

Theorizing modern politics and its ironies of control through the case of East German state socialism

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It is the central claim of this paper that modern forms of politics not only presuppose a particular dynamic relationship with processes of political knowledge-making on the one hand and control practices on the other, but that they produce characteristic unintended consequences that undermine politicians' very intentions. In other words, modern forms of politics generate historically specific ironies of control. Through one historical case, the GDR's efforts to control the peace and civil rights movements in Berlin during the 1980s, I identify two domains of politics in which such ironies have emerged: the party-state's efforts to direct citizens' behavior (section 4) and the political epistemics of the state, exemplified here by its premier investigative agency, the secret police (section 5). Before I can do this, however, I need to outline the general framework within which GDR politics proceeded (section 3). To motivate my concluding remarks about the pertinence of insights generated from socialist politics for liberal regimes, I examine both the historicity of politics, knowledge and structures of control to bare the common modernist roots of both liberalism and socialism (section 1). Although Foucault ([1975] 1995; [2004] 2009) has done more than anyone else to thematize both the historicity of politics and the interdependence between its modalities and its relations to control and knowledge, he has never provided a processual analytics that would allow researchers to trace—ethnographically and/or historically—the emergence of ironies of control beyond direct resistance. In fact, his theory stipulates the mutual amplification of knowledge and control, whereas the historical record,

notably the ultimate failure of socialism in Eastern Europe, urges a more differentiated analysis. A conceptual retooling is therefore needed that will allow us to rethink the relationship between actions, institutions, politics, control and knowledge (section 2).

The emergence of modern politics

Dialectically entangling each other, notions and practices of politics have developed in stages. In time they have assumed ever greater *scope*, increasingly involving more people across wider territories, while also deepening in *scale* to reach into the bodies, hearts and minds of people.⁴¹ Concurrently, the core of politics as we understand it today became more self-consciously intentional, assuming the guise of specific projects which stand in competition with one another. The awareness of a choice between alternative paths raised the issue of criteria with which one could decide rationally between them. Thus both the concept of truth and the ultimate aims of human beings became connected to politics. The notions of choice and deliberation, finally, have reestablished the practice of politics as a domain of free action for the sake of freedom. Eastern European socialisms mark an apex in this development towards widely scoped and deeply scaled intentional political projects that are sanctioned by claims to truth for an emancipatory goal.⁴² Guided by what they took to be the only possible science of the social, Eastern European socialisms, at least initially, aspired to nothing less than world

41 Norbert Elias ([1935] 1976, 312–14) was one of the first scholars to analyze the codependence of territorial expansion, diversifying organizations and the movement from external to internal forms of control. What is more, Elias has provided a processual rationale that is sorely missing in Foucault's ([1975] 1995; [2004] 2009) relatively static comparison of forms.

42 Many scholars have followed James Scott for this reason in calling Soviet-type socialisms »hypermodern« (Scott 1998). This understanding of socialism as a radicalization of the modern was not only part of socialism's self-understanding, but was also fairly widespread during the first part of the twentieth century (cf. Mannheim 1940, part 5; Hayek [1944] 2007, 59).

revolution—carried out by new types of associations, staffed by a new type of human being, to be created by, through and for political action in the service of humankind’s self-emancipation. For this reason, socialisms are particularly interesting objects of study when examining modern politics and the ironies of control they generate.

None of the characteristics of modern politics I have spelled out in the last paragraph are limited to socialism. The Spanish and Portuguese empires are early practical examples of aspirations of a global scope. Conceptually, the global as field for political action is a byproduct of the emphatic universalism first of Christianity and later of Enlightenment philosophy. Scale was added to scope as a political requirement as soon as territorial states were conceived as intentional projects in culturally heterogeneous environments. Missionaries often preceded, and surely always followed, colonizing soldiers. They were instrumental in turning the newly conquered peoples into god-fearing subjects fit for colonial rule (e.g. Steinmetz 2007, 289–96; Tiberondwa [1977] 1998, esp. chap. 3 and 4). In Europe itself, kings and queens aspired to counter what in their minds was the danger of religious plurality by creating a denominationally homogeneous subject population. On the theoretical level, this is reflected in Bodin’s ([1576] 1992, vol. 1, chap. 8) fervent urging that sovereignty must remain undivided and Hobbes’ ([1651] 1994) argument that Leviathan can hold his sword only by also holding the staff. In the same vein, the formation of nation-states beginning in the seventeenth century is not only a reaction to the perceived dangers of religious (and later cultural) pluralism, but also builds systematically on antiquity’s one model for religious homogeneity, namely the Israel of the Hebrew Bible. Thus it is no surprise that nationhood became inextricably intertwined with universal schooling that centered on the formation of national subjects (e.g. Anderson [1983] 2006; Schissler and Soysal 2005). In other words, the condition for the possibility of forming states in the modern sense is the fashioning of a citizen-subjectivity (see Foucault [2004] 2009, lectures 3 and 4).

The intentionality of politics made a first quantum leap from princely tactics and strategies of dynastic growth to choosing from orders of

existence during the Protestant reformation and the ensuing wars of religion (Nexon 2009, chap. 4 and 7). A prince, or even a municipal council, could suddenly *decide* to remain Catholic or to adopt a particular form of Protestantism—with far reaching consequences for property relations, law and international relations. The idea of alternative political orders first arose as a result of encounters with political alterity in the context of global empires, and later through a dramatic succession of different political regimes in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England and through the American Revolution. Entire socio-political orders came under the imagined control of design with the fast-spreading news of the success of the French Revolution (Fritzsche 2004, chap. 1).⁴³ As soon as alternative orders were imaginable, questions surfaced about criteria for choosing the right one. The first important criterion, faithfulness to revealed truths and thus to the presumed divine creator, in the eighteenth century gave way to debates about being true to human nature, a term which took on an increasingly scientific rather than theological-juridical meaning. Post-Enlightenment ideas about the possibility of scientific politics amplified this tendency even further. Popular revolutions also firmly entrenched the idea that politics is a domain of freedom for the benefit and emancipation of the people, who can only thus become citizens.⁴⁴

43 The immediacy of the effect of the French Revolution on the theoretization of the political is nicely illustrated by the contrasting reception of Edmund Burke and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Looking forward, both lay the groundwork for, respectively, conservative and revolutionary thought (see also Mannheim 1926 and 1929). Burke says: »The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers« ([1791] 2001, 181). For Fichte in contrast the goal is a complete transformation of human institutions in accordance with human beings' freely generated image of the same (e.g. [1794] 1997, 17–21).

44 Liberals at times talk about democracy as if it no longer entailed any ultimate references to truth or other absolute standards. They instead see politics as a matter of utilitarian negotiations between parties with different interests. Such a view of course ignores liberalism's own metaphysi-

In short then, the ballooning of the political, its *pari passu* expansion of scope, scale and intentionality, its quest for truth and ultimate values, is part and parcel of modern political imaginaries and thus shared by both socialism and liberal capitalism.

Social life, institutions, politics, power and control

This rough sketch of the history of politics in Europe does not provide any clues about the processual interplay between modalities of politics, modalities of knowing, forms of control, and the specific ironies these all entail. To provide a framework, I will draw on a social ontology I have elsewhere called consequent processualism (Glaeser 2005; 2011, 29–44).⁴⁵ Consequent processualism assumes that the social exists as a dense thicket of processes formed by interconnected action-reaction effect flows.⁴⁶ In other words, the stuff of the social is a flow of actions that prompt each other while intersecting in complicated ways. One action is

cal and, historically speaking, indeed theological underpinnings (Schmitt [1932] 1963, 43–44; Kahn 2012, chap. 3).

