German Intellectuals:
Public Roles and the Rise of the Therapeutic

The Language of Treason
The revelation of their widespread collaboration with the State Security apparatus (the Stasi) in East Germany before 1989 has given new momentum to the debate whether twentieth-century intellectuals have been more often perpetrators of universal treason rather than carriers of universal reason. Julien Benda's juxtaposition of reason and treason in La trahison des clercs has gone through a spirited revival. Benda makes a distinction between upholding ideas of truth, justice, and enlightenment on one hand and selling out to political partisanship on behalf of nation, class, or party on the other. Benda's distinction has been used in order to articulate a moral response vis-à-vis the entanglement of the intelligentsia with the state security and has given expression to entire population's disgust over the loss of trust and civility. Commentators equated Benda's concept of treason with the moral corruption of the SED regime and of its intellectuals.

Yet, with every new revelation, exposure, accusation, and admission of complicity it has become more apparent that the concept of treason, which had been the public perception of intellectual politics in Germany since World War I, is no longer an adequate framework for the issue at stake. There can be no doubt that the accusation of treason has been one of the crucial political weapons in the battles between National Socialism, Communism, and Western democracies. However, although the cold war prolonged and temporarily even enhanced the weight of this accusation, treason has become less central to the West's definition of the intellectual. The recent encounters with the phenomenon of betrayal, even when focused on intellectuals, does not produce the ideological sound waves that accompanied the public accusations and confessions in an earlier period. The disclosure of the Stasi files unraveled a fabric of lies and deception on which many
public careers were built in the German Democratic Republic. But with these lies, the giant screen on which individual conduct could be enlarged and redeemed for socialism or history has vanished as well. What remains is the betrayal of personal or intellectual loyalties. Despite its broad and emotion-laden publicity, this kind of betrayal has no redeeming qualities.

The much-debated cases of prominent East German writers such as Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller who were contacted by the Stasi and of writers who became active informants confirm the frailty of Benda’s universalist distinction of reason and treason. Although the public roles of authors who chose to stay in the German Democratic Republic always invited a comparison with the roles that writers of an earlier generation (most prominently Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, and Johannes R. Becher) had played in the establishment of the state, the change in the language of political commitment cannot be overlooked. Though still a moral discourse that builds on the onerous heritage of twentieth-century German history, this language constructs identities whose components bear little resemblance to the compulsive projection of right and wrong in the language of the generation of exiles. More than two decades ago, Gerhard Zwerenz, summarizing his generation’s attitude toward the language of the older colleagues, bade farewell to their ritualistic self-positioning in the minefield of ideological right and wrong:

The old authors continued battles that had long been anachronistic and did not really concern us anymore. Brecht treated Thomas Mann who lived in Switzerland with irony; Arnold Zweig ignored the present situation with admirable contempt; Lukács and Kurella continued to write their accusations against Brecht, Bloch, Eisler; while they, in turn, confronted Lukács and Kurella, although the adversaries did not always call themselves by name.3

During the 1970s, confrontations between writers and SED officials suggested the increasing shallowness of the languages of treason that the party continued to employ. Most revealing were the SED accusations against the writers who protested the expulsion of Wolf Biermann from the GDR in 1976. Even more disturbing was the unrelenting use of this language against nine prominent authors who were expelled from the writers union in a show trial in 1979.4 The arguments with which in the following years well-known authors justified their allegiance to the GDR while others (among them Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch, Thomas Brasch, Hans-Joachim Schädlich, Jurek Becker, and Reiner Kunze) left East Germany, were clearly distant from the language of treason. At the end of the 1980s, this language had exhausted itself. In spite of the many revelations of betrayal, the language of treason failed to provide a measure for the understanding of emergent political identities.

The exhaustion of this language is even more obvious if one turns to the younger generation of writers. This generation found its own voice in refusing both the language of the Politburo and the moral claims of a Wolf, a Müller, or a Christoph Hein. Sascha Anderson’s seemingly postmodernist line of defense for his collaboration with the Stasi—“I have no clear point of view”—presents the antidote to Ignazio Silone’s famous line: “The final struggle will be between the communists and the ex-communists.” The only message that could still be derived from Silone’s prediction is the expectation that the final word on the entanglement with party, state, and Stasi will arise from the debates between the writers who left the GDR before 1989 and those who stayed.

Nonetheless, the shock of individual tragedies revealed by an exploitative media and the sense of remoteness from the unfolding events in the East contributed to the revival of Benda’s concept of intellectual treason in the West. West German critics, aware of the half-hearted attempts after 1945 of getting to the bottom of the corruption of intellectuals under National Socialism, were quick to refer to the intellectuals’ responsibility to uphold the values of truth and reason under all circumstances, including the constraints of a dictatorial regime. Positive models were mostly taken from earlier periods when Emile Zola’s J’accuse in the Dreyfus Affair and Heinrich Mann’s antiwilhelmine and prodemocratic stance in and after World War I inspired a minority of German writers to engage in the fight against the reactionary Right and National Socialism. The less West German critics had concerned themselves with the realities of life in the GDR and the challenges that East German writers faced in their literary work, the more they tended to frame their analysis of the latter group within the concept of failure of intellectual politics vis-à-vis Nazism and Stalinism. This concept reflects the difficulties of playing public roles under adverse circumstances yet confirms the language of treason’s penchant for demarcating absolutes in a sea of relativity.

