Introduction: On Socialist Vacation

> Enjoyment becomes the object of manipulation, until, ultimately, it is entirely extinguished in fixed entertainments. The process has developed from the primitive festival to the modern vacation
>
> —Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno[1]

> The ultimate vacation, the denial of reciprocal economy, is itself obtained only by means of an economy.
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> —Roland Barthes[2]

I. PROSPECTUS

Let's go on vacation! Let's leave the drudgery of work behind. Let's recreate, enjoy, pursue happiness, liberty, and life. It is harder than we might think. Culture, entertainment, erotics—they all seem to lead back to free-market economics. We can pick up almost any volume of cultural criticism today and find the circulation and accumulation of capital written back into our leisure, into the very heart of our escape. A common logic, not ponderous causality, is the formal bond linking the most disparate modes of living in the most disparate times and places. Contemporary historicism, for example, draws together texts from the most obscure corners of experience on the basis of shared figures whose genealogies can be traced to an overarching *Zeitgeist* (episteme), while poststructuralist philosophies separate the order of causes from the order of effects so that, whatever one might say about causality, the effects are all available in a single empire of signs. Even where such homology is criticized as totalizing, it is first stipulated as omnipresent, so that gestures of paradox and subversion may assume rebellious dignity. Despite the diversity of appearances in modernity, and their critical liberation from positivist causality, the name of the game remains interconnection, and its common form is circulation, exchange, traffic. The substantial boundaries of territoriality and temporality have

succumbed, even retrospectively, to the virtual globalism of a single, assiduous logic.

But relief is in sight, just on the horizon. There we find socialism, communism: an other system. It is this system, and its otherness, that we want to visit here. To visit and to enjoy—this is a vacation, after all, a voiding, an emptying out of economy in favor of plentitude, sensuality, and relaxation. The only string attached is that we carefully choose a vacation we can afford. For we want to have it and enjoy it too, and to do so we must be realistic and practical, not letting our plans become too fanciful. We want our vacation land to be terra firma, not utopia, found in the travel prospectus of really existing, historical socialism—socialism as grounded first in the Soviet Union in 1917. Why not then visit the most concretely bounded of real socialist lands? Head back over the Berlin Wall, into frontline Cold War rivalries, to the gray German Democratic Republic (GDR)? For this adventure, at first glance so dreary, to succeed in showing us what a true vacation from economy means, we must not shy away from resurrecting borders, recharging antagonisms, and crediting the full existential power of global difference in recent historical time.

2. TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Many astute commentaries on twentieth-century socialist regimes assert that the end of an era—the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist states bound to it—is a chance for scholars to reconceive a period so fraught with Cold War tension that an objective analysis had scarcely been possible from within it.[3] In socialism's aftermath, it is contended, we can reconsider the period with an eye toward the dialogues, influences, and enduring structures that extended across military borders and put ideological divisions into question. No longer bound by partisan taboos, we can more accurately assess the epochal similarities of a century universally convulsed by the rise of mass demographics, mass industrialization, mass commodification, mass media, and mass war. The merits of a generous scholarly vantage point are self-evident.

Despite the virtues of such ecumenism, the present study of socialist culture takes the opposite approach, starting with the systematic and historical weight of real and violent border tensions. In this sense, *The Skin of the System* fits into an intellectual tradition that sees social reality as fundamentally agonistic—that is, as based in the inevitable fact of meaningful conflict.[4] It

focuses on what made historical socialism *different* from social systems in the industrial West and insists on seeing socialism, as distinctly as we are able, as an *other* system. Only by sharpening our understanding of socialism as something distinct on the horizon of our presumed realities (whether the receding or dawning horizon) can we grasp it in its empirical specificity as a significant choice—a potentially valid response to systemic opportunities and problems—and thus preserve in our thinking some consciousness of socialism's once very persuasive claim to a rationally transcendent, and not just historically conjunctural, content. The Cold War era, as nasty as it was, is therefore not taken as a superseded age of ideological strife, but as a period in which something universal took place with the advent of the socialist alternative.[5]

