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Making the Audience Work

Textual Politics and Performance Strategies for a ‘Democratic’ Theatre in the Works of Heiner Müller

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PhD
University of Edinburgh
2014
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Abstract

In 1985, the East German playwright Heiner Müller (1929-95) spoke of the importance of a ‘democratic’ theatre: for Müller, the theatre was to be a space in which audience members are free to produce their own interpretations of the material presented on stage. In turn, the audience is encouraged to question the composition of its material reality but is not presented with a solution. Müller explicitly related this practice to his own production of his three texts Der Lohndrücker (1956-57), Der Horatier (1968), and Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauren (1986) together at the Deutsches Theater in 1988-91. As this thesis demonstrates, Müller foregrounds instigating audience participation and the means of creating ‘democratic’ theatre from the very beginning of his career. In studying the composition of Müller’s texts, the historical contexts in which they were written, and their premières we gain new perspectives on the ways in which the possibility for political theatre is anchored in Müller’s texts and just how this political theatre aims to engage its contemporary, implied audiences; indeed, this thesis argues that the politics of Müller’s theatre can be best defined as ‘democratic’.

In the introduction, I establish how Müller understands the term ‘democratic’ and how his understanding differs from interpretations of democracy contemporary to him; in doing so, I borrow critical vocabulary from the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. The introduction also elaborates a methodology for studying both implied and real audiences. While each of the prevalent semiological, phenomenological, or materialist theories of audience response has its strengths, in order to pay sufficient attention to the multiple influences upon and aspects of audience interaction, we must take a more holistic approach to audience research. I therefore articulate a new materialist phenomenological approach to audiences, drawing on Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology. In the following chapters, I study Der Lohndrücker, Der Horatier, and Kentauren in their historical contexts and consider how they were both composed with their contemporary audiences in mind and staged in their premières. This approach sheds new light on each text in question: not only do all three texts demonstrate a concern for a lack of democracy in material reality, but each also contains strategies for engaging audience involvement in a piece of ‘democratic’ theatre. My final chapter analyses Müller’s own staging techniques in Der Lohndrücker in 1988, arguing that they enhance the production’s democratic political potential and contribute to our understanding of Müller’s political theatre. While the productions discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 have largely been overlooked by theatre scholarship to date, they provide important
insights into the politics of Müller’s texts and the possible limits of writing political theatre texts.

This thesis draws on a wide range of both published and unpublished materials, including rehearsal notes, stage manuscripts, audience letters, newspaper reviews, theatre programmes, records of reactions to Müller’s works within the GDR’s statecraft, and Müller’s own notes for writing his texts. Through this wealth of material we not only gain an insight into the ways in which Müller’s texts were written for his audiences but we also recognise the parameters for his audiences’ responses. In offering a fresh perspective on Müller’s works, this thesis demonstrates both a compelling model for audience research and that a synthesis of textual/performance analysis, historical contextualisation, and audience research provides us with a very adept tool for analysing the making of political theatre and the politics of making theatre.
To the loving memory of my father,

Bill Wood (1952-2008):

amongst other things, my very first theatregoing companion.
ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ:

ἐπεὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πρῶτων ἐπὼν οὐδὲν παρ ἦκ’ ἀν ἄργον,

ἀλλ’ ἐλεγεν ἢ γυνή τέ μοι χῶ δούλος οὐ
dὲν ἤπτον,

χῶ δεσπότης χή παρθένος χή γυαίς ἃν.

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΣ:

eίτα δήτα

οὐκ ἀποθανεῖν σε ταῦτ’ ἐχοήν τολμῶντ 

α;

ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ:

μά τὸν Ἀπόλλω:

dημοκρατικόν γὰρ αὐτ’ ἐδρον.

(AEURIPIDES: Again, from the very first lines I wouldn’t leave any character idle; I’d have the wife speak, and the slave just as much, and the master, and the maiden, and the old lady. AESCHYLUS: And for such audacity you surely deserved the death penalty! EURIPIDES: No, by Apollo: it was a democratic act.)

(Aristophanes, Frogs, ll. 948-52, trans. by Jeffrey Henderson)
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Acknowledgements

As with any project of this nature, there are a number of people I would like to thank. There are some people who are not named or may feel it an injustice that they are listed in a particular order; therefore, I do not offer my thanks in an order of preference. Having said that, however, first and foremost I would like to thank my supervisors Laura Bradley and Peter Davies for their advice and input on this thesis: indeed, a keen eye for detail and an ability to see a much larger picture are qualities with which any PhD supervisor should be endowed, but I can barely express just how grateful I am for their supervision and guidance on this thesis.

The research for this thesis was conducted under the auspices of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) PhD Studentship at the University of Edinburgh, and thus I am extremely grateful for this financial support.

My research has led me to numerous archives in Berlin and therefore it is a pleasure to thank the following in particular: Petra Hübner (Berliner Ensemble); Sylvia Marquardt (Maxim Gorki Theater); Ute Räuber (Bundesarchiv Berlin); Bärbel Reißmann (Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin); Karl Sand (Deutsches Theater); Monika Schmidt (Landesarchiv Berlin); and last but by no means least Sabine Zolchow (Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste), whose readiness to aid me in both sourcing and using materials at the Akademie der Künste and make me feel at home there led to many surprisingly happy visits. I conducted a handful of interviews for this thesis and, in that respect, would like to thank Grischa Meyer, Rudolf Mast (Akademie der Künste), and Sabine Zolchow. A special mention should be made for Alexander Weigel, who not only allowed me to interview him, but also offered his friendship and a willingness to contribute on many aspects of this project; I owe him the most heart-felt gratitude. Research trips cost money, of course, so I thank the AHRC, the Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland, and the Institute for Germanic and Romance Studies (now Institute for Modern Languages Research) of the University of London for their financial assistance with my journeys abroad.

I wish to thank the following for their kind permission to publish previously unpublished material and photographs printed here: Agentur OSTKREUZ, Sigrid Meixner, Brigitte Maria Mayer, Suhrkamp Verlag, and Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin. Every reasonable attempt has been made to trace the holders of copyright for materials reproduced here, but any omissions will be rectified accordingly.

Writing a doctoral thesis can be a solitary endeavour at times, and so I thank my friends and colleagues in the Department of European Languages and Cultures at the
University of Edinburgh. I am also grateful to Duncan, Donald, and the back row of the choir at St Mary’s Cathedral, Edinburgh, where an hour or so of choral singing each day provided the oft needed conditions for happy antiphony between solitary scholarly work and collective musical production.

Without a doubt, I offer the deepest gratitude to my mother and my brothers for their enduring love and encouragement throughout. I should also like to acknowledge my dear friends in Edinburgh, Oxford, London, and beyond: especial thanks to Bryn, Tommy, Kate, Chris, Lizzie, James, Alison, Eystein, and more, and particularly to Lucy. While funding was necessary in making archival research trips, these would have largely been impossible without the friendship and hospitality of Cécile, Markus, and Amélie, who made consecutive stays in Berlin both comfortable and productive.
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<td>AdK</td>
<td>Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste</td>
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<td>AGS</td>
<td>Adorno, <em>Gesammelte Schriften</em></td>
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<td>APO</td>
<td>Außerparlamentarische Opposition</td>
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<td>BArch</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv</td>
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<td>BFA</td>
<td>Brecht, <em>Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe</em></td>
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<td>BGS</td>
<td>Benjamin, <em>Gesammelte Schriften</em></td>
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<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union</td>
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<td>CPC</td>
<td>Communist Party of Czechoslovakia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>DDR</td>
<td>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</td>
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<td>DTA</td>
<td>Deutsches Theater Archiv</td>
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<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany</td>
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<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td><em>Der Horatier</em></td>
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<td>HLA</td>
<td>Hans-Lietzau-Archiv</td>
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<td>HMA</td>
<td>Heiner-Müller-Archiv</td>
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<td>ID</td>
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<td>KPD</td>
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<td>LAB</td>
<td>Landesarchiv Berlin</td>
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<td>MGTA</td>
<td>Maxim Gorki Theater Archiv</td>
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<td>MEW</td>
<td>Marx and Engels, <em>Werke</em></td>
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<td>MfS</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</td>
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<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
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<td>NDL</td>
<td>Neue Deutsche Literatur</td>
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<td>SDS</td>
<td>Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund</td>
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<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSB</td>
<td>Staatliche Schauspielbühnen Berlins</td>
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<tr>
<td>TdZ</td>
<td>Theater der Zeit</td>
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<tr>
<td>VdT</td>
<td>Verband der Theaterschaffenden der DDR</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<td>VEB</td>
<td>Volkseigener Betrieb</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>Müller, Werke</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 ‘… ein demokratisches Theaterkonzept’

In 1985, having collaborated on The CIVIL warS the previous year, the East German playwright and director Heiner Müller commented on the practice of his American counterpart, director Robert Wilson:


Regardless of the (in)accuracy of his assessment of Wilson’s directorial techniques, here, Müller finds this ‘democratic’ conception of theatre both interesting and important; in it, Müller locates a model for a theatre in which the audience works instead of consuming, and he stresses that this work must not be taken away from the audience.

According to Müller’s description of a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’, through the combination of text, image, and sound, the events on stage are presented to spectators prior to being interpreted on stage. As meaning has not been assigned to the elements of a performance, it is up to the spectator to generate his/her interpretation of that performance. In characterising the activity of audience members in a democratic theatre as ‘Arbeit’, Müller could be seen to be referring to Karl Marx’s concept of labour. Marx’s basic definition of ‘Arbeit’ is: ‘ein Prozeß zwischen Mensch und Natur, ein Prozeß, worin der

Mensch seinen Stoffwechsel mit der Natur durch seine eigene Tat vermittelt, regelt und kontrolliert.” If we map this on to the case of theatre spectatorship, we understand that the audience is involved in a creative process, in which it handles and shapes raw material in the form of the various theatrical phenomena on stage, and produces meaning. For Müller, this cannot be supplied as a finished product. For meaning to be given in the theatre is anything but democratic: it is ‘Konsumismus’, the capitalist mode of experience. Tellingly, Müller deploys metaphors connected with eating and thus we can recognise an intellectual affinity between Müller and Bertolt Brecht regarding the latter’s category of the ‘culinary’ in theatre and opera. Referring to his and Kurt Weill’s opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in 1930, Brecht describes a form of opera, parodied by his own, which he calls ‘die kulinarische Oper’. For Brecht, in opposition to Epic theatre, the ‘culinary’ is something that is produced for consumption and that trains consumers to acquire a taste for further products. Müller’s description of capitalist theatre bears no inconsiderable resemblance to this: in consumerist theatre, the material on stage has already been interpreted, and is presented in a meaningful, easily digestible form, so that all the audience has to do is sit back, swallow it, and reproduce the ideology contained within it. This is undemocratic precisely because the generation of meaning is taken away from the audience and instead the audience is left with someone else’s interpretation.

In 1988, three years after having made this comment, Müller directed his thirty-year-old play *Der Lohndrücker* at the Deutsches Theater, then in East Berlin, and described his own directorial practice as the use of a ‘breiten Pinselstrich’:


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Although Müller does not couch this description in terms of being ‘democratic’, it bears many of the hallmarks of what he had called a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’ only three years earlier and it explicitly refers to his interpretation of Wilson’s aesthetic. Again, meaning is not to be fixed: the theatrical event is freed as far as possible from prior significance, and each spectator forms his/her own way of rendering the performance meaningful. Here, Müller focuses on the possibility for this to be achieved in spoken dialogue: stripped of emphasis and colouration, dialogue serves as a raw material with which the individual spectator can undertake a creative process.

The production of Der Lohndrücker mentioned here premièred at the Deutsches Theater on 29 January 1988, and performances continued right through the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its subsequent subsumption into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), to 17 September 1991. This was a period of huge political upheaval in Eastern European states when Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempts to democratise the Soviet Union through the policies of perestroika and glasnost were welcomed in Poland and Hungary, but rejected by the GDR Politburo. It is in this historical climate that Müller appears to be both stressing the need for and ushering in a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’; and the questions of democracy and audience activity are central to making sense of Müller’s aesthetic and practice at this time.

