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Autonomous and Between Worlds: Musical Manifestos for Anti-Capitalist Futures in Post-Wall East Berlin

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Abstract

The opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 provided a spectacular climax for Samuel Huntington's third wave of democracy. It represented the triumph not only of a people over their oppressive regime but also, ultimately, of Western economic liberalism; the post-socialist democracy of German reunification was a singular one with consumerism at its core. In the early 1990s, many East German reform socialists resisted this inevitability, and exploited the temporary political and bureaucratic void that emerged in East Berlin as a space in which to imagine alternative democratic futures from the socialist past. In this article I explore the attempts by two very different East Berlin musical communities to incubate anti-capitalist worlds from the legacies – both official and unofficial – of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). First, I reflect on the autonomous musical worlds that were created by members of the GDR's alternative bands in occupied buildings in Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte. Second, I consider the articulation by the *ZwischenWelt-Festival*, a reincarnation of the GDR's Festival of Political Song, of a more outward-looking future for East Germany, based on the ideals of international solidarity.

The opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 provided a spectacular climax for Samuel Huntington's third wave of democracy. Images broadcast across the globe of crowds surging through border checkpoints into the euphoric embrace of their fellow Germans in the west of the city captured the triumph not only of a people over their oppressive regime but also, ultimately, of Western economic liberalism, which for scholars like Huntington and Francis Fukuyama was synonymous with democracy. In his prominent 'End of History' article, written in the summer of 1989, Fukuyama identified material abundance as pivotal to the success of liberal democracy or 'the final form of human government'.¹ He explained, 'we might summarize the content of the universal homogenous state as liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic'.² In the days, weeks, and months following the opening of the Wall, access to consumer culture dominated the discourse of liberation. From the 100 deutschmarks *Begrüßungsgeld* (welcome money) paid out to first-time visitors to the Federal Republic from the German Democratic

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1 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 4.

2 Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', 8.

Republic (GDR), which fuelled endless media fodder of East Germans descending en masse on West German shops, through to Chancellor Helmut Kohl's promise that unification with the Federal Republic would turn the former GDR provinces 'into blooming landscapes where it is worthwhile to live and work',³ the post-socialist democracy that was presented to East Germans was a singular one with consumerism at its core. East Germans were to leave the empty shelves of socialism behind and, as Daphne Berdahl describes, be transformed into 'citizen-consumers'.⁴

The shift from socialism to capitalism happened quickly. In the GDR's first free election on 18 March 1990, a large majority of the turnout (48.1%) voted for the West German-backed coalition Alliance for Germany. Fronted by the East German wing of the Christian Democratic Union Party, the Alliance ran on a platform of 'Nie wieder sozialismus' (Never again socialism), campaigning for rapid German reunification and private property ownership.⁵ This result set in motion a rapid chain of events, including the introduction to the GDR of the West German deutschmark via the monetary union of 1 July, German reunification on 3 October, and the subsequent replacement of the GDR's structures, systems, and institutions with those of the Federal Republic. Berlin served as the poster child for this expeditious pace of change. As developers swooped in to capitalize on the wastelands that had surrounded the Wall and the topographies of the once-divided city merged to form an expansive cultural and administrative centre, Berlin began to give physical form to the Western vision of reunification. The physical transformation was replicated in the rapid demographic overhaul of East Berlin's cultural and intellectual institutions. West German professors, for example, were brought in to restructure the Humboldt University on the city's Unter den Linden boulevard in 1990 as part of a wider reform of East German universities, and East German academics were required to reapply for their positions, many without success.⁶ Meanwhile, across the street from the Humboldt in the former GDR state opera, the new manager appointed in 1991 was Georg Quander, whose previous role was as director of music for the US-funded RIAS (Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor/Radio in the American sector) in West Berlin.⁷

Away from the epicentre of the city, the pace of Westernization was slower. The dilapidated tenements and abandoned buildings that spanned from the edges of Berlin Mitte northeast into Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain epitomized the financial bankruptcy of the GDR

3 Helmut Kohl, 'Fernsehansprache des Bundeskanzlers Kohl zum Inkrafttreten der Währungsunion am 1 Juli. 1990', https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3101&language=german. All translations from German are my own unless otherwise indicated.

4 Daphne Berdahl, 'The Spirit of Capitalism and the Boundaries of Citizenship in Post-Wall Germany', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47/2 (2005), 235.

5 Wolfgang G. Gibowski, 'Demokratischer (Neu-)Beginn in der DDR: Dokumentation und Analyse der Wahl vom 18. März 1990', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 21/1 (1990). For a discussion of West German influence on the election, see Jürgen Habermas, 'Yet Again: German Identity: A Unified Nation of Angry DM-Burghers?', *New German Critique* 52 (1991).

6 Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Anticommunist Purge or Democratic Renewal? The Transformation of the Humboldt University, 1985–2000', in *East German Historians since Reunification: A Discipline Transformed*, ed. Axel Fair Schulze (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

7 'Leitungsteam für Oper', *taz*, 18 September 1991, <https://taz.de/Leitungsteam-fuer-Oper/!1702069/>.

regime. They also provided sites for reform socialists – the artists, intellectuals, and counter-cultural groups who had advocated for political change in the final years of the GDR – to articulate alternative East German futures in which the GDR was not simply recast in the image of the West. Reform socialists found the enthusiasm with which their fellow citizens embraced Westernization and consumerism hard to swallow. In an article for *Der Spiegel* in December 1989, the writer Stefan Heym condemned the speed with which his compatriots had transformed from a people who had ‘risen up and taken their fate into their own hands’ and who had ‘only recently seemed to be marching nobly into a promising future’, into a ‘hoard of frenzied shoppers’ descending with ‘cannibalistic lust’ on West German department stores in search of useless trash.⁸ Heym’s contempt found a practical expression in the interventionist performance event that the anti-capitalist Eimer music collective staged in Berlin Mitte’s Rosenthaler Straße on 14 April 1990. The collective, which was led by members of the East German alternative bands IchFunktion, Freygang, and Die Firma, announced the event via leaflets, posters, and newspaper advertisements that read: ‘We want to be Westerners!!! On Saturday the 14.4.1990 at 17.00 hours 5,000-DM among the people. Whoever likes western money should come!’⁹ On the day itself a crowd of around 500 people, some equipped with empty bags and upturned umbrellas, gathered on the street outside Rosenthaler Straße 68, an abandoned building that the collective had occupied several months earlier. At 5 p.m. a man appeared on the roof of a building across from the Eimer and began to throw down coins. Instead of the advertised 5,000 deutschmarks, however, he dispensed only a few handfuls of one and two pfennig coins, following which he instructed the crowd to shout ‘we want to be Westerners’ to get more money. Some obliged and were rewarded with another few handfuls of coins.¹⁰ Reporting in the *telegraph*, Sebastian Mönning observed of the crowd: ‘Whoever saw and heard this had to be ashamed of being an “Easterner” (at least I was).’¹¹

For East Berlin’s disparate and often niche, musical communities, the as-yet unaltered soundscapes of the GDR offered scope for renegotiating post-Wall East German identities on their own terms. Revealing, for example, is the punk gig captured in Petra Tschörtner’s 1990 fly-on-the-wall documentary *Berlin Prenzlauer Berg–Begegnungen zwischen dem 1. Mai und dem 1. Juli 1990 (Berlin Prenzlauer Berg – Encounters between 1 May and 1 July 1990)*. The gig takes place in the Franz-Club (now the Frannz Club in the Kulturbrauerei) on 30 June, the eve of the monetary union, and features a droll funeral for the East

8 Stefan Heym, ‘Ash Wednesday in the GDR’, trans. Stephen Brockmann, *New German Critique* 52 (1991), 31. Originally published as ‘Aschermittwoch in der DDR’, *Der Spiegel*, 3 December 1989.