- 45 This rethinking of social ontology tries to accomplish several tasks at once. First, aligning itself with and extending the Manchester School of anthropology (Evens and Handleman 2006; Gluckman 1964) it attempts to provide a process-centric framework within which ethnographic forms of analysis can be »scaled up« to macro-historical developments, while at the same time freeing macro-analysis from politically highly problematic reifications. With its process centrality and its hermeneutic turn, it is line with Giddens (1984), while attempting to provide a much clearer conception of process and structure (cf. Sewell 1992) that at the same time frees the hermeneutic approach from its rationalistic bent and the closely associated phenomenological approach (Schütz [1932] 1974) from its individualistic bias. Lastly, it takes issue with the layer-cake ontology of critical realism (e.g. Archer et al. 1998).
- 46 For another contemporary perspective that argues for an understanding of social life from within the flow of actions, compare Collins 2004, chap. 1. The major difference between Collins' and my approach is, for example, that he focuses on face-to-face interaction, whereas I am just as interested in mediated action effect flows across space and time, as shall become clear in the following.

typically a reaction to a number of antecedents, and at the same time gives rise to a multitude of consequences. What is more, action-reaction effect chains can create reflexive loops. For where the flow of actions and reactions is repeated in a self-similar manner across time, institutions emerge. They endure in time—that is to say they have an identity—in the *form* of self-similar flows. Importantly, actions can be *projectively articulated* across time and space, thus connecting people across continents and generations. Incidentally, this is the reason why I prefer the admittedly cumbersome term action-reaction effect flow to *interaction* which, at least since the second Chicago school, has acquired a definite face-to-face connotation. The projective articulation of action effects is enabled by socio-technological means of communication, transportation, and storage. Reactions are linked to actions by alterable historically, culturally and even biographically contingent *understandings*. Seen thus, understandings are the condition for the possibility that action-reaction effect flows may turn reflexively onto themselves to form institutions. Indeed, understandings are the linchpin of processes of institutionalization. What, then, are understandings? They are discursive, emotive and/or perceptual ways of differentiating and integrating the world (Glaeser 2011, 9–17). By functioning as a practical ontology, they provide orientation and direction for action. Where understandings become validated in agreement with other human beings, where they are confirmed or disconfirmed by the ex post assessment of the success or failure of action, or where they are supported by comparison with already existing understandings, they congeal into more objectified forms. They become transmogrified from existing only in fleeting performance to memorized exemplars or abstracted templates (Glaeser 2011, 22–26).⁴⁷

47 Because understanding is the key term of the hermeneutic tradition and because it captures the process of objectification through its morphological ambiguity as a continuous and a gerund, I prefer it to more contemporary terms such as schema or frame.

What we now have at our disposal is a four-step procedure for thinking through the stability of institutions.⁴⁸ First, we need to link institutions to the action-reaction chains that constitute them; second, we need to identify the understandings that produce these links in a regular form; and third, we need to find the processes of validation that stabilize these understandings. Often enough we will find, fourth, that these issue from yet other institutional arrangements, thus showing us how the layering or dove-tailing of different kinds of processes can create local stability in social life. Conversely, we have equipped ourselves with a method to analyze processes of deinstitutionalization, including catastrophic institutional breakdowns such as those which occurred from 1989 to 1991 throughout Eastern Europe.

Consequent processualism opens a very simple, straightforward and analytically fruitful perspective on politics, control, knowledge and power. From this viewpoint, politics is best understood as the *intentional effort* to form, maintain, alter, and in the last consequence also destroy, institutions. Politics is therefore neither primarily a struggle for power as Max Weber believed ([1922] 1980, 822)—a definition which makes politics into an empty pursuit of tokens. Nor is its fundamental defining characteristic the distinction between friend and foe as Carl Schmitt insisted ([1932] 1963, 26)—a definition which is far too narrow and far too pessimistic to grasp a whole range of phenomena which standard discourses would easily classify as political.

Of course not all politics is successful. Intentions misfire due to misunderstandings, resistance and the production of unintended consequences, as well as due to unforeseen contingencies. This is where the notion of power comes in. Viewed from the perspective of consequent processualism, power is the ability to *succeed* in politics. What precisely power is in any particular instance depends very much on the institution aimed at

48 With its hermeneutic focus on a plurality of understandings structured by validations, the approach outlined here differs fundamentally from neo-intuitional approaches in economics (e.g. North, 1990; 2005) political science (e.g. Thelen 2004) and sociology (e.g. Powell and DiMaggio 1991).

and the situation from within which politician targets that institution. At times, socio-technological means of projective articulation matter most and politicians need what Michael Mann calls infrastructural power (1984). At other times understandings are key, in which case politicians need especially what Nye Joseph (1990) calls soft power (cf. Lukes 1974). Neither money nor knowledge are power per se. However, political knowledge—well-validated understandings of the kinds of action-reaction effect chains that are central to particular institutions—is extremely useful for acquiring and exercising power. Yet such knowledge is still not power on its own. I may know, for example, that the business of banks is centrally dependent on balancing incoming and outgoing cash-flows. In an attempt to ruin or deinstitutionalize a bank, this piece of knowledge becomes power only if I also know how to stage a big enough run on a bank. This also means that overall, power is not necessarily positively associated with knowledge as Foucault suggests (e.g. [1975] 1995), because knowledge—as we shall see—can actually undermine the ability to form or maintain institutions. Nor should power be interpreted simply as the capacity of one person to impose her will on others, even those who resist, as Weber proposes ([1922] 1980, 804), because that too may in the longer run undermine processes of institutionalization, for example by provoking silent forms of resistance such as working to rule.

What, then, are the major means of doing politics? Since institutions exist in the self-similar reproduction of interlinked action-reaction effect flows, politicians can intervene at all moments along the path of process: at the moment of initiating action; at the moment of orienting and directing reaction through understanding; or at the moment of articulating that action across time and space. Since actions presume material resources in terms of time, space and energy, politicians may support or hamper the expression of action by freeing or closing access to these resources. This may then be called a *politics of general enablement or disablement*. Examples pertinent to the case at hand are the regulation of access to public spaces, to means of communication and to leisure time. Since actions require understandings to orient and to direct them, politicians

may want to cultivate or deracinate particular understandings. This may be called a *politics of education*. If particular understandings about the relative value of certain goods are already firmly in place, for example through a politics of education, politicians can build on this fact with a politics of incentivization that aims at tipping the scale of people's calculation of value so that they act in accordance with politicians' intentions. Money can act as an incentive only where the understanding that more money would be desirable is already firmly in place; medals prompt self-sacrifice only if people already believe that receiving a medal bestows honor and if honor is what they care for. Finally, since people can only react to an action if they are placed within its reach, politicians may want to enable or disable the articulation of action effects in time and space by meddling with communication, transportation or storage. By making ideas secret, for example by locking away books or by preventing critiques from being stated or by insulating critiques once voiced, the flow of actions and reactions can be disrupted. This may be called a *politics of articulation or disarticulation*.

Wherever the institutions targeted by politics go beyond a certain scope, politicians need to team up with others while also recruiting staff to assist them. In other words, they need to *organize*, because the formation of institutions is contingent on the coordination of many spatially and temporally distributed actors. Their successful enrollment into a political project without their direct participation in defining goals makes them into *political subjects*. This need for massive enrollment confronts politicians with a collective action problem. This is where *organizations* come into play. The fundamental idea of organization is to coordinate large fields of loosely connected actors to achieve a particular institutional effect (e.g. profit, freedom from violence, etc.) with the help of a much smaller but tightly connected and firmly controlled group of politicians (as in a social movement organization or a party) or by staff hired and directed by politicians (as in a modern bureaucracy). In fact, organizations are all about politics. It is important to see that *organizations* are themselves a special kind of institution. While institutions in general exist in a self-similar replication of action-reaction chains, whether or not

there is a politics in place to address them, it makes sense to speak of organizations only if institutions become self-conscious, in the sense that they are associated with groups of politicians who (typically assisted by staff) try to maintain these institutions. The rise of organizations as a social form is thus a useful index for the increasing intentionality of politics. While this meta-institutional character of organizations may vastly increase the chances of success in generating, maintaining or changing institutions, thus making politics in a sense easier, it also makes politics much more complex because organizations must engage in maintaining themselves; they must practice a self-(sustaining) politics in addition to pursuing external political goals.

This brings me finally to the issue of *control*, which becomes acute precisely because politicians need the voluntary and dedicated collaboration of ever larger numbers of people to realize their institution-forming ambitions. The word »control« has two interconnected and yet distinct meanings highlighted by different primary usages in various European languages. In English, the primary sense of »to control« is »to direct,« or »to determine,« that is effectively »to dominate.« In terms of consequent processualism, control occurs if one actor, the politician, can with a high degree of certainty, through any of the political means discussed above, predetermine a favorable response by another who thus becomes a political subject.⁴⁹ This formulation immediately makes it clear why the very idea of control is an aphrodisiac to politicians. If institutions exist in regularized action-reaction effect flows, then control promises to furnish the politician with the agency to create institutions at will.

