

INTRODUCTION

Comics at the Intersection of State Power and Childhood



In the immediate aftermath of World War II in Europe, concerns over the acceptability and supposed harmfulness of comics were bolstered by the effects of Americanization on youth and how these issues affected the nation state, European civilization, and culture (*Kultur*).¹ In the United States, Dr. Fredric Wertham, a German-American psychologist and one of the comic industry's most vocal opponents, suggested that comics "indoctrinated children against the accepted rules of decency," comparing these publications to propaganda under European dictatorships. Although his science was questionable and less than objective, Wertham was not entirely wrong in this instance as comics were used by those very same dictatorships, just as they were by governments and the Church in the West. Wertham's thoughts on comics sided with the social theory and philosophy of the Frankfurt School, associated with the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University Frankfurt. "Mass culture," the Frankfurt School contended, was used for the purposes of "homogeniz[ing] society with false class consciousness and capitalist aspirations."² In Wertham's estimation, comics served this same function in Western society. Comics produced in North America, Europe, and even the Soviet Bloc during the 1950s, the latter being the subject of this book, were hotly contested sites of power between educators, parents, politicians, and their constructions of the state and of childhood and how those two interacted and related to one another. As spaces typically uncontrolled and unmonitored by adults, comics gave children a site in which to demonstrate their desires and make meaning of the spaces they created. In effect, children themselves, and the state's perception of those children and their desires, were responsible in affecting the production of these comics and exerting their own modes of power over their contents.

Comics in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), published by the Free German Youth's (FDJ) state-owned publishers, provided spaces in which the regime and children came together and defined what was thought to be "childhood" and what that meant to notions of belonging within the state itself. Although, this was certainly not limited to the East German state or even to the Soviet Bloc, and it may just as easily be applied to the Western world. In this instance, the state as a political body and the state's publishing regime exercised obvious demonstrations of power. But the consumption of the comics themselves and children's interactions with those publications were indicative of the readership's own methods of control and how the contents of those comics were understood and digested by that readership. As such, comic books in the GDR provided an intersection between the various institutions and bodies of state power and the development and *Alltag* (everyday life) of the comics' child-readership. Comics provided a site of interaction and negotiation between children and that which was expected of them by the regime, despite these publications being indicative of the Socialist Unity Party's (SED) authority. These publications were power constructions of the state and in this purpose served the state well. They were also power fantasies, escapist, and constructive of the childhood experience. In effect, East German comics were spaces within which the state, the FDJ, the publishers, and the children for whom these comics were published enacted and exercised their various independent and individual definitions and constructions of childhood and what it meant to be a child living and growing up under East German socialism. While these comic publications were most assuredly sites of state power, they were necessarily negotiated through the lens of the child's understandings of state and society. Additionally, as comics were read and consumed within the domestic space, they became associated with privacy and the ersatz public sphere, becoming sites of children's criticisms of the state via the state's own cultural production. Comics allowed children the opportunity to interact with the FDJ and the SED regime on a level that was both engaging and entertaining, operating to increase their own political awareness. In so doing, comics enabled and encouraged dialogue between the child-citizen and the state for the perpetuation of the participatory dictatorship.³ Through comics, these child-readers were entangled in the state's educational and ideological regimes. At the same time, they found themselves participatory to the East German culture of complaint afforded by perceptions of privacy associated with the niche society.

Comics and *Kinderzeitschriften* (magazines for children), as with much other mass media and entertainment oriented toward youth in

the GDR, occupied a problematic middle-ground between the state and the children for whom they were intended. As an aspect of the FDJ's publishing regime and unofficial extension of the state's educational systems, comics as a medium suffered from the influence of its Western forebears. The FDJ wanted to publish comics because of their popularity with children on both sides of the postwar ideological divide. To ensure their own popularity, however, the publishing regime needed comics that, for all intents and purposes, mirrored those found in the West. The Berlin Wall made possible the reorientation of the East German comic market, allowing the inclusion of education and ideology to a greater degree. But these publications were never able to include as much propaganda as the FDJ wanted. This was particularly true of *Mosaik von Hannes Hegen*.⁴ Children consumed these comics in ways similar to how they understood Western publications prior to the implementation of regulations curtailing their availability in 1955. As such, children as consumers negotiated what was permissible within the pages of those publications. This does not suggest that children ignored or removed ideology from comics. Instead, the ways children consumed comics and *Kinderzeitschriften* suggested that, though the ideology and education was understood and the comics themselves were considered part of the socialist education, children recognized comics as private entertainment, making their own meanings of the content, regardless of the state's intention to provide a socialist alternative to the Western *Schund und Schmutz* (trash and filth).