9 Wir wollen Westler sein!!! Am Samstag, dem 14.4.1990 um 17.00 Uhr 5000,- DM unters Volk / Wer Westgeld mag, soll kommen! The text is quoted in Sebastian Mönning, “Wir wollen Westler sein!” Aktionskunst am Ostersonnabend gegen 16.30 Uhr auf dem Rosenthaler Platz in Ostberlin wird zur bitteren Karikatur’, *telegraph* 8 (1990), archived at <https://telegraph.cc/wir-wollen-westler-sein/>.

10 Mönning, “Wir wollen Westler sein!” The *telegraph* was the new incarnation of the GDR samizdat magazine *Umweltblätter*. For another account of the event, see *taz*, ‘Sternthaleraktion mit Westmark im Osten’, 17 April 1990, <https://taz.de/Sternthaleraktion-mit-Westmark-im-Osten/!1772095/>. Only 150 Deutschmarks were dispensed in the end.

11 Mönning, “Wir wollen Westler sein!”

German mark.¹² As midnight strikes, a bell tolls and the unnamed punk band yields the floor to a trio of brass players in t-shirts and jeans who begin a solemn rendition of the GDR's national anthem 'Auferstanden aus Ruinen' ('Risen from Ruins'). The band's drummer parodies the rhythms of a military drum corps, the lead singer pretends to conduct, and a girl in clown makeup holds up sparklers in front of the stage. As the crowd whistle and some couples slow dance in exaggerated fashion, the performance of the anthem becomes increasingly distorted, and the clown girl produces an upturned umbrella full of East German coins, which she throws into the crowd. The anthem comes to a dissonant and decidedly unceremonious conclusion, a fitting end to the GDR state. The possibility of rebirth follows, however, as the band launches into a raucous version of 'Sag mir, wo du stehst' ('Tell Me Where You Stand') to which the crowd pogo and shouts along. Written in 1966 by Hartmut König, 'Sag mir, wo du stehst' was synonymous with structures of state power. It was the unofficial anthem of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth, FDJ) and a staple of the East German school curriculum. Its lyrics are not subtle; as David Robb remarks, 'there is no mistaking the party rhetoric, the veiled references to the "class enemy", and the "either with us or against us" stance'.¹³ The unorthodox rendering at the Franz-Club entailed a clear rejection of this divisive ideology; the unbridled enthusiasm with which the crowd took ownership of the song also suggested, however, that – for this group at least – the recent East German past was something that might be reclaimed rather than discarded.

The role that music might play in invoking socialist democracies was far from straightforward. The utopian potential that had been ascribed by the Socialist Unity Party (Socialistische Einheitspartei, SED) to Western art music and political song in the early GDR had failed to materialize, and the oppositional aesthetics that had emerged in the 1970s were concerned, for the most part, with the critique of existing systems rather than the development of new ones. With the evaporation of the SED regime, musicians – from art-music composers to punks – were faced with a loss of aesthetic function. Reiner Bredemeyer had described himself in September 1989, for example, 'as a composer who on principle wants to and must meddle in the "situation"', the situation here being the current affairs of the GDR, which featured frequently in his rapidly written topical works.¹⁴ By 1992, however, he complained that it was now 'no fun at all to meddle', explaining that 'you can't even be against . . . – no one is interested in that. They don't get angry anymore, everything is regulated by money.'¹⁵ The GDR's singer-songwriters and cabaret artists similarly struggled. They had positioned themselves in the 1970s and 1980s as news bearers, as tellers of truth in a climate of censorship. Bettina

12 Petra Tschörtner, dir. *Berlin Prenzlauer Berg – Begegnungen zwischen dem 1. Mai und dem 1. Juli 1990* (DEFA, 1991).

The scene begins at 28'15". The film can be located in the PROGRESS archive at <https://progress.film/record/2444>.

13 David Robb, 'The Liedertheater of Wenzel & Mensching: A Creative Use of the Agitprop Tradition in the GDR', *Theatre Survey* 52/2 (2011), 227.

14 Reiner Bredemeyer, "Ich wendete mich nicht". Einige persönliche Gedanken und Überlegungen zu meiner *Winterreise*', *MusikTexte* 64 (1996), 34. The article, which was published posthumously, was originally written in September 1989.

15 "'Reiner Bredemeyer – Komponieren nach der Wende". Ein Gespräch von Gisela Nauck vom 25.11.92 in Berlin-Pankow', www.gisela-nauck.de/texte/1992_Bredemeyer.pdf, 1. Ellipsis in the original.

Wegner explained in 1992 that she and her fellow song writers were a ‘press replacement’ in the GDR. But, she added, ‘if there is no press censorship, you don’t have to write those songs’.¹⁶

Countering the uncertainty in the 1990s as to how, or indeed whether, music might serve as an agent of change in and of itself was the function that music had played in the GDR in binding together distinct communities and inscribing specific identities and sociopolitical values. The dismantling of the state’s structures had resulted in the decimation of some of these communities – the East German composition community, for example, struggled to survive as commissions and performance opportunities dwindled.¹⁷ For others, however, the void that opened up in East Berlin in the early 1990s provided an unprecedented opportunity to repurpose and rethink the ideals that had underpinned their music making with a view to incubating new anti-capitalist worlds. In what follows, I reflect on two such incubation attempts: first, briefly, on the construction of autonomous creative East German ‘states’ by members of the GDR’s alternative bands; and second, in more depth, on the articulation of East Germany as part of a broader socialist, musically connected world by those who had been involved in the GDR’s political song movement. I do not examine these communities’ musical outputs, but consider instead how they repurposed and renegotiated the political potential of the identities and practices that had defined them in the GDR.