As Theresa Gant reminds us, Müller’s literary career spanned over forty years, and his ‘oeuvre presents a complete overview of these four decades in German history.’ Indeed, the 1988 production of Der Lohndrücker juxtaposed the original play with two earlier works by Müller, produced during these turbulent times: his 1968 text Der Horatier; and Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauren, written in 1986. Notwithstanding the political significance of combining these texts in 1988, each clearly responds to a particular historical context in which democracy seemed to be a distant dream. Der Lohndrücker, written in 1956-57, was composed against the backdrop of mass disappointment in the lack of democracy and input of ordinary East Germans in GDR politics as the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) sought to follow a Soviet path to socialism. Written in the year of the Prague Spring, Der Horatier was also conceived in a period of potential upheaval and political change: Alexander Dubček’s hopes for democratic reform in Czechoslovakia, along with East German desires for something similar in the GDR, were dashed when Warsaw Pact tanks rolled into Prague. Kentauren too considers the lack of democracy in a state in which, shortly after Gorbachev’s reform programme had been

---

announced in the USSR, nothing looked set to change. That is, each of these texts was
composed at a moment at which ordinary East Germans, including Müller, were more than
aware of their inability to participate in politics except within the parameters defined by the
SED.

In this thesis, I shall investigate what Müller means by a ‘democratic’ theatre, and
assess how useful a tool it is in examining his work both as a playwright and as a director.
Indeed, while Müller’s texts at the various points in time noted above seem to be concerned
with a lack of democracy in the everyday world, whether or not they are concerned with the
democracy of audience response in the theatre and try to do something about it is another
matter entirely. As I shall illustrate through an analysis of Der Lohndrücker, Der Horatier,
and Kentauren, not only does Müller fill his texts with the potential to be political theatre,
but he also demonstrates a clear concern with configuring the politics of his theatre in the
interaction between stage and auditorium. Müller’s texts illustrate an awareness on his part
that an audience exists only within an historical context, so the possibilities for democratic
forms of audience response depend on this context. Yet before we can begin to examine the
potential for ‘democratic’ theatre in Müller’s work as playwright and director, we must ask:
what is meant by ‘democracy’?

1.2 Defining ‘Democracy’

One of the first hurdles in answering such a question is explaining Müller’s choice of the
term ‘democratic’ to describe his theatrical utopia. The citation at the beginning of this
chapter, in which Müller describes a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’, is taken from an
interview with the West German journalist Olivier Ortolani, conducted in summer 1985, and
subsequently printed in the 1985 issue of Theater, the yearbook of the West German theatre
magazine Theater heute. He deploys the term in describing the practice of an American
director, in whom a particular notion of ‘democracy’ is doubtlessly culturally ingrained. But
in order to gain a better understanding of what Müller means by a ‘democratic’ theatre, we
might want to look at how it was interpreted in the GDR context and whether this offers us
an adequate description of Müller’s use of the term.
1.2.1 Democracy in Socialism

As a central part of the state’s name, in the GDR democracy was a staple in public, particularly state-endorsed, discourse. While we shall look at examples of the term’s usage in the following chapters, for now it is enough to note that the SED could make claims to being ‘democratic’ according to its Marxist-Leninist interpretation of democratic centralism. The GDR’s democratic centralism presented its electorate with the ability to vote and to seemingly participate in politics, but all decisions were effectively pre-determined by the ruling SED’s Central Committee. Thus, democracy had a particularly top-down flavour, in which ordinary citizens had no real ability to influence policy. Citizens could still make suggestions and recommendations to functionaries via a system of Eingaben; but whether or not these Eingaben might ever result in actual political change was another matter entirely. As for the realm of cultural production, in the GDR in the 1970s, according to the East German literary theorist Dieter Schlenstedt, the so-called ‘Literatur der Selbstverständigung’ placed emphasis on discussion between readers of prose literature and was cast in terms of democracy: ‘Es handelt sich um den Entwurf eines demokratischen Wirkungskreises sozialistischer Literatur’. However, according to Schlenstedt’s characterisation of it, this theory prized the building of consensus through the provision of information by a responsible author; in many senses, it appears not too far removed from democratic centralism.

But was democracy a concern for theatre practitioners? At the Fifth Congress of the Verband der Theaterschaffenden der DDR (VdT) in Berlin on the 11-13 November 1985, and therefore only months after Müller talked of a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’, the term ‘democracy’ was not used in reference to an audience; instead, spectators were conceptualised in terms including ‘mündige Zuschauer’. Hans-Peter Minetti, president of the VdT, and Hans-Rainer John, then secretary of the VdT and editor-in-chief of the East

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8 Schlenstedt, Die neuere DDR-Literatur und ihr Leser, p. 67; and Schlenstedt, ‘Prozeß der Selbstverständigung’, p. 9.
German theatre magazine *Theater der Zeit*, applied themselves to questions of communication between stage and auditorium: at the congress, Minetti spoke of the theatre as ‘eine Form des Dialogs, ein Forum aktiver Kommunikation und Bewegung’;\(^{10}\) and John, prior to the congress, wrote of the contribution that many theatres in the GDR had made ‘zur Mobilisierung, Erziehung und Unterhaltung unserer Zuschauer’.\(^{11}\) In the above cases, this dialogue, movement, or mobilisation was in the name of reinforcing ‘die Werte und Ideale des Sozialismus im Denken und Fühlen der Bürger unseres Landes’.\(^{12}\) That is, as ‘ein Organ der sozialistischen Demokratie’,\(^{13}\) within the parameters of official discussion at least, theatre was to engage dialogue to the end of supporting the SED’s policies.

‘Democracy’ is, however, a term which Müller does indeed use (albeit very occasionally) in GDR contexts, from as early as the late 1960s onwards: his essay, ‘Sechs Punkte zur Oper’, published in *Theater der Zeit* in 1970, describes opera’s potential to become a ‘demokratisches Genre’;\(^{14}\) and an essay about GDR theatre from the end of the 1960s, unpublished until 2005, contains a mention of ‘Demokratie’ not dissimilar to the longer quotation cited above.\(^{15}\) This is to say that Müller’s reference to a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’ in 1985 does not emerge entirely out of the blue, rather from a longer-term interest in democracy. Moreover, his understanding of democracy at each of these points in time is very much at odds with the approved GDR understanding of the concept; indeed, we shall see this in detail in the following chapters.

Even so, while Müller wrote and said a substantial amount relating to the role of theatre and art, and the political and social possibilities inherent in theatrical forms, ‘democracy’ is rarely his mode of discourse when talking about his own work. Furthermore, while his statement about a ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’ in 1985 refers to the presentation of material for an audience, we might want to ask what political function this might serve. In the following, therefore, I shall attempt to flesh out Müller’s references to ‘democracy’ and in doing so demonstrate why ‘democracy’ is an important category when looking at Müller’s aesthetic. I shall also offer a new perspective on what constitutes political theatre for Müller. This will eventually aid us in looking for the ‘democratic’ in

\(^{10}\) Hans-Peter Minetti, ‘Vergewisserungen’, *TdZ* 41/1 (1986): 7-13 (p. 11).
\(^{11}\) Hans-Rainer John, ‘Die Bilanz ist gut’, *TdZ* 40/11: 5-9 (p. 5).
\(^{15}\) See: Heiner Müller, ‘[Nach der Theatersituation in der DDR gefragt…]’, in *W8*, pp. 539-45 (p. 539).
successive chapters. As we shall see, Müller’s understanding of democracy is radically different to the manifestations of democracy found on either side of the Iron Curtain, leading him to write in 1992, that ‘seit ihrer Erfindung im Athen der Sklaverei [die Demokratie] immer nur als Oligarchie real existiert hat’.  

1.2.2 Democratic Political Theatre?

The two longer quotations on pages one and two illustrate that an integral factor in Müller’s description of a democratic theatre is that it collapses the dichotomy of production and reception: rather than passively consuming an intended meaning, the spectator should have the freedom to actively produce meaning for him/herself. Participation therefore emerges as integral to what Müller understands as ‘democratic’: Müller notes that television too could become ‘ein Instrument von Demokratie’, primarily as it could bring art to the people and would be interesting insofar as ‘alle mitmachen können’.  

As we shall see, the notion of participation on an individual basis is central to Müller’s understanding of the possibilities of political theatre.

Individual participation in the theatre is political primarily because theatre necessarily relates to contemporary reality. As Müller states in 1975: ‘Die Leute sitzen im Theater, erleben in diesem Augenblick, in dieser Zeit ein Stück und beziehen es auf die geschichtliche, gegenwärtige Situation in der sie leben.’  

In emphasising the importance of individual responses, he assigns theatre the role of a space in which possibilities for life in the external world can be generated on an individual basis. Citing perhaps one of the most famous formulations of the GDR philosopher Wolfgang Heise, Müller talks of the theatre ‘als Laboratorium der sozialen Phantasie’:

Und das finde ich schon ganz gut. Wenn man davon ausgeht, daß die kapitalistischen Gesellschaften, aber im Grunde jede moderne Industriegesellschaft, auch die DDR, ein Industriestaat ist und die Tendenz hat, Phantasie zu unterdrücken, zu instrumentalisieren, auf jeden Fall zu drosseln. Und ich glaube schon, so bescheiden das ist, die politische Hauptfunktion von Kunst ist jetzt, Phantasie zu mobilisieren […] Wenn [der Zuschauer] einen Vorgang gezeigt kriegt, oder einen Dialog hört, der so formuliert werden muß, daß der Zuschauer sich einen anderem Dialog vorstellen kann, der möglich gewesen wäre oder der wünschbar wäre.

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18 Ibid., p. 74.
In this statement, we can find a direct relation between the project of providing spectators with material to be interpreted on an individual basis and what Müller deems to be the main political function of art. That is, if the modern industrial society serves to suffocate the possibilities for ways of being within it that are not represented by that society, the theatre should be deployed in a way which enables spectators to imagine these possibilities.

It is in this respect, but by no means this respect alone, that it is useful to draw on the critical vocabulary of the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière (b. 1940). It is clear from Müller’s statements that a society is in some sense governed by a particular way of acting, seeing, and being in the world, which moreover wishes to exclude alternatives. In Rancière’s terminology, the world and its contents, along with the conditions of sociality, are already determined by the ‘distribution of the sensible’. This ‘defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc.’\(^\text{20}\) The original French term *partage du sensible* may be slightly more accommodating: it implies the way in which that which is perceptible to sense is divided up and shared out; that is, it determines how we see the world, how it is known, how we act in it, and indeed who can act in it. Rancière’s description of a ‘police’ *partage du sensible* is particularly relevant with regard to Müller’s comment regarding industrial societies: playing on the tendency of police officers at a crime scene to tell bystanders ‘please move along: there’s nothing to see here’, Rancière characterises a *partage du sensible* of utter consensus, which further attempts to render alternatives invisible, ‘the police’.\(^\text{21}\) In calling for the generation of alternative modes of sociality, Müller seems very much concerned with theatrical forms which disrupt such a *partage du sensible*.

In 1981, Müller talks of the emergence of ‘Inseln der […] Unordnung’ in Western states which serve to question the dominant values and ways of being.\(^\text{22}\) This sense of creating disorder is crucial to understanding Müller’s view of the potential political efficacy of the theatre. It is through presenting individuals with the means to generate differing and alternative interpretations of material, that disorder can be created and that consensus in the theatre can be disrupted. This has the further role of challenging the consensus of a society’s interpretation of the world outside of the theatre. In talking of disorder, Müller is not talking of merely dividing an audience, but of creating a plethora of different possible social fantasies. According to his 1992 autobiography, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, politics which is

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conducted along a Schmittian dichotomy of friend/foe\textsuperscript{23} leads to representation and selection and, ultimately, a stronger exclusion of otherness. In the case of humanism, for example, the foe instantly assumes the position of being inhuman, and must therefore be eradicated: ‘Unsere Zivilisation ist eine Zivilisation der Stellvertretung. Und Repräsentation bedingt Selektion, Auschwitz und Hiroshima sind Finalprodukte selektiven Denkens.’\textsuperscript{24} Here, politics that relies on people having their interests represented by another and attempts to ban a representative foe is a destructive facet of contemporary civilisation. Thus, Müller seeks to effect a politics of theatre in which the individual is not only not represented by others in the theatre, but also in which there can be no clear-cut dichotomies, rather a plethora of differing interpretations of what is presented on stage and, therefore, of the external world.

Again, drawing on Rancière’s terminology, we could understand Müller’s belief in the political possibilities of theatre to be concerned with breaking consensus and generating dissensus. For Rancière, dissensus ‘is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself’.\textsuperscript{25} That is, dissensus functions as a particular partage du sensible devoid of consensus, in which the possibility for different modes of acting, speaking, thinking, and knowing, is opened and non-sanctioned experiences and interpretations of the world become visible. When we combine Müller’s seeming conviction that the theatre must be a space for dissensus with his utterances regarding the role of the individual spectator in a ‘democratic’ theatre, we see that the politics of Müller’s theatre would appear to be profoundly concerned with the theatre as a space for democracy. Indeed, Rancière provides a definition of ‘democracy’ which chimes with Müller’s assertions: ‘Democracy is more than a social state. It is a specific partition of the sensible, a specific regime of speaking whose effect is to upset any stable relationship between manners of speaking, manners of doing and manners of being.’\textsuperscript{26} In short, for Rancière, democracy appears to be characterised by dissensus rather than consensus concerning one’s place in the world.