Taken in this sense, the desire for and advocacy of control involves a set of meta-understandings about the political process, notably a monologic imaginary of politicians as suitors of universal truths and values. This is what legitimates their presumption to direct others, whom they see as political subjects, toward what they think they know is in the subjects' best interests. Control as a part of the social imaginary has its emotional roots in fantasies about the unhindered realization of worthy intentions,

49 Control in the English sense is therefore much like power in Weber.

as well as in fantasies of the politician as hero, as a maker and shaker of the world.⁵⁰

Since most everybody knows from experience that control efforts are not necessarily crowned by success (i.e. lead to power), control also has the meaning (still its primary meaning in, for example, French, Italian and German) of »to check,« »to verify« or »to inspect.« That is to say it is a modality of political knowledge-making. True to the likely origins of the term in medieval administrative practices, in the control register of politics, informational feedback typically leads merely to a readjustment in the deployment of political means in order to more effectively pursue the institutionalization effect envisioned by the politician.⁵¹ The pursuit

50 Weber's analysis of the three forms of legitimate domination ([1922] 1980, 122–76) falls short in analyzing the motivations behind demands for compliance, precisely because it does not look at deeper imaginary referents, including emotions, such as the fears of the wrath of god, of a violent state of nature or, positively, the hope for fulfillment in the form of the most desirable goods: salvation, beauty, lust, truth.

51 It is probably not an accident that the continental European languages preserved a collective memory for the connection between surveillance and domination in the concept of control for the individual, her body and its direct technical extensions (tools, skis, cars etc.), but *not* for social relations. For individuals and their bodies, this collective memory is supported, its understandings continuously validated, by for example Paulinian theology and classical Greek ethics, both of which emphasize the domination (archê) of soul over body. Within this understanding, the administrative practices of »contra-rotulus« might have insinuated a convenient metaphor for benchmarking the performance of self against scriptural norms and ideals. At the same time, rulers were probably eager to emphasize the technical appearance of the administrative use of the term while deemphasizing political intentions, thus hiding the link between surveillance and domination in the social sphere. In English, however, the connection between the Latin contra-rotulus and domination might have become particularly apparent in the intra-élite confrontation between Normans and Anglo-Saxons. It is interesting to note in this respect that the term was introduced precisely at a time when growing kingdoms needed to retool their administrative capacities. In England, this happened right after the Norman conquest. The Normans used new bureaucratic techniques of inspection and documentation to

of control in both the English and continental meaning transmits a very distinct flavor to political practices. One could therefore also speak of control as a particular register of politics that, due to its focus on preset intentions, might best be called *monologic*. Within it, the goodness of goals tends to sanction the political means that are employed, often in a manipulative manner: The politics of education becomes marketing or propaganda; the politics of enablement or disablement, articulation or disarticulation becomes favoritism for conformist behavior.

The polar opposite of the control register is dialogue, which allows for the interactive shaping of intentions from within the political process. In terms of consequent processualism, actors count on, and in an ideal scenario even hope for, the independent, surprising reaction of others. The underlying imaginary of social life as dialogue does not operate with a hierarchical distinction between politicians and political subjects. Instead it assumes that all participants needed to form, sustain or alter an institution partake in these actions as co-politicians. The knowledge about means and ends deployed in the process is never taken as final, as *the* truth, but remains open to renegotiation and adjustment. Dialogic registers of politics operate with open, malleable, even emergent project goals and they refrain from manipulative uses of political means. They emphasize enablement rather than disablement, articulation rather than disarticulation, argument rather than incentives. With the growing scope and scale of political projects, dialogic registers of politics—although often celebrated as ideal (e.g. Rousseau [1762] 1997, vol. 2, chap. 3)—became suspect to modern politicians due to their inefficiency or impracticality in regularizing action-reaction flows across space and time (e.g. Habermas [1963] 1990). Modern politics has therefore largely been conducted in the register of control. That is also true for representative democracies, where the effects of control are mitigated as a result of centralizing enforceable individual rights, and of institutionalized political competition.

dominate through precise records of holdings and tax obligations, which became *prima facie* unalterable. Hence, perhaps, the moniker »Doomsday Book« for William the Conqueror's great survey.

In both the register of control and the register of dialogue, the conscious effort to form institutions is itself in need of useful discursive, emotive and kinesthetic understandings to orient and direct its efforts. In other words, politics is in need of an epistemics that is adequate to the task at hand.

Socialism's project and politics⁵²

Given the emphasis on the central role of understandings in the theory of institutions presented here, I need to begin my interpretation of the socialist project by sketching the ways in which the party has taught its members to understand it.⁵³ Its basic presupposition was that Karl Marx had established the fundamental principles of a true science of the social. At the heart of this science dwelt an understanding of history as an inevitable progression towards a secular paradise. The party understood this »march of history« as driven by the class struggle between two principal classes, one of which acted as the agent of the status quo ante and thus

52 Much of what follows is based on my own ethnographic and historical work, which I have reported in Glaeser 2011. The empirical material is drawn from 25 interviews (between four and 40 hours in length) with former full time officers of the Stasi and 16 members of the peace, civil rights and environmental movements active during the late 1970s and 1980s in Berlin. It also draws on archival work in the Stasi document center Berlin (BStU), the Mathias Domaschk Archive and, as a comparison with administrative practices in other part of government, the Berlin branch of Germany's Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv-SAPMO).

53 Arguably the single most important document for socialist parties' self-understanding is the »Short Course« on the history of the CPSU (CC-CPSU 1939). The development of the official »party line« can be best gleaned from the reports of the general secretary to the party congresses as well as from key articles in the party newspaper that helped set said line, *Neues Deutschland*. Individual members on all levels have of course in their personal understanding deviated more or less from the official version. Such personal deviance from the party line at any one given point in time has typically also varied as regards subject matter, in response to historical events and, on average, systematically over time. Besides the interviews, I have made extensive use of the memoirs of socialist politicians on all levels of influence, including both renegades and stalwarts.

of an unjust social order while the other acted in the service of progress and thus justice. In this way a strong Manichaeian sensibility was introduced into the socialist project. The seemingly improbable success of the October Revolution however also taught the party that the teachings of Marx needed to be adjusted continuously to changing historical circumstances. After all, Marx himself had adapted his own teachings to the lessons he had derived from current events, as evinced by the 18th Brumaire and his writings on the Paris Commune. In Lenin, socialist politicians saw the great adapter of Marxism to fit post-WWI Russia. That such adjustments were necessary was in their minds demonstrated by the fact that Marx himself would have predicted Russia to be an unsuitable country to stage a revolution, while the sheer success of the October Revolution corroborated Lenin's position. In this sense, the party spoke of Lenin's teachings as the »Marxism of our times« and called the ideology governing its politics »Marxism-Leninism.«

Stalin, who against both Lenin and Marx affirmed that socialism could be established in one country, was officially interpreted in his time as having adjusted the teachings of Marx and Lenin to the experience of failed revolutionary uprisings outside of the Soviet Union. Once more history was read as having corroborated this position in the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. For some time, therefore, Marxism-Leninism actually became Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. After Stalin's death, the party bureaucracy was charged with adjusting socialism to changing historical circumstances. As I will show below, this was a fatal move because the greater adjustments of doctrine had historically been dependent on charismatic leadership as well as on more or less violent purges. At any rate, the first generation of post WWII socialist leaders thought of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism as providing the prerequisite political knowledge and, through its embodiment in Soviet institutions, a living blue-print for the successful formation of socialist institutions in Eastern Europe. Hence one of the most important propaganda slogans was »Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win!«

Socialist parties saw themselves caught up in a mortal battle with the bourgeoisie and the capitalist institutions it supported. This enemy was, like an injured beast, deemed to be the more dangerous the closer it came to its certain death. Accordingly, the party sensed that the institutional achievements of the October Revolution were increasingly imperiled. They needed to be defended, if necessary with arms, since socialist institutions constituted humankind's best hope for a better life (e.g. Grimmer et al. 2002, 58). Readiness for battle required mass mobilization and central direction by an organization that had, with the utmost clarity, absorbed the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. Socialist parties believed they could only protect themselves against the enemy's sabotage and subversion by keeping all eyes firmly fixed on the true understanding of history. Hence the necessity of what Lenin called »a party of the new type« to function as the vanguard agent of historical necessity. In the terminology of consequent processualism, it was the task of the party to overcome the problem of collective action inherent in all large scale political projects. Since that project concerned nothing less than a revolutionary restructuring of social life in an entire country, the party had to become a master-organization, determining who could organize how and for what purpose and in what relationship to other organizations. The party was believed to be able to play this role precisely to the degree that it was a highly motivated, excellently trained and tightly controlled organization (Lenin [1902] 1961, chap. 1.d). Party members were invited to see themselves as co-politicians in this project by humbly accepting, against romantic subjectivism, that every member had to become an obedient bureaucrat. By implication, the rest of the population was relegated to the status of mere political subjects.