Looking in: autonomous anti-capitalist musical worlds

For many of the punks, experimental musicians, and members of the *die anderen Bands*, or ‘other bands’ – a label applied to a broad spectrum of semi-official alternative music in the late 1980s – the solution to the onslaught of Western capitalism was to create new, specifically ‘East German’ worlds. As Christian ‘Flake’ Lorenz, the keyboard player of Feeling B and now Rammstein, recalls, ‘we didn’t want the GDR to be taken over by the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany], we wanted to become a cool, independent state. We thought, now it’s getting good, the Honeckers are gone, now we can make something really sensible out of it.’¹⁸ The temporary relaxation in bureaucracy and policing that accompanied the transition of governments provided the perfect conditions for countercultural musicians to engage in full-scale expressions of the alternative lifestyles they had forged for themselves in the GDR’s liminal spaces.¹⁹ The squatting and DIY art cultures that they had evolved under late socialism equipped them to operate independently of the constraints of the capitalist

16 Bettina Wegner, interview 11 September 1992, in Michael Kleff and Hans-Eckardt Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht: Gespräche mit Liedermachern und Kabarettisten der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2019), 293.

17 For a discussion of East German composers in the 1990s, see Elaine Kelly, ‘Reflective Nostalgia and Diasporic Memory: Composing East Germany after 1989’, in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

18 Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister, *Feeling B: Mix mir einen Drink; Punk im Osten; Ausführliche Gespräche mit Flake, Paul Landers und vielen anderen* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2002), 262.

19 Two excellent accounts of the space for experimentation that emerged in East Berlin in the early 1990s are Alexander Vasudevan, ‘Reassembling the City: Makeshift Urbanisms and the Politics of Squatting in Berlin’, in *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (London: Verso, 2017); and Ulrich Gutmair, *The First Days of Berlin: The Sound of*

music industry – temporarily at least – and to engage in creative living as an end in itself rather than a path to productive citizenship, as per socialist ideology.²⁰ In the manifesto they issued for Rosenthaler Straße 68, the Eimer collective declared their way of life as being ‘to re-function the ruins of a vulnerable world and to create, in the process of living and working, our own culture’.²¹ The Eimer, which they conceived of as a ‘permanent centre, for art, culture and communications’, was entirely self-contained – Tatjana Besson from the band Die Firma described the ethos as ‘stay in . . . do it yourself . . . make it yourself’.²² They developed the space to include a venue, recording studios, a cinema, a bar, and sleeping quarters. The building paid for itself through the gigs that were held in it, and surplus income was distributed equally among everybody working and living there.²³

Another such collective was Wydoks, led by Aljoscha Rompe of Feeling B, which occupied a vast tenement block at nearby Schönhauser Allee 5. In addition to providing extensive accommodation for squatters, the Wydoks building housed gig venues, a cinema, film and sound studios, and its own pirate community radio station, Radio P, which launched on 4 May 1990, and declared itself to be ‘the first free radio in the GDR’.²⁴ The station disseminated information about the squatting scene in Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte, played cassettes of upcoming bands, and provided live coverage of countercultural protests against the reunification process in the area.²⁵ Musicians from the *anderen Bands* had become adept in the GDR both at self-sufficiency and at playing the system, skills that equipped them well for the early 1990s. Wydoks availed fully of the subsidies put in place by the new government to resuscitate East Germany’s failing economy; Rompe and Grisú, a co-founder of the collective, obtained paid positions through a new job creation scheme as ‘co-ordinators of youth and media’ to run the house and secured extensive funding to build state-of-the-art recording

Change, trans. Simon Pare (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), originally published as *Die ersten Tagen von Berlin: Der Sound der Wende* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2015).

- 20 On these cultures, see, for example, Susanne Binas, ‘Die “anderen Bands” und ihre Kassettenproduktionen – Zwischen organisiertem Kulturbetrieb und selbstorganisierten Kulturformen’, in *Rockmusik und Politik: Analysen, Interviews und Dokumente*, ed. Peter Wicke and Lothar Müller (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996); Seth Howes, ‘DIY, im Eigenverlag’, *German Politics and Society* 35/2 (2017); Tim Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus: Punk Rock, Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2018); and Jeff Hayton, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- 21 Cited in translation in Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City*, 151.
- 22 Besson utters the statement in the film *Sampler Wydoks*, which was directed and produced by the Wydoks collective in 1990 (Wydoks, dir. *Sampler Wydoks*. 116 mins. VHS, 1990).
- 23 See Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 341; Ulrike Steglich and Peter Kratz, *Das falsche Scheunenviertel: Ein Vorstadtverführer*, 2nd ed (Berlin: Verlagsbuchhandlung Oliver Seifert, 1994), 10–11; and Birgit Herdlitschke, ‘Quasi anerkannter Underground’, *taz*, 19 March 1990, <https://taz.de/!1776022/>. For a discussion of the aesthetics of those involved with the Eimer, see Patricia Anne Simpson, ‘Soundtracks: GDR Music from “Revolution” to “Reunification”’, in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- 24 *Sampler Wydoks*. On the radio station, see also Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 265.
- 25 A recording of the programme that was broadcast by the station from Prenzlauer Berg on the eve of German reunification is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/radio-p> (accessed 15 January 2022).

and video suites.²⁶ Rompe's visions for the collective were such that he established a new political party, Unabhängige Autonome Aktion Wydoks (Independent Autonomous Action Wydoks), to run in the local Berlin elections in May 1990. Rompe stood as a candidate in Prenzlauer Berg, Besson and Freygang's André Greiner-Pol in Mitte, and Flake in Marzahn. The party received 2,265 votes in total, which was 0.1% of the overall vote.²⁷

Alexander Vasudevan describes the radical squats that flourished in East Berlin in the early 1990s as 'sites of collective world making',²⁸ a characterization that echoes Rompe's own rationale for Wydoks: 'one had to found one's own independent world'.²⁹ In contrast to the international orientation of squats such as Tacheles on Oranienburger Straße,³⁰ the world envisaged by Wydoks, however, was an insular one that sought to maintain clear boundaries between a specifically East German counterculture and the rest of the world. The squat at Schönhauser Allee 5 adopted an exclusionary vetting process: in a scene from the building in the 1990 documentary *Sampler Wydoks*, Flake proudly declares that 'only East Berliners live in the house'.³¹ The concept of autonomy on which the Wydoks party campaigned in 1990 was also decidedly protectionist in nature. As an election manifesto explained: 'We need our own concert venues, cafes, pubs, and cinemas, we need our own autonomous broadcaster in East Berlin for East Berlin, we need our own legal department to fight against the machinations that surround us, and we need our own elected representatives.'³²

Looking out: the 'between worlds' of international solidarity

The isolationist stance of the East German squats, which found a darker expression in the racism and xenophobia that percolated to the surface of East Germany in the early 1990s, reflects the niche mind-set that characterized the GDR's private spheres.³³ Indeed, the legacy

26 Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 247, 249, 251–3. This reliance on state funding caused unease among some members of the collective; see, for example, the interviews with Olaf Tost and André Greiner-Pol, (pp. 251–3). Tost notably remarked that a 'state-funded counterculture is surely an absurd notion' (p. 252).

27 See Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 263–5; and www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/blBerlinOst.htm (accessed 17 February 2022).

28 Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City*, 167.

29 Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 255.

30 While the first wave of squats in East Berlin were occupied by East Germans, the occupants of buildings squatted after February 1990 were predominantly from the West. See Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City*, 146, 154. Tacheles started as a joint venture between Eastern and Western squatters but the Westerners quickly exerted control. See Gutmair, *The First Days of Berlin*, 26; and Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 342–5.