From at least the Brezhnev era in the Soviet Union forward, East German society and politics were in a perpetual state of transition. As suggested elsewhere by historian Mary Fulbrook, this transformation "was not intended to be . . . democratic in the Western sense" as it lacked the popular support for SED policy. Rather, the East German state and society was indicative of "real existing socialism" or "developed socialism" whereby society's transitional state was directed by the Marxist-Leninist "dictatorship of the vanguard party." As some of those among the oppressed classes whom the SED sought to liberate may still suffer from their perceived "false consciousness" lingering from their long experience with capitalism, they may yet be prone to active protest and opposition. This meant that it was the responsibility of the state, of this "dictatorship of the vanguard party," to enact communist policy, sometimes despite the wishes of the population, until that population was politically conscious through the development of the socialist personality to ascend to the Marxist "dictatorship of the proletariat."⁵ While SED rhetoric often employed the term "socialism" to describe the GDR's state

and society, the SED was a communist party and often used “socialism” interchangeably with “communism” as the terms were employed in the nineteenth century. The title of this book uses a similarly conflated terminology. Throughout, I discuss the GDR in terms of its socialist character. That said, the SED was a communist party building the socialist German Democratic Republic as a Soviet-style communist state.

Fulbrook continues, describing the power exercised by the SED as both benign and malign in her conceptualization of East Germany as a “honeycomb state.” This suggests that the GDR was a state in which the activities of the population were compartmentalized. Arguably, the division and overlap of the public and private spheres exonerates the vast numbers of civilians who willingly participated in the SED-system. At the same time, this notion maintains the perception of separation from and victimization by those same structures of governmental authority. Malign power often refers to the obvious means of coercion employed by the state against its own population. The most apparent perpetrators here are the Stasi, the East German secret police whose tendrils ran deep in the FDJ’s publishing houses as with all aspects of the SED state. However, the conceptualization of malign power also refers to threats made by state officials against individuals and groups, such as the East German church, to secure their demonstrations of loyalty to the Party or the state in exchange for better housing, employment opportunities, or the ability to send one’s child to pursue a university education over manual labor in the lignite (brown coal) mines.⁶ It was in these malign modes of SED power that writer and researcher Phil Leask suggests the SED employed methods of humiliation, as the unjustified use of power seemingly at random and without reason. These demonstrations of state-power against Party members secured loyalty through the individual’s desire to conform as a means of attaining their own ideals.⁷ Often, direct interference in the lives of the East German citizenship, conceived as a carrot-and-stick approach to policy formation, saw the SED regime offer the population incentives in exchange for their loyalty or, particularly after 1971, the outward demonstration of conformity over a dyed-in-the-wool belief in the SED Party-line. If these incentives proved ineffective in generating the desired conformity or conviction, the stick was applied to produce loyalty by force.⁸ The carrot-and-stick approach to the perception of the SED’s malign demonstrations of power is clear, largely in those social areas without a consistent policy to deal with a problematic population.⁹

Benign power, as the term suggests, is more difficult to detect. Fulbrook suggests that the benign was more completely woven into

the fabric of the East German *Alltag* and was found in many nebulous forms. Benign power shaped the reality of everyday life from shopping to entertainment to the perceived acceptability of the East German culture of complaint that was generated through the practice of *Eingaben* (citizen petitions).¹⁰ These letters of complaint provided something of a pressure valve for the pent-up problems and desires of the population. At the same time, the individualistic nature of these letters atomized voices that could lead to popular protest.¹¹ Andrew Port characterizes the GDR as a “grumble society,” effectively as a state defined by controlled confrontation and condoned interaction with the state through the official endorsement of complaints issued to the local, regional, and national SED-authorities.¹² Meanwhile, Fulbrook suggests that those of the working class demonstrating left-wing tendencies or sympathies could “grumble,” typically through the use of those *Eingaben*, without being admonished or punished by the regime.¹³ Likewise, Corey Ross argues that the East German population had its own agendas, its own sense of self (*Eigensinn*), that contradicted and clashed with the state. The accommodation negotiated between state authority and the desires of the population effectively consolidated the regime, at least for a time.¹⁴ Benign power structures were those invisible to the life lived in the GDR as they affected not only the ways in which the population related to the state, but how people interacted with each other.¹⁵ Through these power structures, East Germans normalized their interactions and senses of self, sometimes acting against the state that was itself responsible for the creation of those power structures. The population internalized these everyday modes of power, producing their own meanings of East German life and society.¹⁶ Although this internalization was not divorced of the SED regime’s carrot-and-stick approach, these benign power structures provided the illusion of freedom from the regime’s authority; authority that was understood solely in terms of those obvious and malign demonstrations of power.¹⁷ The population’s conscious and willful ignorance of the state’s benign power created the illusion that the state stopped at the door of the home, the domestic space. This provided people a sense of freedom from the state’s malign presence and of one’s own ability to lead a “normal” life; a question broached by West German bureaucrats assessing the value and legacy of the GDR in the wake of (re)unification in 1990. In the minds of many East Germans, the private sphere was construed as an area safe from the state’s malign power structures regardless of the truth of the matter.¹⁸ The importance of this distinction between the malign and the benign modes of SED authority allowed the creation of the perceived *Eigensinn* in the East

German subconscious, generating meaning in the *Alltag* beyond the simple binary offered by narratives of state power and victimization.

Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the Panopticon provides an interesting lens through which to view the effects of the SED state's malign and benign constructions of power and how those were incorporated into the East German *Alltag*. Panopticism proposes a perpetual state in which prison inmates are assumed to be watched, regardless of the truth of the matter. As such, individual behavior is modified to adhere to the perceived laws and rules of the prison as institution.¹⁹ In terms of the GDR, citizens conducted processes of self-regulation and self-censorship while acting in the public space under the assumption of state and Stasi surveillance. In his study on forensic psychology, deviation, and the socialist self as subject, Greg Eghigian suggests that the SED defined the socialist personality and asocial deviation through the linguistics of direction (i.e., to steer [*Steuerung*], to divert [*ableiten*], derailings [*Entgleisungen*], etc.). Contrary to Western perceptions of deviation as deviation from a statistical norm, the GDR understood deviation as that from "a path of natural development, a path by which all socialist subjects should invariably converge" into the socialist personality.²⁰ Eghigian contends that demonstrations of conformity in the GDR were part of a project to educate the psychology of the self (psycho-pedagogical) as much as they were a political impetus. This rationale implies that observation in the East German state and the population's subsequent self-regulation were parts of the socialist utopian project, demonstrated in instances of socialist science fiction novels, comics, and films. Comics were used by the SED as aspects of this Panopticism and of the levers of power employed by the state. As with other mechanisms of SED power, comic books were set upon the population for the express purposes of the self-regulation of youth, their perceived conformity to the state, and the associated retreat into the private sphere that allowed for the legitimization of SED authority.²¹ This modification of behavior becomes a defense mechanism to avoid discipline by the state while acknowledging the state's authority to enact that discipline.²² It should be noted, however, that this approach is hardly new to the study of the SED— and the Stasi state, and it is often used in connection with studies of the East German *Alltag* and the perception of the private sphere.²³

One such mode of SED power was the Free German Youth, a mass organization re-founded in 1946 by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) to combat fascism among youth. This was of particular importance given the recent history of children's involvement in the

Hitler Youth and the Volkssturm (a militia organized by the Nazi Party as Germany's last line of defense against the Allied Forces encroaching on German territory) in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ).²⁴ Subordinated to the SED following the marriage of the East German Social Democrats (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1946 and, in a more official capacity, after the foundation of the GDR in 1949, the FDJ acted in parallel with the official educational regime of the SED state, largely responsible for the organization of the free time of youth, effectively educating children in their responsibilities and the ways in which they were to act in service to the socialist state.²⁵ As free time, not to mention the notion of a leisure society (*Freizeitgesellschaft*), was on the rise generally among the postwar population, it was the FDJ's responsibility to turn this arguable waste of youthful energies toward the construction of East German socialism and society. Not only did the idea of children and youth left to their own devices threaten the controls and conformity of the fledgling East German state, but the organization of leisure activities and time subverted the influence of Western capitalism that transgressed the GDR's borders both before and after construction of the Wall. Mass culture and the organization of leisure time became prominent features of both Germanies during the postwar. When individuals were not acting directly in service to the state, free time was dominated by state-run agencies delivering state ideology through organized activities to such an extent that there developed a close, almost indistinguishable association between free time and mass culture, or more precisely "the mass consumption of culture."²⁶ Comics, children's magazines, and other publications produced by the FDJ and the state-owned publishing houses served this function of organizing children's free time, time that was not dominated by the structures and institutions of education or of the FDJ, in an unofficial capacity. The portability of these publications and their goal to fill that leisure time away from the obligations to school, parents, or other institutions and figures of authority penetrated the perceived sanctity of the domestic space, the private sphere and last bastion of East German life free from the state. As comics proved immensely popular with children not only in Germany, but throughout Europe and North America, they provided a platform by which the FDJ continued to loosely organize sites of leisure in a way that was equally educational and ideologically acceptable to the motives and agendas of the East German educational and political regimes.

The unofficial steering of children's free time through comics proved more important following the construction of the Berlin Wall. As a means of keeping youth closely in line with the socialist cause af-

ter the perceived suspension of West German and American influence and all that entailed, including Western comic books, the SED regime under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht initiated the relative liberalization of the FDJ's and the SED's youth policies. Policy related to comics, however, regardless of the unevenness in the implementation of that policy from comic to comic and across the larger scope of children's magazines and publications, moved in the other direction as controlling leisure time became of greater importance for the FDJ and the SED regime.²⁷ In this, comics were considered both a part of the regime's state-socialist education and of larger developments surrounding children's literature in the GDR, improving the content and quality of publications for children to compete with perceived Western influence.²⁸ With the *Verordnung zum Schutz der Jugend* (Regulations for the Protection of Youth) in 1955 outlawing the possession and sale of Western comics and children's publications, and the Berlin Wall supposedly making these materials inaccessible, the FDJ and their publishing house for children's books and magazines, Verlag Junge Welt, put aside perceived competition with Western publications that previously, albeit arguably, determined much of the direction, presentation, and content of East German comics prior to the beginning of the 1960s.²⁹ The Berlin Wall not only created a captive audience for these publications but allowed the comics published in the East to be more than derivative clones of West German and American publications, attaching themselves to the burgeoning children's literature movement in the GDR, and evolving into quality publications that exceeded the cheapness and disposability that defined and glutted the medium in the postwar period.³⁰ In the post-Wall space, East German comics were sites in which the FDJ and the editorial regime attempted to control children's leisure time in a way that operated hand-in-hand with the East German educational systems in constructing children and childhood as a developmental space for the socialist personality.³¹