If we draw on Rancière’s terminology, we can see that Müller’s conception of the political function of theatre is ‘democratic’ within a discourse of radical democracy: in calling for numerous interpretations of material presented on the stage, Müller hopes to achieve a space in the audience characterised by dissensus; given the theatre’s necessary relation to material reality, the audience provides its own new approaches to that reality. In a

\textsuperscript{24} Heiner Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in Zwei Diktaturen, in W9, pp. 7-291 (p. 246).
sense, if the theatre audience is punctuated by internal difference, then the space of the theatre is, in itself, democratic. This is, however, not to say that for Müller the aim of a democratic theatre is one in which there is no overlap in how spectators have interpreted the material presented on stage; rather, even though interpretation is a task for the individual, Müller sees experience in both the theatre and the external world as necessarily collective:


While he hopes that theatre will democratically engage numerous differing interpretations from individuals within the audience, the end result might be to create groupings within the audience which may overlap with others. Müller’s form of dissensus takes into account the necessary sociality of experience and the possibility for dissensus to be collective, but asks only that no interpretation assume an a priori position of hegemony and therefore inform a prevalent partage du sensible. He expresses his belief in the theatre’s possible role in creating collective dissensus in the external world as early as 1975, again using Heise’s metaphor to refer to the theatre as a ‘Laboratorium, wo Situationen oder überhaupt gesellschaftliche, kollektive Phantasie produktiv gemacht oder auch erst kreiert werden kann.’ 

Aside from creating individual social fantasies, as a collective endeavour, the theatre must be a space in which fantasies can be created on a collective basis or can be made productive and possibly deployed in the world.

1.2.3 Making Theatre Politically

If Müller’s theatre is indeed ‘democratic’ beyond the simple definition of allowing spectators to undertake their own interpretations of what is presented on stage, then its audiences will not only contain a certain degree of collective dissensus, but will also emerge from the theatre with differing perspectives on a performance’s relationship to the dominant partage du sensible outside of the theatre. For Müller, the potential for a theatrical production to be political and, by extension, democratic, is, at least in text-based theatre, already contained in the theatrical text. While Müller is aware that spectators will bring their political reality with

them to the theatre, he is concerned with making theatre politically. Citing the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, Müller states that ‘die Aufgabe bestehe nicht darin, politische Filme zu machen, sondern Filme politisch zu machen. Also, es geht um die Behandlung des Stoffes, um die Form, nicht um den Inhalt.’

Müller claims to situate ‘das utopische Moment’ of his texts ‘in der Form, auch in der Eleganz der Form, der Schönheit der Form und nicht im Inhalt.’

While one cannot deny that Müller’s work as both a playwright and a director is packed with references to his contemporary political reality, his concern is with both writing texts and creating productions which are political in their form. Referring to Müller’s practice as a playwright, Hans-Thies Lehmann writes: ‘Die Politik eines Textes bemisst sich nicht an seinen inhaltlichen Thesen, sondern an der Art und Weise, wie er sie/sich organisiert. Nicht die Politik im Text, sondern die Politik des Textes.’

That is, when looking at the politics of Müller’s theatre, we must look to the ways in which this political potential is anchored in the form of Müller’s texts; in this sense, we should study the textual politics of Müller’s texts as a set of strategies for engaging audience responses and possibly producing a ‘democratic’ political effect.

It remains in the following chapters for us to look to the individual strategies Müller uses to engage audience members to produce varied and differing responses and thus create a ‘democratic’ theatre. Indeed, given the span of the period in which Müller composed the three texts under consideration in this thesis, I shall chart some changes in his understanding of what constitutes democracy both inside and outside of the theatre. In our analyses of Der Lohndrücker, Der Horatier, and Kentauren we shall also consider how these texts were staged in their premières and the forms of audience response elicited in these productions; this will allow us to explore the relationship between the texts and their productions and the concrete political reality they shared with their first audiences. With the above discussion in mind, we will have a clearer notion of what we might be looking for when studying Müller’s work and his audiences’ responses.

1.3 Interpreting Müller

For Müller, democratic theatre engages individual audience members to partake in collective dissensus in the theatre and thus have the means to question the partage du sensible in the

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29 Heiner Müller, ‘Ich weiss nicht, was Avantgarde ist’, in W11, pp. 100-13 (p. 104).
world outside of the theatre. Furthermore, as we have seen above, the three texts to be discussed in this thesis were composed in historical moments at which democracy was a major concern in the political realm at large. As I shall argue, looking through the lens of democratic theatre in Müller’s sense brings us a new perspective on the politics of Müller’s work as both a playwright and a director. Thus far, I have drawn from statements taken from the 1970s and 1980s in setting out Müller’s position: therefore, we can see that Müller is concerned with democracy in these decades. I shall argue, however, that Müller’s texts formulate a form of democratic theatre from start to finish. Before doing so, however, we must ask how this approach differs from current perspectives on Müller’s work.

1.3.1 Müller as Playwright

Müller’s literary output is considerable, and there is a correspondingly large amount of secondary literature which discusses it. I shall, however, not provide an account of the thematic trends in Müller criticism; such an undertaking would be both colossal and would not address the specific concern of this thesis. Rather, I shall focus on how scholarship on Müller’s textual production has dealt with questions regarding the politics of Müller’s texts, and the ways in which these texts may have an effect upon an audience. In terms of the three texts under discussion in this thesis, I shall assess the state of scholarship on them in each of the relevant chapters.

Critics almost unanimously agree that Müller’s theatre is political and that his texts themselves contain the kernel of their political potential. Critics also largely agree that Müller’s plays are written in an open style for the purpose of eliciting multiple responses from their audiences. Given Müller’s complex relationship with Brecht, nicely characterised by the statement: ‘Brecht gebrauchen, ohne ihn zu kritisieren, ist Verrat’, many commentators take this relationship as a starting point in their analyses of his texts. Indeed, it is generally accepted that Müller eschews the parable form as a pre-determined, teacherly form of theatre. Andreas Keller notes that Müller strives for quite the opposite of didacticism, writing, ‘[dass] die meist paradox zugespitzten Konfliktsituationen in Müllers Texten radikal offen [bleiben].’

32 Heiner Müller, ‘Fatzer ± Keuner’, in W8, pp. 223-31 (p. 231). See also the note at the end of Mauser, which explains that the play ‘setzt voraus / kritisiert Brechts Lehrstücktheorie und Praxis’: Heiner Müller, Mauser, in W4, pp. 243-60 (p. 259).
33 See, for example: Theo Girshausen, “‘Reject it in order to possess it’: On Heiner Müller and Bertolt Brecht’, Modern Drama 23/4 (1980): 404-21 (pp. 413-17).
While Müller’s interest in Brecht cannot be denied, approaches which emphasise the Brechtian influence tend to display some often fairly subtle limitations. Georg Wieghaus, for example, describes Müller’s goal as the ‘Störung eines oberflächlichen gesellschaftlichen Konsensus’ and thus the ‘Spaltung des Publikums’.

While it is true to say that Müller wishes to disrupt consensus in the social realm, to speak in terms of ‘Spaltung’ sounds, perhaps, too Brechtian: for Brecht, the theatre is to divide the audience, for example, according to class; Müller is not looking for a mere divide, but a much more complex proliferation of perspectives and responses. In *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, for example, Müller states, ‘daß Brecht mit seinen klassisch marxistischen Kategorien in eine Wirklichkeit kam, die damit überhaupt nicht zu fassen, die viel differenzierter und komplexer war’.

We are offered an alternative in David Barnett’s reading of the relationship between Brecht and Müller. Here, Barnett takes Müller to be adopting the *Lehrstück* form, but ‘accept[ing] the dialectic only to multiply tensions at every turn’. That is, the *Lehrstück* form is used not for the sake of learning per se, but ‘encourages experiences’, geared towards the recognition of conflict in the world and the creation of the ‘collective individual’.

For Barnett, Müller’s adoption and adaptation of the *Lehrstück* form, therefore, is a case of pedagogy, but one through which both actor and spectator must attempt to learn for themselves how to position themselves in this collective subject. Nonetheless, it is not clear what form this ‘collective individual’ might take. Sue-Ellen Case likewise turns her attention to the form of identity that Müller would like to encourage through his theatre: in rejecting the Brechtian model outright, Müller also rejects the form of ‘representative identity’ that we find in *Lehrstücke* such as *Die Maßnahme* (1930-1).

While commentary from the angle of Brechtian aesthetics is often illuminating, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, it can also be misled by or unjustified in its readiness to use Brecht’s terminology.

Further pieces of critical literature on Müller’s texts discuss questions of his aesthetic and intended effect upon an audience without using a Brechtian lens. Writing about Müller’s 1985 text, *Bildbeschreibung*, Martin Buchwaldt argues that Müller’s intention is

38 Ibid.
39 Although Barnett does attempt to defend this lack of clarity on the basis that Müller himself does not know what shape it may take: ‘This “new animal”, as Müller calls it, is a synthesis of the dialectic of survival and extinction depicted in the nightmares of his later work. Its composition as yet cannot be forseen, yet it is Müller’s dialectical response to the collapse of the sovereign individual in postmodernity.’ Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 99.
that the recipient’s normal modes of experience are called into question, allowing for alternative ways of seeing an otherwise heavily mediatised reality.\(^{42}\) Indeed, Katharina Keim pursues this line of interpretation too: for Keim, Müller’s works are composed in such a way that they call for new modes of perception from their audiences, questioning how the everyday world is perceived.\(^{43}\) That is, Müller fills his texts with signs which either cannot or refuse to signify, forcing the recipient to review their perceptual habits. While this is close to much said above about Müller’s theatre attempting to disrupt consensual modes of being, Buchwaldt and Keim limit their conclusions to questions of language’s role in this. They also only consider Müller’s later plays, drawing conclusions which may not fit all of his texts.

Stefanie Maeck formulates the sort of interaction which is encoded in Müller’s texts in her analysis of *Die Hamletmaschine* (1977); here, she comments on the density of the language of Müller’s texts, arguing that this plurality of possible meanings allows for heterogeneous experience, opening space for alterity, and ‘eine Zukunft des Rezipienten’.\(^{44}\) Yet, Maeck ends her discussion with the assertion, ‘Heiner Müllers “einsame Texte” warten […] darauf, von uns in der richtigen Weise gehört zu werden’.\(^{45}\) This is an immensely restrictive caveat: there is only one way for Müller’s play to be effective, and that is, to be heard in a particular way, regardless of non-verbal signs.\(^{46}\)

As for the form of the collective that is to be brought about through Müller’s theatre, Norbert Otto Eke and Fabian Lettow provide two compelling expressions. Eke characterises Müller’s writing style as ‘offenes Drama’.\(^{47}\) Focussing on the practice of Überschwemmung, i.e. the overloading of texts with symbolic potential,\(^{48}\) Eke argues that Müller’s later plays resist the possibility of ‘Sinnsynthesen’.\(^{49}\) In doing so, they encourage the interpretative


\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 362. Emphasis in original.

\(^{46}\) This is also recommended by Heinrich Vormweg, who appears to suggest that Müller’s plays would be most effective in the form of a radio play. See: Heinrich Vormweg, ‘Sprache – die Heimat der Bilder. Vorschläge zur Annäherung an Heiner Müller’, in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), Text + Kritik 73. Heiner Müller (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1982), pp. 20-31.


\(^{48}\) This term is one used by Müller himself, but we shall turn to it in greater detail later in this thesis.

practices of individual spectators, effecting a ‘demokratische Gesellschaft’ in the audience.  

Eke asserts that part of this programme of democratisation is the questioning of closed forms of knowledge offered by the Enlightenment,  

yet presents no discussion of how he arrives at the term ‘democratic’. Lettow, on the other hand, describes the chorus of Müller’s texts to be an analogy of the potential audience to be brought into existence: ‘Es ist der CHOR, der in dieser Formel aufscheint. Im Chor geht weder der Einzelne im ganzen auf, noch zerfällt der Chor einfach in die Einzelnen, die ihn bilden.’  

What we must bear in mind, however, is that Eke, Lettow, Keim, and others discussed above, concentrate in their studies on Müller’s later plays and therefore leave the possibilities of his earlier works to one side. This is a glaring omission, not least, as Joachim Fiebach states that ‘[d]ie geistig-sinnliche Ko-Produktion der Rezeption ist Axiom seines Kunstverständnisses seit den sechziger Jahren’.  