Although distance from the events undoubtedly has its heuristic advantages, it also enhances the desire for dramatizing the seemingly innocuous, causing every personal, political, and aesthetic encounter to appear to be the result of conspiratorial strategies and counterstrategies. What emerges is a different screen, one of familiar proportions on which intellectuals and their conflicts figure in a continuous replay of events that were too quick to be registered by the unsuspecting eye. It is hardly surprising that the most gripping dramatizations of treason as a betrayal of personal and political loyalties originated in countries that never knew occupation and the concomitant entanglements of collaboration: England and the United States. From George Orwell’s visionary dismantling of totalitarianism to Britain’s
successful exportation of spy novels and films about the 1940s and 1950s, from John le Carré's master thrillers to the Hollywood fabrications of cold war Berlin, there is an astounding and continuity in the imaginary topography of treason still lingering behind many useful journalistic documentations of life under communist regimes. The fascination with tracing "the other" in daily life leads to one or another version of what George Steiner described in the essay "The Cleric of Treason" in 1980:

I would like to think for a moment about a man who in the morning teaches his students that a false attribution of a Watteau drawing or an inaccurate transcription of a fourteenth-century epigraph is a sin against the spirit and in the afternoon or evening transmits to the agents of Soviet intelligence classified, perhaps vital information given to him in sworn trust by his countrymen and intimate colleagues. What are the sources of such a scission?

Setting a morning of intellectual routine against an evening of treason provides more than just a plot for spy thrillers. Steiner's fascination has been shared by many Western writers who were in search of exciting material as well as clues to their less-than-exciting identities in the confrontations of the cold war. They generally overlooked the fact that much of their dramatization corresponded with the language of treason that the communist parties had tried to maintain. Since the breakdown of these parties in 1989, the writers' need to serve a broader market will guarantee further exploration and exploitation of the concept of treason.

The changes registered in the moral self-positioning of participants in literary discourse reflect a transformation of the social predicament of intellectuals that took place long before the opening of the Berlin Wall and are not exclusive to East German writers. It is one thing to illustrate the power of the paradigm of treason with the increasing distance from the events; it is another to follow up on the moral ambiguities of German public life, be it during or after a dictatorship, and assess critically its reflection in the ensuing dialogue of writers and intellectuals with a thoroughly disenchanted audience. The fact that such figures as Heinrich Böll and Christa Wolf were praised as creators of an effective language of moral concern helps situate this phenomenon historically. The language of treason, with its sparks of intellectual heroism, tends to obscure the predicaments of creating and justifying a public role for the literary intellectual.

Since World War II, a new communicative attitude has arisen among writers, on the basis of which they have established a moral authority that eschews heroic distinctions and creates a discourse both of scrutinizing and healing the effects of history. This is what I would like to call the rise of a therapeutic mode of discourse as part of the transformation by means of which modern societies have redefined political conflicts as social concerns. As the social welfare state has expanded both in capitalist and socialist countries, and socialist welfare policies have corresponded closely to the growth of the welfare thinking in the West, the rise of a therapeutic mode in the public and aesthetic discourse followed. It was not limited to one or the other side. The concept of literature as social work underwent similar transformations in East and West Germany. Thus, the therapeutic attitude can be traced both in Böll's and Wolf's narrative.

Of course, the differences cannot be overlooked. In retrospect, even an understanding of the "social" cannot be defined without reference to the rather peculiar kind of social work in which the Stasi engaged. It is noteworthy that this institution, which originally was charged with surveillance of the population in order to prevent and reveal treason, became itself an agent of "social" work, eventually monitoring and exploiting a therapeutic mode as a crucial vehicle of political integration.

The West German Debate

Although the phenomenon of the university 'mandarins'—the academics who reluctantly shared published opinion with nonuniversity intellectuals after World War I—has received considerable attention in recent studies of German intellectuals, there is still not enough information about the mandarinate's effort to recoup its influence after 1945. Neither the postwar encounters between writers and academic mandarins nor their separateness as distinct publics have been analyzed by the intellectual histories of that period. Thus, the conflict between writers and sociologists that surfaced in the earlier part of the century, taking a dramatic turn in the student revolt of the late 1960s and then in the subsequent debates about the influence of intellectuals of the 1970s, has been largely overlooked. This conflict is generally a clash of idiosyncrasies and an expression of contempt rather than an open dialogue. But at its core lie the competing interests of sociologists and writers in how to assess the general well-being of society. The conflict figures centrally in the shifts of the intellectual discourse from an exchange over ideas and ideological positions to an exchange over social and psychological concerns.

Once a matter of different forms of prestige, this conflict always entailed an uneasy acknowledgment of the other discipline's insight, as was the case in Max Weber's and Thomas Mann's renditions of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, respectively. Later, the conflict evolved into a hostile clash when a peculiarly German brand of anti-Enlightenment sociology called for German culture to be cleansed of the "sociological" view of Weimar's left-wing intellectuals. The rivalry over society and its well-being remained one of the important areas in which the Left and the Right
intersected. There is a close correspondence between the missionary disposition of Weimar writers, who revitalized literature's potential for social intervention, and sociologists such as Hans Freyer, who propagated the new sociology as "value-oriented political therapy." In the continuity of these debates after Nazism are most prominently displayed in the two famous treatises on the state of German society, Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit (Man in the modern age, 1931) and Die Schuldfrage (The question of German guilt, 1946). In these treatises Karl Jaspers linked diagnosis and therapy in an aesthetically charged language of moral concern. In his assessment of German guilt in 1946, Jaspers set the stage for a public debate about carrying the burden of German history as an act of individual responsibility. To that end, he chose a language of empathy rather than one of distance. Like the writers of the journal Der Ruf, Jaspers maintained an allegiance to a certain national sense of duty that results from "participation in German spiritual and emotional life."