At the same time, comics were typically read in the home, in spaces considered part of the private sphere, and in those moments that were arguably unregulated by both parents and the FDJ. Comics were often purchased by the children themselves and with their own money, bypassing the permissions and authorities of parents or institutions, the FDJ included. The assumed absence of authority made the child-reader's sense of ownership over their leisure time and their private space total and empowering.³² Moreover, the awareness that thousands of others were making the same purchases and for the same reasons created kinship among children necessary for the establishment of a comic cul-

ture.³³ For this reason, comics were important to the regime from an ideological standpoint to control children's free time and those sites of leisure.

In the mid-1980s, Günter Gaus articulated the GDR as a "niche society" (*Nischengesellschaft*) in that its population retreated into the private as an escape from the incessant ideology and politicization of society rendered by the SED.³⁴ Moreover, historian Anna Saunders suggests that the niche is useful to highlight the importance of privacy and the interactions occurring within the home as a space supposedly removed from the regime's influence. However, the concept of the niche fails to recognize the significance of interactions between the public and the private spheres, maintaining a certain rigid impenetrability between the two. While the niche is important in constructing ideas of East German identity and *Eigensinn*, it should not be implied that the private space is one entirely free from the state's politics.³⁵ Since Gaus, then, historians have come to understand the private space in a socialist society as an ersatz public sphere.³⁶

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas suggests that the bourgeois order emerging with the Enlightenment created a distinction between the public and the private. Within this private realm, a bourgeois public sphere developed as a space where the critical engagement with politics and society was possible. This public sphere shifted from the private to the public realm with the mobilization of mass society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as divisions between the two blurred and intertwined with the rise of the modern social welfare state.³⁷ Typically, the public sphere was inconsistent with the lived experience of the GDR as the state did not permit criticisms aimed at the Party, socialism, or the successes and failures of socialist society. As a socialist state, the GDR and the entire Soviet Bloc for that matter, lacked the bourgeoisie and political structure and freedoms upon which Habermas based his notion of a public sphere as providing space for the formation of rational and critical public opinion.

That said, Habermas himself suggests that the public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body."³⁸ He characterizes the "public sphere as a sphere which mediates between state and society, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion, accords with the principle of the public sphere."³⁹ This would suggest that the public sphere exists anywhere citizens are allowed to gather and where

the practice of open conversation is allowed to foment public opinion of rational criticism of the political state. In the GDR, the occurrence of this sphere of critical public opinion, as Habermas understood it, appeared in the perpetual ersatz public sphere conducted within the privacy of the domestic space.⁴⁰ When this idea is coupled with Fulbrook's conceptualization of the East German normalization and internalization of the supposed omnipresence of the SED and Stasi power, allowing those citizens to pursue a "normal" everyday life, the domestic space is transformed into an ersatz public sphere free from state power.⁴¹ Not only this, but as state power was internalized, the citizen's perceived ability to construct the home as an ersatz public sphere provided de facto stability to the SED regime in that rational criticisms were conducted in such a way, employing language acceptable to the regime, that there was no real challenge to the structures of the state as a result.⁴² Everyday experiences of life under Soviet-style regimes, including the GDR, caused citizens to become "organizationally passive and detached" from the regime exercising power over them.⁴³ The transformation of the private into an ersatz public sphere politicized the domestic space. As this transformative process was unofficially permitted if not encouraged by the regime, the ersatz public sphere and the incomplete freedoms permitted through the domestic practices of *Eigensinn* were themselves constructions of the SED state's exercised power. Although these practices were prevalent during the Ulbricht era of GDR history, this was more frequently the case after Erich Honecker's rise to power in 1971 as outward demonstrations of loyalty became unofficial SED state policy. The socialist personality no longer warranted genuine loyalty to socialism as it did under Ulbricht. Instead, and insofar as citizens demonstrated adherence to state laws and conventions in public, they were arguably left to their own devices in the domestic or private space of Gaus's "niche society."