In this thesis, however, I shall argue that it can be clearly seen as early as the 1950s.

The scholarship discussed above is intended to be representative of the perspectives currently available on Müller, as it offers detailed analysis of aspects of Müller’s aesthetic and the possible ways in which it is structured around various modes of interaction with the audience. Much of the above scholarship places the ‘Zuschauer’ at the centre of the study, noting its importance for Müller without taking any clear consideration of who that spectator is, or what informs his/her experience; it thus creates a fictional spectator in a vacuum. Furthermore, discussions of Müller’s aesthetic in relation to an audience are discussed at length often at the beginning of a study, but receive no further attention.  

This is reminiscent of a criticism lodged by Barnett in his 1998 study of Müller’s later plays, in which he identifies the prevalence of criticism of Müller’s texts from the angle of Literaturwissenschaft as opposed to theatre studies. In response, Barnett wishes to address ‘Müller as a writer for the stage’, which had, until the publication of his thesis at least, ‘almost totally been ignored’.  

To this end, in this study, I shall assess Müller’s texts from the angle of the audiences he most likely had in mind when writing and, in doing so, bridge the gap from page to stage, stage to audience. This will enable us not only to see a great

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50 Ibid., p. 45.
51 Ibid., pp. 47-8.
54 See, for example, Keller, Drama und Dramaturgie; and Eke, Apokalypse und Utopie.
many strategies for audience response, but also gain a clear impression of the potential his
texts both had and have for featuring at the heart of democratic theatre.

1.3.2 Müller as Director

While much scholarly attention has focused on Müller as a producer of texts, considerably
less research discusses his work as a director. Nonetheless, the little that there is provides
some keen insights into his dramaturgical practice. In an essay on Müller’s workshop and
promenade performance of Quartett (1980-81) and Mauser (1970) with students in Vienna
in 1991, Eva Brenner highlights Müller’s resistance to his actors’ portrayal of psychological
states, and his encouragement of input from the actors themselves.56 She intimates that
Müller’s interest in the role of the individual spectator is well realised in the promenade
performance in which the spectator can actively choose his/her own perspective from which
to view the performance.57 Yet she finds his work with professional actors stultifyingly
complex: a combination of Müller-as-playwright and Müller-as-director results in “Müller
plus Müller,” a doubling of heavy text and heavy-handed mise-en-scene’.58 For this reason,
she suggests that Müller’s various techniques fail to communicate with an audience in the
theatre. But to suggest that it is a combination of text and performance that produces this
effect is somewhat unfair: it fails to pay heed to Müller’s approach to staging his own works
and indeed his treatment of all elements of a performance as equal parts.

Brenner’s appraisal of Müller’s work as a director also does not consider the
possible forms of response that may be evoked in the audience. To be able to achieve this,
she would require a degree of historical contextualisation of the performance. One scholar
who attempts this is Loren Kruger, who devotes a chapter of her study on Brecht’s post-
imperial resonances to Müller’s 1988 production of Der Lohndrücker. Here, Kruger states
that Müller’s formal experimentation cannot be sheared away from its socio-historical
context, and thus situates it within the context of the final days of the GDR, as well as within
the postmodernism/modernism debate.59 She recognises the actors’s lack of psychologisation
as a means to enabling spectators to identify the relationship between the historical
circumstances depicted and their own.60 Nonetheless, Kruger tends to be essentialising with

(pp. 161-2).
57 See: ibid., p. 164.
58 Ibid., p. 167.
59 See: Loren Kruger, Post-Imperial Brecht. Politics and Performance, East and South (Cambridge:
60 See: ibid., p. 99.
regard to audience experience, so that we only receive her perspective on the performance, and the individual elements of it. Where she writes, ‘[t]he red hands of the workers glowed against their blackened faces, suggesting mythic power against the naturalistic reproduction of soot and sweat’, 61 we may wonder if this largely academic observation and a number of details mentioned would have been available to a theatregoing public.

We are offered another approach entirely by Barnett, who brings us somewhat closer to Müller’s practice than Brenner or Kruger’s analyses. In two recent essays examining Müller’s productions of Macbeth in 1982 at the Volksbühne, Berlin, Der Lohndrücker, and Hamlet/Maschine in 1990 at the Deutsches Theater, Barnett identifies a relationship between Müller’s textual and staging practices. In terms of Müller’s contact with actors, Barnett casts this less as actor input, and more as Müller being an enigmatic director, who ‘imposed a working method which set tasks only the actors could address’. 62 Barnett demonstrates that a key to understanding Müller’s practice as a director is to view it through the lens of his textual practice: Müller’s theatrical texts are written in a highly metaphorical way, which increases the potential productivity of his texts; and he presents texts and actions simply on the stage, ‘offering [them] up to the audience rather than interpreting [them] on stage’. 63 A first step in this is for Müller-as-director to ‘forget’ his attitudes when writing the text in the first place, thus abdicating his authorial role. 64 Again, for Barnett, this provides an essential piece in the puzzle of Müller’s relationship with Brecht with regards to directorial praxis: Müller, like Brecht, was interested in the historical conventions which shape our changeable modes of being in the world; yet Müller combines this ‘orthodox Brechtianism’ with ‘a series of directorial strategies designed to amplify the metaphorical qualities of the play’. 65 In this sense, Müller figures as a post-Brechtian director. Barnett’s analysis is indeed compelling, but it stops short at giving the audience and the myriad possibilities for audience interaction a full treatment. This would require more exposition of the context of the productions in question.

61 Ibid., p. 126.
63 David Barnett, “‘I have to change myself instead of interpreting myself’: Heiner Müller as Post-Brechtian Director’, Contemporary Theatre Review 20/1 (2010): 6-20 (p. 15).
64 Ibid., p. 13.
65 Ibid., p. 15.
1.3.3 Approaching Müller

As seen above, what appears to be lacking in Müller scholarship is a study which elucidates Müller’s aesthetic while taking into consideration how the political potential within it is anchored in historical reality by giving detailed consideration to the audiences for which they may have been staged or written. To make such a step would allow us both to provide a richer analysis of the formal strategies within Müller’s texts and their stagings, and to be able to analyse them within the project of democratic theatre. As argued above, this requires a relationship with the material reality of their recipients. Even the term ‘democracy’ is largely avoided in examinations of Müller’s textual and theatrical production; where it occurs, ‘democracy’ is taken as a given term, requiring no further elucidation.

According to how I have interpreted Müller’s ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’ above, it is one which instigates a dialogue with the audience through which each individual spectator generates his/her own interpretation of the event. The audience we shall be searching for in the following is, therefore, a collective of people, sharing the same discursive space, but each having their own individual responses. A result of this, so Müller hopes, is the entrance of difference and the questioning of the established relations of production and reception in the political realm. Therefore, in this thesis, I shall examine the texts of *Der Lohndrücker*, *Der Horatier*, and *Kentauren*, all of which demonstrate a clear thematic and formal concern for democracy and, in turn, I shall attempt to construct an historical narrative through them. This will take into account the implied audiences of both the texts at the time of their initial literary production and their premières in order to assess ways in which Müller and the practitioners who handled his texts can be seen as responding to the texts’ potential. Alongside Müller’s *Lohndrücker* at the Deutsches Theater, I shall study Hans Dieter Mäde’s East Berlin première of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1958-60 and Hans Lietzau’s world première of *Der Horatier* at the Schiller Theater in West Berlin in 1973. The combination of theoretical and historical approaches will aid us in an investigation not only of the relationship between textual politics and performance strategies, but also of the extent to which Müller’s theatre can be said to be democratic.

1.4 Theatre Audiences

Given the emphasis that this study will place on the role of the audience in the theatre, and particularly on the part of the individual spectator, it will be necessary to consider how the audience can be understood to respond to a theatrical performance. The investigation of
audiences has been a crucial part of much recent scholarship in performance and theatre studies, in which the main thrust of analysis is given over to examining forms of external communication between stage and auditorium. This attention to the recipient has further increased with the growth of theatrical forms such as performance art and postdramatic theatre, which present new possibilities and challenges for audience research.

Before turning to the ‘audience’, however, we must interrogate this term a little further: what, precisely, is the object of study? As Christopher Balme notes, the terms ‘spectator’, ‘audience’, and ‘public’ are not discursively coextensive and lend themselves to different academic lenses, whether psychological/cognitive, sociological, or economic. Furthermore, to use a collective term such as ‘audience’ or ‘public’ homogenises the multiple experiences of diverse subjects into a ‘we’ or an ‘it’. In Helen Freshwater’s words, doing so ‘risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context, and environment which condition an individual’s interpretation of a particular performance event’. Not least, as Guido Hiß states, ‘[w]ahrscheinlich sehen 500 Zuschauer der gleichen Hamlet-Inszenierung 500 verschiedene Dänenprinzen’. It is generally understood that the spectator is an individual, active participant in the theatrical event, and the potential diversity of spectators and their responses leads Freshwater to be sceptical of the very possibility of having any foundation for a study of the audience. Indeed, in this vein, Susan Kattwinkel suggests that ‘it may require a set of theories that can be combined to examine individual experiences’. Nevertheless, scholarly interest in audiences and spectators has produced three established approaches: theatre semiotics; phenomenology; and materialism. As I shall argue, while these theories can account for aspects of audience

72 See: Freshwater, Theatre & Audience, pp. 75-6.
74 This list purposefully ignores cognitive approaches to theatre spectatorship, which are in their relative infancy, although there is no space here to discuss the reasons why. For an example of a
response, in order to be able to pay heed to the multiple influences on audience response and provide a working methodology for studying potential audience reactions, we will need to both combine and exclude elements from each. I shall therefore suggest a way in which aspects from each can be brought together through the lens of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology as outlined in his *Sein und Zeit* (1927). This will identify a robust method which considers the phenomenological relationship the spectator has to a culturally mediated reality, always-already loaded with meaning, and therefore enable us to look at theatre audiences both past and present.

1.4.1 Audience Horizons

When we go to the theatre, we are confronted with a vast quantity of data, which contribute to our interpretation and understanding of a performance. Not only do these include verbal and non-verbal sounds, bodies, and stage designs, but also lighting, space, and a theatre’s architecture. Theatre semiotics responds to these facets structurally, showing the ways in which verbal and non-verbal signs constitute a performance’s meaning. Signs on the stage are often polyfunctional: to use Balme’s example, a table on the stage might signify a table, but also a tunnel, or a mountain. As theatre semiotics is concerned with the relation between signs and audience, it is predicated on the very absence of the signified from the stage: giving the example of a drunkard present on the stage at a Salvation Army meeting, Umberto Eco demonstrates that, while the drunken man is present, ‘[h]e is no more a world object among world objects – he has become a semiotic device; he is now a sign’. That is, according to Eco, the theatricality of being incorporated into a mise-en-scène causes the drunkard to refer not to himself, but to a drunk, or a particular class or category. The aesthetic distance created between the audience and the drunkard renders the latter absent. Nonetheless, Eco identifies the necessity of the presence of a body on the stage in the first place: ‘In order to be recognized as a sign, [the drunkard] has to be recognized as a “real” spatio-temporal event, a real human body.’77 The sign on the stage assumes a dual nature of having to announce both its presence as a signifier and its absence as a signified. This is,

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however, already problematic. In many cases of theatrical performances, we find a pair of signifieds: particularly in the case of watching a famous actor on stage, we encounter a duality of presence and absence, actor and character respectively.