In short, throughout the twentieth century there was a stratum of converging and diverging approaches of writers and sociologists to society's fabric, a competition between academic mandarins and writers in representing the historical moment. Thus it cannot surprise that the sociologist Helmut Schelsky singled out Heinrich Böll as the embodiment of the moral claims with which West German writers had promoted themselves to positions of power. In his broadside against Böll, he articulated the frustrations of the mandarin who felt that the writer had the unfair advantage of personalizing the therapeutic approach to Germany's ills. Although Schelsky's book Die Arbeit tun die anderen: Klassenkampf und Priesterherrschaft der Intellektuellen (1975) has been recognized as the quintessential declaration of West German conservatism, its furious digression on Böll can be read as an informative treatise on the rise of the therapeutic discourse among cultural critics as well as on the post-Freudian mandarins. In Schelsky's digression, Böll is seen as a high priest of a social messianism (soziale Heilsreligion). Böll is represented as both the cardinal and the martyr: on one hand, Böll undermines the political system of the Federal Republic; on the other, he claims to suffer pain and persecution inflicted by it. In particular, Schelsky is irritated by Böll's assertion that he seeks not to acquire political power but rather to proclaim and establish whatever he considers morally "positive":

The fact that this moral and social religion of salvation is very vague and subjective, not only accounts for his persuasive writing power with his "idealistic" reading audience, but also for the invaluable possibility to apply it, at any time, to reality according to his own casuistry. Nobody but he himself determines the occasion and the inner duty when and where he should morally intervene in the social and political reality and when he can remain silent, yet his claim of condemning "society" rests on this "innermost self-understanding as a warning voice and conscience in opposition to the ruling establishment." Schelsky's indictment is the exact antithesis of the statement with which the Swedish Academy bestowed the Nobel Prize for literature on Böll as the representative of a new generation of German writers who were "ready so soon to shoulder their country's and their own essential task in the spiritual life of our time." What Schelsky called illegitimate posturing as cardinal and martyr, the academy praised as Böll's ability to connect a sensitive representation of individual endurance with a far-reaching engagement in the moral recovery of German society. The recognition of Böll as the proponent of German self-criticism also in communist countries—an important element of the Swedish Academy's citation—added to Schelsky's displeasure.

The mandarin's insistence that the glass was half empty, not half full, reflected his obsession with the political power of intellectuals. By exposing Böll's techniques as those of a high priest of social therapy, Schelsky curiously affirmed the writer's extraordinary influence in the public domain. His affirmation came at a time when the student rebellion of 1968, mostly using a sociological rhetoric, had declared literature dead and the whole fuss about the influence of the Group 47 passé. It was an ironic move that he repeated in his defense of sociology. While highlighting the centrality of the discipline, he destroyed the authority of sociologists who, in his view, represented a vulgar scientific sociology. Schelsky wrote this attack as the foremost sociologist in postwar Germany.

In his intellectually stimulating though empirically flawed vendetta against the left-wing intelligentsia, Schelsky interprets the increase in psychosocial doctrines of salvation as a maneuver of the Left to exert effective thought control over the private sphere—and thus prevent the rise of the social (as the proper domain of sociologists). Although he is mostly concerned with demonstrating the de-motivating influence of these doctrines of interiority (Innerlichkeit) on the work habits of the "productive part of the population," he also considers the use of depth psychology as a doctrine of social action to be part of this maneuver. Apart from Böll, Alexander Mitscherlich is a particular target of this polemic: having rejected the warning that "the psychoanalytic physician cannot assume the authority of the physician of the entire society," Mitscherlich, "as a critical writer, as a political partisan, . . . has attempted with the means of psychoanalysis 'to impose the therapy on the masses,' i.e. to control them."

Even a short discussion of the rise of the therapeutic cannot skip these accusations from the conservative mandarinate, which used to blame the
tyranny of the consumer ideology over the life of the individual for society's decline. What Schelsky excluded from his assessment is a reflection on the predicaments of a society in which the therapeutic approach could assume such importance for the inner well-being of the country: the experience of war and the nonexperience of the Holocaust, both of which haunted Germans for decades afterward. Both Böll and Mitscherlich are key examples of intellectuals who developed their professional self-understanding and public roles in response to this predicament. They linked, albeit in different ways, the realm of the individual emotions to the collective experience, and they used this link to forge a public sphere designed to form a barrier against the prevailing tendency to escape the past without cathartic renewal.

Böll's early narratives about survivors of the war are filled with an array of emotional triggers of sights, sounds, smells, joy, melancholy, and Angst from past and present experiences. These emotional triggers are repeated in *Wo warst du, Adam?* (Where were you, Adam?), *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (And never said a word), and *Haus ohne Hütet* (The unguarded house). The redundancy of emotional signals was meant to set a therapeutic awakening in motion. In subsequent works, this momentum builds to a forceful resentment (perhaps even hatred) toward those who forge ahead in their lives without moral reflection or regret. One can find the influence of Riesman's observation that inwardness yields to the "social" in Böll's development as a writer. In *Ansichten eines Clowns* (The clown, 1963) the author abandons his preference for mythologizing everyday situations in favor of analyzing these situations with a sociological, even journalistic eye. In this highly successful novel, the narrator scrutinizes the involvement in the Nazi regime of a well-to-do family in the Rhineland. Böll builds his cathartic message, relying on a certain ironic redundancy of the emotional triggers. While carefully pacing the emotional recovery of the past within the everyday present, he nonetheless conveys the impression that he is running out of patience with the present. If the buildup of resentment and aggression was initially, in the forties and fifties, part of a therapeutic recovery, he increasingly came to articulate them directly, especially during the seventies, as part of his political intervention.

Although Mitscherlich's essayistic contributions to contemporary life were lively, consequential, and often brilliant, he was measured against the reestablished corps of academic psychologists, therapists, and analysts. These mandarins rejected his agenda of reintegrating Freud's cultural theory into the therapeutic practice of everyday life. Their arguments were similar to Schelsky's: that Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's step from individual psychology to a social-psychological analysis in *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauen* (The inability to mourn, 1967) was unscientific, mere politics. In turn, the Mitscherlichs insisted that individual psychology had to be transcended in order to gain the appropriate historical reference for the crisis of the individual. A mere generalizing of individual psychology without a sociohistorical perspective could not enable one to come to terms with the traumatic aftereffects of the collective disaster of National Socialism.