31 *Sampler Wydoks*. On the strict controls that Rompe exerted over who could live in the building, see Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 246–7. For another perspective on the exclusionary policies of Wydoks and Eimer, see Dietmar Wolf, 'Fünf Jahre danach und fast vergessen: Über die Hausbesetzungsbewegung in Ost Berlin, Letzter Teil', *telegraph* 2/3 (1996), <https://telegraph.cc/archiv/telegraph-2-3-1996-86/foenf-jahre-danach-und-fast-vergessen-ueber-die-hausbesetzungsbewegung-in-ostberlin/>.

32 Reprinted in Galenza and Havemeister, *Feeling B*, 263.

33 The term 'niche society' or *Nischengesellschaft* was first coined in 1983 by journalist and diplomat Günter Gaus, who was West Germany's first official representative in the GDR. See Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983). For a more recent discussion, see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of niche culture on reform socialism was profound. Instead of coming together to form a united front, the various opposition groups, from civil rights to environmental movements as well as those seeking to reform the GDR's structures from within, continued to furrow distinct paths. The exclusionary politics of the Wydoks collective was not, however, endemic; others sought to resist the tide of Western liberal democracy by looking outwards rather than in, by framing the potential of East Germany not in terms of a narrow East–West nexus, but in the global context of international socialism.

International solidarity had permeated East German society as both rhetoric and practice from the 1960s onwards. East German workers made monthly solidarity 'donations' alongside their union dues towards overseas development projects, to support groups such as the African National Congress, and to provide scholarships for students from non-aligned countries to study in the GDR. Schools, workplaces, and FDJ branches organized regular solidarity fundraising events, and a solidarity consciousness was cultivated more broadly through coverage of campaigns on postage stamps and posters, in the media, and in dedicated films, concerts, and recordings.³⁴ Solidarity was not something to which East Germans simply paid lip service. Revealing is the enthusiasm with which interview subjects recall their personal acts of support for the Vietnam War campaign in a recent study by Christina Schwenkel.³⁵ Likewise, for many artists and intellectuals, the SED's commitment to solidarity was an aspect of the state they could support.³⁶ Given the extent, however, to which the collective spirit of solidarity had been manipulated into existence by the SED, there was no space for it in the hegemonic discourse of reunification. Indeed, the focus on German nationalism left little room for any construct of solidarity other than that between white Germans. The Afro-German writer May Ayim, who was living in West Berlin at the time, remarked of the situation that 'talk in the media was of German-German brothers and sisters, of unified and

34 See Achim Reichardt, *Nie vergessen - Solidarität üben! Die Solidaritätsbewegung in der DDR* (Berlin: Kai Homilius-Verlag, 2006); Toni Weis, 'The Politics Machine: On the Concept of "Solidarity" in East German Support for SWAPO', *Journal of South African Studies* 37/2 (2011); Gerd Horten, 'Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the "Vietnam Bonus" of the Early 1970s', *German Studies Review* 36/3 (2013); and Gregory Witkowski, 'Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Image of Solidarity in East Germany', in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

35 Christina Schwenkel, *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 89. See also Christina Schwenkel, 'Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam', in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

36 See, for example, Nora M. Alter 'Excessive Pre/Requisites: Vietnam through the East German Lens', *Cultural Critique* 35 (1996); Martin Brady and Carola Nielinger-Vakil, "'Altes wird aufgerollt": Paul Dessau's Posthumous Collaborations with Brecht', in *Brecht Yearbook*, vol. 42: *Recycling Brecht*, ed. Tom Kuhn and David Barnett (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017); and Elaine Kelly, 'Music for International Solidarity: Performances of Race and Otherness in the German Democratic Republic', *Twentieth-Century Music* 16/1 (2019). This support set East German intellectuals apart from the oppositional intelligentsia in the Soviet Union, who as Rossen Djagalov notes, 'equated these causes with Soviet foreign policy'. Rossen Djagalov, 'Guitar Poetry, Democratic Socialism, and the Limits of 1960s Internationalism', in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 158.

reunified, of solidarity and togetherness’, but ‘German-German was discussed and celebrated even in the women’s movement as though Germany were exclusively white and the centre of the world’.³⁷ The ideology of international solidarity was no less wedded to a white Germanocentric perspective of the world; it also failed to address either the GDR’s own systemic racisms or Germany’s broader colonial history. Yet, in the context of reunification it offered scope for imagining a more socially engaged society than that promised by consumer capitalism.

One attempt to reclaim international solidarity from the official structures of the GDR was the *ZwischenWelt-Festival* (Between Worlds-Festival), which was conceived as a replacement for the *Festival des politischen Liedes* (Festival of Political Song) and ran annually from 1991 to 1994. The Festival of Political Song was one of the most prominent exhibitions of international solidarity in the GDR and also one of the most problematic, epitomizing the extent to which solidarity was synonymous with the regime. For a week every February, left-wing musicians from across the world converged on East Berlin to sing in support of socialism and against global injustices. Administered by the FDJ, the festival was a very public demonstration of SED power. Strict guidelines and a culture of censorship determined who sang, and in the case of GDR artists, what was sung: the genre favoured by East German singing clubs at the festival – chief among them the FDJ’s *Oktoberklub* – was ‘DDR-Konkret’, a term, which was coined by the FDJ in 1968 and anticipated Erich Honecker’s declaration of the arrival of real-existing socialism three years later. Political songs were no longer to be conceived as ‘a means of struggle of an oppressed class against a class of exploiters’, but should instead be ‘created for the policies of the party and the government’.³⁸

Some critics condemned the festival as little other than a grandiose spectacle of state propaganda. The writer Regina Schmeer described it in 1993 as a ‘shop window’ for East German socialism: the visiting musicians ‘returned to their countries with the feeling that everything they dreamed had been achieved in the GDR’.³⁹ Yet for its East German participants – members of amateur singing clubs as well as professional musicians – it also

37 May Ayim, ‘The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective’ (1993), trans. Tes Howell, in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955–2000*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 126–7. Originally published as ‘Das Jahr 1990. Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive’, in *Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung*, ed. Ika Hügel et al. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1997).

38 Inge Lammell, *Das Arbeiterlied* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1970), 82. For an overview of the *Singebewegung* and festival, see Lutz Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR: Chronisten, Kritiker, Kaisergeburtstagssänger* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993); Lutz Kirchenwitz, *Rote Lieder: Festival des politischen Liedes Berlin/DDR 1970–1990: Daten + Dokumente* (Berlin: Lied und Soziale Bewegungen, 1999); and David Robb, ‘The GDR “Singebewegung”: Metamorphosis and Legacy’, *Monatshefte* 92/2 (2000), 199–216. For discussion of the festival’s international scope, see Christina Richter-Ibáñez, ‘Latin American Songs in the GDR and the East German Singer-Songwriter Repertoire (1970–2000): Gerhard Schöne’s “Meine Geschwister” in the Light of Translation Studies’, *Twentieth-Century Music* 17/3 (2020).