The instrument most suited for mobilization was believed to be the appeal of Marxism-Leninism itself. Since its teachings were assumed to be true, and since people were assumed to be rational by nature, people could be expected to accept the principles of Marxism-Leninism of their own volition, because of their own insights. This understanding of human beings led to a mode of accounting for errors that had all the characteristics of a theodicy, because it preempted criticisms of the sys-

tem. According to socialist party logic, there were only two reasons why the natural proclivity to accept Marxism-Leninism could fail to express itself: insufficiencies in their own propaganda efforts or inimical action by the class enemy. In both cases, the root of the problem was typically sought in the performance of individuals rather than that of institutions.

The task of the party, to first establish and then maintain and adjust socialist institutions, thus suggested two different directions for politics. From the very beginning, both directions were expressed in a register of control due to the truth claims connected with Marxism-Leninism, which left no room for goals in contradiction with the party line. First, there needed to be an expansive politics of education that enabled as many people as possible to understand and identify with Marxism-Leninism. That effort was supported by a politics of articulation that ensured that the party's teaching would reach everybody on an ongoing basis. This side of socialist politics was enacted by an enormous propaganda machinery that suffused every corner of society through mandatory participation in propaganda events as well as by the party-state's monopolization of all mass media and of public spaces.⁵⁴ Second, there needed to be a politics of disablement, which prevented enemies from acting against the interests of socialism and, where this failed, a politics of disarticulation limiting the effect flow of enemy action. This could be achieved by locking people away, by exiling them or by keeping them busy with their own problems. That side of socialist politics came to be spearheaded by the secret police. In this sense, the Stasi saw itself as the »sword and shield of the party.«

Contrary to Marx's own superstructure-infrastructure model, in the course of time socialism became an ever more self-consciously ideology-driven project. Indeed, after the major waves of the socialization programs of first industry, then agriculture and finally craft production and retail trade and had been completed, ideology was seen as the primary

54 The only type of larger space not controlled by the party-state were churches, which the official state-church compact interpreted as »private« in the sense that they were dedicated to religious worship.

vehicle to maintain and finally reform socialist institutions in the direction of a communist society. The hope was that socialism as a set of ideas would drive a set of practices, and hence institutions. In other words, socialism was de facto treated by the party as if it could self-realize performatively. Former Stasi officer Herbert Eisner (interview, Glaeser 2011, 66–67) expresses the centrality afforded to that ideology with the following words:

Socialism is very sensitive to ideological disturbances. The bracket which keeps the whole thing together is ideology and if this bracket is weakened the whole system falls apart. In capitalism this bracket is money. Thus we always spoke of the ideological work, the party-educational work which aimed to make everybody identify with it. The idea was that I will raise my children, that I will influence the neighborhood, the parents' council at school, the national front, the association of fishermen, whatever, in accordance with party policy. We wanted that everybody internalized the policy of the party.

Indeed, the party aspired to construct what I have called a monolithic intentionality (Glaeser 2011, 82). People were supposed to think, speak, feel and act in accordance with the natural dynamics of history made flesh in the latest party pronouncements, the so-called party line. This was supported by a specific socialist ethics. The distant glimmer of true humanity on the horizon justified the demand for the self-objectification of everyone in the image of the party. Self-objectification, the heroic Kantian fight against subjectivist inclinations, found its expression in a socialist categorical imperative. Former officer Martin Voigt (interview by A.G., transcript 2001) put it this way: »We only had to ask ourselves ›who benefits from your action, socialism or the capitalist class enemy?«

In socialist societies this imperative exerted tremendous pressure on anyone with career ambitions to demonstrate that they were adhering to the party line. For this reason the party created countless opportunities to show allegiance, ranging from active participation in propaganda events to the use of particular speech forms. In sum, after power had been seized, after the party had established itself as the political master

organization, and after the economy had been socialized and thus brought under control, the main political task became the maintenance and deepening of socialist institutions by cultivating as much identification with the party's current line, its historically adjusted interpretation of Marxism Leninism, as possible. The means to do so was a massive politics of education aiming at the unity and purity of understandings of all party members, and as much of the rest of the population as possible.

Organizational arrangements that place so much of their hopes in the unity and purity of a particular set of understandings are in a rather peculiar situation once their politicians realize that convictions can be feigned. In cases where the developments projected by the true science of Marxism-Leninism did not unfold as expected, the socialist theodicy offered a tantalizingly simple diagnosis. Unexpected problems could always be blamed on wanting propaganda efficacy or on enemy action. Thus the failure to surpass capitalism economically in the late 1950s nourished suspicions that people who professed to be socialist were actually merely feigning allegiance. Under these circumstances, there appeared to be only one way of finding out what people truly believed: one had to observe them across all of their life contexts, notably in situations where they assumed themselves to be unwatched by socialist authorities. This perceived need to verify allegiance was the impetus behind the creation of a massive surveillance apparatus, of which the Stasi was the central and most powerful part.⁵⁵ The secret police were tasked with running comprehensive background screenings whenever particular trust was deemed necessary or concrete suspicions about someone's loyalty surfaced. Ultimately, only secret police methods able to cut

55 More or less clandestine surveillance was an integral part not only of party membership, but also of the organization of schooling, housing and personnel management. Through its network of secret informants, the Stasi de facto pulled most of these lines of policing together, even in areas where it had no formal bureaucratic authority. The most comprehensive source of information about the Stasi remains BStU 1995. Readers who do not read German can consult Koehler 2000 for an overview of foreign espionage activities and Bruce 2012 for a historical study of the work of two Stasi county offices.

through the veil of public performances were deemed suitable to assess loyalty. One consequence of this was what one might want to call a secret police model of truth. The truth about people could not be found in conversation with them or even in open research; instead it needed to be clandestinely spied out. Another consequence was the extreme moral valancing of conformist behavior and the criminalization of non-conformist behavior.

In sum, propaganda and secret policing operated in tandem. The one attempted to propagate true understanding, the other tried to stamp out the falsehoods endangering it; the one aspired to cultivate ethical behavior, the other aspired to eradicate unethical and criminal behavior; the one operated in broad daylight to effect control in the sense of direction, the other had to operate clandestinely to effect control in the sense of surveillance. Both were seen as essential to the institutional reproduction of socialism and both, for that very reason, grew in size, effort and budget through all the many crises of socialism from its inception to its end.⁵⁶ When there was no paper for printing literary texts, there was always paper for printing propaganda material. When administrative budgets had no room to improve medical services, there was always room to increase intelligence manpower. Thus the secret police grew almost sixfold in size from the mid-1950s to the end of the GDR, finally sporting about 90,000 full time employees (Gieseke 2000, 552–57) while keeping nearly 180,000 full time informants on call (Müller-Enbergs 2008, 59).

Precisely because socialism operated with the understanding that it was based on a scientifically ascertained and thus true and necessarily fixed

56 To my knowledge there is as yet no comprehensive study of the GDR propaganda effort. Statistics about it are difficult to assemble because propaganda expenses were part of so many different accounts. My assessment is built on interviews as well as Boyer's (2005, chap. 3) study of journalists in the GDR. For the secret police, reasonably good figures exist by comparison (see above). Even if employee statistics reflect once more only a part of surveillance activities, they resonate positively with the subjective accounts of its growth that I was given in interviews.

goal, precisely because, at least initially, it had to be established against the resistance of an entrenched ruling class, central control was integral to the socialist project. Losing control was socialist politicians' greatest anxiety, because to them it was tantamount to the deinstitutionalization of socialism. In the political imaginary of socialism, this was of course supposed to be a transitory situation. With the firm establishment of socialism, after the class enemy had finally been defeated, the state, the coordinating center of control, would gradually expire because it would no longer be needed.⁵⁷ In the much quoted words of Engels ([1876–78] 1962, 262):

The state interference in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and by the direction of the processes of production. The state is not »abolished,« it withers away.⁵⁸

Ironies of direction in socialist politics

Socialism's political focus on the transmission of specific understandings, paired with a rigorous policing of the success of transmission, fueled distrust in all possible directions (Glaeser 2004; cf. Kligman 1998; Havel 1990). The party-state in general, as well as almost all bureaucratic superiors, looked for clear signs of allegiance in their subordinates, because in cases of failure they would be held accountable for the lack of proper socialist training in their domain of responsibility. In accordance with the socialist theodicy, proper training was thought to act as the main guarantor of success. People with career ambitions had to worry that their actions could be misread as deviant. Such accusations, typically presented as cases of »ideological uncertainty« or »lacking class consci-

57 Since the state was seized by the party, the end of control would come only with the end of the party as a vanguard institution.