The historical vantage afforded to us travelers and observers by the end of Eastern European socialism is an important one, although the reasons for its importance are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, a unique epoch undoubtedly closed with the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the historical and cultural balance of the socialist era can be assessed, if not teleologically, nonetheless with a sharpened sense of how certain social programs played themselves out in a real historical context. The end of the era—the tying off of its lines of continuity and development, the exhaustion of its potential, at least in that historical embodiment—makes socialism's experience that much more available for a detached empirical description and evaluation. The rare scholarly luxury of having recourse to such relatively stable empiricism in the social and cultural sciences has now become a common scholarly necessity for any credible cultural study of socialism. In this sense, real socialism must be historicized.

On the other hand, the significance of historical socialism's difference is thrown all the more strongly into relief by its absence on the current European stage. No longer there, the distinct bundle of problems, aspirations, unintended consequences, and achievements that were socialism can now be loosed from their tactical mooring in Cold War positions, and understood against the more principled aspects of a fractured modernity. Here, the word *modernity* signifies an epoch in which universalist human aspirations have uneasily converged with the mechanisms and institutions for their social implementation, whether as "good" or "bad" universals, as cyberspace or hydrogen bomb.[6] In this sense, then, I do not restrict my discussion of the socialist culture of the GDR to the relentlessly (and vaguely) invoked desideratum of "historicization," but pursue a speculative as well as empiricist line of argumentation.[7] Modernity is not singular, but riven

by rival universalisms that widely exclude each other, as illustrated nowhere more clearly than in the case of socialism. An all too easy acceptance of the factuality of the present globalism's claims to necessity and totality is a dead end in which economic liberalism triumphs because that is simply the way the world is.

As a travel guide into another system, this book takes us on a tour of an alternate form of modernity, one strangely different from the familiar modernity of liberal capitalism. By defining this strange system emptily at first, simply as *other* to capitalist modernity, the book aims to let this system emerge gradually on its own terms. Inevitably, though, such an account sees its foreign soil through the lenses of many other travelers. It aims to describe a new world freshly, but its descriptions also take their place among an existing literature on social alternatives; the distinct way in which it intervenes in that literature should here be remarked to give a clearer idea of what is being embarked upon. While I argue for the possibility of real alternatives in social organization and experience, I do not argue that we get to know and achieve that difference through more or better *politics*. In fact, I hold that the socialist alternative is no political formation at all, but a *system*, with a characteristic arrangement of subsystems. A system, if it means nothing else in the following book, defines an arrangement with *boundaries*. It contrasts with a structure, which operates as an ordering whole. Politics, to the extent that it is a structural feature of human life, will go on as usual, even (or especially) in socialism.

By contrast, an influential post-Marxist literature, developing since the 1980s in part as a reaction against the perceived scientism of structural Marxism, has heralded a "return of the political" in which politics has ever more emphatically been receiving its due as an autonomous sphere of human activity irreducible to economics, technology, or administration. This return of the political emphasizes the infinity of differences in human affairs. Politics here takes the form of disagreement, antagonism, and decision. It takes place not in formalized institutions, such as market, parliament, and judiciary, where disagreement is already subordinated to systemic constraint, but on the streets, in the papers, on the shop floor, in the marginal neighborhoods—anywhere but where order, calculation, and planning reign. It takes place among the uncounted and unlettered. Even when politics appears at the apex of society, its authentic form is the bold stroke, not the capillary action of diffuse suasions and stimulants, sanctions and sedatives. This return of the political often falls together with a celebration of "life"—life not as biology, but as a foundational point of indeter-

minacy and source of the new, as that which escapes all modes of system and counting (hence, the renewed concern with Hannah Arendt's concept of *natality*, the condition of politics in the unpredictable renewal of life). Politics and politicization become, in effect, not another means for maneuvering in institutional environments, but synonymous with the aspiration for openness in the authentic human life. There are many names associated with this new politics, perhaps the most prominent of which are Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, Claude Lefort, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri.