39 Regina Schmeer interviewed in Alex Grote and Christian Steinke, dirs, *Sag mir wo du stehst: Die Geschichte vom Oktoberklub* (MDR, 1993).

fostered a sense of connectedness with the wider socialist world. Looking back on the festival in May 1990, singer-songwriter Norbert Bischoff identified its most important aspect as

the fact that you got in touch with people who brought very different experiences with them. When people from Africa or South America came and you met them at night in sessions in the Haus der jungen Talente [House of Young Talent; the central club of the FDJ, now the Palais Podewils], you somehow got a very different closeness than at these mammoth events that were only intended to represent something to the outside world.⁴⁰

Such encounters enabled East Germans to experience the abstract notions of international solidarity in more tangible forms and helped to create, as Holger Böning explains, ‘a solidarity that was not only alleged but felt’.⁴¹

The festival ran for the final time in February 1990. The elections in which East Germans voted to join the Federal Republic were still a month away, and the official structures that had previously governed the festival had yet to be dismantled, providing the organizers with space to rethink the event’s relevance and function in the absence of the tight controls of the SED regime. In an interview in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 9 February, programme director Jörn Fechner, who as a founding member of the Oktoberklub had been involved with the festival from the outset, signposted a change of course. The twentieth-anniversary festival would attempt to reposition itself as a vital platform for envisioning a new East Germany by expanding its political boundaries to encompass a broader range of left-wing perspectives. Fechner declared that ‘the festival sees itself as a left-wing cultural forum. It is meant to be pluralistic.’ Acknowledging the extent to which ‘socialism’ had become ‘an empty phrase’, he proposed that a path to a more tolerant society might be ‘to express and share our visions and utopias for a meaningful life’.⁴²

The commitment to a new pluralism was in evidence in the bringing into the fold of leftist movements previously considered dissident; interest groups with concerns spanning from xenophobia, antifascism, and human rights to the environment were represented at thirty exhibition stands in the foyer of Prenzlauer Berg’s Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, the central location of the festival that year.⁴³ Meanwhile, three events under the banner ‘Vision of Socialism’ signposted the role that the festival might play in developing a new path for East Germany. Each of these was billed as including ‘discussion, information, concerts’, and each had a different focus: ‘ecology’ on the 12 February, ‘women’ on 13 February, and ‘youth’ on the 14 February. The musical line-up for these events consisted predominantly of festival regulars who were very much part of the GDR’s official music scene: Duo

40 Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 32. Interview undertaken on 3 May 1990.

41 Holger Böning, *Der Traum von einer Sache: Aufstieg und Fall der Utopien im politischen Lied der Bundesrepublik und der DDR* (Bremen: edition lumière, 2004), 213.

42 Interviewed in Thomas Meizer, ‘Forum für Toleranz und Pluralismus: Politische Lieder – vielleicht zum letzten Mal’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 9 February 1990.

43 Meizer, ‘Forum für Toleranz und Pluralismus’.

Sonnenschirm, Christian Krebs, and the Potsdam-based singing club Rotdorn performed at the ecology event; Barbara Kellerbauer, Gerlinde Kempendorff, and Maike Nowak at the event on women, and the Oktoberklub, Arno Schmidt, and Stefan Körbel at the youth event.⁴⁴ The rest of the festival was more international in scope. The opening concert, for example, very much in the tradition of previous years, evoked solidarity via song. Titled ‘Gegen Gewalt’ (‘Against Violence’), the concert featured Chilean band Inti-Illimani, Soviet band Nautilus Pompilius, US band the Klezmatics, as well as Konstantin Wecker from the Federal Republic and Norbert Bischoff from the GDR. Similar in intent was the double bill of Israeli singer and activist Sara Alexander and Palestinian group Sabreen at the Jo-Jo youth club on 12 February.⁴⁵ This continued international focus met with some resistance, not least from prominent figures in the GDR’s political song scene, who argued in an open letter to the press that international acts had been secured at the expense of East German performers, who were ‘consigned to peripheral venues’ and faced with cuts in their fees.⁴⁶ Fechner defended the number of international acts (thirty-five from eighteen different countries)⁴⁷ with the explanation that ‘we do not want to consider the GDR’s development from a navel-gazing perspective’.⁴⁸ Despite his efforts, however, the festival failed to stake its relevance in the changing political environment. Audience numbers for the concerts were significantly lower than they had been in previous years, and the ‘Vision of Socialism’ events were not well attended.⁴⁹ The critical perspective on the festival meanwhile was that it was an exercise stuck in the past rather than something that might offer new ways forward. Writing in the former SED newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, Günter Görtz observed of the ‘Against Violence’

44 The full programme is provided in the *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 January 1990. Christian Krebs had previously performed at the festival in 1986, Duo Sonnenschirm and Gerlinde Kempendorff in 1988, Maike Nowak in 1987 and 1989, Arno Schmidt in 1988 and 1989, and Stefan Körbel in 1989. The chanson singer Barbara Kellerbaum meanwhile was an SED member and embedded in the cultural bureaucracy of the state in the 1980s. The line-up also included several international acts: Terem and Nautilus Pompilius (both from the Soviet Union), and West German experimental group Vladimir Estragon played at the ecology event; and Tania Libertad (Peru) and Rachel Faro (United States) at the women’s event. For a full list of performers at the festival by year, see www.musikundpolitik.de/archive/festivalteilnehmer-1970-1990/festival-des-politischen-liedes-teilnehmer-nach-jahren/ (accessed 14 December 2022).

45 Lutz Pretzsch, ‘Karibiksound, Klesmermusik: Festival des politischen Liedes eröffnet’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 13 March 1990.

46 The letter’s signatories were Barbara Thalheim, Stefan Körbel, Gerhard Schöne, Hans-Eckardt Wenzel, Reinhold Andert, Kurt Demmler, Duo Sonnenschirm, Arno Schmidt, Detlef Hörold, Perry Friedman, and Matthias Görnandt. See Günter Görtz, ‘Die Stimmen der Liedermacher werden auch künftig wichtig sein: Gespräch mit dem Sänger Perry Friedman’, *Neues Deutschland*, 8 February 1990; ‘Diesmal mit Krug?’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 January 1990; and the interview of 8 February 1991 with Perry Friedman in Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 76. The full text of the letter can be accessed at: ‘Offener Brief an die Leitung des 20. Festivals des Politischen Liedes’, *Folk-MICHEL* 4/1990, 8, www.folker.de/foelker-archiv/archive/archiv-ddr/90-4.pdf.

47 ‘Festival des politischen Liedes in Berlin eröffnet: Einige Prominente sagten Beteiligung aus Protest ab’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 February 1990. This was versus thirty-three East German acts.