58 English translation by Emile Burns (1935, 315). The popularity of Engels' formulation probably owes itself to the fact that Lenin quoted it quite frequently, notably in some of his key writings.

ousness,« had significant consequences. Thus the party-state's mix of political means of instituting a socialist society led to increasing levels of performative self-monitoring and self-seclusion in the form of the famous retreat into private life (Betts 2010, 9–11; Wolle 1998, 219–20; Gaus 1983). Rather than mobilizing people with socialist ideas, their controlled, mechanistic reproduction in late socialism was widely experienced as infantilizing and depressing—in the final years even among functionaries such as secret police officers.⁵⁹

What we have here is a situation in which the policies deployed to exercise control ironically undermined power. The particular irony of control under consideration here could be called the irony of proselytization. It is the danger of any politics of education that sees political subjects as containers to be filled with specific, non-negotiable understandings. Politics of this kind suffers from three fundamental misunderstandings. On the most basic level, it tends to overlook the fact that the communicative process is characterized not only by inevitable losses of information, but also that education is contingent on successful translations between divergent life worlds, and that interpretation is therefore always a reconstruction (Reddy 1993).⁶⁰ Moreover, the cultivation of particular understandings is often pursued by means of the explicit denigration of others which, depending on the relationship between educator and educated, can stimulate counter-imaginaries in which they attain value as forbidden fruit.⁶¹

59 For an illuminating comparison with the late Soviet Union and the emergence of particular forms of humor in response to this situation see Yurchak 2005.

60 Interestingly, the linguistic ideology (Silverstein 1979) underlying socialist politics of education was already discredited by early Soviet semioticians (see Volosinov [1929] 1973).

61 The classic reference for such processes is Foucault [1976] 1978. Once more, even though richly suggestive, the work is weak on theorizing process in contexts of contingencies. For a dialectical heuristic for thinking through cases in which counter-imaginaries take place, see Glaeser 2011, chap. 4.

On a more specific historical level, socialist politics of education ran afoul of prevalent modern understandings of selves as not only active but as creative and critical (e.g. Taylor 1989; 2004). Modern self-ideals are incompatible with politics articulated in the register of control, calling instead for dialogic inclusion in political processes. For the realm of politics, this means that every citizen should be understood in a fundamental way as a politician, as a co-former of institutions. Ideally, this is in the end precisely what people's sovereignty means (Rousseau [1762] 1997, vol. 1, chap. 6). Socialist propaganda recognized these understandings of modern selves as genuinely socialist.⁶² In fact socialist critics of liberal democracies (modeling themselves on Lenin [1917] 1962) accused them of violating these modernist values by deceiving their electorates in such a way that they mistook the choice between pseudo-alternatives presented by seemingly different parties for genuine choice between institutional frameworks. Socialist officials offered involvement in the party, or in any of the socialist mass organizations, as a pathway to living the modern ideal of the self as an active, creative and critical part of the popular sovereign. Even though large parts of the population remained distrustful of this invitation by the party, during the years of reconstruction after World War II, problems notwithstanding, this is how many party members could and did experience their participation (see Epstein 2003, chap. 6). Extraordinary career opportunities in which young people could quickly advance to positions of leadership further corroborated party members' self-perception as active formers of institutions.

Yet, the rigidities of life in the party and socialist mass organizations remained off-putting for many non-members and became increasingly troublesome even to some of the most dedicated members (e.g. Schürer 1996; Henrich 1989; Scherzer 1989). The notorious, regularly recurring »freeze« periods with heightened levels of surveillance led increasingly

62 It thus created the potential for the appearance of a fundamental contradiction that no conservative authoritarianism needs to face, because conservatives are anti-modern as regards precisely this point.

larger numbers of members to disengage.⁶³ During the last years of the GDR this happened at an accelerating pace.⁶⁴

Yet, rigidities were introduced precisely because the party leadership felt it imperative to control ideological reproduction tightly. It attempted to reconcile its desire for ideological control with modern self-ideals by exhorting everybody to creatively apply general, prevalent doctrine to specific contexts. It also encouraged critique, but only in relation to the class enemy and in areas where the party did not yet have any clear doctrinal commitments. Otherwise the party demanded discipline and self-objectification in line with the socialist categorical imperative. For its historical context, it explicitly acknowledged that freedom at the macro-political level, the freedom to create and sustain (socialist) institutions, was only available at the price of sacrificing individual freedoms for the sake of a better future. To help people get over their »subjectivist inclinations,« the party devised a range of rituals with dialogic names such as »critique and self-critique« and, later, »talks« (*Aus-sprachen*) which however rarely shed their fiercely didactic, monologic character. The result was fixed in advance: re-alignment or isolation. While these socialist ways of reconciling »personal« and »civil« liberties (Rousseau [1762] 1997, vol. 1, chap. 8) resonated positively with the *Aufbaugeneration*⁶⁵ during the GDR's first 20 years, when socialist institutions were young and believa-

63 Such freezes occurred either in response to major domestic or international events such as in 1953 (June 17 uprising), 1956 (Hungarian uprising), 1968 (Prague Spring) and 1987 (Soviet glasnost) or in response to domestic policy shifts such as in 1965 (11th Plenum condemning cultural productions perceived to swerve from the party line), 1976 (after the forced exile of Wolf Biermann) and 1989 (perception of growing crisis).

64 Individual higher-ranking functionaries, especially in less policed domains of social life, showed time and again that a greater openness and more satisfying life within the party was possible by creating an atmosphere of trust. Such pockets of openness remained the exception, however, and my interview partners have reported that they decreased in later years.

65 The founding generation that engendered and benefited from a fresh start after WWII.

bly threatened, they increasingly lost their persuasiveness with the apparent stability of socialist arrangements, which were touted by the party as major successes.⁶⁶

Beyond the irony of proselytization generated through a combination of propaganda and surveillance, socialist practices of central planning produced yet another irony of control which resulted from efforts to direct the behavior of citizens. Instead of relying on floating prices and free markets, socialism depended on central coordination to allocate scarce resources. A plan determined what would be produced by whom in which quality and quantity; it also determined inputs and investments for productive units as well as what would be available where for final distribution to consumers. It also more or less fixed the prices of goods for exchange (Mittag 1969; cf. Steiner 2004). In other words, economic planning was the epitome of control. The argument socialist politicians made for planning rested on the understanding that, for several reasons, it was more rational than the market. Most importantly, planned economies were understood to be more efficient than market economies, because planning could consciously harness »economic laws« to attain chosen outcomes, while free markets were thought to subject participants to these laws in an uncontrollable fashion. In other words, planning promised to replace the chaotic »laws of the jungle« created by the short-term self-interested behavior prevailing on free markets with centralized, long-term coordination in the genuine interest of society. The model for this sort of liberation was the scientific identification of the laws of nature and their systematic use for human ends in engineering applications. Thus planning promised to eliminate business cycles produced by over- or underproduction as well as the human misery of mass-unemployment and deskilling. Planning was thought to allow for the creation of productive monopolies and thus the realization of the

66 Once more it is interesting to note that socialist practices of pairing a monologic politics of education with tight surveillance contradicted early Soviet theories of pedagogy (Vygotsky [1932-34] 1978, chap. 6 and 7) and the results of what were later much-celebrated pedagogical experiments (Makarenko [1933-35] 1955).

largest possible economies of scale without incurring the exploitation associated with monopoly pricing on free markets. Finally, it was thought that planning also eliminated other kinds of waste associated with market competition such as the need for excessive or deceptive advertising as well as the need for useless product differentiation. The rationality of production would be supported by the rationality of consumption, socialist thinkers taught, because the end of class warfare would end the need for social differentiation through conspicuous consumption. The combined result of these rationalizations was expected to be a far greater average standard of living, more funds for socially useful investments, and thus quicker increases in the productivity of labor and ultimately higher economic growth, which would eventually allow for the establishment of communism.