As much as their work finds an echo in these pages, this book is not conceived as a response to a theoretical literature; on the contrary, it is not about that literature, but about really existing socialism, its stories, tasks, and problems. But while I do not polemicize against the new salience of the political, I think that it is nonetheless helpful to note how different the course I pursue is. Where the new political theories dismantle the idea of "specific difference" (a specific otherness *to capitalism*) in favor of difference per se as an endless round of contingencies, it is precisely the sharp smack of one existential difference that preoccupies my subjects. And where the new political focus is based on the primacy of some field of minimal systematization (the political), my study accords primacy to fields of maximum systematization. Theories that value politics as a distinct and self-sufficient field of human endeavor do so because they understand a true politics as less regulated even than language (with its logicist grammar); politics in these theories is essentially an aesthetic field—it is not syntax and phonology, but a purely symbolic rhetoric that, in the last instance, is about itself. Thus, even a communicatively oriented social theorist like Jürgen Habermas is held to shortchange political openness by binding himself too tightly to the rationalist assumptions of linguistic pragmatics.

While that which escapes modernity's "count," and remains indeterminate with respect to our familiar calculations, is likewise at the heart of this study, I do not find the New and Different—the *Novum*—emerging in and aspiring to a minimally structured space of its own, but in a world of systemic commitments and implications. Power, economy, and communication share their universal lessons not in unimpeded discourse, but in more stringent media such as law, money, and bureaucracy. Where choice and decision figure in my treatment of socialism—where political and aesthetic subjectification come into play—is at the boundaries of systems, boundaries that function as indices of transformation, pointing beyond an actual (and even a potential) state. My theoretical ground is not freedom, but the

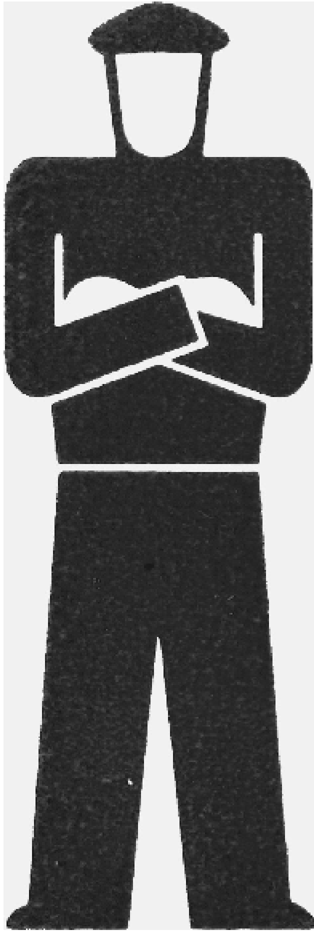

Fig. 1. The New Man in ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic Picture Education) of erstwhile Bavarian Soviet Economic Advisor Otto Neurath. Courtesy of www.gerdarntz.org. Collection Gemeentemuseum The Hague.

universal limits of coercion. Otherness, excess, transformation, and incommensurability refer in the following pages to systemic productions, and what interests me is how they are presented in the media of real socialism. What new and different things do we come to recognize and choose by means of socialism's money, laws, wars, and commands? The New Man or Woman?

When human agency and subject formation emerge as important categories in this study—as they do—they are seen as rare and brief moments of awareness that are just as likely to be disappointments as satisfactions, and certainly not to be welcomed unconditionally as liberations. Awakened

by an encounter with a system boundary, social awareness often manifests itself as an inability to distinguish before and after, inside and outside, self and other: as an inability to plan. Such consciousness of change refers to a triggered affect, an unexpected emotional awareness—an ecstasy. However, a new quality of agency is only confirmed—and pleasure in selfhood experienced again—in the feedback arising from devotion to a system for capturing such change. The New Human is not, in the following account, a slumbering giant, a rising voice, and a thundering deliverer from wrong. The New Human we meet here is the patient devotee of transforming social circumstances, the recipient as well as donor of obscure signals groping for some stable pattern that will eventually be recognized not just as new but as new and improved. While politics and freedom play a role for this New Human, what she seeks most is that really existing thing which demonstrates a difference between one politics or another. To the extent that *socialism* names the difference between two great political choices, it cannot itself be a politics. It is rather the object equally of our protagonists' humble patience and agonizing impatience, a matter of solicitude, confrontation, and shock.