48 Meizer, ‘Forum für Toleranz und Pluralismus’.

49 The Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle was only a third full for the final concert. See Christoph Schnauß, ‘Wo man singt . . . Zum Abschluß des Liedfestivals’, *Neue Zeit*, 21 February 1990. Regarding the poor turnout for the ‘Vision of Socialism’ events, see the interview of 3 May 1990 with Jens Quandt in Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 239.

concert that: 'it was an evening that evoked nostalgic memories rather than providing inspiration for the use of political song in a changing world'.⁵⁰

The FDJ washed its hands of the festival immediately after the final concert, an indication perhaps of the extent to which the festival had served purely propagandistic purposes for this organization.⁵¹ This provided the opportunity for a wholesale reconceptualization of the event by those who were keen to perpetuate this East German legacy in some shape or form. As Birgit Walter commented in what was effectively a eulogy for the festival in the *Berliner Zeitung*: 'Berlin with a view to unification and perhaps a very large capital city also has an obligation to work to preserve left-wing cultures. The others can do commerce better. But they don't have such a festival.'⁵² But what might such a festival look like in the absence not only of the GDR's rigid hierarchies and control systems but also its generous arts subsidies? What societal visions might it articulate, and how might it contribute to the realization of these?

As soon as the FDJ vacated its festival office in Prenzlauer Berg's Oderberger Straße, the space was taken over by a new grassroots organization, the Förderverein für ein progressives Kulturfestival Berlin e.V. (Association for the Promotion of a Progressive Cultural Festival Berlin), which planned to take responsibility for staging a revamped festival the following year. The association's hope, according to Jens Quandt, the final director of the Oktoberklub and now steering the new venture, was to realize a festival that might be understood 'as a communal thing that grows from below and stays below'.⁵³ This plan came to fruition a year later with the first ZwischenWelt-Festival, which took place in venues across East and West Berlin from 8 to 12 May 1991. With the subtitle '20+1', the event made clear its relationship with the past. The past to which it looked, however, was not so much the Festival of Political Song as its predecessor the Hootenany-Klub. Instigated in East Berlin in 1966 by Canadian folk singer Perry Friedman, the Hootenany-Klub was modelled on the democratic participatory principles of North American folk clubs – anybody was welcome to come and listen, join in, sing existing songs, or present new material.⁵⁴ It was taken over by the FDJ in 1967 and rebranded as the Oktoberklub but not before it had inspired the founding of hundreds of such grassroots clubs across the GDR, a phenomenon described by the SED at its seventh party conference in April 1967 as the *Singebewegung* (singing movement).⁵⁵ The Festival of Political Song had retained some elements of the community spirit and emphasis on dialogue so central to this movement. Writing in 1969, Lutz Kirchenwitz notably explained that the new singing clubs should be conceived of not as 'singing clubs but as singing *clubs*' offering space for the discussion of the social and musical content of songs.⁵⁶ This, as Hagen

50 Günter Görtz, 'Impressionen vom Festival des politischen Liedes', *Neues Deutschland*, 13 February 1990.

51 The FDJ closed the festival office altogether on 19 February 1990. See Meizer, 'Forum für Toleranz und Pluralismus'.

52 Birgit Walter, 'Wohin entläßt die FDJ ihr Festival?', *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 February 1990.

53 Interview with Quandt in Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 236.

54 Interview with Friedman in Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 66–71.

55 For details of these clubs see Hagen Jahn, 'Jugend, Musik und Ideologie. Zur Geschichte der FDJ-Singebewegung', *Hallische Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte* 12 (2002).

56 Lutz Kirchenwitz, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Singeklub?', in *Octav* 5 (Berlin, 1969), 1.

Jahn, observes, was a perception that extended far beyond the singing clubs themselves; Jahn cites the writer Volker Braun's 1975 description of such clubs as a 'model community'.⁵⁷ The ZwischenWelt-Festival was conceived very much in this vein. It was, Quandt claimed, the antithesis of the hierarchical, officious FDJ festival and instead 'a model of how people try to promote culture in a grassroots, voluntary way in their free time'.⁵⁸

The grassroots impetus of ZwischenWelt did not result in a more locally orientated event. The 1991 festival brought together sixty-nine groups and soloists from twenty-two different countries, and evinced a commitment to cultural pluralism similar to that demonstrated by Fechner the previous year. The line-up spanned a variety of musical genres from political song, punk and rock, to jazz and folk. Concerts featured, among many others, alternative bands such as the *Die Skeptiker* (one of the GDR's *anderen Bands*) and Latin Quarter (United Kingdom); East German political singers Arno Schmidt, Stefan Körbel, and Gerhard Gundermann; Michele Shocked, pianist Chris Jarrett, and the anti-war campaigner Darnell Stephen Summers (all from the United States); and folk or 'world' music by Mezcia (Cuba), Hamid Roudbari (Iran), Tommy Sands (Ireland), and Africa MMA, a West Berlin-based group of five percussionists from Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria.⁵⁹

In the absence of its own funding streams, the festival relied on significant amounts of goodwill, including from the new Berlin senator for culture, Ulrich Roloff-Momin, who offered rent-free use of the Haus der jungen Talente, observing that 'we must try to keep this festival going. It can have two results. Either it was an FDJ festival, in which case it will have no future in the transformed society. Or there was also opposition and autonomy behind the scenes, as some say – then it will last'.⁶⁰ Sponsorship was provided by like-minded organizations such as the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS), which succeeded the SED, *junge Welt*, which had until 1990 been the newspaper of the FDJ and was also seeking a new way for itself, and BasisDruck Verlag, which was founded in December 1989 as the first publishing house of the 'new' GDR. Most important was the contribution of the performers themselves, all of whom played for free and lodged with locals.⁶¹ This not only ensured the financial viability of the festival, but also facilitated Quandt's desire to break down boundaries between artists and audience and provide a forum for communication.⁶²

57 Volker Braun, 'Was gefällt dir an der Singebewegung? (Antwort auf eine Rundfrage)', in *Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit* (Leipzig: Notate, 1975), 84. Cited in Jahn, 'Jugend, Musik und Ideologie', 5.

58 Quoted in André Gross, 'Jetzt gibt man sich basisdemokratisch: Programm für das ZwischenWelt-Festival vorgestellt / Viele Schauplätze', *Neue Zeit*, 4 May 1991.

59 See Tom Böttcher, 'Stampfender Folk-Rock gegen Unterdrückung: Der erwartete Ansturm beim Festival des politischen Liedes blieb aus', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 May 1991; Christoph Schnauß, 'Erfolgreich ohne große Namen: Das Festival des politischen Liedes ist überlebensfähig', *Neue Zeit*, 17 May 1991; Gross, 'Jetzt gibt man sich basisdemokratisch'; 'Multikulturelles musikalisches Ereignis', *Neues Deutschland*, 20 April 1991; and F. [Heiko Fritsch], 'Zwischen April und Juni: Zwischenwelt beerbt Festival des politischen Liedes', *UNAUFGEFORDERT*, 15 May 1991, www.unauf.de/Ausgaben/UnAuf_Nr_024.pdf.

60 Cited, among other places, in, 'ZwischenWELT-Festival insgesamt erfolgreich', *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 May 1991.