Phenomenological theories of audience response aim to address this absence: they question how theatre can refer to something absent if it is present before us. Furthermore, it asks, if body and sound are in the auditorium with us, how do we react to them as real things? Phenomenological theories of audience response therefore emphasise the physicality and corporeality of the performance as a vehicle for interaction. Both Bert States and Erika Fischer-Lichte place emphasis on the fact that theatre exists in the spatio-temporal horizon of its spectators, presenting real speech, sounds, movement, and objects.79 In this vein, rather than a distance between the spectator and performer, Fischer-Lichte posits a ‘leibliche Ko-Präsenz’ between the two: the phenomenal body (‘Leib-Sein’) of the performer is privileged over the semiotic, representational body of the character (‘Körper-Haben’). In this sense, signification occurs after a physical, phenomenal experience.80 As we can see from this example, theatre phenomenology tends to hold semiotic and phenomenological considerations apart: according to States, ‘we might say that they constitute a kind of binocular vision: one eye enables us to see the world phenomenally; the other eye enables us to see it significatively’.81 That is not to say, however, that theatre phenomenology forgets the semiotic dimension of experience altogether; States writes that theatre’s object is to strip signs, to empty them of received content and to reconstitute them as a beginning or, in Rousseau’s word, as a birth. It is what we might loosely call a phenomenological theater (as opposed to semiological) in that it seeks to retrieve a naive perception of the thing – its “objective aspect” – before it was defined out of sight by language.82

For States, once stripped of their representational function, material elements on stage no longer have to signify according to ways in which we might normally read them within established discourse. That is, the very ways in which theatrical signs represent are called into question, and a new possible world of experience is opened. As we can see from the above quotation, the phenomenological aspect of States’s understanding of theatre rests on the assumption that phenomena do have meaning for us, but that phenomenal experience

80 Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetik des Performativen, p. 67 and p. 139.
81 States, Great Reckonings, p. 8.
82 Ibid., p. 109. Emphasis in original.
precedes significative experience in the theatre. In Jerome Carroll’s words, this version of theatre phenomenology ‘emphasises the largely sensory or corporeal components of perception, to some extent divorced from meaning.’\(^83\) Such an understanding of phenomenology, however, betrays a certain degree of naivety regarding the way in which we encounter phenomena in both the external world and the theatre.

The two schools of thought outlined above largely offer theoretical observations about how we may experience a performance at the time of being in the theatre. In this sense, they neglect a number of important layers of experience, which are addressed by materialist approaches. Here, I use the term ‘materialist’ in the broadest sense to refer to approaches which consider the material conditions of production and reception. Susan Bennett places emphasis on the cultural conditions underlying production and reception in the theatre, as it is ‘because of the cultural context in which any person can conceive of a place in the world’ that interaction between stage and auditorium takes place.\(^84\) It is only in this way that, for Bennett, we can account for both the private and social dimensions of audience experience and interaction.\(^85\) Therefore, borrowing a central term from Hans Robert Jauß’s theory of reading, Bennett considers our relation to the theatrical event as mediated by an *Erwartungshorizont*,\(^86\) that is, the assumptions and expectations we take with us to the theatre. For Bennett, if we wish to study theatre audiences we must therefore also consider the full scope of material which informs an audience’s response to the theatrical experience, including the space of the theatre, the programme, conventions of theatregoing, and an audience’s preference for a particular theatre with a particular style and repertoire.\(^87\) Ric Knowles recommends that a materialist account further considers every stage of the creative process, including the rehearsals, the acting style, and the power relations between the staff at the theatre in question.\(^88\) At the heart of both Knowles’s and Bennett’s investigations of audiences is a concern for how the spectator’s material reality outside of the theatre informs his/her experience within it: both have recourse to questions of how ideologies are encoded in all facets of a performance, from the first decision to go to the theatre, to the continued

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\(^{85}\) See: ibid., p. 125.


reflection on the performance that one experienced long ago. Ideology in the cultural realm thus flavours the spectator’s semiotic decoding of material.

While ideology is clearly relevant in audience research, as I shall argue, we may profit from a much less restricted understanding of culture. In the light of the above illustration of theories of spectatorship, we can see that context is a concern for all to some extent. The de- and subsequent re-segmenting of phenomena in States’s and Fischer-Lichte’s phenomenological accounts presumes that there is a way in which signs are already read, which can be reconfigured. Furthermore, Eco argues that it is the context of the presentations of the drunkard which might give him particular semiotic potential: in the setting of the Salvation Army meeting, a particular ideology is guiding the way in which the spectator encounters the drunkard; as a result, this ideology reproduces itself.89 Perhaps what is less clear is that none of these theories necessarily excludes the others: Eco does assume that the phenomenal body has a role to play, but places less emphasis on it than phenomenological theories do; phenomenology turns to semiotics after the material experience of theatre; and while they cannot necessarily tell us what an audience thinks, materialist accounts provide a backdrop for questions of how the performance is encountered and subsequently analysed: this may include dense demographic study or historical contextualisation.90 Knowles recommends that materialism and semiotics converge in his ‘materialist semiotics’: for Knowles, culturally specific conventions guide how we experience signs on the stage and render them meaningful. He therefore argues that it is only after we have grasped the conditions underlying production, including hierarchies in theatres, ideologies behind particular training, acting, and directing methods, etc., that we gain an insight into the ‘political unconscious’ that ‘speak[s] through the performance text whatever its manifest content or intent.’ 91 In understanding the audience as situated within a culture and taking into account a wide range of influences on production and reception in the theatre, Knowles’s methodology is compelling and it might provide us with a solid foundation for audience research. However, Knowles’s method may not be able to go further than describing the conditions of production and reception.

One thing generally missing from theories of spectatorship is mood. As Jens Roselt reminds us, mood governs our experience in the theatre as well as leading to mental and

91 Knowles, Reading the Material Theatre, p. 10.
physical experiences of boredom, irritation, tiredness, and hunger, which further affect our levels of attention.\(^92\) Indeed, if we take mood in a broader sense, we shall see that it both adds to our understanding of a cultural context and presents the possibility of a plethora of differing interpretations. While looking for the moods of individual spectators may seem frankly impossible, none of the above theories takes mood into consideration. If we would like a methodology for audience response which takes mood along with semiological, phenomenological, and materialist aspects of audience interaction into account, then, as I shall argue, Heidegger’s phenomenology may provide a particularly promising starting point.

1.4.2 Being-in-the-Audience

For Heidegger, everyday experience is ordered by our belonging to a culture, so being within a particular socio-historical culture determines how we encounter phenomena: all beings within the world are meaningful to us on account of the practices in which we and these objects are involved. As Heidegger argues in Sein und Zeit, in looking at a hammer, for example, we do not see a wooden shaft with a metal head attached; instead, a hammer is something with which we can hammer, and we recognise places and contexts in which to hammer, and other objects related to the activity of hammering.\(^93\) Likewise, signs do not refer to something absent, but are involved in a totality of relations, whereby they have a purpose of indicating something which we understand and pay heed to.\(^94\) As I argued above, theatre phenomenology and semiotics were separated by their respective differences regarding the presence and absence of the signified. Here, however, a sign does not operate by pointing to something absent: the phenomenon and its meaning are present to us at the same point of interaction.\(^95\) For Heidegger, both the phenomena we encounter and the way in which we do so are affected by mood: in the case of fear, if we are in a fearful mood, then we will encounter something fearful.\(^96\) To return to the hammer, for example, if we are fearing for our lives in a conflict situation, the hammer appears as a fearful instrument with which we may be killed, or, conversely, as a tool for dispatching that which we fear may be harmful to us.

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\(^93\) See: Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), pp. 68-70.

\(^94\) See: ibid., pp. 76-9.

\(^95\) See: ibid., pp. 79-80.

\(^96\) See: ibid., pp. 132-42.
Borrowing from a philosophy that sets out to examine existence in its ‘durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit’\textsuperscript{97} may appear at odds with formulating a theory of audience interaction in the theatre; but just as Heidegger’s phenomenology emphasises our sociality, the theatre too is a social place filled with social beings. Not only does Bennett write that ‘theatre is an obviously social phenomenon’,\textsuperscript{98} but Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst also argue that audience research should pay heed to ‘networks of everyday life’.\textsuperscript{99} In \textit{Sein und Zeit}, Heidegger gives an indication of the ramifications of the phenomenology of the everyday in relation to art: ‘Wir genießen und vergnügen uns, wie man genießt; wir lesen, sehen und urteilen über Literatur und Kunst, wie man sieht und urteilt;[…] wir finden “empörend”, was man empörend findet.’\textsuperscript{100} Here, he indicates that it is our situation within a larger social nexus that governs the ways in which we encounter works of art, from our tastes to the ways in which we read, see, and interpret. This loosely tallies with Stanley Fish’s notion of ‘interpretative communities’, as bodies of people who, given their situation, generate the meaning of a literary text without that meaning being an internal element of the text;\textsuperscript{101} the difference in Heidegger’s conception is that the meaning is inherent in a text or other phenomenon precisely because it is situated within a context in which it is meaningful.

When we understand that phenomenology in the everyday is governed by reference, by which we recognise that a phenomenon is always-already meaningful because it refers to a set of practices in which that phenomenon has a meaning, we can see that this, too, is how phenomenological experience in the theatre is organised. A phenomenon in the theatre is always-already meaningful because it refers to our experiences of the everyday realm, governed by our expectations of how to understand phenomena. The phenomenon is present, as is the meaning it bears, because meaning is contained within the very experience of that phenomenon. It is clear how this phenomenology may function in relation to representational theatre, in which phenomena on the stage clearly represent phenomena in the everyday realm. What, however, happens in theatrical performances in which our ordinary expectations of how to read and interpret phenomena are called into question? Heidegger takes us some way there in a possible answer when he considers what happens when an object breaks and can no longer be used as it normally can: at this point, this object becomes

\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{98}Bennett, \textit{Theatre Audiences}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{100}Heidegger, \textit{Sein und Zeit}, pp. 126-7. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{101}See: Stanley Fish, \textit{Is There a Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities} (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 303-37.
conspicuous, and we are made more aware of the meaning and function that that object has in the everyday. In the space of the theatre, this would amount to us recognising a certain level of slippage between an object’s everyday meaning and the new meanings it may acquire. In other words, our cultural sensibilities are awoken and placed under scrutiny.

A phenomenological theory of theatrical experience which borrows aspects from Heideggerean phenomenology has much in common with materialist approaches: it will study the expectations and conventions of spectators and how these were anchored in their historical reality; it will also examine materials such as theatre programmes, playwrights’ and directors’ public profiles, press previews, acting techniques, and rehearsing procedures, as these will contribute to the multiple influences on an audience’s response. While materialist approaches to date, however, identify the above factors as influences upon audience response, a Heideggerean perspective enables us to see these as both informing audience response and informed by the cultural conventions of the time. That is, they enable us to see the ways in which people are and were disposed to experiencing phenomena as already meaningful in a particular way. Moreover, in considering mood as a determinant of experience, we can grasp just how a mood can affect how phenomena are meaningful to an entire culture. In Sein und Zeit, Heidegger criticises previous philosophical schools of thought for producing a solipsistic interpretation of beings in abstraction from the relations in which they have meaning; this, he suggests, was as a result of the mood in which previous philosophers conducted their investigations. To this extent, a Heideggerean approach to phenomenology accounts for materialist, semiological, and phenomenological facets of audience response, while seeing these as necessarily entwined.

Before moving on, however, we might want to ask how mood brings us further in an understanding of audiences than considerations of context or horizons of expectations. Context, of course, gives us a good deal of information regarding what is going on in external reality and how this might relate to theatrical practices and spectatorship in the theatre; this in turn feeds into an Erwartungshorizont. Jauß asserts that reconstructing the Erwartungshorizont makes it possible ‘Fragen zu stellen, auf die der Text eine Antwort gab, und damit zu erschließen, wie der einstige Leser das Werk gesehen und verstanden haben kann,’ and thus suggests that we can read off potential responses from studying a literary text in relation to the Erwartungshorizont of its recipients. An Erwartungshorizont is of the utmost importance in understanding audiences, not least because it can shed light on the conventions underlying spectatorship at a particular time. Mood, however, brings us an extra

102 See: Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, pp. 72-6.
103 See: ibid., p. 138.
dimension to studying audience response in that it moves past expectations, context, and convention, to questions of disposition: that is, a mood determines how we encounter a phenomenon and can significantly alter how that phenomenon is meaningful for us at a given time. In this sense, mood presents us with an understanding of how conventions are set and how these conventions can be both contradicted and transcended. In the case of the hammer cited above, for example, in a fearful mood, a hammer’s meaning becomes something altogether alterior to its everyday meaning, while still being appropriate to its context. If for example, one visits the theatre in a mood of disappointment with one’s political situation, this mood will regulate whether and the degree to which a performance will answer this disappointment. The vocabulary of talking about mood is, furthermore, different to that of expectation: while an audience member may have certain conventions regarding how to interpret material on the stage, being disappointed, complacent, upset, etc. are matters of mood and give us greater insight into how a non-artistic/aesthetic context can affect interpretation as an activity based upon convention. In this regard, mood could even provide us with more nuanced accounts of possible historical responses.