In its analysis of socialist culture, *The Skin of the System* combines several broad areas of concern. It is, most explicitly, a study of what insights into socialism the remarkable East German literary loner Franz Fühmann (1922–84) gives us. Not well known outside Germany, Fühmann has an oeuvre conspicuously lacking a "great novel" to secure his reputation. He is, however, an author whose intense combination of mythology, logical conundrums, and philosophical aphorisms with dreamscapes, nightmares, and the sharply etched details of war and bureaucracy qualifies him as a cosmopolitan modernist with the talent and intensity to merit an international reputation. Whatever genre might be used to classify Fühmann, his writings have an aesthetic authority that warrants close reading and sustained critical scrutiny. The choice of Fühmann, moreover, has what is for my purposes an essential aesthetic specificity, one conveyed by contrast with his close friend—and much better known author—Christa Wolf. While both shared a deep commitment to real socialism and an equally deep dissent from those forces more interested in the tactics of institutional self-preservation, they represent strikingly different literary sensibilities. Where Wolf is best known for her interest in the problems of subjective identity—how a person in society can "come to oneself" without at the same time dropping out or away from others—Fühmann is concerned with the problem of securing subjective discontinuities, of preserving the conscious possibility of transformation, of getting outside of one's own well-worn skin.

But if literary exegesis of Fühmann is one armature around which *The Skin of the System* develops, aesthetic questions are neither its only, nor necessarily primary, concern. I want to cite two additional rubrics for the book's subject matter—the relation of science to society and that of literature to economics. The cultural study of science and society has helped complicate a prominent humanistic line of argumentation that treats science as a field of human activity guided by a means-ends rationality, with strict criteria of truth and falsity and correspondingly few measures of moral and cultural value. Like some of this work in "science studies," *The Skin of the System* refuses the dichotomy of instrumental reason versus communicative reason, adopting an approach that sees function and meaning as closely intertwined facts of modern life. Its position can be contrasted to the Frankfurt School tradition of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, extended most prominently by Habermas, which places emphasis on consensus, normativity, and reflective decision-making. Here the emphasis falls more strongly on institutions, system-bound discretion, and the brief, but inevitable moments of paradox and contradiction that exceed the limits of prior constraints. Even the much-maligned category of instrumental-technical reason finds a sympathetic airing in these pages, since the study, basing itself in postanalytic philosophy and systems theory, situates itself in a pragmatic and utilitarian framework that strives to be broad enough to entertain (though not adhere to) figures as antipodal as W. v. O. Quine and Karl Marx. Such a framework allows us to ask questions about Fühmann's writing, and—through his biographical dilemmas—about the role of technical-rational systems such as cybernetic steering and positive legal jurisprudence in the development of a socialist mentality.

The study of literature and economics has been productively enriched by literary and economic scholars over the last several decades, and the discussion they have initiated is also one that this study joins.[8] The perspective here, however, diverges from that found in the substantial scholarly work articulating and criticizing parallels between the circulation of capital and the circulation of symbolic meaning[9]—the divergence stems from the insistence on a meaningful difference between real socialism and capitalism, a difference that must naturally extend into any parallels between economic forms and symbolic ones. As some sympathetic critics of using economic models to understand culture have noted, the search by cultural analysts for an economic principle prior to and different from capitalist principles often issues in a sort of paradoxicality that winds up making capitalism seem more inevitable than ever. In the spirit of this "internal critique" of

economic-cultural studies, this study takes as its theoretical starting point the possibility of systems other than the familiar capitalist system and as its empirical starting point the history of socialism in East Germany. The inevitability of capitalism—and capitalist homologies in the circulation of cultural meaning—is thus ruled out from the beginning.