61 'Künstler spielen zum Nulltarif', *Berliner Zeitung*, 22 April 1991.

62 See Gross, 'Jetzt gibt man sich basisdemokratisch'; and interview of 8 May 1991 with Quandt in Kleff and Wenzel, eds., *Kein Land in Sicht*, 244.

The festival's combination of discussion forums and concerts – its slogan was 'Songs and Talk' – epitomized the approach to political change that was favoured by many reform socialists. The Wydoks collective were not typical in their engagement with party politics. Others, reflecting their experiences of both the GDR and the 1990 elections, were suspicious of party democracy, and advocated instead for grassroots politics. As Detlef Pollack explains, they 'viewed politics primarily as a form of discussion aimed at achieving a broad consensus'.⁶³ Attempts to conceive of new socialist democracies took place in grassroots discussion groups, cultural events, and protests. In the case of the 1991 *ZwischenWelt*-Festival, the end goal of its discussion politics was not altogether clear. The title of the festival notably referred not to the between-world status of East Berlin itself, but to 'the worlds between the wealth of the northern hemisphere and the poverty in the south'. The festival, according to its organizers aimed 'to build bridges between the continents'.⁶⁴ In order to do so, it facilitated discussions on a variety of topics, and screened a film series on issues in the global south. Yet, as Frank Pohl observed in his review of the festival for *Neues Deutschland*, 'only seldom were conceptual ideas recognizable'.⁶⁵

The second iteration of the *ZwischenWelt*-Festival, '20+2', had a much clearer remit. A more concentrated affair, it took place over the course of a single weekend from 8 to 10 May 1992 with a new central location of the Kulturbrauerei in Prenzlauer Berg and had a defined thematic focus. The events on the Friday night promoted tolerance, bringing musicians from seven countries together under the banner of 'Andere neben Dir' ('Others Beside You') and featuring a performance by the Jamaican dub-poet and racial justice activist Linton Kwesi Johnson. Saturday was devoted to the theme of 'Unsichtbaren Widerstand' ('Invisible Resistance'). It had as its centre point an event that sought to interrogate the global celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the 'discovery' of America and to shift the focus from the triumph of the colonizers to those who had suffered and been disenfranchised by colonization. The concert featured Zapotec musicians performing indigenous songs, Cuban music by Marta Campos and José Antonio Quesada, and indigenous Argentinean music presented by Silvia Barrios. Sunday, finally, marked the tenth anniversary of the death of the writer Peter Weiss. Under the theme of 'Widerstehen' (Resisting), the events that day revolved around Weiss's three-volume activist novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (*The Aesthetics of Resistance*),⁶⁶ including screenings of films about him and a forum exploring his contemporary relevance. The focus on Weiss shifted the emphasis of the festival closer to home. Participants of the discussion forum, who included politicians André Brie of the PDS and Reinhard Schult of the Neues Forum (New Forum) – the oppositional group formed by

63 Detlef Pollack, 'Civil Rights and Opposition Groups since the *Wende*', in *Voices in Times of Change: The Role of Writers, Opposition Movements and the Churches in the Transformation of East Germany*, ed. David Rock (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 79; on suspicions of party democracy see also p. 91, and Eva Kollinsky, 'Party Governance, Political Culture and the Transformation of East Germany since 1990', *German Politics* 10/2 (2001).

64 'Polit-Songs sollen kein Aushängeschild mehr sein: Festival des politischen Liedes in neuer Form', *Berliner Zeitung*, 22 February 1991.

65 Frank Pohl, 'Auftakt oder Abgesang?', *Neues Deutschland*, 15 May 1991.

66 Peter Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975–81).

GDR intellectuals and artists in September 1989 that had demonstrated first for reform within the GDR and subsequently for socialist democracy – explored ‘Weiss’s legacy as a guide to action’. Reporting in *Neues Deutschland*, Pohl described how they considered ‘many varieties of resistance: against the ongoing colonisation of America, against the cultural expropriation of East Germany, against patriarchal structures, and against everyday opportunism’, and discussed whether and how the ‘concept of resistance could be applied to such different social contexts as fascism, real socialism and the capitalist market economy’. The event culminated in an evening concert in which East German political singer-songwriters including Körbel, Wegner, Stefan Krawczyk, and Barbara Thalheim, came together under the banner ‘Deutschland, Deutschland unter anderen’ (Germany, Germany among others) to articulate ‘what they were for and against’.⁶⁷

This constellation of events asserted a perspective of East Germany’s global situatedness that was deeply rooted in the legacies of the GDR. The festival articulated kinship with musicians from other countries, and in particular from the postcolonial world, on two levels. The first was the goal of the festival to use ‘world music as an impulse to promote more tolerance and sensitivity towards the suffering people of this planet and to raise awareness of the problems of the Third World’.⁶⁸ As per the Festival of Political Song, this reflected the belief that socialist empathies could be created through musical encounters, encounters that the grassroots nature of the *ZwischenWelt-Festival* could render more immediate than its predecessor. This was a goal that extended beyond the festival itself. In December 1993, for example, the association hosted an event in *Die Wabe* on *Danziger Straße* to showcase the diverse winter celebrations of Berlin’s non-German residents. Titled ‘Weihnachten zwischen den Kulturen’ (‘Christmas between the Cultures’), the concert featured musicians and dancers from countries including India, Peru, Turkey, and Mexico.⁶⁹ While such endeavours undoubtedly represented a positive opposition to the growing number of racist attacks in the region, this brand of empathetic solidarity also contained within it clear distinctions of self and other. Quinn Slobodian describes the worldview encapsulated in socialist internationalism as ‘socialist multilateralism’, a concept he defines as ‘a means of representing the world without disrupting the primacy of the nation-state container’.⁷⁰ Underpinning both the Festival of Political Song and the *ZwischenWelt-Festival* was an emphasis on world music as a performance of nation that served as a mode of othering. Notably, while the German music that was showcased was predominantly political song – that is, self-penned songs about topical issues by singers or *Liedermacher* accompanying themselves on guitar – the ‘world’ music of the festival’s international acts, particularly those from the global south, tended frequently to be that of ethnic folk music. The resulting

67 Frank Pohl, ‘Lieder vom Wider Stehen gegen reale Alpträume’, *Neues Deutschland*, 14 May 1992. Further details of the programme are provided in Micha Schulze, ‘Der Widerstand der Ästhetik’, *taz*, 8 May 1992, <https://taz.de/!1671143/>.

68 Ingolf Kern, ‘Suche nach modernem Peter Weiss: Zwischenwelt-Festival erlebt zweite Auflage / Alte Bekannte haben sich angesagt’, *Neue Zeit*, 7 May 1992.

69 Antje Grabley, ‘Buntes “Wabe”-Treiben: Das Fest zwischen den Welten: 200 Berliner feierten multikulturell’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 24 December 1993.