Often this ersatz public sphere was given voice through the East German practice of the *Eingaben*. GDR citizens were afforded the legal right to complain about problems of the state through these petitions written into Article 3 of the GDR's 1949 Constitution. Ulbricht argued this right created a binding force between state and citizen, providing citizens a legal outlet to engage with the state in a way nonthreatening to SED power.⁴⁴ This right was not exclusive to the GDR, but it stemmed from a pre-Soviet Russian tradition whereby peasants believed the leadership to be on their side; if the leadership knew the plight of peasants, surely their problems would be solved.⁴⁵ The implication here was that the problems experienced by the citizens were not the fault of the lead-

ership, as the leadership was obviously and apparently on the side of the peasantry, but the fault of petty bureaucrats, absolving the Party of perceived injustices to the citizenship. This practice continued into post-revolutionary Russia and, arguably, found its greatest expression in the Soviet Union during the reign of Joseph Stalin.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the practice of *Eingaben* in East German society was one of the most prolific and common means constructing this ersatz public sphere, giving citizens the perception of having a voice in socialist society.⁴⁷ This firmly associated the ersatz public sphere in East Germany with the domestic and the feminization of space as the act of petition-writing established the home as the site of exchange between the authors of these *Eingaben*, their neighbors, and friends sharing similar complaints.⁴⁸

It was, however, the *Eigensinn* that permitted the construction of the domestic as a space supposedly free from the state and thus free to foster this ersatz public sphere, provided that dialogue and negotiation with state power was arguably left at the door. More than simply doing things one's own way, *Eigensinn* implied the marginalization of state structures of power to make meaning of everyday life in ways that expressed the normalcy of those meanings.⁴⁹ The marginalization of official power is equivalent of Fulbrook's process of normalization. This is important in the consideration of *Eigensinn*'s effect on Gaus's construction of the "niche society." The niche is an effective tool describing the lived experience of citizens in the German Democratic Republic. However, this same niche ignores the reality of state authority and power beyond their initial purposes of atomizing and controlling society, though there is debate surrounding the perceived atomization of East German society.⁵⁰ *Eigensinn* nuances the niche society in that it accounts for this exercise of state power. It recognizes the constructed nature of the domestic space and the entire notion of privacy in the GDR. This notion allows East Germans the pretense that the regime does not transgress the boundaries and threshold of the home despite the constant presence of television, radio, print publications, and other forms of mass media. Of course, this says nothing of the Stasi presence, the FDJ, the trade union (FDGB), or even the women's league (DFD) pervading the home in an ethereal, if not a very concrete, way. But the concept of *Eigensinn* suggests an approach to daily life that marginalized that state power, negotiating the citizen's place within East German society with a supposed voice provided by engagement with the ersatz public sphere. In this way, *Eigensinn* effectively allowed citizens to interact with and criticize the regime through means permissible to both citizen and state. This interaction then proposes a negotiation between

notions of power and the conceptualization of a public sphere, albeit a public sphere necessarily transposed onto a society lacking a liberal bourgeoisie. *Eigensinn* understands state power's engagement with the ersatz public sphere while acknowledging that public sphere as another yet unofficial institution of that same power.

Chapter One examines the birth of *Mosaik von Hannes Hegen* and the early development of issues surrounding the comics medium in the GDR, more generally. Following the appearance of these problems in the creation of *Mosaik* and more broadly across East German comics publishing, the chapter turns to a proposal for and the implementation of changes to the comic magazine *Atze*, submitted to the FDJ Central Committee in 1966 by then-Editor-in-Chief (*Chefredakteur*) Wolfgang Altenburger. Of the two dedicated comics in the GDR, *Atze* was a distant second in terms of both quality and sales to the more popular and consistent *Mosaik*. While *Mosaik* was allowed, within reason, to follow trends borrowed from Western European and American comics, Altenburger suggested changes to *Atze* to improve the overall quality of the publication and bring the comic in line with the ideological and educational objectives developing in children's literature with the implementation of the *Bitterfelder Weg* in 1959. This proposal spoke to larger trends in East German children's literature, elevating the mediums, both literature and comics more generally, to compete with the best adult literature produced in the socialist state as well as with the literary canons of the Western world. At the same time, attentions focused on *Atze* suggest a relative hands-off approach to *Mosaik*, for a time at least, due in no small part to the comic's overall popularity and sales. Moreover, this chapter argues that Western trends, notably the anti-comics campaigns of the 1950s as a conflict over cultural power in East Germany, revealed flaws in the East German comics industry at large.⁵¹ As such, the East German variation of the anti-comics campaign highlighted the importance and potential of these types of *Kinderzeitschriften* for the FDJ and the SED state.