The challenges of real socialism and the drama of Fühmann's writing are complex and actual—that is, they relate to the empirical world of history and practice. There are, however, certain classical concepts that recur throughout this diversity, concepts related to the difficulty of experiencing transformation as anything more than a fleeting change of names in an unchanging world. These key concepts are marked by such Latin phrases as *tertium non datur* (there is no third), *optimum optimorum* (the best of the best), *differentia specifica* (specific difference), and *unicuique suum* (to each his due), which reappear in different problematic configurations throughout this analysis. In each particular appearance, they turn out to be figures antagonistic to their own universal conceptualization, figures of immediacy and directness in the very literal sense of abolishing any mediating terms. For those on whom these figures suddenly impose themselves as ciphers of real experience, their flash of relevance not only calls forth one affect alone but also evokes in each new situation both an ecstatic longing to stand out as such, as a subject of pure heterogeneous experience, and an indexical longing to register the force of existence plainly, with no special experience of oneself at all. They call on a person uniquely—or call a person forth as unique—that he or she may serve as a sign of universal difference: be a straw in the wind of revolution . . . or, in the less romantic terms of Quine, be the value of a variable.

What reading Fühmann adds to our reflections on the universal problems of social transformation is his overwhelming insight that the *complexity* of transformation—the *improbably difficult* set of historical mediations transformation entails—is engaged only in the event of an experience of blunt *simplicity*. Fühmann's work, it will be seen, turns around the problem of how a world-creating medium and a self-delimiting index can ever be brought to coincide. Or to put it in words of the philosophical canon, how the *tertium comparationis* (a third term for comparison) or *metretike techne* (science of commensuration) can ever coincide with the *novum* or *ex nihilo* (the new thing, never-yet-encountered), since this unheard-of coincidence of universal and particular is the only test of radical change. Fühmann's unique merit as a writer is to lend this abstract problem the tangible, passionate force of his temperament, intelligence, and historical situation in East Germany. The

devil, of course, is in his details—and our own—so it will take many careful restatements and refinements of the problem of universal socialist transformation before we begin (I hope) to appreciate its cumulative force fully. Meanwhile, we follow the remarkable path of a Central European writer whose choices and chances put him in the center of the twentieth century's vast and disorienting clash of systems—a brilliant naif, traversing liberalism, fascism, and socialism, trying to experience in body and soul what the meaning of these grand formations could possibly be.

3. ITINERARY

Those commencing this vacation on the heels of our socialist protagonist might find it convenient to know that the book is divided into nine chapters organized into two parts. Part One, comprising three chapters, develops the main theoretical ideas of "other systems." In light of the antipathy of especially leftist social theorists to really existing socialist institutions, Chapter 1 begins with the strategies of cultural studies—from those of Adorno and Habermas to those of Stuart Hall and Richard Rorty—for denying intellectual significance to East European socialism. Against such strategies, I hold that socialism was nothing if not also its practical experience. Yet what did this experience amount to? Having cited academic prejudices, I do not want to make the case easy for myself, so I turn to the exuberant days of the collapsing Wall in the 1980s and 1990s when few were ready to concede that socialism ever existed in the departing mess of the Soviet bloc. The giddy release from socialism's ontological burden is hard to argue with. Socialism's heavy fictions seemed to yield in a magic moment to a reality as free for possibility as any fairy tale. This moment—whether socialism's compendium or contravention—exposes a socialism bereft of power and pretense, a socialism that is not one. Precisely in this afterimage of rigid institutional forms, harsh police measures, legal arbitrariness, arrogant scientism, and, most strikingly, decisive collapse, historical socialism becomes the site for thinking about what is universal in the socialist alternative—about what was or still is there to insist upon. Like the moment of socialism's installation, the moment of its collapse marks it as a system with boundaries, not an idyll of utopian longing. In particular, East Germany—the focus of the book—is not belittled here by adopting the tendency to see it as having been a provincial and parochial backwater of modernity. Rather, in the following analysis East Germany remains an avant-garde,

with all the perversity such a claim might imply, an avant-garde that helps us think the future of our own present. This vanguard status is not attributable to some absurd ideological loyalty to the dour martinet of the Eastern bloc, but to the simple conviction that whatever else GDR socialism was, it was real.