The Mitscherlichs were eager to emphasize that *The Inability to Mourn* was meant as a scholarly contribution to the current debates. In 1967, the German public's attention was not only focused on the students' movement and their awakening as political activists but also on right-wing and neo-Nazi organizations whose activities revealed the shortcomings of the politics of silence about the Nazi past. Some of their critics conceded that the Mitscherlichs, owing to their intellectual engagement in the public discourse, had done more to integrate psychoanalysis in the postwar dispute over Germany's responsibility for the past than their mandarin colleagues in their various university institutes. Yet, the polemic tended either to trivialize or to demonize their work. The discipline's aversion to linking their professional outlook to the engagement with the recent past echoed Schelsky's aversion to including an examination of German sociology during the Nazi period in the redefinition of the discipline. Administering the fortresses of *Wissenschaft*, whether those of sociology, psychology, or history, with their traditional claim for Truth as a coat-of-arms, seemed to suffice. That a particular historical event, even one of the magnitude of National Socialist rule, should be able to derail a science contradicted the mandarin sense of scholarly legitimacy.

In contrast to the attempts of academics to rebuild their disciplines along the lines of acceptable continuities, and with the help of the occasional import from the West, postwar West German writers of the war generation had convened under the banner of a new beginning. This emphasis on "Hour Zero" could be interpreted as an illusionary shedding of responsibilities. But owing to Hans Werner Richter's stern command over Group 47, an agenda had emerged that clearly responded to the failure of German writers and intellectuals to resist National Socialism. The main impulses for this group came from France and Italy, in particular from Sartre's definition of resistance as an existential act that went far beyond the predicament of the totalitarian control of everyday life. It helped restate the conviction that after World War II writers could regain legitimacy through their commitment to resisting any recurrence of Nazism. A key part of this kind of resistance, nachgeholter Widerstand, was the constant effort of integrating the experience of war and complicity into
the narrative of the present. There were other influences that contributed to the emergence of the attitude of resistance in the works of such authors as Alfred Andersch, Wolfgang Koeppen, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger—less visible at the time, but noteworthy nonetheless. The aesthetic attitude (Haltung) of both Gottfried Benn and Ernst Jünger, despite their implication in the rise of National Socialism, caught on among writers. From very early on, this attitude contributed to an almost existential opposition to the diluting of aesthetic and intellectual challenges within the new middle-class society of West Germany.

Although Böll never engaged in this kind of a masculine aestheticism in the manner of a Jünger or a Benn, he shared with these writers the conviction that the author’s function had to be redefined in the wake of the moral and aesthetic fall of German writers. He rethought issues of memory in their individual and social dimensions and found in the need to remember the new legitimacy for his public intervention as a writer. Avoiding labels such as “therapy” and “social work,” Böll wrote about how literature could recover from a disastrous past through its service to the moral recuperation of a whole society. The strategy he suggested was slow and unassuming, yet it contributed to the success with which writers of the war generation were able to engage a considerable segment of the reading public in their first reckoning with the Nazi past in West Germany.

The Twilight of Literature and Sociology
During the early sixties, the works and public appearances of Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Peter Weiss, Martin Walser, and Uwe Johnson created a sense that the dominance of conservative politicians, the cold war, and the continuities to the Nazi period could be successfully challenged. The prerequisite for this efflorescence of therapeutic literature was the growth of an institutional and professional network from the cooperation of private publishing houses and public broadcasting stations. The political elites were upset by the fact that part of this network was supported by taxpayer’s money, but this was clearly in keeping with the German tradition of public funding for intellectual work.

That the postwar efflorescence of literature was so short-lived is not hard to understand if one compares it with the reign of Expressionism in the post–World War I period. Expressionism appealed to writers’ and artists’ desire to create a new art, even a new society. It did at least help to launch a new culture of modernity. In 1961, by contrast, the writers helped engage in a discourse about the ways in which the past was still closing in on the Germans. The erection of the Berlin Wall arrested not only to the lack of a vision for the future under communism, but also to the longevity of Hitler’s legacy. One might even draw an analogy between the writers’ concern about this legacy and the federal government’s commitment to vindicating itself through a social welfare policy for the victims of the war. Although separated by contrasting languages and public attitudes, both endeavors drew their legitimacy from the impulse to reconnect the present with the past. The energies the Expressionists were able to muster for an aesthetic foray into the future, cutting their links with the past, were beyond the grasp of writers of the war generation in the Federal Republic.

Such a foray into the future, engendered by the student movement, followed hard on the heels of the literary revival. Although it was directed against literature, among other things, it was not unlike the more radical utopianism of Expressionist writers. The rhetorical self-liberation that once had been shaped by aesthetic eccentricity was now inspired by the rediscovery of the Enlightenment as a phenomenon that reached far beyond the commitment to catching up with history. When Enzensberger, in a famous article in Kursbuch (1968), wrote about the death of literature, he confirmed the victory of the socio-revolutionary paradigm in the public discourse on contemporary society. He also commented on the interplay of the languages and warned against entangling literature in the sociological rhetoric of revolution.23 The uses of a language of Wissenschaft as the conduit to a rationally reconstructed society had its own poetry, as the ritualized use of Marcuse’s and Adorno’s sentences showed in innumerable variations. In the mantra-like reference to these classics, literary and scientific pursuits merged. Thus, a new German Wissenschaftssprache emerged with the belief that the new self-empowerment through the language of rational discourse would finally establish a truly social avant-garde.

Neither sociology nor literature recovered from this denouement of the seventies and eighties. West Germany’s enormous economic expansion allowed the disillusionment of a younger generation to become a worthwhile oppositional experience, even a movement. This new movement centered around competing practices of rediscovering the individual subject. Resonating, though often inadvertently, with another expansion of the social welfare state, the intellectual discourse tended to yield to an agenda of therapeutic debates that catered to individual needs for self-realization and collective needs for security and a safe environment. But academics did not come to the rescue in his situation. By vilifying rationalism and left-wing enlightenment as the cause of all the evils of modernization, Schelsky reinvented, rather, a traditional cultural pessimism and thus failed to halt the rise of the therapeutic that he so vividly documented.