Chapter Two turns on those notions of power projected through the comics and *Kinderzeitschriften* themselves and how the FDJ employed children's interests within those constructions of power. Through the concept of benign power, this chapter expands upon discussions in the first chapter through an analysis of the operation of power constructions in *Atze* and the rationale for the comic's new profile proposed in the mid-1960s. The chapter then turns to *Mosaik*, specifically the *Weltraum-* (outer-space) and *Amerika-Serie* as stories devised to harness the cultural zeitgeist of their respective decades, turning their backdrops toward

decidedly ideological approaches to storytelling without sacrificing the entertainment that initially drew children to the publications. This dual approach created tensions between children and the educational and publishing regimes as children perceived these stories in terms arguably different than those intended by the FDJ. Invoking many of these same elements and the societal zeitgeists that accompanied them again in the early-1980s, the FDJ and Verlag Junge Welt hosted a meet-up between the child-audience and the creators of one of these publications (*Frösi*, in this case). Here the FDJ used comics and the culture created around those *Kinderzeitschriften* to generate the perception of youth enthusiasm toward the state as legitimizing East German socialism.

Chapter Three picks up on threads of the previous chapters, bringing the comics as constructions of state power into the home as the home itself constituted the ersatz public sphere. In doing so, this chapter looks toward the transformation of these comics from the constructions of authority as the FDJ and the state-owned publisher, Verlag Junge Welt, intended them to be, to sites of children's criticisms through the understanding of what these comics meant to those children as both consumers and citizens in the East German state. Through an analysis of letters written to the FDJ's publishing regime and reports drafted by the publishers to determine trends among the letters themselves, this chapter suggests that comics created sites of interaction and negotiation between the state and the readership over whom the state enacted their modes and methods of control. Of course, children did not consciously ignore these modes of authority, nor were they oblivious to them. Instead, East German children, viewed through the lens of the experience of childhood, created their own meanings and significations across these publications based on what they themselves deemed important. In the domestic space and the perceived ersatz public sphere constructed therein, children reconstituted comics as sites of *Eigensinn*; spaces in which children redefined the experience of childhood and belonging in the socialist state. This does not suggest that children necessarily understood their own senses of self or that they understood their reading of comics in a particularly critical way. Children reading these publications foregrounded and prioritized their own interests and desires within the provided ideological content. This practice did, however, enable children to critically evaluate promises made to them in those publications and by the FDJ and to indirectly confront the FDJ's perceptions and definitions of childhood within socialism.

Chapter Four returns to the stories of *Mosaik* and of *Pats Reiseabenteuer* (Pat's Travel Adventures, appearing in *Atze* since the mid-1960s)

and their dependence on Western comic book tropes and the visual language of travel to construct an image of the GDR and of Eastern European socialism in a form easily digestible to children reading these comics. Comics permitted the readership opportunity for the “inner emigration” that the regime considered so problematic among citizens who consumed West German media and culture. It also allowed the FDJ opportunity to demonstrate an idealized socialist state in order to generate the socialist personality among youth, to foster participation within the structures and constructions of the state that were necessary for the continuation of the GDR. By necessity, depictions of travel in these comics and the required ideological objectives of the state represented socialism through Western tropes. Arguing in favor of the superiority of East German socialism, these travel and Western tropes often led to the agents of socialism and capitalism being portrayed as virtually indistinguishable as each enacted their will over others. In the context of a supposed historically accurate past, travel in these comics did not actively address issues of German division or of the GDR as an enclosed society, thus effacing the lived reality of East German citizens. Instead, comics idealized socialism in spite of its perceived failings. This chapter goes on to suggest that comics and the representation of the socialist experience through travel opened a window onto the possibilities and potentials of European Communism that the lived reality of life in the divided and walled state could never hope to achieve. As a result, and despite the stories’ attempts to create genuine enthusiasm toward the state and socialism, these stories had the opposite effect, building unrealistic expectations among the children reading these comics.

The final chapter then turns to the problems between Hannes Hegen, creator of the popular comic *Mosaik*, and the publishers of these comics from 1955 until his departure from the *Mosaik-Kollektiv* (Mosaik Collective) twenty years later. Initially hired to develop a comic providing a counterpoint, a socialist alternative, to the comic books accompanying American GIs during World War II and flooding the German marketplace in the aftermath, Hegen created the *Digedags* as direct competition to the American “funny animal” genre embodied by Disney comics published by Dell in the United States, licensed to Ehapa Verlag in West Germany.⁵² This aspect was important and necessary for *Mosaik* to carve its own niche in the marketplace of the mid-1950s.⁵³ Following the authors and publishers conference held in the industrial town of Bitterfeld in 1959 and the subsequent implementation of the *Bitterfelder Weg* as a new direction for East German literature, dedicated to the depiction of the lived experiences of average workers in the socialist state,

Hegen was attacked by the FDJ's educational regime. Although it was adherence to Western tropes that popularized *Mosaik* upon its debut in December 1955, by the turn of the decade those same conventions were accused of disregarding historical accuracy, educational value, and ideological content, proving harmful to the development of the socialist personality among the publication's readership. Essentially, *Mosaik* was charged with too closely emulating the *Schund und Schmutz* from which it originated. This chapter explores Hegen's changing relationship with the editorial regime and the tensions that developed in the widening gap between the two. Here, Hegen exercised his own control over the publication and the direction of the stories despite the interference of the FDJ. This dynamic ultimately proved too much, forcing Hegen's departure. But during his tenure, the publication's popularity provided Hegen the space necessary to resist, if only marginally, the power constructions of the state. While this arguable and limited opposition is not intended to speak to larger conversations of resistance in the GDR or elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc, it is demonstrative of trends developed throughout this book. Specifically, it addresses the benign and malign machinations of the FDJ and SED state authority and individual abilities to carve spaces within and make their own meanings of East German socialism and socialist society.