Famously, these expectations were not realized. Not only did the forecasted growth rates not materialize, but socialist economies developed serious shortages that endured for decades, even in basic necessities such as shoes or building materials. As Janos Kornai (1992, chap. 7 and 12) has pointed out, these shortages were produced by the incentive structure of central planning. Managers not only manufactured in abundance of what they could easily produce to fulfill their plans, they also hoarded resources to deal with the vagaries of the plan. To keep the economy running, all production units relied increasingly on »fixers,« people enmeshed in personal networks who could strike barter deals outside of the plan. They ironically introduced counter-plan practices which made the plan seemingly workable while at the same time increasing planning uncertainties.⁶⁷

67 Precisely because the secret police had very many lateral contacts, it regularly served the role of fixer. Thus the Stasi stole Western technology, specialty chemicals or other urgently needed components from the class enemy; within the GDR it helped to broker supply deals for everything from coal to apartments, and it regularly acted as a purveyor of information that could not travel through official channels. Of course there were definite boundaries to this trickster work set by the secrecy requirements of the Stasi.

Central planning was an effort to control as many economic action-reaction links as possible by monopolizing the projective articulation of supply and demand. Once more, control led directly to a loss of control. The question is why? Kornai's answers remain in many ways merely descriptive. The flaws he describes were well known to insiders, practitioners, planners and theorists of the socialist economy. This is, after all, the world in which Kornai had lived for a long time.⁶⁸ The question is therefore no longer why a particular form of planning did not work, but why a system which was known to be dysfunctional could not be changed. The first answer to this question is technical, and I will sketch it here. The second answer, however, involves a complex of political and epistemic issues that I will discuss at the end of this paper, because it is relevant to the ironies of control discussed in the next section as well.

Thinking about the economy from the perspective of consequent processualism highlights the staggering complexity of economies as concatenated activities across time and space. Modeling such complexities in a meaningful way is very difficult to this day. The heuristics introduced in socialism to accomplish the task added many additional inaccuracies and uncertainties. That is to say control that truly amplifies power is dependent on the available material and social technologies. Deficiencies in material technologies can be compensated to a certain degree by institutional arrangements and vice versa.⁶⁹ The GDR leadership tried to do

68 There was actually a lively debate in the late 1950s and 1960s about socialist incentive schemes and planning methods, which led to a sway in economic reform proposals. Important contributors were, in Poland, Oskar Lange (1959, 1970), Ota Sik in Czechoslovakia (1972), Erich Apel and Günter Mittag in Germany (1963), and in the Soviet Union, Evsej Liberman (1974).

69 The builders of the massive constructions of the ancient world were obviously able to overcome (what from today's perspective looks like) the lack of power machinery through the tight coordination of massive amounts of human labor as well as through much longer planning horizons. In the opposite direction, the American National Security Agency banks on screening telecommunications electronically rather than on informant-based spying operations.

this by using classical propaganda methods geared towards overfulfilling plans. Of course these were in turn subject to the ironies of proselytization that I have described above.

Epistemic ironies of socialist surveillance

Another type of ironies of control becomes apparent in the investigation of the party-state's political epistemics. In particular, I analyze how the secret police of former East Germany, popularly known as »the Stasi,«⁷⁰ worked within the parameters set by its role within the socialist project. My analysis focuses on secret police attempts to know and control the peace and civil rights movements in Berlin. What interests me here is the question of why the Stasi never came to understand the phenomenon of dissidence, in spite of its oft-stated intention to do so. This is relevant on the practical level of policing, because the Stasi failed to check the growth of these movements, their establishment of local and country-wide institutions and their linkage with Eastern and Western European counterparts. This is also relevant from the perspective of the party-state's self-sustaining politics, because such knowledge would have educated the party about significant reasons for its own propagandistic inefficacy. As an epistemic project of the state, moreover, the secret police's generation of knowledge about dissidence throws an interesting light on the ways in which the party-state more generally produced knowledge about itself. Systematic comparisons with the party-state's other epistemic projects reveal that the causes for the Stasi's failure are symptomatic of the system as a whole. In other words, the Stasi case reveals how the party-state's efforts at generating political knowledge in the end undermined its chances for successful self-sustaining politics. This is the basic epistemic irony of control that I shall explore in this section.

70 The official name was Ministry for State Security, abbreviated MfS, which maintained regional and local offices. Its various branches, beyond its foreign espionage and much-discussed domestic secret policing services, included a passport control unit, the GDR guard regiment, a body guard unit, a legal affairs unit, etc.

So who were the dissidents?⁷¹ For two reasons, the situation of dissidents in East Germany was very different from those elsewhere in Eastern Europe. First, until 1961, when the Berlin Wall was built, 2.7 million people or about 15% of the population escaped through the Berlin gap in the Iron Curtain. This drain of people pre-empted classical liberal or conservative dissidence in the GDR. Exceptions were Protestant ministers who faced reemployment prohibitions in the FRG if they abandoned their flock in the GDR. Not surprisingly, people from the Protestant milieu played a significant role in non-conformist circles. In fact, the Protestant Church supplied vital resources for party-independent activists as regards space and access to duplication and communication technology. In this way it contravened the state's politics of general disablement vis-à-vis anybody unwilling to live their political ambitions within the frameworks provided by the party. The second reason for the atypical situation of dissidents in the GDR is that, second only to the Soviet Union, the GDR was perhaps the Eastern European country where socialism held the highest legitimacy, due to Germany's Nazi history. Nowhere else could socialism more successfully cast itself as a living bulwark against fascism. It is significant in this respect that even among the members of the last politburo of the GDR, about half had wartime anti-fascist credentials.

Given both of these reasons, it is not surprising that dissidence outside of the party and on a somewhat larger scale only appeared in the early 1980s, when the new cold war triggered fears of an all-out nuclear war. This fear led to the formation of peace groups both in Western and Eastern Europe. In the GDR, activists recruited themselves from two

71 Thanks to the historical research of former dissidents themselves, the literature on the lives of dissidents and the history of all forms of resistance in the GDR has become vast. Arguably the most comprehensive introduction is still Neubert 1998 and, with an emphasis on the last two decades of the GDR, Ansorg et al. 2007. Valuable analyses of individual groups can be found in the contributions in *Deutscher Bundestag* 1995, vol. 7. Poppe et al. 1995 provides insight into the various forms of resistance. In English, Joppke 1995 and Torpey 1995 and, with a focus on the last year of the GDR, Olivo 2001 and Pfaff 2006 can be consulted.

rather different sources, whose interaction became critical for the groups' success. On the one side were more radical Protestants who were willing to break out of the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine (see for example Sengespeick-Roos 1997; Eppelmann 1993). On the other side were non-religious young men and women with clear sympathies for socialism as an idea, who had, however, also repeatedly come into conflict with the party-state (e.g. Templin, 2000, 112–14; Kukutz 1995; Rüdtenklau 1992) and who felt ever more clearly that socialism needed thorough reform.

The Stasi's understanding of dissident activity was fully embedded within the party's understanding of history as progressing in clearly delineable stages. In the early to mid-1950s, the Stasi focused its efforts on fighting the domestic class enemy presumed to resist the party's revolutionary project. For the Stasi this included churches as agents of reaction. More importantly, however, the open borders in Berlin made the two Germanys a playground for spies that the Stasi endeavored to catch (cf. Kierstein 2007; Möller and Stuchly 2002, 431–558; Labrenz-Weiß 1998, 35–41). After the Wall was built in 1961 however, spying slowed down considerably because the closed borders made it significantly more dangerous and more difficult to organize. Moreover, during the latter part of the 1960s, an understanding of GDR society began to prevail that saw socialism as being so well established that domestic class enemies no longer existed. Says former officer Martin Voigt (interview, Glaeser 2011, 465):

We have always worked from the assumption [...] that in a developed socialist society, there could not exist such a thing as a genuine opposition. All there was, was a so-called opposition, which was in reality an anti-socialist political underground, inspired and directed by the class enemy.

For the party and for the Stasi, the problem of dissidence was in a sense always already understood. It resulted from a conjunction of a GDR citizenry that had failed to absorb the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, and the malicious interventions of the foreign class enemy engaging in ideological warfare.