A decade later, Ralf Dahrendorf, the leading liberal sociologist, wondered whether the sociology of the eighties had completely succumbed to
the individualization, losing entirely its ability to generalize empirical facts and deliver knowledge concerning the institutions and structures of social action. According to Dahrendorf, contemporary sociologists had shifted the focus of their discipline away from the institutions—as "materialized forms of norms, authorities of decisions and sanctions"—and toward everything "that crawls and creeps underneath the institutions," for which they even found a name: "life world" (Lebenswelt). The innovations of the 1980s, Dahrendorf added, had occurred in politics, economics, ecology without any evident input from the social sciences. Other critics voiced less dissatisfaction with the consequences of these innovations but also pointed to the withering of the social sciences from intellectual life.

Literature underwent similar transformations. Individualization diminished the capacity to generalize stories, plots, and personal experiences. In one of the most insightful assessments of this retreat from the center of the intellectual debate, the Swiss writer Adolf Muschg immersed himself in the study of therapy, which he considered to be the only viable way to reach the younger generation. His lectures, Literatur als Therapie? (Literature as therapy?), were intended to raise consciousness and expectations of literature, in order to defend literature against the accusation of being a mere compensatory strategy for the ills of modernity. "I was interested in liberating the engagement with literature from the blemish of flight and treason, if possible even to embed it with the sense of withstanding." Few other writers went as far as Muschg did in rationalizing the new closeness of literature and therapy. Most authors internalized the shift from social to individual concerns more as an attitude than an intellectual project. In order to successfully establish public legitimacy, the sense of a moral withstanding had to be wired to a sense of therapeutic understanding. The literary works of established authors such as Peter Härting, Martin Walser, Walter Jens, Siegfried Lenz, and many younger writers began to center on problems that allowed this attitude to become a freestanding concern of its own.

Taken as a key to the less-than-excitng literary production of the eighties, this attitude might help explain why writers deferred their own internal disputes in favor of an encompassing and all-embracing solidarity movement for peace in the early 1980s, when the cold war seemed to return with the NATO decision to install new medium-range missiles in central Europe. West German critics even put off disputes with East German writers such as Hermann Kant, whom they had counted as part of the political inventory of that state, hardly worth a thorough literary critique. Although Günter Grass, who was a driving force behind the demonstration against the renewed arms race of the big powers, insisted that the East-

West consensus of writers not overpower the protest against the brutal crackdown on intellectuals in Poland, he could not prevent the dissension of well-known authors, especially of those who had left the German Democratic Republic as the victims of its restrictive cultural politics. Even Julien Benda’s accusation, La trahison des clercs, was quoted as pertaining to these endeavors—and rejected. The accusation of treason led nowhere in a situation in which Erich Honecker, as the representative of the GDR, was officially received both by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in 1981 and Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1987.

**Against the Western Therapists of an Eastern Past**

The speeches by Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, Stefan Heym, and others during the mass meeting at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz on November 4, 1989, have been considered (along with the proclamation Für unser Land [For our country]) the moment of truth for East German intellectuals in their precarious wanderings between the realities of the Stasi state and the hopes for a better version of a socialist society. Whether these addresses were the logical result of the troublesome commitment of GDR loyalists to this state or an attempt to articulate the warnings of intellectuals against the unification of the two Germanies (which Grass and other West German authors echoed with different arguments shortly thereafter), the event supplied critics with a rich source of polemics for and against the accommodationist attitude of East Germany’s intellectuals. One is tempted to argue that, if it had not been for these controversies, the West German debate about the fall of the GDR, at least in the initial stages, would have drowned in economic grandstanding and neighborly sympathizing with a population deprived of the amenities of Western life. After the Runde Tische (Round tables) with their refreshing medley of people and interest groups had ceased to function as a conduit for the variety of East German views, and once the technical intelligentsia, which was instrumental in dismantling the ideological claims of the regime, worked on its new acculturation, the intellectuals’ reflection on the end of a state-supported cultural establishment in the GDR served as a focus for the more painful questions regarding the social achievements, the moral legitimacy, and the intellectual heritage of this state. Even the popular press felt obliged to comment on the fact that Christa Wolf published her autobiographical text, Was bleibt (What remains), in 1989, not in 1979, when the events it recounts—the frustrating experience of being a target of Stasi surveillance—actually happened. For a while, it seemed that the cultural heritage of this state would have to be sifted from among the thousands of files that the Stasi had collected on the writers.
The language of treason helped, at this point, to stimulate a dramatic view of the disastrous consequences of the death of the GDR for its intellectual and academic elites, but it did little to realign the assessment of the plight of the intellectuals with that of the population at large. The latter had become the domain of economic and psychological deliberations. The fact that the revolt of 1989 had returned a progressive meaning to the term Volk, as a living, thinking, and fighting organism (Wir sind das Volk, Wir sind ein Volk) reinforced the tendency to choose diagnostic tools that already reflected the holistic—or, rather, psychological—language of the envisioned recuperation. Though credited with regaining its identity by shedding the dictatorial regime, this Volk, so it was thought, would complete its “turnaround” (Wende) with an economic recovery and, equally important for many Western critics, with a psychological recovery. Both expectations were of course intimately tied to Western help.

“Patient DDR” was the appropriate title of a therapeutic assessment that Reimar Hinrichs published in the journal Kursbuch.29 The piece reads like a satire on the therapeutic reductionism applied to the deceased GDR, but it means to present a serious and convincing list of significant events of the past as markers of the peculiar neurosis that the East Germans had gone through and that now required a sensitive balance of love and mourning. In the same year the East German psychotherapist Hans-Joachim Maaz published the widely successful account of this neurosis, Der Gefühlsstau.30 Although Western psychoanalysts criticized Maaz for going overboard—or, alternatively, for being naive—in modeling the whole population into one big patient, his studies became the focus of a broad-based discussion in East and West. Maaz, despite his idiosyncratic call for a “psychic revolution,” set a measure for the successful integration of macro and micro factors without which the history of the GDR, including the accommodationist pattern in the situation of distress in the 1980s, cannot be understood. With its broad applicability, the therapeutic paradigm became the favorite shorthand in the West for what already in the 1980s had been cultivated in the search for a sensitive approach toward the East. Obviously, the very success of this paradigm after the fall of the Wall also had to make up for its earlier preponderance over more critical—and political—perceptions of the communist system.