Taken as a whole, this book questions power as a construction in publications for children and as a means of conditioning those child-readers to act in ways devised to perpetuate the East German socialist state. It is hoped in demonstrating the state's apparent benign methods of coercion, children's resistance to or acceptance of those *Kinderzeitschriften* will be made clear as letter columns, reader taste, and consumption patterns made East German comic books sites of dialogue between children and the state. This book also addresses the comics themselves—*Mosaik* and *Atze*, and to a lesser extent the magazine *Frösi*, the title of this latter being a contraction of *Fröhlich sein und singen* (Be Happy and Sing)—across the divide in socialist representation created by the *Bitterfelder Weg* and the construction of the Berlin Wall from the mid-1950s to the mid- to late-1960s as means of demonstrating the limitations imposed by both the readership and Western influence on the state's ability to publish ideological material in a supposedly insular society. Moreover, *Mosaik* and *Atze* allow for larger comparisons and discussions of Western influence in the GDR as these comics came to be as a result of the availability of similar Western publications, particularly at a time when questions of comics' potentially harmful effects on childhood development infiltrated the GDR from Western Europe and the United States.

Notes

1. James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 9–11; Richard Ivan Jobs, “Tarzan under Attack: Youth, Comics, and Cultural Reconstruction in Postwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 688–95; Goran Jovanovic and Ulrich Koch, “The Comics Debate in Germany: Against Dirt and Rubbish, Pictorial Idiotism, and Cultural Analphabetism,” in *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign*, ed. John A. Lent (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1999), 95–102; Peter Lee, “Decrypting Espionage Comic Books in 1950s America,” in *Comic Books and the Cold War, 1946–1962: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns*, ed. Chris York and Rafiel York (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 30–44.
2. Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 159.
3. Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 12.
4. The comic created in 1955 by Johannes Hegenbarth and featuring the Digidag characters was officially titled *Mosaik von Hannes Hegen* (this being Hegenbarth’s pseudonym). This title remained in place until the introduction of the Abrafaxe characters, developed by Lothar Dräger and Lona Rietschel, at the beginning of 1976. At this point, Hegen’s name was removed from the masthead and the comic officially became known as, simply, *Mosaik*. Throughout this book, I use the title *Mosaik* to refer to both the Digidags and the Abrafaxe eras, though not interchangeably. When it is necessary to draw distinction between the two for the purposes of analysis, I revert back to the titling employed by Verlag Junge Welt. It should also be noted that Hegenbarth assumed the official title of the comic to be *Mosaik* and, after his departure, sued for use of the word as a recognizably associated and copyrighted aspect of his comic publications.
5. Fulbrook, *People’s State*, 5–6.
6. Fulbrook, 235–49.
7. Phil Leask, “Humiliation as a Weapon within the Party: Fictional and Personal Accounts,” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 237–56.
8. David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow’s German Ally* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 281. See also, Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2–10.
9. Where this notion of the carrot and stick is applied with regard to East German authors, see Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176–88; in relation to youth and the Free German Youth, see Alan McDougall, *Youth*

- Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946–1968* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); in relation to East German gender and sexuality, see Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
10. Fulbrook, *People's State*, 235–49.
 11. Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), 5.
 12. Port, *Conflict and Stability*, 115.
 13. Fulbrook, *People's State*, 4–5.
 14. Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945–65* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000), 8–9. See also, Mary Fulbrook, "Putting the People Back In: The Contentious State of GDR History," *German History* 24, no. 4 (November 2006): 618 and Grieder, *German Democratic Republic*, 2–6.
 15. Fulbrook, *People's State*, 235–49.
 16. Mary Fulbrook, "The Concept of 'Normalisation' and the GDR in Comparative Perspective," in *Power and Society in the GDR 1961–1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?* ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–30.
 17. Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (New York: Norton, 2014), 149–227.
 18. Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–18, 119–47, and 173–92.
 19. Michel Foucault, "Discipline and Punish, Panopticism," in *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 195–228.
 20. Greg Eghigian, "The Psychologization of the Socialist Self: East German Forensic Psychology and its Deviants, 1945–1975," *German History* 22, no. 2 (2004): 203.
 21. Eghigian, "Psychologization," 200–4.
 22. Foucault, "Discipline," 195–228.
 23. Governmentality and Panopticism form the theoretical backbone of numerous studies of the East German *Alltag* in relation to both the modes of state power and how the population worked within and normalized that power including but not limited to: Betts, *Within Walls*; Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*; Mark McCulloch, "The Sword and Shield of Consumption: The Police–Society Relationship in the Former East Germany," *Past Tense: Graduate Review of History* 1 (2012): 67–83; Port, *Conflict and Stability*; and Judd Stitzel, "Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining: Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR," in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 253–86.