Chapter 2 is the main theoretical chapter, explaining in general terms how my analysis of socialism works, how it relates to other traditions—especially that of philosophical ontology—and what it accomplishes that other approaches do not. It forms a self-standing, if condensed and demanding, argument that guides the book's agenda, as well as establishing avenues for further research and debate. In this way, it is the most broadly applicable section of the book, useful to readers who want to engage with the methodological assumptions and implications of this work and to relate it to some of the theoretical literature I have alluded to in this introduction. Drawing on the disparate fields of economics, semiotics, systems theory, and philosophy, the chapter's tasks include the following: explaining what "ontology" has to do with socialism; introducing a set of classical ontological problems reaching from Plato's *Parmenides* to the critique of positivism by Horkheimer and Adorno; using a combination of "internal realism" (Quine, Hilary Putnam) and "systems theory" (Parsons, Luhmann) to reformulate the ontological problems in a way relevant for understanding socialism; showing that this reformulation is especially helpful in distinguishing between "political ontology" (Carl Schmitt, Laclau, Rancière) and something like "economic ontology" (General Equilibrium Theory, Marxism); and, finally, suggesting that a "socialist ontology"—which is the ultimate promise of the book, becoming visible over the course of Part Two—is obliged by its inmost aspirations to generic superiority to chop up its world differently than liberal political and economic ontologies do. Lest this seem too crowded an agenda for one chapter, I want to emphasize that the last item—the socialist ontology—receives no prescriptive formulation, but relies on the disruptive and generative potential of its new synthesis (what used to be called "totality" in the pre-postmodern days). Socialism is not a slick "system differentiation," whereby a new subsystem emerges to resolve a paradox in one or another system—say, the paradox of overproduction in the market economy—but it first appears as something new and incompletely articulated against the background of a vast social "de-differentiation."

Chapter 3 is assigned the task of persuading the reader that my theoretical vocabulary of socialist ontology is also a vocabulary that speaks with and to

the literature of really existing socialism. It takes up one of the key contrasts developed in Chapter 2—namely, the contrast between indexical pointing and symbolic mediation, and exemplifies it on the examples of Fühmann and the most famous East German literary figure, Christa Wolf. This pair exemplifies what I call the "skin of the system," to indicate a system's being both an intact whole and a vulnerable body, and the "din of the system," to indicate both a system's physical norms (a pun on DIN, or German Industrial Norms) and their susceptibility to the noise of infinite regression. After showing how what might seem like an abstract and rather technical contrast in fact has aesthetic consequences that might be discerned and appreciated, I pursue an important aspect of Fühmann's poetics to illustrate a related theoretical term—*sovereignty*. This key term I subsequently turn back onto the poetics of real socialism. Sovereignty is such an important notion because it points both to a subjective dimension of intentional selfhood and to an objective dimension of ultimate authority. In Fühmann's poetics, sovereignty becomes an erotic category in the sense that it is not simply a category of individual autonomy—the personalistic authority of the supreme commander—but also a category that in its claim to represent the superlative always relies for its test on an encounter with something worse or better, but surely other. This harrowing and exultant encounter is, for Fühmann, always essentially an erotic encounter, because it is both disruptive of identity and generative. We thus glimpse how Fühmann's rendering of socialism's encounter with antagonistic social forms—a theme of potentially deadening dryness and stolidity—finds an expressive venue in the poetry and philosophy of erotic desire.