The concept of treating a whole society as a patient has its traditions, especially in the United States, where conventional ways of dealing with foreign countries had lost credibility owing to the inability to contain Nazi Germany and Japan.31 The fact that Schelsky and other critics viewed the American attempts at reeducation after 1945 as part of this therapeutic mindset, and took pleasure in associating it with the cold war fear of brainwashing, might explain the older generation’s deep-seated suspicion toward the new interest in the therapeutic in the seventies and eighties. For them, the totalitarian features of rewriting collective as well as individual pasts that Orwell had unmasked so vividly overshadowed the possible psychological benefit from exposing oneself to the recollection of the past. The resolution to oppose these exploratory techniques draws heavily on fears of an omnipotent state or political system that had been invigorated by the cold war. Considering the increasingly critical reaction of the East German population to the Western suggestion that it had better go beyond psychological analysis and actually engage in a process of collective therapy, these associations should not be overlooked. Though directed toward the past, the Western suggestions tend to overlook the actual experience of this past as a reality that included the presence of the Stasi and other intrusive political organizations. After all, the ubiquity of the Stasi as an organization that devoted itself to the thoughts and not just to the actions of the individual still has an Orwellian ring. Who were those Westerners who claimed the legitimacy to administer the therapy for coming to terms with a dubious past?

In contrast to the writer Monika Maron’s complaint against the “therapeutic attitude” of the West Germans,32 the theologian and politician Richard Schröder differentiated between two forms of therapeutic commitment. He distinguished between the immense need for therapeutic treatment, be it with professional therapists, social workers, or church representatives, on one side, and programs for Vergangenheitsbewältigung, of coming to terms with the past, on the other. Schröder considered the latter an extension of the West German project of coping with the Nazi past, which, in his words, was undertaken mainly by the children who wanted to make up for the failure of the parents: “Now, in the GDR, another dictatorship has collapsed. It seemed to be an appropriate opportunity for some contemporaries in the West to offer their experiences: We come to terms with your past, for we already did the same for our parents.” Schröder’s rejection of this offer is unambiguous. He views the expectation that Vergangenheitsbewältigung would produce a therapy of society as dangerous: “For therapy means cure, and cure is a restoration of health. The assumption is that someone knows what constitutes a healthy society and how a sick society can be cured. This sounds familiar to me: the rotting capitalism and the healthy development of the socialist system. The demand for a therapy of society veils a massive claim for domination.”33 Schröder’s distinction of the program of Vergangenheitsbewältigung from the therapeutic engagement in social work treaded explosive terrain in Germany, where the remembrance of the Holocaust and of persecution holds a clue to the moral
legitimation of a national politics. Yet, this distinction seems appropriate, not least because it has been an important tool of critics who refer to the German population as the object and interject themselves as the subject of the moral discourse. The breaching of the walls of silence concerning the Nazi past, for which the Mitscherlichs generated the therapeutic reference in the 1960s, has become the confabulation of moral mastery whose power to ordain intellectual identities reaches far beyond Germany.

Schroeder's distinction helps us understand why, in his response to Habermas's essay Die andre Zerstorung der Vernunft (The other destruction of reason), he concentrates so much on the author's complaint that the addition of the former GDR to the Federal Republic spoiled the established ways of making and reflecting democratic politics. West German intellectuals had to readjust their identities and their mission: this was, for Schroeder, the reason for his complaint about the East. However, assessing the arrogance with which Western intellectuals had imposed the therapeutic paradigm on the East, Schroeder concluded that this adjustment had not progressed very far. Or had it? In a satirical comment, Lothar Baier asserted that West German intellectuals had indeed embarked on a transformation, albeit only in their self-perception. Realizing the extent to which the East German intellectual had been coopted by the homey and muggy universe of social work, West Germans felt the need to demonstrate their distance from a life of the social worker. Their new ideal was a life of constant confrontation, the life of a fighter, exposed to the cold winds of Modernism. While the East German intellectual had held a secure position by giving the state a hand in providing mental comfort to the population, the West German had pursued the course of reason and democracy on a high wire, without a net. Baier's conclusion: Since this self-perception drew on the encounter with the GDR as social workers' paradise, it would have been preferable if that state had been maintained in order to assure the permanence of perception.

The Last Chapter Is Still Being Written

In her first major prose work, Der geteilte Himmel (The divided heaven), Christa Wolf recounted the attitude, pro and con, of a young woman toward the GDR before the Berlin Wall had made a freely chosen departure impossible. Rita travels to West Berlin to see her fiancé, Manfred, who had left the GDR but now asks her to live in the West with him. She says no—as it turns out, only a few days before the erection of the Wall on August 13, 1961. After her return, Rita attempts to commit suicide. The book begins when she wakes up in the hospital and recapitulates the attempt to justify her decision to remain in East Germany without her fiancé. The book ends with the completion of Rita's recovery as a fully adjusted citizen who has gotten over her emotional breakdown through "precise thinking," as she calls it.

In the following works, beginning with Nachdenken über Christa T. (The quest for Christa T.), Wolf grounded her narrative of individuation within East German society in a more sophisticated use of the therapeutic paradigm. Whereas the recovery in Der geteilte Himmel, in which Rita settles her mourning with a political rationalization of her case, is still close to earlier exemplary transformations of human beings into socialist heroes, the case of Christa T. reflects both a clear departure from and an explicit critique of these transformations for which Wolf's political disillusionment in the mid-1960s provided the momentum. Wolf made the case for the self-realization of the individual in this society with the help of an informed reflection on Freudian categories. She highlighted the encounter with the past (including the Nazi past) within a therapeutic framework. In this respect, her work is similar to that of Franz Fuhrmann, Gunter de Bruyn, and other, usually younger authors.