It would be too easy, however, to see this understanding of dissidence as foreign-inspired as a mere fantasy. The theory was developed in response to historical experiences, which, in the eyes of the Stasi, corroborated it. Until 1961, Western organizations did try to foment and organize discontent within socialist countries. The churches in the 1950s did define themselves in opposition to the socialist project, and they did receive and continued to receive ample support from affiliated West German churches. Yet by the mid-1970s the Protestant Churches had reached a compact with the state, which led them to argue for »a church embedded in socialism« (e.g. Pollack 1994). However with the increasing importance of electronic mass media, the entirety of the GDR came to be within the radius of West German radio and television broadcasts (Hesse 1988). And there is no doubt that these Western broadcasting services insisted on the official West German government position that the GDR was illegitimate, that the population of the GDR was suppressed, and that the Bonn government was the only truly democratic government in all of Germany. Finally, a few prominent cases of socialist dissidence, notably Robert Havemann's and Wolf Biermann's, were interpreted by officers and other officials as corroborating the notion that dissidence in the GDR was the result of capitalist interventions.⁷²

For the Stasi, it seemed logical to apply the theory of Western-inspired and organized dissidence to the emerging peace and civil rights movements as well, because it fit the party-state's understanding of the dynamics of the renewed Cold War. At the height of the movements' development, the Stasi estimated that there were about 2,500 activists in the entire country, organized in several hundred small groups (Mitter and Wolle 1990). All were known by name and address, and all were under surveillance by hundreds of secret informants. The telephones and the apartments of the more important members were bugged. Thus the Stasi knew about almost all meetings, they knew approximately who said what

72 On the Stasi case against Robert Havemann see Polzin 2006 (with an emphasis on Havemann's work as a secret informant) and Vollnhals 2000. For the interpretation of this case by Stasi officers see Glaeser 2011, 303–6.

to whom, and they knew about almost all events way in advance. These events were exclusively peaceful; typically small demonstrations, vigils, blues masses, political night prayers, petitions, or information fairs about group activities.⁷³

Given the size of the population, this »political underground,« as the Stasi called it, was a relatively small affair. And yet it was deemed dangerous. The reasons should be clear, considering the character of the socialist project as an ideology-driven attempt to perform a self-fulfilling prophecy. The party feared that these intramural »influence agents« (Suckut 1996, 303–5) could validate the messages of Western mass media in face-to-face interactions, thereby undercutting the efficacy of its own propaganda. Moreover, the party feared that because of the interplay of Western propaganda and local influence agents posing in the guise of a democratic opposition, the GDR would become the target for blackmail on the international diplomatic scene because it might appear as if it repressed a genuine opposition when it did nothing but control the activities of a Western, agency-sponsored, pretend opposition.⁷⁴ In short the party-state was firmly convinced that the actions of the activists seriously undermined the socialist project.

In this situation, the secret police was charged with the task of stopping dissident activities. Their ideal way of doing so was to collect evidence for a trial of activists for political crimes according to the penal law of the GDR. All of the cases opened against activists began with the presupposition of a violation of a particular set of laws, typically either the subversion of the ideological resolution of the GDR population or the transmission of secret information to the class enemy. Had the plan worked, imprisonment would have operated as a combination of a politics of general disablement (as prison is designed to preempt action), a

73 For an overview of the full breadth of these activities see Neubert 1998.

74 At issue were international recognition and the GDR's bargaining position for obtaining hard currency credits, which became necessary to finance a surge in consumption spending (cf. Schalek-Golodkowski 2000; Schürer 1996).

politics of disarticulation (as it aimed to sever action-reaction effect flows between prisoners and their friends), and a politics of education (by withdrawing a source of recognition for dissident understandings while spreading fear of the state). In other words, imprisonment is a totalizing form of politics.

Three factors in particular militated against this route of stopping the activists. First, the dissident's activities were designed to remain on this side of the law or, if they were not legal, they were calculated to fall into the category of misdemeanor rather than of that of felony. Second, the post-Stalinist GDR became an increasingly bureaucratic and concurrently legalistic country. Although it never became ruled by law, there was an increasing emphasis on rule-governed proceedings. In Weberian terms (Weber [1922] 1980, 44), the formal rationality of procedure began to gnaw into the substantive rationality of the vanguard-party concept. Accordingly, the Stasi maintained a legal department (division IX) which checked the formal merit of any case.⁷⁵ The Stasi's main problem of operation within this increasingly legalized environment was that most of its evidence rested on the testimony of secret informants. These, however had to be protected both so that they could continue to operate as sources producing information and to uphold the promise of secrecy they were given when they signed on as informants. Third, even when legal proceedings would have been possible, they were often deemed inopportune for political reasons because the dissidents had learned to mobilize domestic and international protest against incarcerations.

With the ideal, juridical ending to their casework effectively blocked, the Stasi took recourse to methods of harassment as an alternative. The Stasi's term for these methods was *Zersetzung*, that is »decomposition« (Pingel-Schliemann 2002). These aimed at activists' sense of reality, including their sense of self and their social integration. Harassment included efforts to prevent activists from gaining employment suitable to

75 Unfortunately the research on the Stasi has neglected this department. My assessment here is based on interviews with officers as well as on a comparative analysis of casework documents.

their level of education, restrictions on travel, clandestine but obvious apartment searches, performative shadowing in the streets, the instigation of sexual jealousy, the spread of rumors about the moral character of a particular person or simply the amplification of pre-existing conflicts in their marriages, friendships or groups, so that members would busy themselves with infighting.⁷⁶

Even though secret police harassment created real suffering, it failed to prevent the opposition from growing. Instead it contributed to its radicalization. Police harassment identified as such constituted an obvious human rights violation. Thus dissidents had evidence for the party-state's contemptuous action, which they learned to broadcast to the world. Elsewhere (Glaeser 2011, 450–51), I call this the *ecce homo* strategy.⁷⁷ The very embarrassment that the party-state tried to escape on the international scene by controlling expressions of dissidence was thus produced by these control efforts themselves. In this manner, the Stasi contributed to the creation of the very specter it tried to exorcise. As to the question of the Stasi's efforts to prove connections between activists and Western secret service agencies, now that all the important dissident files of the secret police have been studied again and again, we can be certain that the Stasi never really had proof for its theory; and I say this even though it is quite possible that the one or the other dissident worked actively for the CIA, BND, or other secret service agencies. The point is that dissidence in the GDR was not produced by Western interference. The secret the party-state could not unlock was that dissidence was produced from within the political dynamics of the GDR itself. As peace and civil rights activist Thomas Klein said (interview, Glaeser

76 This list is oriented toward the effect of the action and is more inclusive than the Stasi's own technical use of the term which did not include travel restrictions, employment prohibitions, and searches.

77 How this worked becomes particularly apparent by studying samizdat publications, most notably *Grenzfall* which was explicitly founded to document, broadcast and satirize human rights violations in the GDR (Hirsch and Kopelew 1989; Kowalczyk 2002).

2011, 341): »The »enemies« of the GDR were made by nobody more effectively than by the GDR herself.«

Many activists began their »deviant« careers after experiencing bitter disappointment at not being taken seriously by the party-state. They were shocked by shaming rituals, or they rebelled against overly zealous, heavy-handed propaganda. Unlike party officials who were, through their personal networks, led to rationalize similar experiences as failures of particular individuals, future activists' networks began to recognize them as problematic characteristics of the socialist system. Moreover, with its control efforts, the secret police amplified the original causes that led activists to speak up against the party-state in the first place. If this is so, then why did the Stasi not discover the »elephant in the room«—this root cause of dissidence—and why did it remain oblivious to its own role in worsening the problem rather than in helping to solve it?

To understand this we have to take the organizational cultures of the Stasi and of the party into account. Anyone writing a document within an organization engages in an act of communication between a lower and a higher level of bureaucracy. Such documents are taken to reveal the qualities of the writer, in this case that of an officer as a member of the party and as a bureaucrat charged with a particular task. Accordingly, officers had to follow conventions of writing that allowed them to cater to their superiors' expectations that they perform flawless class consciousness. Thus officers ostentatiously distanced themselves from »enemy« views and actions, while equally ostentatiously identifying with the party line. Nothing could be said that looked in the faintest like a critique of anyone above themselves. The universal slogan in GDR socialism was »no discussion about mistakes.« One had to be positive; one had to avoid anything that could be read as undermining mobilization and resolve. Hence former officers describe their report-writing as acts of acute self-censorship (interviews). One of them said: »the principle was

simple: what should not exist can not exist.« Another said: »we needed to castrate our reports«, a third referred to his reports as »lullabies.«⁷⁸

That situation was aggravated by the fact that the knowledge-generating ideology underlying much of socialist bureaucracy was one of contract engineering. Lower levels were supposed to fulfill only limited, clearly circumscribed tasks. More specifically, they were supposed to generate facts, but add neither interpretation nor analysis. That was the prerogative of higher-ups, simply because they had access to more information. Of course this kind of thinking was thoroughly indexical, characterizing work all the way up to the politburo itself. The ultimate analytical referent was exactly: nowhere.