Part Two remains in a philosophical register, but takes on board the rich and particular historical experiences of Fühmann, experiences not so much of this or that relationship or this or that episode in his life, but those odd, graphic, highly personal experiences that suddenly, perversely evacuate themselves of specificity in order to take on the cast of the universal—like narrative art in the good old days that promised to reveal eternal human verities in deft little situations, only here the universal truths are often unrecognizably distant from the human. Universality in Fühmann has no guarantee of familiarity, which is exactly its frightening challenge.

Chapter 4, the first of Part Two, is the most descriptive chapter, taking us through the work, biography, and institutional commitments of Fühmann, from his experience reading Georg Trakl as a fascist *Wehrmacht* soldier in the 1940s through his antifascist re-education in prison camp, to his desperate fight against his own sarcasm and self-destructive rage in the face

of the GDR's growing institutional absurdity in the 1970s and 1980s. Crucially, Fühmann is presented not as the case study to which the preceding conceptual framework will be applied, but as equally *explanandum* and *explanans*—as both a part of socialism to be explained and as a singularly telling explicator of socialist phenomena. To help readers orient their aesthetic expectations, I place Fühmann's work into a broader context of literary modernism. I also give an overview of his oeuvre, focusing especially on his unlikely travel journal *Twenty-two Days, or Half a Lifetime*, a document of whimsical but unsparing self-interrogation that I return to throughout the book. The life that emerges in his writing is shaped by violent personal transitions, from keen fascist to convinced socialist to what, toward the end of his life, may be called a state of apocalyptic suspense. I address this sequence of ruptures in Fühmann's selfhood not with a theory of psychological trauma, but by way of Fühmann's highly conceptualized perception of the challenge that an existential demand for transformation poses to core subjective needs for boundary and identity.

Chapter 5 addresses Fühmann's Muses, drawing us headlong into a poetics of transformation whose task is not to ascertain just any difference, but to ascertain the true difference a difference makes. Not just transformation, but transformation for the better—in fact, for the best—is Fühmann's concern. A poetics of supercession—a socialist poetics—finds itself only beyond itself, where the ethereal Muses engage the workaday situation of those enunciating their songs. Fühmann's Muses show themselves in just such a material engagement in "Marsyas," a short story based on the Greek myth of the impertinent satyr flayed alive after the Muses judge his music inferior to Apollo's. We see in this story how a realist poetics that is also a socialist poetics leads to a brutal ontologization of formal logic that, ultimately, takes on the illogical form of a physical erotics. Importantly, we see how this erotics is not conceived as an individual bodily experience, but as a *systems erotics* of social transformation. This systems erotics supplies the central figures of Fühmann's experience of socialism, above all the principle of a present and forceful difference: the logical law of the excluded middle, *tertium non datur* (there is no third). This figure, necessary for imagining the sharp boundaries of difference that Fühmann longs to experience as evidence of transformation, describes a kind of skin of the system—that is, the system's outermost boundary that both secures its identity and demarcates its particularity. The flaying of this skin is the fatality that Fühmann explores throughout his imaginative work and relentlessly *un*imagined biography.

After these two chapters have indicated the stakes of Fühmann's dogmatics and poetics, Chapter 6 introduces three rubrics, *camps*, *laws*, and *plans*, which mark historical stations in Fühmann's biography and conceptual stations in socialist transformation. After sketching the broad significance of these terms, the chapter explores the idea of the camp with reference to Fühmann's internment in a Soviet antifascist re-education camp, the *lager' voennoplennych*, where the brutality of containment—of dogma, detention, and discipline—comes together with the lyrical abjection of the unlivable life. Chapters 7 and 8 then continue the program set out here and take up the other two terms. The three institutional realms of camps, laws, and plans correspond, albeit ambiguously, to three competing world orders in modernity: fascism, liberalism, and socialism. Fühmann's own relationship to each order is a central concern of his poetics of transformation. Building on the analysis of "Marsyas," Chapter 6 resituates the bodily torment of the satyr's flaying in the Stalinist prison camp where Fühmann reads Georg Trakl, the expressionist *poète maudit* who first inspired him as a fascist soldier, and whom he continues to read as an elusive constant of his own inconstant life, autobiographically recounting his changing readings of Trakl in his epic critical essay *Facing the Fire Pits*. The camp that emerges in this chapter is both a harrowing instrument of physical orthopedics and a ground-laying, a taking of position, a drawing of sides—the straitened socialist who discovers himself and his Muses in this camp is one who, having confounded all laws of retribution and distribution, is ready to receive the new dispensation.