Western critics welcomed this development as an important step toward some measure of literary autonomy in the GDR. They noted that Wolf was not merely catching up with the stylistic experiments and psychological introspection in the West but engaging in a genuine rethinking of the potential for individualization in East Germany. Gunter de Bruyn acknowledged that Heinrich Boll was the author who had always provided important impulses for this endeavor: "Boll's admonishing memories were also necessary here, as was his defense of individual self-determination against the political apparatuses and his strict rejection of enemy projections, war and the military. He was read, loved and understood, and his sincerity and courageous nonconformity have served as a model." Yet, while Boll helped justify the moral integrity of the therapeutic attitude in narrating stories of survival and recovery, the political predicament was so constraining that the concept of self-realization, even in its Freudian turn, took a very different form. Both its achievements—providing access to the individual experience—and its limitations—correlating, though often ex negativo, the individual experience with a surmised socialist self-realization on the part of this society—deserve closer scrutiny.

A historical approach might take up this task at the earlier observation that a different language replaced the compulsive projection of right and wrong in the literature of returned exiles. Distancing his generation's work from the anachronistic battles of the older writers, Zwerenz indicated the end of an era in which treason meant life or death for the individual in fact. Using the case of Alfred Kurella, one of the most powerful men of that
era, Zwerenz diagnosed what separated the older communist intellectuals who went to prison or had fled Germany during the Nazi regime from the younger ones who became adults in the communist state. The concept of treason was crucial for this separation between old and young, because it signaled the decision that the older generation had to make: to leave the bourgeois class in order to join the proletariat. Or, according to Georg Lukács in Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein (History and class consciousness): Whoever intends, as a bourgeois, to become a communist, must first become a traitor to his class.41 Kurella, in Zwerenz’s diagnosis, is the quintessential communist intellectual who had to make up for this treason: “The bourgeois intellectual, as Kurella himself once was, out of disgust with this origin and class affiliation, jumped into the marxist fountain of youth and reemerged from it as an executioner.”42 Not surprisingly, the language of the ideological executioner masks a persistent feeling of insufficient service to the movement. “The revolutionary as an unhappy martyr who again and again offered to sacrifice himself for history—yet was rejected. However, when he was not allowed the great unique act of existential extermination, he did away with himself in portions, put his ego, as it were, under the guillotine in small pieces, slice by slice.”43 This is obviously not a language of recovering the self from the “residue of history” (Bodensatz der Geschichte), as Christa Wolf formulated it in Der geteilte Himmel, but rather of sacrificing the self in ever-renewable acts of loyalty, always invoking the specter of treason.

It is ironic—but may have been meant as an act of consolation—that Wolf chose a word from that most notorious, gifted, and unhappy communist intellectual of bourgeois origin who guided the East German cultural policy through the Stalinist years, Johannes R. Becher, when she introduced Nachdenken über Christa T., her fictional manifesto for a therapeutic recovery of the self. Becher’s word, used as a motto for the work, was also highlighted in a previous Selbsttermin (Interview with myself) in 1966 when she said: “For this deep unrest of the human soul is nothing but the faculty to sense and to divine that man has not yet come to himself. This coming-to-oneself—what is it?” Wolf answered by replacing Marx with Freud as guide, yet she retained the socialist frame for the psychological construction of the self: “This is a great thought—that man does not rest until he has found himself. I see a deep-seated accord between genuine literature and socialist society, which is rooted in this very feature: both aim to help man arrive at self-realization.”44 In pursuit of this agenda the function of the writer consists in mediating between two very different forms of self-realization. The trials of the self have to be authenticated in the socialist claim of a self-realization of society. An older generation of communists felt compelled to utilize literature for constructing and simultaneously internalizing the socialist camp, which may account for the preponderance of topics featuring sabotage, wrecking, treason, and sacrifice—given the fact that the process of interiorization was bound to be fickle and prone to subjective error. Wolf’s generation, on the other hand, had seen the Wall go up around this camp and felt compelled to expand and deepen the inner space of the socialist self. By drawing on the romantic, utopian, and realistic traditions of German culture, this generation helped readers rediscover literature as a mediating experience for the trials of the self. Reflecting a long tradition of German inwardness (Innerelichkeit), these writers overcame the barrier that separated postwar audiences and the message of the returned exiles, among them Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Zweig, and Friedrich Wolf.

When the Wall was erected in 1961, it was proclaimed an antifascist protective wall. The fact that literature or, more specifically, reading was held in high esteem in the walled-in East German state was usually understood by literary critics as a direct consequence of this event. Protective it seemed to be, though less against the vague phenomenon of fascism than against what was labeled the Coca-Colonization of German society. Literature received a last reprieve in East Germany before the onslaught of Western mass culture. The developments since the fall of the Wall in 1989 have confirmed this perception. The Leseland GDR is no more. Poems and statements of the young writers of the Prenzlauer Berg scene already implied that much in the 1980s. By removing the moral trappings of poetic language, these authors disentangled themselves from the therapeutic use of literature and from the opposite incriminations of both “serving” and “disturbing” the interests of socialism, actions that had helped literature gain the limelight. They could not care less for Innerelichkeit.

When Wolf, Hein, Heym, and other authors at the demonstration on November 4, 1989, five days before the Wall fell, proposed that a better edition of the GDR be created, their attachment to the precarious fortunes of the Leseland might have played an important role. The interest in reform shown by these writers was, in any case, different from that of the engineers and other members of the technical intelligentsia who had to cope with the Reformvermeidungspolitik (policy of avoiding reforms) of the SED. Their frustration with the outdated equipment and anti-innovative command structure in industrial production, together with a loss in social status, had reached alarming proportions. The writers’ interest was also different from that of the intelligentsia in the natural sciences whose leading spokesperson, Jens Reich, soon began to express grave doubts about the reform potential of the system. In his assessment of the role of the intelligentsia in
the demise of the GDR, Abschied von den Lebenslügen, Reich showed little patience for the concerns of writers. In a public discussion with Heiner Müller, Reich reiterated his thesis that the most valuable contribution of the technical and scientific intelligentsia had been the liquidation of the exhausted system without bloodshed. The intelligentsia had rebelled against its own privileged status at the side of the party nomenclatura.