1.5 Theory and Practice

As argued above, both the producer and the recipient of the theatrical performance exist within a particular historically contingent cultural nexus. This socio-historical context is integral to understanding the ways in which phenomena refer or do not refer to the everyday discursive practices of the audience. It is also is crucial in understanding the concerns of both playwright and theatre practitioners, and thus the ways in which dialogue between stage and audience is instigated. In order for interaction to take place, a director takes account of the expectations of an audience, and will tend to play to or challenge these, depending on his/her ideological bent. In this sense, the implied audience of a performance is present at every stage of artistic production, from the writing and editing of the dramatic text, to the choices involved in staging. With an adequately thorough description of the historical and cultural mood of an audience at a particular time, we can combine theory and practice and begin to reconstruct the conditions of both production and reception. This includes investigating the socio-political climate in which the audience exists, and who is going to the theatre, as well as their expectations of theatregoing. Even so, as Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow state in

their demographic study of theatregoers in Victorian London, ‘even after such investigation, we remain aware that what we offer is informed speculation.’ With a particularly robust approach to theatre audiences as that outlined above, however, we can reconstruct the possible ways in which audience members might react to the material on stage and relate them to external reality, or in which they might attempt to do so.

Given that textual production and a text’s subsequent editing for the stage and the strategies deployed in staging are temporally distinct occurrences, we can reconstruct different implied audiences. For example, an author may encode a text with particular potential for one implied audience, while a censor evaluating that same text may recognise that potential or other, and censor according to their conception of an implied audience. Again, a marketer of a performance may have another implied audience in mind altogether. Furthermore, with the model of theatrical production and reception outlined above, we may consider how an alternative culture may react to a performance. As a performance is devised with the referential capacities of a particular culture in mind, a different culture will be unlikely to produce the same meaning. Rather it will produce a different reading of the performance altogether, based on its own socio-cultural climate and its expectations of the theatre of both its own culture and that of the performance’s source. In the light of this, we must ask what material is at our disposal to study audience response.

1.5.1 Material Matters

This thesis will focus first and foremost on ways in which implied audience reactions are situated in texts, and we can find both supporting and contesting information in Müller’s numerous interviews and the correspondence between cultural functionaries and theatre practitioners. In the case of the latter, the Bundesarchiv and the Landesarchiv Berlin hold substantial records of both national and regional responses to Müller’s works and their stagings. Through this wealth of information, we can grasp how texts and performances were perceived to be loaded with possibilities for bolstering a particular ideological position, and/or questioning the established discursive practices of the cultural realm. Furthermore, by assessing the cultural politics of the social realm outside of the theatre, we can gain a crucial insight into how theatre audiences might have responded to performances, and proceeded to attempt to construct some form of meaning. This will become a particular focus in Chapter 5.

106 Davis and Emeljanow, Reflecting the Audience, p. 227.
in which I shall examine Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker*: after the Wende, the audiences of the Deutsches Theater gained a new shape, receiving growing numbers of Western spectators with very different experiences and expectations, and playing to former East German spectators who found themselves in an entirely new political and cultural situation.

As my approach to audiences regards the theatrical performance as a form of culturally embedded practice, I shall consider ways in which audience responses are guided by conditions prior to performance on the sides of both recipient and producer. Communication does not merely begin in the theatre itself: it is already instigated by the creation of a pre-performance climate, shaped by directors, dramaturges, artists, journalists, designers, marketers, reviewers, and friends, before the decision to visit the theatre is even made.108 Furthermore, audience response is already prefigured in the audiences’ expectations of a theatre and its repertoire.109 Using documentary evidence from individual theatres’ archives and the archive of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, along with reference to contemporary figures, I shall attempt to grasp the sort of people visiting the theatres under consideration, and investigate the status, profile, and repertoire of each. In this context, we can find press previews for productions, reviews, interviews, transcripts of discussions broadcast on the radio, and programmes for all of the productions under discussion, as well as documentation of the repertoires of theatres.

As Knowles suggests, it is also important to research acting and directing styles, along with relations of production within the theatre. Much of this material can be supplied by rehearsal documentation and interviews with practitioners. While material relating to the earlier productions under consideration is limited, we can still find accounts of the relations in the theatres in question in the aforementioned archives and in occasional statements from actors published since. In the case of Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker*, there is ample material at our disposal to this end: the Akademie der Künste contains extensive details of rehearsal notes and documentation for *Der Lohndrücker*, and an interview I conducted with Alexander Weigel, dramaturge of this production, gives some detail to Müller’s directing style and how it was received by actors and technical staff at the Deutsches Theater.

In terms of reconstructing past performances, we can find stage manuscripts and promptbooks relating to all three productions considered in this thesis in individual theatre archives and at the Akademie der Künste. A considerable number of newspaper and

108 See: Max Schumacher, ‘Expect Expectation – Gestaltung der Erwartungshaltung als Teil einer “Over-All-Dramaturgy”’, in *Paradoxien des Zuschauens*, pp. 73-84 (pp. 75-6).
109 See, for example: Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, p. 123.
magazine reviews relating to all of the productions discussed are accessible, some of which give accounts of specific aspects of the performances. Theatre reviews are, however, limited in disclosing the performance to a theatre historian: not least, each review will offer merely one perspective on a performance, from which it would be dangerous to generalise. But combined with the available rehearsal and performance photographs and other materials mentioned above, reviews can present us with some sense of what these performances looked like. In the case of Müller’s 1988 production, we can supplement these sources with video documentation of performances, something unavailable to theatres before the 1980s. A video of a performance will, however, only provide us with the performance in a vacuum, without the multiple perspectives available to the audience members present, and devoid of the physicality of the event. Despite its obvious failings, Hiß lauds the merits of video documentation, on the basis of its ‘Informationsdichte’ and availability. Combined with an understanding of the cultural politics of its contemporary situation, reviews, rehearsal notes, and readily available notes from functionaries, which give us an idea of just how subversive material on stage was deemed to be by the authorities, the performance video can provide us with a fairly sharp tool for analysis. Citing Barnett, however, who uses a vast array of documentary materials in reconstructing how past performances might have appeared, ‘[e]ach description should be regarded as an attempt at a description rather than a faithful reproduction of a series of real events’.

But is there much which can be achieved beyond situating a past performance and theorising its audiences? That is, is there any way to investigate real, historical responses? The reconstruction of audience response is, as Laura Bradley states, ‘notoriously difficult for theatre historians to gauge’. Nonetheless, Bradley’s study demonstrates that it is possible to gain an insight into past audience responses with a great deal of archival research, and discussion with practitioners. The holdings of the Maxim Gorki Theater archive contain a small collection of letters written by spectators to the leadership of the Maxim Gorki Theater in response to Mäde’s 1958 production of Der Lohndrücker: these letters present us with an insight into the responses of individual spectators and those who accompanied them to the

111 Hiß, Der theatricalische Blick, p. 126.
112 Barnett, Literature versus Theatre, p. 17. Although, given this assertion, Barnett does a commendable job of extracting an enviable degree of information from these sources and presenting very detailed descriptions of performances. See, for example, pp. 93-112 in the same volume, which describe past performances of Die Hamletmaschine.
theatre, although it cannot be presumed outright that no level of self-censorship is at play. Video documentation often presents us with audible examples of audience response, such as applause and laughter. But while the video appears to be a medium for the investigation of the audience on a general level, how can we talk of individual responses where we have nothing like letters from audience members?

As mentioned above, theatre reviews will play a part in helping to reconstruct what productions looked like, but they will also give us some insight into the forms of responses audience members may have had. That is, existing within the same historical context and social mood as both artists and theatregoers, they will aid us in recognising certain parameters of response. Then again, theatre reviewers are a form of specialised theatre audience, which has perhaps an academic interest in the theatre and a more acute awareness of what is going on both on and off stage. Moreover, when looking at reviews, particularly in the East German context, one must be wary of the agendas of both reviewers and the publications in which their reviews are published as well as of a level of censorship, even self-censorship. As Barrie Baker notes, GDR theatre critics ‘were expected to criticise along Party lines’ and in some cases ‘to inflict fear of imminent censorship’ on dramatists and directors alike.115 Furthermore, as we shall see in this thesis, some theatre critics also saw their role as one of helping potentially controversial productions make it to the stage.116 This thesis will therefore draw on theatre reviews, but will handle them with caution, and will not consider them by any means to be the last word on audience response.

Nevertheless, the discussion of a supposedly ‘real’, historical audience will not be a step in proving or disproving an hypothesis; rather, it will offer a perspective on the possibility for culturally situated responses, the ways in which democratic theatre may be achieved in the theatre, and its limitations. Furthermore, being concerned with both audience members and the larger audience collective, I shall not attempt to generalise my findings of actual audiences, projecting them on to further performances. Rather, the very possibility of difference between each spectator, and between each audience of each performance, will be the focus of this study.

1.5.2 Text to Performance, Author to Director

One particularly prominent issue in a thesis that studies theatre texts and performances of these texts is the relationship between a text and its staging. That is, can we move from a textual study to a performance analysis without projecting one on to the other? Hans Christoph Angermeyer highlights the fact that, in such a study, we have two very different objects: on the one hand, the fixed, literary text; and on the other, a variable audience.\(^{117}\) Moreover, by the time a literary text has reached an audience, it has already been through several stages of mediation, as it is initially mediated by a director, whose understanding is then mediated by performers, who constitute another degree of separation between text and audience.\(^{118}\)

To this end, a transformational analysis appears questionable from the start: as Balme notes, in analysing a text and assessing how a particular production copes with the options provided by the text, a transformational approach forces a literary bent on an otherwise non-literary event.\(^ {119}\) Moreover, such analyses can often become prescriptive. For example, Jean Howard studies Shakespeare’s ‘orchestration’ techniques, that is, how he prefigures an audience response to stagings through the organisation of the dramatic text. She reaches some reductive conclusions, such as:

> In attending to the orchestrational technique the audience becomes receptive to the whole range of aural, visual, and kinetic effects produced by the sequential progress of staged events. These, in turn, lead to the fullest understanding of theme and idea. The dramatic art of the plays is inseparable from their meaning.\(^{120}\)

In essence, the result of such approaches is that any form of mediation, including the slightest degree of artistic variation, is ruled out: to perform Shakespeare without full attention to his intentions as prescribed in his texts, ‘just isn’t cricket’ – or Shakespeare, for that matter. While a theatrical text is clearly intended for performance,\(^ {121}\) we simply cannot

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\(^{120}\) Howard, *Shakespeare’s Art*, p. 168. See also: Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience*, p. 39. Here, Styan writes: ‘Shakespeare leaves us in no doubt when he wants a costume to contribute to his stage meaning.’

go this far. Due to the nature of Müller’s texts, moreover, any steady relationship between text and performance is out of the question. Müller’s texts pose problems to both actors and directors by challenging the categories of classical drama, and in this sense, are largely considered to be ‘postdramatic’ or ‘nicht mehr dramatisch’.

More specifically, in Barnett’s words, Müller’s texts ‘expose and emphasize the distance between text and performance’. Thus, apart from identifying a relationship between textual politics and performance strategies, any way of mapping a text on to a performance or vice-versa would be forced.

This points to a related issue: that of reading Müller as playwright in relation to Müller as director of his own work. Such an approach might fall into the trap of regarding Müller as the director who will produce the most werkgetreu stagings of his own plays. Yet this would be to assign Müller a role he self-consciously shirks. Müller was ideologically opposed to the author figure, seeing it as a privileged position which must be shed: consider, for example, the iconic ‘Zerreißung der Fotografie des Autors’ in Die Hamletmaschine. Furthermore, Müller did not consider himself to be the best renderer of his own work on stage. He regarded his own production of Die Hamletmaschine in Giessen in 1985, for example, as falling short of Wilson’s 1986 production in New York. Nonetheless, as we have seen above, Barnett identifies affinities between Müller’s practice as playwright and as director. Thus, in the light of the above discussion regarding the relationship between text and performance, and Müller’s own denial of the privilege of authorship, I shall neither undertake to map one medium on to another, nor read Müller’s production as the most valid rendering of Der Lohndrücker. Rather, my approach shall be comparative: studying text and performance individually in their own right as separate objects for analysis, I shall examine the various formal methods anchored in texts and performance strategies deployed, often noting points of convergence and divergence between the two.

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1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis will study the development in Müller’s approach to instigating interaction with his audiences and situate this within a concern for writing for a democratic theatre. This is a theatre which enables its audiences to produce a plethora of differing interpretations and therefore create a collective *dissensus* that might serve to question the prevailing *partage du sensible* outside of the theatre. Through analysing *Der Lohndrücker*, *Der Horatier*, and *Kentauren*, and finally examining Müller’s staging of all three texts in 1988, I shall argue not only that he is concerned with democracy in the political realm external to the theatre, but that he is also attempting to create some form of democratic theatre from the start. This will involve exploring each text’s relationship to the contemporary reality in which it was written and looking for ways in which its textual politics point to a potential set of audience responses. I shall look further to the premières of these plays and consider how their directors harnessed the political possibilities of the texts and the possible effects these had on their audiences.

