and Wallace Fowle, *Age of Surrealism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960, 174 and 190.
19. See, among others, Bert Papenfuß and Ronald Lippok (eds), *Psychonautikon Prenzlauer Berg*. Fürth: starfruit publications, 2015.
20. I will focus on fictional literature in the SBZ and the GDR, similar to the beginnings of the historical avant-garde movement Surrealism in Paris, which was also characterized by a transcultural overlap. See the catalogue *Max Ernst, Zeichendieb. Eine Ausstellung der Nationalgalerie, Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*. Bonn: VG Bild-Kunst and Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2019, 23.
21. It should also be noted that in the visual arts, Magic Realism was a German phenomenon that derived from Italian metaphysical painters such as Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrá. It is argued that Paul Klee and Max Ernst came across it independently, as did the art historian Franz Roh and the circle of artists related to Magic Realism. Roh introduced the term *Magischer Realismus* in 1925 in parallel with that of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Austerity) coined by his friend Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub. Cf. Matthew Cale and Katy Wan (eds), *Magic Realism: Art in Weimar Germany 1919–33*. London: Tate, 2018, 7–19 (8). The list of visual artists from the GDR who were associated with Surrealism is impressive. It includes the names Hermann Glöckner, Carlfriedrich Claus, Horst Hüssel, Hans Ticha, Günther Hornig, Rolf X. Schröder and Angela Hampel. See also Chapter 7.
22. Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR. Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere; 1970–1989*. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997.
23. Manfred Berger (ed.), *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch*. Berlin: Dietz, 1970.
24. Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001, 9.
25. Enzensberger, 'Aporien der Avantgarde' and Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*.
26. Karlheinz Barck, Dieter Schlenstedt and Wolfgang Thierse (eds), *Künstlerische Avantgarde. Annäherungen an ein unabgeschlossenes Kapitel*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1979.

27. Cf. Michael Sobotta, *Berlin in frühen Farbfotografien: 1936 bis 1943*. Erfurt: Sutton Verlag, 2015; and Alexander and Alice Nakhimovsky, *Witness to History: The Photographs of Yevgeny Khaidei*. New York: Aperture, 1997.
28. The movie was first screened in Germany in 1952 in a Munich film club, and it was only shown on German television in 1978.
29. The cycle *Das zerstörte Dresden* (The Ruined Dresden), which consists of over 150 bourdon tube drawings, has been held by the Dresdner Kupferstich-Kabinett (Dresden Etching Cabinet) since 1959.
30. Lothar Lang, *Malerei und Graphik in der DDR*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1983, 28.
31. Ingrid Pfeiffer et al., *A.R. Penck. Werke 1961–2001*. Düsseldorf: Richter, 2007.
32. Cf. Gerrit-Jan Berendse, 'Zu neuen Ufern: Lyrik der "Sächsischen Dichterschule" im Spiegel der Elbe'. In: Margy Gerber et al. (eds), *Studies in GDR Culture and Society: 10 Selected Papers from the Fifteenth New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1991, 197–212 (199).
33. Victor Klemperer, *Tagebücher 1945*, ed. Walter Nowojski. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1995, 37. Translated by Martin Chalmers in *To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1942–1945*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, 393. Ellipsis added for copyright reasons.
34. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*. London: Vintage, 2000, 159–62. Ellipses added for copyright reasons.
35. Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*. In: *Das Gesamtwerk*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980, 122–23. Translation by David Porter in Borchert, *The Man Outside*. New York: New Directions, 1971, 100. Ellipses added for copyright reasons.
36. Marianne Schmidt, *Wolfgang Borchert. Analysen und Aspekte*. Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1974; and Peter Rühmkorf, *Wolfgang Borchert mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997.
37. Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR 1945–1990*. Cologne: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1995, 5.
38. See Adolf Endler, *Dies Sirren. Gespräche mit Renatus Deckert*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010, 98.
39. Berendse, "Dank Breton". Surrealismus und kulturelles Gedächtnis in Adolf Endlers Lyrik'. In: Karen Leeder (ed.), *Schalstelle. Neue deutsche Lyrik im Dialog*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, 73–95 (89).
40. *Athena* 2 (1947–48) 2: 46–8.
41. *Ibid.*, 46.
42. The German writers represented in *Athena* were, among others, Wolfgang Bächler, Max Frisch, Paul Gurk, Karl Krolow, Elisabeth Langgässer, Thomas Mann, Wolfdieterich Schnurre and Anna Seghers. In the early 1950s Edgar Jené and Max Hölzer edited *Surrealistische Publikationen*, published by Verlag Josef Haid in Klagenfurt. Its subtitle was 'Texte und Bilder der Surrealisten aller Länder', and it promoted *Nachkriegssurrealismus* (post-war Surrealism) and featured, for example, Czech post-1945 Surrealism, Paul Celan, Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Dieter Wyss and Max Hölzer.
43. Held by the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic, BStU).
44. Timothy Garton Ash, 'Preface', *Oxford German Studies* 38(3) (2009): 234–35 (234).