70 Quinn Slobodian, ‘The Uses of Disorientation: Socialist Cosmopolitanism in an Unfinished DEFA-China Documentary’, in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 222.

distinction, with its implicit exoticization of the non-German, precluded the possibility of more fluid notions of socialist, or indeed German identity. Revealing in this regard is the remark in a review of the *ZwischenWelt* Christmas event that the concert provided an opportunity for the artists, ‘who all live in Berlin to tell their Christmas stories to the “original Berliners” [Ur-Berliner]’.⁷¹

The second level of kinship that *ZwischenWelt* delineated emerges in the narrative of shared victimhood that framed relationships between East German musicians and their postcolonial counterparts. Toni Weis has described the ideology of solidarity as ‘anti-colonial’ rather than postcolonial: ‘instead of continuity with the past, it emphasised rupture; instead of otherness, likeness’.⁷² The SED’s presentation of the GDR as a new state that was unencumbered by Germany’s colonial past – this mantle had been passed to West Germany – enabled East Germans not only to empathize with the struggles of the colonized, but also, after reunification, to identify these struggles with their own. Striking in this regard is the way in which the focus on resistance and colonization in America at the 1992 *ZwischenWelt*-Festival served as a launching pad for discussions of the colonization or expropriation of the GDR, a prominent theme in East Germany after reunification.⁷³ Such comparisons allowed for the expression of dissatisfaction with contemporary political conditions and created a context for opposing Western liberal democracy that was not specifically tied to the socialist state. This context was less fruitful, however, as a means of envisaging new political paths. The implicit centring of East Germany by the *ZwischenWelt* community impeded the imagining of radical post-national alternatives to German reunification.

Looking back

By the mid-1990s, the opportunity for imagining alternative worlds in East Berlin had passed. The squats dissipated as members moved on, and occupied buildings were evacuated for development. The organization behind the *ZwischenWelt*-Festival declared bankruptcy in 1994, having failed to assert a viable role for itself in post-Wall East Germany. In the absence of the massive state subsidies that had buttressed the Festival of Political Song, its international ambitions were not sustainable. Moreover, *ZwischenWelt*’s tendency to conceive of world music in terms of ethnic national folk musics did not differ sufficiently in presentation from the neoliberal commodification of the ‘world music’ label in the West.⁷⁴ As a consequence, *ZwischenWelt* struggled to distinguish itself from other, better-funded world music festivals, such as the annual *Heimatklänge*, which had been founded in 1988 in West Berlin, or the pointedly apolitical *Rudolstadt* folk festival in Thuringia. As a 1993 article in *Neues Deutschland* observed: “mediating culturally between worlds” . . . is not enough of a goal’.⁷⁵

71 Grabley, ‘Buntes “Wabe”-Treiben’. My emphasis.

72 Weis, ‘The Politics Machine’, 352.

73 See Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (New York: Berg, 2005).

74 On world music as commodity, see, for example, John Connell and Chris Gibson, ‘World Music: Deterritorializing Place and Identity’, *Progress in Human Geography* 28/3 (2004); and Simon Frith, ‘The Discourse of World Music’, in *Western Music and Its Others. Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

75 ‘Gute Absichten allein sind noch kein gutes Konzept’, *Neues Deutschland*, 25 May 1993. On the comparison with the *Rudolstadt* Festival see Robb, ‘The GDR “Singebewegung”’, 215n100. See also, David Robb, ‘The Demise of Political

The fate of the ZwischenWelt-Festival reflects that of reform socialists more broadly. They were not equipped to offer an effective alternative to Western capitalism. For starters, their experiences of the GDR had set them at a far remove from the wider populace; the privileges that the intellectual and artistic elite had enjoyed had generated resentment,⁷⁶ and the counter-cultural and protest groups were just too different.⁷⁷ It was also the case, as Jennifer Yoder observes, that reform socialists by and large lacked the political experience – or in the case of musicians, the bureaucratic expertise – to compete with the West Germans who took on the task of determining the GDR's post-socialist future.⁷⁸ Perhaps the biggest obstacle, however, was the lack of consensus or indeed vision among reform socialists as to what a new socialist East Germany might look like. The squatters' radical experiments were neither sustainable nor extendable, although traces of their commitment to non-consumerist modes of artistic production can still be located in the otherwise overwhelmingly neoliberal culture of contemporary Berlin.⁷⁹ And those advocating for a renewal of the GDR's official cultures were unable to articulate sufficiently radical pathways. The grassroots reincarnation of the Festival of Political Song did not lead to a fundamental rethinking of international solidarity. Yet this is not to say that East German cultures and practices did not contain within them the potential for new democratic futures. Illuminating, for example, is Jenny Erpenbeck's 2015 novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (*Go, Went, Gone*), which brings East German memories of solidarity to bear on Germany's current refugee crisis.⁸⁰ In the early 1990s, however, the socialist past was still perhaps too close for radical reimaginings; it was easier to look backwards than forwards.⁸¹

Song and the New Discourse of Techno in the Berlin Republic', in *Protest Song in East and West Germany Since the 1960s*, ed. David Robb (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 255.

76 The writer Monika Maron, notably criticized the attitude of Heym's *Spiegel* article quoted earlier as redolent of the 'arrogance of the man with his stomach full, the man disgusted by the table manners of the starving'. Monika Maron, 'Writers and the People', trans. Stephen Brockmann, *New German Critique* 52 (1991), 37. Originally published as 'Die Schriftsteller und das Volk', *Der Spiegel*, 12 February 1990.

77 Detlef Pollack, *Politischer Protest: Politisch alternative Gruppen in der DDR* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2000), 63. See also Jennifer A. Yoder, *From East Germans to Germans? The New Postcommunist Elites* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 58.

78 Yoder, *From East Germans to Germans?*, 59–60.

79 One such example is Schokoladen, a centre for alternative culture and living that was established in 1990 in a former chocolate factory on Ackerstraße in Berlin-Mitte and has survived despite numerous threats from developers seeking to gentrify the building. See, for example, Christoph Spangenberg, 'Räumung abgesagt: Der Schokoladen ist gerettet', *Tagesspiegel*, 17 February 2012, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/der-schokoladen-ist-gerettet-2035861.html>. The former Eimer building, which stood on an otherwise empty lot on Rosenthaler Straße, has been fully renovated and is now surrounded by new-build hotels and restaurants. Schönhauser Alle 5, once home to the Wydoks collective, now houses, among other things, a shisha bar and, at the time of writing, a strip club.

80 Jenny Erpenbeck, *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (Munich: Knaus, 2015). See also, Anna Horakova, 'Paradigms of Refuge: Reimagining GDR Legacy and International Solidarity in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (*Go, Went, Gone*)', *TRANSIT* 12/2 (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/T7122047468>.

81 The ZwischenWelt-Festival ran for a final time in 1994, reviving not only the title of its predecessor – it was now called ZwischenWelt-Festival des politischen Liedes – but also its predecessor's mascot, a red cartoon sparrow called Oki. The festival was subject to yet another reincarnation in 2000, and has been running since then under the name Festival Musik und Politik (Festival of Music and Politics). The festival website can be accessed at: www.musikundpolitik.de/.

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