In Chapter 2, I shall study *Der Lohndrücker* in the context of 1956-60, demonstrating that it responds to a general mood in the GDR in the time of a need to work towards a form of socialism that is more essentially democratic. As I shall show, the text sets out to create an audience formally different to the homogenised and silenced inhabitants of the GDR, and questions the shape of East German Socialism in the mid- to late 1950s. In analysing both Hans Dieter Mäde’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* at the Maxim Gorki Theater in East Berlin in 1958-60 and its audiences, we shall gain further insights into the politics of Müller’s text and the audiences for which it was written. Chapter 3 will follow a similar pattern with regard to *Der Horatier* in 1968: again, at this time, hopes for democratic reform within the GDR were quashed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to quell the so-called Prague Spring, leading Müller to write a text that asks its audiences to think about the prevalent ways of interpreting the place of the individual in society and how to move beyond them. I shall then consider *Der Horatier*’s première in West Berlin in 1973 and explore the scope for Müller’s text to remain as open in the FRG as he may have intended it to be in the GDR. Chapter 4 will analyse *Kentauren* as a reaction to stasis and stagnation in the GDR in the mid-1980s despite hopes for democracy in the GDR in the light of Gorbachev’s reform programme in the USSR, but a consideration of its première will be left until Chapter 5. In this final chapter, I shall explore the performance strategies Müller deployed in his production of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1988, asking whether the production as a whole can be seen as democratic and whether and how it attempts to live up to Müller’s
description of it as a piece of democratic theatre. In a concluding chapter, I shall attempt to plot developments in Müller’s textual politics over his career and consider briefly whether the notion of democratic theatre can be applied to his oeuvre at large. Moreover, I shall evaluate the method deployed in this thesis and whether it can present us with greater insights into making political theatre.
2 Producing ‘das neue Publikum’ in the Age of Sovietization: Der Lohndrücker, 1956-60

2.1 Situating Der Lohndrücker

From the very beginning of Heiner Müller’s literary career, we can identify a concern with questions regarding democracy both within and outside of the theatre. His first major theatrical text, Der Lohndrücker, written in 1956-57 and published in the May 1957 edition of East German literary monthly, Neue Deutsche Literatur, is no exception. The play proved hugely successful, helping to launch the young Müller’s career: even two months before its publication, the dramaturgical staff at the Deutsches Theater indicated interest in staging the text, which, according to head dramaturge Heinar Kipphardt, demonstrated new dramatic talent;¹ and work on Der Lohndrücker gained Müller and his then wife, Inge Müller, the Heinrich Mann Prize in 1959,² allegedly due to Walter Ulbricht’s own initiative,³ before it began to feature on East German school syllabuses in 1961.⁴ While the text seemed to have gained a good deal of institutional acceptance in the GDR, it examines the conditions surrounding the building of socialism in the GDR from a critical perspective, problematising the distinctly Soviet shape of East German Socialism. Indeed, Müller prefaces the text with a note indicating that it is concerned with a ‘neue[s] Publikum’.⁵ This new audience is one that

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¹ Letter from Heinar Kipphardt to Wolfgang Langhoff, 1 March 1957, Deutsches Theater Archiv [=DTA], B22 – Dramaturgische Gutachten – Der Lohndrücker-1957, unpaginated.
⁵ Heiner Müller, Der Lohndrücker, Neue Deutsche Literatur [=NDL] 5/5 (1957): 116-41 (p. 116). Owing to differences between this and later editions (see, for example: Heiner Müller, Der
differs from the public of the GDR, whose own myriad German histories have been silenced for the sake of the ‘Sovietization’ of the young state and its cultural and political machinery. That is, Müller strives to question the particular partage du sensible enforced by the state, and render German history visible again. In this chapter, we will see that the notion of Produktion is key to unlocking the textual politics of Der Lohndrücker, and the possibilities within it for creating dissensus. Yet the sense in which ‘production’ is to be understood is far above and beyond industrial manufacturing.

Industry does, however, stand at the heart of Der Lohndrücker. The play focuses on a nationalised factory, or Volkseigener Betrieb (VEB), in the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany in 1948-49, in which production is threatened as the kilns required for manufacturing materials are in desperate need of repair. One mason within the factory, Balke, rises to the challenge of repairing the kilns under dangerous conditions so as not to hinder the factory’s productivity, and develops new, more efficient techniques for doing so. Through repairing the kilns, Balke exceeds production norms, thus becoming the ‘bestes Pferd’ (L, 125) of the factory’s leadership. Nevertheless, in increasing production norms, Balke also increases the amount of labour required to receive the same wage, essentially causing him and his co-workers to have to work more for less. In the eyes of most of his co-workers, Balke is therefore a ‘Lohndrücker’ and ‘Arbeiterverräter’ (L, 126): he receives death threats and a beating, is bullied in the workplace, and efforts are continually made to sabotage his work.

Balke’s story almost exactly matches that of Hans Garbe, a mason at Siemens-Plania in the Lichtenberg district of Berlin, in 1949-50. For his Stakhanovite efforts, Garbe was elevated to the status of Held der Arbeit, a personification of the idealised consciousness of the new, socialist working class; he was therefore incorporated into the ‘Standardrepetoire der Produktionspropaganda’ of the ruling SED. He remained a hero throughout an age in which the ‘Aufbau des Sozialismus’, announced by Ulbricht in July 1952, continued to be the ‘grundlegende Aufgabe’ of the East German state; and his story was further projected into national consciousness by literary works such as Eduard Claudius’s 1951 novel, Menschen an unserer Seite, and Käthe Rülicke’s 1952 collection of interviews with Garbe, entitled Hans Garbe erzählt. The paradoxical position of Garbe as both Held der Arbeit and

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traitor of the workforce further provided material for Brecht, whose *Büsing* fragment remained incomplete upon his death in 1956.

The increasing of production norms in an attempt to build socialism on German soil was central to many internal conflicts within the GDR in its early years. These eventually culminated in the 17 June Uprising of 1953, in which strikes over a norm increase of 10%, announced on 14 May 1953, broke out across East Germany involving anywhere between 372,000 to over a million demonstrators.\(^9\) The strikes were violently suppressed by Soviet and GDR forces. It is not surprising therefore that most commentators on *Der Lohndrücker* study the text within the context of the early years of the GDR, up to and including 1953. Such studies consider it an examination of the conditions surrounding the switch from a capitalist, fascist old society, to a new socialist reality, and the conflicts which emerge regarding the position of the individual in relation to the larger societal whole.\(^10\) Within this context, Georg Wieghaus reads *Der Lohndrücker* as Müller’s capitulation to SED propaganda, in which Balke serves as a ‘nachahmenswertes Beispiel’ for *Aufbau*.\(^11\) In contrast, Jonathan Kalb interprets any optimism in Müller’s text as merely an attempt to bypass censors.\(^12\) As we shall see, however, neither of these readings can be wholly substantiated; a more convincing reading is that of Bernhard Greiner, who suggests that the character of Balke is open, and almost Brechtian, paving the way for critical engagement from spectators.\(^13\) Grischa Meyer astutely notes that the play’s context ‘ist untrennbar verbunden mit der Geschichte der Reparationen für die durch Deutsche zerstörte Sowjetunion’,\(^14\) indicating that further consideration must be given to the question of the relationship between the GDR and the USSR; yet Meyer only discusses this tension in relation to Müller’s 1988 production of *Der Lohndrücker*.

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\(^12\) See: Kalb, *Theater of Heiner Müller*, p. 68.


Little consideration is given to the historical context surrounding the text’s literary production, aside from cursory mentions of international matters, such as Nikita Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Hungarian uprising, both in 1956.\(^1\) Roland Clauß, however, breaks the mould of literary criticism on the play: rather than being about the bloody repressions of 1953-6, Clauß argues, *Der Lohndrücker* is concerned ‘mit den Prinzipien einer Erziehungsdiktatur, die meinte, ihren Sozialismus nur gegen die eigene Bevölkerung durchsetzen zu können’.\(^2\) While this is a central issue in *Der Lohndrücker*, Clauß gives little indication of why this might have been a pertinent question in 1956.

What appears to be missing from most historically situated studies of *Der Lohndrücker* so far is in-depth consideration of the conflicts within the GDR at the time it was written. Clearly, the international context within Eastern Europe in the latter half of the 1950s cannot be ignored in an analysis of *Der Lohndrücker*; Müller confirms this in an interview in 1988, claiming: ‘Als ich die Streikszene [scene 14] schrieb, hörte ich im Radio Berichte über die Budapester Ereignisse von 1956. Das floß in den Text ein.’\(^3\) The significance of the context of the earlier half of the decade should not be underestimated. These historical considerations and their relevance for Müller and his audiences in 1956-60 must be seen as both informing and being informed by the conflict within the GDR in these years. As we shall see, attention to these internal conflicts will provide a much richer insight into the particular questions posed by the text in the late 1950s, and, by extension, to the discursive parameters informing spectators’ responses. In turn, we can gain a much clearer perspective on what the *Produktion* of a ‘neue[s] Publikum’ means for Müller. This, too, has received only minimal attention in the secondary criticism.\(^4\)

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2.2 The Soviet Path to Socialism

In the late 1950s, internal conflict was not new to the GDR. The founding of the SED in 1946, through the amalgamation of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD), was fraught with difficulty. As Peter Grieder writes, the SED was not founded as ‘a Leninist party committed to Sovietization but as a Marxist party committed to parliamentary democracy’. Yet, the ‘democratic way to socialism’ enshrined in the SED’s charter was received variously: while Ulbricht’s followers understood this path as one that needed to be modelled on the Soviet Union, supporters of Anton Ackermann recognised the need for a path to socialism qualitatively different to that of the USSR. Ulbricht’s vision of a party and national structure based on the Soviet model was, however, brought to fruition, and after the SED’s response to the 17 June Uprising, in Grieder’s words, the SED was ‘fully Stalinized’. This caused much of the East German public to fear that demonstrating dissatisfaction might bring about wholly negative, as opposed to positive, results. A testament to the Stalinization of the SED leadership under Ulbricht was his own nod to cultivating a personality cult: the deadline of the 1953 increase in productivity norms, for example, was shifted from 1 June to 30 June, Ulbricht’s sixtieth birthday. Nonetheless, the political landscape within the Eastern Bloc looked set to change in 1956, following Khrushchev’s so-called ‘Secret Speech’, delivered in the early hours of the morning of 25 February 1956. Khrushchev denounced Joseph Stalin’s activities as First Secretary of the CPSU, in particular his violent crimes committed against his own people, his encouragement of a cult of personality surrounding him, and his utter rejection of collective leadership in contradiction of the tenets of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Although the speech was delivered in secret, it was intentionally leaked to the worldwide press. As a result, it opened the floodgates for de-Stalinization in the Eastern Bloc: in October that year, in Poland it led to the liberalising Władysław Gomułka being ‘swept to power on a wave of

19 Grieder, East German Leadership, p. 8.
20 Ibid., p. 10. It must, however, be noted, that Ulbricht’s alignment with Soviet policy was not the result of directives from Moscow and often resulted in tensions between the GDR and USSR leaderships. See: Hope M. Harrison, Driving the Soviets up the Wall. Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).
21 Grieder, East German Leadership, p. 8.
23 Biburger, Sprengsätze, p. 111.
popular revulsion against Stalinist excesses'; less successfully, a rebellion in Hungary calling for democratisation and secession from the Warsaw Pact was put down in a bloody suppression by Soviet Warsaw Pact forces.

Khrushchev’s speech brought hope for change to the governance of the GDR and for the development of democratic socialism. Evidence of this can be found as early as 29 April 1956, when an article was published anonymously in *Neues Deutschland*; the article aligned itself with the resolutions of the Twentieth Party Conference of the CPSU. This article, now attributed to Karl Schirdewan, Ulbricht’s second in command, subtly criticised the lack of collective leadership in the SED, and called for much more open discussion within the party. Amongst other things, the author writes of a reunified German state as a ‘demokratischer Staat’, and practises self-criticism on behalf of the Party: ‘Nicht immer haben wir mit genügender Schärfe auf die konsequente Wahrung der demokratischen Gesetzlichkeit geachtet.’ Mention is made of democracy, but very little indication is given as to what it means. We might assume that the author adopts the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of democracy: for Lenin, democracy is ‘the equal right of all to determine the structure and administration of the state’. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, the SED Politburo was, however, wedded to the concept of democratic centralism. Democracy was therefore practised from the top down, with a usually minimal array of possibilities given to the electorate, whose only available option was to state their approval; in all likelihood, Schirdewan’s proposals would have changed little in the political life of East German citizens.