The root cause of the epistemic ironies of control lies in the institutionalization of the generation of political knowledge in the GDR. The party-state had formed practices of communication that made learning immensely difficult as soon as it in any way challenged fundamental assumptions. All knowledge that threw a critical light on the functioning of the socialist system, in fact anything that looked as if it might endanger mass mobilization, had to be kept secret or was best not even developed. This is the result of a fundamental tension between knowledge-generating practices and action. People need understanding to orient and direct their action. Since there can be a multiplicity of ambiguous, ambivalent or even contradictory understandings, people search for validations to find the most reliable path for action. Agency, the ability to act, is in this sense contingent on sufficiently validated understandings. But this also means that raising doubts has a detrimental effect on agency. Those who

78 I have checked the results of my investigation of Stasi-internal patterns of communication against reports from other branches of GDR government and the results about party life with the help of the extensive body of memoirs which has confirmed these findings as systemic features of the party-state. This holds true regardless of how the authors positioned themselves vis-à-vis the GDR after unification, and of the branch and level of the party-state organization. In addition to the aforementioned literature I would like to mention Eberlein 2000; Modrow 1995; Uschner 1993; Schabowski 1991.

crave to act therefore crave sufficiently certain knowledge, and they potentially perceive anybody calling this certainty into doubt as a spoilsport.

This basic tension was amplified by the fact that Marxism-Leninism cultivated an awareness of the fact that decisive action could change circumstances in such a way that the knowledge of yesteryear might quickly become old hat. In Marxist-Leninist thought, what counted as true *political* knowledge, which aims at the formation of institutions, is therefore knowledge that accommodates itself to the performativity of human action. In other words, true political knowledge allows for the possibility of self-realization and reflects the conditions of this possibility. Accordingly, critiques that derive their punch from a mere analysis of what currently exists are always in danger of being, in the truest sense of the word, no more than petty nagging. Useful political knowledge thus necessarily requires an image of social life that reflects its temporal progression into the future. And such knowledge, it was believed in socialism, was only available at the center of the party. Its instantiation moved from Marx to Lenin to Stalin and then to the apparatus of the politburo. Yet none of Stalin's successors had either the depth of social analysis and/or the charismatic authority to make deep institutional accommodations to changing circumstances in the same way that Lenin or Stalin did. Ironically, the continuing functioning of socialist institutions rested on charismatic political epistemics. And, perhaps tragically, this charisma was lost before the party's institutionalized political epistemics could be changed.

Power, as I said at the beginning of this paper, is the ability to form, maintain or alter institutions. Unfortunately, what de facto is and is not power is revealed only within a wider temporal horizon. For that reason, and quite myopically, power is often perceived merely as the ability to get action going. Socialism, inspired by revolutionary ambitions, in this manner placed a huge premium on mobilization, on getting everybody united behind the party's agenda. To support mobilization, the party instituted processes of validation which could only safely validate that which was already known. To put it bluntly, in 1989, Leninism was still the Marxism of its time. Knowledge formation processes that are cut off

from renewal through experience and thoroughgoing critical procedures become completely circular. This is what happened in the GDR. Yet party officials believed they had profound knowledge about the social world in which they acted. And how could they not? Their environment constantly validated their understandings. At the bottom, in everyday experiences, there were of course doubts, because people saw individual aspects of the project derailing with their own eyes. But there was also always the hope that this was just a local occurrence, and that those further up, owing to their deeper knowledge, knew better. When it became ever clearer to party members that that which had first appeared as a local problem was indeed a failure of the system, the party no longer had institutional frameworks to develop better understandings of their situation, understandings that might have enabled successful self-sustaining politics. In fact, the political epistemics of the party-state led to a self-fetishization of socialism at a particular stage of development. Unable to act constructively, devoid of the power that would have come about with the help of a different kind of knowledge, the party-state simply imploded.

Conclusions: Learning from socialism

At the beginning of this paper I presented socialism as a form of hyper-modernity. The analytical purchase of this classification is that it allows us to step out of the comparative political systems model, whose principal flaw lies in the mutually exclusive juxtaposition of seemingly closed and coherent systems. These systems are seen as alternative models of social life that one could choose to institutionalize politically.⁷⁹ If one such system fails while the other survives, scholars are tempted to argue that the former broke down because it was unlike the latter. Not surprisingly, there are plenty of accounts of socialism's impossibility (and, retrospec-

79 These flaws pertain much more to contemporary work in the genre of social analysis than to its ancient Greek origins. Both Plato and Aristotle were quite aware of the continuities between »politeiai« simply because they were interested in the transformations of the one into the other, its causes and consequences.

tively, dissolution) that essentially blame it for not having been a capitalist liberal democracy (notably Mises [1922] 1936; Hayek [1944] 2007, but also their contemporary students at the Cato Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, etc.). Neo-Parsonian modernization theories (e.g. Zapf 1993; Meuschel 1992) do not fare much better, because they implicitly identify that which strikes them as necessary in social processes of differentiation with those extant in surviving (concretely, capitalist/liberal) systems. Not only do neoliberal and modernization theoretic approaches engage in problematic reifications, but their comparative matrix never lets them look deeply enough into the dynamics of process. Moreover, a comparative systems approach systematically blocks from view the fact that many of the processes which form and maintain institutional arrangements are quite similar across various modern institutional clusters. Finally, no concrete assembly has the neatness that the systems metaphor suggests.

Similarities across different clusters of institutional arrangements are traceable to common historical origins and to similar problem constellations that may lead to similar institutional solutions. All modern political forms, including liberalism and socialism,⁸⁰ have developed imaginaries which operate with global scopes and on personality-transforming scales. They aim to bring about, as an effect of intentional transformations, putatively liberating institutional arrangements, be it a global free market among a community of representative democracies, or world communism. All modern political forms have developed a putatively true science to supply the political knowledge needed to support these transformational political ambitions, among them (liberal) economics and Marxism-Leninism. Precisely to the degree that they operate with pre-set goals which are *not* open to adjustment in negotiations with citizens who are thus treated as political subjects rather than as co-politici-

80 I have not included fascism here because it is a more fragmented phenomenon. Even though German National Socialism easily falls into the categories above, its goal (a global order of races) and its science (race-based social Darwinism) does not easily translate into Italian or Spanish fascisms.

ans, and to the degree that the underlying scientific practice is hypostatized as true, these formations need to engage in a politics cast in a register of control. Liberals need to force market participation (intensifying with scope and scale of the project) while enforcing the operation of the price mechanism; socialists need to force political participation in the party and its mass organizations while aligning everyone with the party line.

I have sketched out some of the major ironies of control that beset the operations of socialist politics. Are there similar ironies of control in operation within capitalist liberal democracies? Epistemic ironies abound wherever the generation of political knowledge in the service of control becomes entangled in circular processes of validation (something that happens regularly in organizational contexts) and where imperatives to act seem to predominate (for example in foreign policy transactions). Ironies of direction appear regularly where government actors try to prescribe and enforce particular courses of action (for example in anti-smoking campaigns), thus clearly dividing politics into agents and subjects. Yet, there is one element of liberal, capitalist institutional arrangement that seems to break the edge off ironies of direction. Actors interested in the maintenance or expansion of capitalist logics of behavior have been much more successful in naturalizing these logics than socialists were. By systematically veiling the fact that markets are institutions formed in interlinked action-reaction effect sequences, that is through the fetishization of »the market« as an autonomous actor, the intentionality of actors in shaping markets—their politics—is methodically obfuscated. The contradiction that has appeared in socialism between modern notions of self on the one hand and the division of political agency into politicians and subjects on the other, is thus submerged in capitalism in the fog of seemingly universal subjecthood vis-à-vis the market as Leviathan. The reason for the greater success in naturalizing capitalism probably lies in the corroboration of this understanding by its success in producing income growth for everyone. After three bubble economies that have systematically widened the income and

wealth distribution between the super-rich and the rest of the population, that may be about to change.

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