In Chapter 7, the renegades are already legion, and the walls of the socialist camp no longer exert the force they once did, socialism's unity requiring a renewal through the purer force of law. The promised new law of socialist order, however, remains stubbornly suspended between the emergence of socialism and its catastrophic state of emergency. This suspension becomes grimly apparent in Fühmann's correspondence around the time of several aggressive legal actions against GDR writers in the mid-1970s, and it only intensifies in the letters about his abortive attempt to assemble an anthology of younger, unpublished poets shortly before his death. The idea of laws as an opposite to camps, or, more technically, the opposition of indicative and normative orders, becomes ever harder for Fühmann to maintain, especially as his various goals of sovereignty and system are seen to exclude, repeat, and exceed each other. More and more, the positive law of socialism diverges from socialism's systemic disposition until it is no longer clear which order is more absurd. At that point of disordered expecta-

tions, Fühmann becomes keenly attuned to the privative (lacking) case of sense: the maddening *non*sense of real socialist law.

Chapter 8 then takes up the plan, the institutionalized form of providential reasoning that lies somewhere between normative law and factual description and that is—in the guise of the "Five-Year Plan"—the proverbial institution of real socialism. I examine more closely the philosopher Georg Klaus, the leading proponent of cybernetic systems theory in the GDR, whose writings on norms I introduce in the previous chapter. Klaus's cybernetic project aims to find an efficient quantitative measure of the socialist system and in doing so runs up against the problem of maintaining a substantial quality of socialism. The unbiased flow of quantitative commensuration would itself be something so new in human affairs that such a liberated quantity would count as the very quality by which socialism's success could be measured. From Klaus's paradoxes of quantity and quality, we turn to Fühmann's science fiction story "The Heap," which poses the classical Eleatic problem of the *sorites*—namely, when does a quantity become a quality?—and answers it with biting reference to the unresolved problems of GDR socialist identity: sovereign quality and quantifiable system must both yield again to transformation.

Fühmann died in 1984, before the collapse of East German socialism. Chapter 9 draws together some of the key themes from Fühmann's work, reminding readers of the landmarks of socialism from the vantage point of a brief trip to the West, a strange place, if we can picture it, free of socialism's anguished contortions. In the futuristic story "The Street of Perversions," Fühmann's protagonist journeys across the wall to liberal Libroterr. There he is able to glance back at real socialism (Uniterr) from across the horrible ontological dividing line of its immeasurable difference. Right on the edge of that line, I pause to consider an essay on E. T. A. Hoffmann's novella "Ignaz Denner," in which Fühmann asks what happens when the Hegelian dialectic of progress comes to a shuddering halt, not in an exuberant flash of revolutionary energy but in an abject perception of the material inertia of the world. Perversely, though, this moment of belonging to things, while shattering, addresses the fundamental desire—the desire for socialism—whose many forms I have been exploring over the course of this book.

After such difficult travels, after so many marvels and so many desolate stations of transit, we might feel exhausted and ready to return to the border checkpoints where, in Part One, we first got our documents in order. By the time we reach the end—dare I reveal it?—the checkpoints are gone.

Without any border between systems, we are no longer free to leave another system, but *compelled* to return to our more familiar sectors. My hope is, however, that at least some touch of (other) worldliness remains behind from that earlier freedom to go. May you cheerfully avail yourself of it.

Bon voyage!