24. McDougall, *Youth Politics*, 2–5.
25. Fulbrook, *People's State*, 121–28; Anna Saunders, *Honecker's Children: Youth and Patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979–2002* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 11–13.
26. Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 286.
27. Ross, *Constructing Socialism*, 174–75.
28. Jeanette Z. Madarasz, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971–1989: A Precarious Stability* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003), 62–66; Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth, “About Official and Unofficial Addressing in East German Children’s Literature,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 34–35; and Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth, *Translation under State Control: Books for Young People in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–4. Madarasz approaches this material from the position of the FDJ’s mandates in drawing youth into the socialist fold. Meanwhile, Thomson-Wohlgemuth suggests that East German children’s literature underwent a period of transformation as the FDJ attempted to raise it to levels enjoyed by adult literature and in keeping with the *Bitterfelder Weg* and tenets of Socialist Realism mapped out by the regime in 1959. However, both meet in the middle to suggest the importance of children’s literature published by the FDJ and its educational mandate in the development of the socialist personality and the construction of German socialism given the perceived significance of youth participation to the future of the SED state.
29. Jan Palmowski, “Between Conformity and Eigen-Sinn: New Approaches to GDR History,” *German History* 20, no. 4 (2002): 499–500.
30. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 1–29.
31. Dorothee Wierling, “Youth as Internal Enemy: Conflicts in the Educational Dictatorship of the 1960s,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 166–73.
32. Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1996), 28.
33. Matthew J. Pustz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 155–56. Though Pustz is writing to the American experience, the experience of childhood may be understood as a universal and it is not difficult to imagine East German school children discussing comics before and after class, particularly as the FDJ encouraged connections between comics and the classroom.
34. Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986).
35. Saunders, *Honecker's Children*, 10.
36. See Betts, *Within Walls*; Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross, “Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany: an Introduction,” in

- Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006), 1–22; Fulbrook, *People's State*; and Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Wierling, "Youth as Internal Enemy," 157–82.
37. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 175–77.
 38. Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique* no. 3 (Autumn 1974), 49.
 39. Habermas, "Public Sphere," 50.
 40. For more on the development of the public sphere in a liberal society, closer to that conceptualized by Habermas, existing in the Soviet Bloc and how that public sphere affected the collapse of Soviet-style communism, not only in East Germany but throughout Eastern Europe, see Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009); Michael Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Scribner, 2009); and Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
 41. A "normal" everyday life is here implied to mean the ability to live under the assumption that the state was not always watching or else to act in such a way that practices of self-censorship became normal in and of themselves.
 42. Fulbrook, "Concept of 'Normalisation,'" 1–16.
 43. Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 153.
 44. Betts, *Within Walls*, 174–75.
 45. Leonid Heretz, "Petitions from Peasants," in *From Supplication to Revolution: A Documentary History of Imperial Russia*, ed. Gregory Freeze (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 170–79. This made the practice of *Eingaben* completely in line with socialist society and the Party line of loyalty and participation of the socialist personality as integral to the continuation of the state.
 46. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 175–89.
 47. Betts, *Within Walls*, 175.
 48. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 58. In "Novels and Children," Barthes argues that the domestic is a space from which men, and thus the state as the masculinized political and public sphere, are absent. Yet, pressure is exerted on the domestic by men on all sides. This suggests that within the domestic, the individual is free, relatively speaking, so long as they acknowledge the authority of the state and their obligations to that authority. Interactions with the state are permitted from within the domestic so long as they are subordinated to those authorities and obligations.

49. Alf Lüdtke, "Wo blieb die 'rote Glut?' Arbeitererfahrungen und deutscher Faschismus," in *Alltagsgeschichte, Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1989), 224–82; Thomas Lindenberger, "Alltagsgeschichte und ihr möglicher Beitrag zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR," in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, ed. Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 298–325.
50. Konrad H. Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Toward a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 47–69 and Port, *Conflict and Stability*, 87–94.
51. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 87.
52. Wright, 31. Bradford Wright suggests that at least thirty-five thousand copies of *Superman* were received and read by American GIs every month during World War II. American comics were an identifiable, if not synonymous, part of GI culture during the war. This led to assumptions by European observers of "American immaturity and unsophistication."
53. Indeed, Hegen and members of the Mosaik-Kollektiv were allowed to read, and take home for study, Western comics confiscated at the border. This enabled and encouraged the Kollektiv to draw inspiration and influence from these "harmful" publications. See, Thomas Kramer, "Donald, Asterix and Abrafaxe: Die Verarbeitung amerikanischer und französischer Comic-Serien in den Mosaik-Bildgeschichten der DDR (1955–1990)," in *Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung 1999/2000*, ed. Hans-Heino Ewers, Ulrich Nassen, Karin Richter, and Rüdiger Steinlein (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2000), 40–66.