Although Reich's thesis has been contested, it helps explain why the secondary position of literary intellectuals in the events of 1989 received more attention than the "turn-around" of the technical and scientific intelligentsia. The latter may well have decided the November revolution of 1989 as far as the course of events was decided in the GDR. But the dramatization of the writers' quest remains intimately tied to a central aspect of the liquidation of that state: the dissolution and, more important, the much slower phase-out from within of the Stasi as thought police. Although such close parallels between the fate of the writers and the fate of the Stasi were never desired or even thought of by the writers, it was the flip-side of their public engagement in the intellectual life of the people, of their close relationship with the readers as individual beings. Once a younger generation of writers had established their legitimacy as intimate observers with a public mission, they were no longer alone in their musings about mastering life in a socialist society. On one hand, they shared much of the stage with the church; indeed, the church provided the only stage when they tried to address the public directly—uncensored—in readings, discussions, and performances. On the other hand, they also shared with the Stasi, if unwittingly, a concern for a therapy of and for the people. While the church has been engaged in softening the shocks of the social transformation after 1989, the writers have had a hard time to situate themselves vis-à-vis the dismantling of the Stasi. A statement such as Dieses Miftrauen gegen mich selbst (This suspicion against myself), which was used by the highly regarded author Günter de Bruyn in order to deal with his failure to recollect the extent of the contacts with the Stasi, contains more information about their practices of intimidation and deception than lengthy investigations. De Bruyn compared his personal recollection with the entries in the Stasi files. Neither account is reliable, but he has to live—and write—with them, as he states, for the rest of his life.

The prerogative of the literary intellectual to articulate a public perception within the GDR was secured by the antisociological self-understanding of the SED. Christa Wolf's question as to the coming-to-oneliness was directed toward the individual as part of a socialist community. Her individual is that of the German Bildungsroman, not the focus and instigator of social conflicts. Under these auspices, the party resigned itself to privileging writers and not social scientists to create the discourse on the inner life of this society, but simultaneously empowered the Stasi to act as social investigator and social worker. Without the institutional infrastructure that made the writers into beneficiaries of this peculiar system of welfare and surveillance, the literary intellectuals would not have been able to take over some of the sociologists' traditional tasks.

This arrangement was the second choice of the SED after a comprehensive attempt to integrate literature into the transformation of the industrial system, the so-called Bitterfelder Weg, had failed. Ulbricht's investment in the various activities of the Bitterfelder Weg were motivated by the idea that a broad involvement of workers in writing campaigns would help enhance industrial productivity. Although the therapeutic turn of literature in the capitalist West—at least until the late 1980s—accompanied high productivity, in the East, after a period in the 1960s when writers were punished for not joining the productivist effort, this turn was increasingly recognized as a compensation for the low productivity of the system. As a consequence, literature has been quite limited in its documentary scope, neglecting the developments in the sector of industrial productivity. This is why writers, little involved in the industrial realities of the GDR, still maintained utopias of a reformed socialism at a time when most members of the technical intelligentsia had given up these hopes.

In the summer and fall of 1989, when thousands of young families succeeded in forcing their exit from the GDR via Hungary and Czechoslovakia, writers were particularly shocked by the Sprachlosigkeit (speechlessness) with which the young people turned their backs to this state. They were not victims of the Stasi, nor were they respondents to the activities of the civil rights groups, let alone to the reasoning of the writers. Their actions were a testimony to the failure of language, official as well as literary. Was there any language left? When Honecker heard of the end of the German Democratic Republic, he is reported to have reacted with the one word that shaped the language of his generation of communists, whether intellectuals or not: "Treason."

Notes


14. The most comprehensive definition of the adjective therapeutic used as a noun is to be found in Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud (Chicago, 1966). Though stimulated by the broad historical contextualization of "the therapeutic" as a concept, I do not share Rieff’s views on society and culture.

15. Schelsky, Die Arbeit tun die anderen, 404.


17. Schelsky, Die Arbeit tun die anderen, 383.


28. Christa Wolf, Was bleibt (Frankfurt am Main, 1990) (What remains and other stories [New York, 1993]).


37. Christa Wolf, Der geteilte Himmel (Halle, 1963) (Divided heaven [New York, 1976]).
41. Georg Lukács, Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein (Berlin, 1923) (History and class consciousness [Cambridge, Mass., 1971]).
42. Zwerenz, Der Widerspruch, 135.
43. Ibid., 139.
46. Jens Reich, Abschied von den Lebensläufen: Die Intelligenz und die Macht (Berlin, 1992). See also the critical overviews in Wolfgang Bialas, Vom unfreien Schweben zum freien Fall: Ostdeutsche Intellektuelle im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

The Inconsequence of Doubt: Intellectuals and the Discourse on Socialist Unity

Doubt is the Beginning of Wisdom.
—René Descartes

Doubt is Sin and Eternal Death.
—Martin Luther

Inconsequence: lack of proper sequence in thought, speech or action
—Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

Who Speaks?
With the arrival of a new state, we were confronted with a new set of institutional constraints after more than forty years of predictability, central planning, and paternalistic welfare. Whereas institutional pressures to adjust and to acculturate came overnight, my everyday affairs are changing much more slowly. There are psychological ruptures. I encounter the diffusion of new lifestyles and a new intellectual habitus. These changes are uneven and unbalanced. They create new hierarchies of wants and demands. In lieu of the centrally planned and altogether predictable life in the collective of old, I am now asked to be efficient and to perform. I am counted as an individual. All the same, I am the subject of interrogation as an East German intellectual.

For East German intellectuals, the current remaking of their existence means that their present and their future are radically changing. The course of events, however, depends on the evaluation of their past. What they did or did not do will decide what they may or may not do henceforth. Negative stereotypes about “the guilt of intellectuals,” or the “symbiotic links