In Mary Fulbrook’s words, ‘[v]ery few East Germans appeared to have believed the official line that “imperialist machinations” were the cause of the uprisings [in Poland and Hungary]. Most considered that a lower standard of living and a desire for national freedom from the Soviet yoke were the main causes of popular resistance.’ Later in 1956, therefore, the revolutionary energy that had sparked calls for democratic participation in statecraft in Poland and Hungary catalysed movements for such reforms in the GDR. Public demands in the GDR for an end to one-party dictatorship took on a particularly Western flavour: a gathering in Erfurt, for example, called for the introduction of Bonn-style parliamentary...

26 Grieder, *East German Leadership*, p. 108.
27 See: ibid., p. 130. Grieder claims this on the strength of testimony from Schirdewan himself. According to Schirdewan, the article was initially much more critical of Ulbricht’s leadership, but was censored by Ulbricht personally, and the published draft could only be published because Ulbricht was on holiday.
democracy in the East.\textsuperscript{31} Political unrest in Magdeburg in 1956 was, according to Fulbrook, on the same scale as 1953, although the SED suppressed news of this within the GDR itself, denouncing Western reports as fascist propaganda.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, students of the Humboldt University in East Berlin led a rebellion, initially directed against compulsory lessons in Marxist-Leninist theory and Russian; this escalated into a demonstration calling for reform to the political systems of the GDR, which was suppressed by a workers’ militia.\textsuperscript{33}

The demand from certain sectors of the East German public for an end to the way in which socialism was being built in the GDR received backing from some intellectuals. The Soviet shape of \textit{Aufbau} was seen to be incompatible with an East German history and consciousness. At the end of 1956, the East German philosopher Wolfgang Harich composed a fifty-page manifesto, drawing on discussions held with other GDR intellectuals, demanding ‘einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus’. This manifesto called for the democratisation of the GDR, freedom of information, and, in the event of an open democratic win for the SPD in the East, possible reunification with the FRG as a social democratic state.\textsuperscript{34} Notwithstanding the social democratic flavour of Harich’s proposal, it is notable that there was a mood in some sections of the East German populace that a break with Ulbricht’s Soviet path to socialism, and one which was democratic and particularly German were necessary. In the years that followed, however, Ulbricht maintained his grasp on power, and was able to quell opposition with relative ease: for example, Schirdewan was ousted from the Central Committee, and Harich was given a ten-year prison sentence. Ulbricht consolidated his path to Soviet-style Socialism by denouncing ‘revisionism’ and announcing the acceleration of \textit{Aufbau} in 1957.\textsuperscript{35} He further introduced a new Seven Year Plan in 1959 to align the GDR’s economy with that of the USSR.\textsuperscript{36} In the words of a young worker in \textit{Der Lohndrücker}, the GDR could indeed have resembled ‘Das Sowjetparadies’ (\textit{L}, 118) by the end of the 1950s.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See: Grieder, \textit{East German Leadership}, p. 108.
\item See: Fulbrook, \textit{Anatomy of a Dictatorship}, pp. 188-9.
\item See: Grieder, \textit{East German Leadership}, p. 112.
\item Grieder, \textit{East German Leadership}, p. 113.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
2.2.1 ‘Das Sowjetparadies’

This Sovietization did not go unnoticed within the cultural sphere, and an awareness of it can be seen within Müller’s text. *Der Lohndrücker* is replete with references which suggest that the GDR is being built in the image of its protector superpower. Balke’s working methods are, without a doubt, innovative, and are clearly recognised as such by the co-workers in the factory. But Müller’s text goes further than this: as a newspaper reporter asks in scene 5, ‘Sie arbeiten nach sowjetischen Neuerermethoden, sozialistischer Wettbewerb?’ (*L*, 123).

Inasmuch, a direct parallel is drawn between the GDR and the USSR: Soviet methods have been transplanted into GDR working life.

The socialism represented in the play is not of the democratic, participatory type hoped for by the likes of Ackermann and his supporters after the war. Nor, for that matter, is it of the kind hoped for by the likes of Harich and countless demonstrators in 1956; rather it is top-down, in the mould of Marxist-Leninist democratic centralism. Indeed, this is the selfsame image of democracy presented in the third scene. Here, the factory director suggests Schurek for the position of union representative. Schurek is clearly unpopular with the workers: for example, Zemke calls Schurek an ‘Arschkriecher’ (*L*, 120); and Geschke complains, ‘Wer Schurek wählt, ist selber schuld’ (*L*, 120). Nonetheless, the workers, including Geschke, cast their votes in favour of Schurek, as no one else puts himself forward for the position despite the director’s empty gesture of inviting them to do so. One worker’s dejected ‘Wir können nichts machen’ (*L*, 120) announces clearly that there is no choice but to vote for Schurek, as he has been officially sponsored.

The path then followed towards socialism is one of which very few are in favour. It has nevertheless been chosen, although it will lead to the wholesale exploitation of the workforce. In scene 8a, Trakehner identifies the way in which Balke wishes to work not as visionary, but rather as exploitative. He tells Balke, ‘Dieser Plan ist etwas für den Papierkorb, eine Utopie’ (*L*, 130), before asserting: ‘Ihren Sozialismus aufzubauen ist kein Spaß’ (*L*, 131). Trakehner’s scepticism about Balke’s methods does not merely stem from resignation to the old ways of maintaining the kilns; he disagrees with the particular utopia and the path towards it recommended by Balke. Trakehner’s comment suggests that there are different models of socialism and different paths towards it. From the very start of the play, it is plain that the socialism being built is that of the SED, and this is initially announced by the presence of a placard at the end of the first scene, bearing the text: ‘SED – Partei des Aufbaus’ (*L*, 117). Furthermore, when the workers complain about the price of butter in scene 2, Schurek holds fast to the party line, stating the credo of *Aufbau*: ‘Wenn wir besser
leben wollen, müssen wir mehr produzieren. Das ist doch klar, Kollegen’ (L, 119). This is an unmistakable paraphrase of the SED’s 1947 maxim, ‘Mehr produzieren, gerechter verteilen, besser leben’, and would have been easily recognised as such by any East German. The SED’s Soviet model is being contrasted with a form of socialism in which there is no exploitation, and in which ordinary people can have a voice in politics.

The rebuilding of the kilns can be read allegorically as the building of socialism in the GDR: it references the difficulties of Aufbau from 1949-55 as consecutive economic plans were forced through by the SED and replaced by other, much harsher ones. This process of building socialism is attempted using bricks which are ‘noch feucht’ (L, 121), i.e. not yet ready for the form of socialism that is to be built. Balke and Lerka’s first attempt to repair the kiln fails precisely for this reason. Furthermore, Müller’s choice of names for his characters suggests that the bricks represent the individuals who are required for the building of socialism. As Jan-Christoph Hauschild notes, drawing on the names of four workers, Balke, Schorn, Karras, and Zemke, these individuals are no longer autonomous individuals, but raw materials in the project of Aufbau: ‘Zum Aufbau gebraucht wird eben jeder und jedes, Balken, (Schorn)steine, Schubkarren, Zement.’ Tellingly, on the second attempt to repair the kiln, every dry stone available is built into the structure, including the one thrown at Balke by Brillenträger as he walks past Balke. Kolbe suggests that the brick should be kept as evidence of Brillenträger’s attempted sabotage, but Balke asks merely, ‘Ist er trocken?’ (L, 133); upon hearing that it is, he builds it into the wall. This image is ambiguous. On one hand, it may serve as an uncomfortable symbol for the seeds of failure in the rebuilding of the kiln and socialism: the dry stones available have already tried to sabotage Aufbau, and may try to do so again from within. On the other hand, we could read the image as indicating that each individual, notwithstanding his/her differences, is required for Aufbau. Müller’s text problematises the project of Aufbau in this Soviet mould by drawing his audience’s attention to the specific Germaness of the bricks which must be used to build socialism. This Germaness has been all but forgotten by, invoking Rancière’s terminology, the official ‘police’ partage du sensible governing GDR history. Before turning to examine the specific ways in which Der Lohndrücker sets out to engage its German audiences in dialogue, we shall briefly consider the context of its initial audience members.

37 Emmerich, Kleine Literaturgeschichte, p. 113.
38 See: Biburger, Sprengsätze, pp. 26-7. See also: Greiner, Allegorie zur Idylle, p. 69.
39 Hauschild, Heiner Müller, p. 163. Emphasis in original. See also: Schulz, Heiner Müller, p. 27.
2.3 Audiences of Der Lohndrücker

Above, we have seen that the period in which Der Lohndrücker was composed was one characterised by a great degree of dissatisfaction with the form of East German society. Der Lohndrücker appears to be addressing an implied audience constructed of people aware of the conditions of Aufbau, doing so by referring directly to their material reality. It does not necessarily imply an audience critical of the SED’s policies. However, the general mood of dissatisfaction with the GDR’s institutions and a desire to democratise them and make them resemble a German form of socialism had not only informed Müller’s writing, but will also have had an effect on Der Lohndrücker’s audiences.

Der Lohndrücker received its première in the Studio of the Städtisches Theater, Leipzig, under the direction of Günter Schwarzlose in March 1958. At the same time, it was in rehearsal at the Maxim Gorki Theater on Unter den Linden, in the cultural heart of East Berlin and not a minute’s walk from the Humboldt University, under the direction of Hans Dieter Mäde. Due to the lack of sources pertaining to Schwarzlose’s première and the wealth of material at our disposal for an analysis of Mäde’s production, such as press reviews, performance photographs, and audience letters, the latter shall be the focus of the following discussion of audience response.

Mäde, born in 1930, was a member of the SED from 1946, and after completing his studies in Germanistik and History in Rostock, studied for a diploma in theatre, dramaturgy, and directing at the Deutsches Theaterinstitut in Weimar, known for its Stanislavskian approach to theatre. Thereafter, he worked as a director and as head dramaturge in Erfurt from 1952, before becoming engaged as a director with the Maxim Gorki Theater in 1956. In his production, Der Lohndrücker was combined with Müller’s 1958 text, Die Korrektur, which was performed in the second half. There were three significant audiences of Mäde’s production: the functionaries who watched a dress rehearsal on the eve of what was initially planned to be the production’s première on 1 May 1958; the audiences visiting the Maxim Gorki Theater during Der Lohndrücker’s relatively long run of seventy-five performances between 2 September 1958 and the 22 April 1960; and a group of workers, for whom the production was performed on 15 June 1959.

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As Müller writes in 1958, this first audience consisted of ‘Funktionäre aus Betrieben und Kulturfunktionäre’. The functionaries who attended this rehearsal of *Der Lohndrücker* and *Die Korrektur* intervened in the production’s continuation, calling off the première until Müller had written a second draft of *Die Korrektur*. The second draft was then performed instead of the first draft as of September 1958. No archival documentation of this visit has yet come to light, but excerpts from this discussion printed in the first West German edition of Müller’s plays illustrate that the focus of much of the functionaries’ criticism was *Die Korrektur*, which they largely regarded as being far too negative for a GDR public.

Notably, *Der Lohndrücker* was not beyond criticism: whilst some found it to be an eminently realistic portrayal of working life in VEBs across the GDR, one, referring to the end of the tenth scene, in which Balke is beaten by his co-workers Zemke and Karras, declared ‘Das ist ja längst überholt’, and asked the rhetorical question: ‘Wo werden heute Aktivisten wie Balke, die eine neue Norm aufstellen, auf der Straße zusammengeschlagen.’ Nonetheless, there is no indication that this reaction caused a re-editing of *Der Lohndrücker*, presumably because it was considered that a new draft of *Die Korrektur* might serve the purpose of correcting the perspective of *Der Lohndrücker*.

Following the uprisings in Poland and Hungary, the SED Politburo was particularly sensitive to the potentially subversive role of literature and therefore the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS) stepped up its monitoring of theatre. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that Mäde’s production and Müller’s texts were scrutinised to this degree. At this time, the Berlin *Stadtrat für Kultur* was particularly concerned that Berlin’s theatres should aid in the ‘Entwicklung einer sozialistischen Dramatik sowie eines Spielplans, der den Bedürfnissen der Bevölkerung gerecht wird und unsere Menschen begeistert, die vor uns stehenden politischen und ökonomischen Aufgaben zu erfüllen’. Tellingly, the *Stadtrat’s* conception for Berlin’s theatres in 1958 calls for theatres to align their productions with the demands of the SED, and to use Socialist Realism in doing so: theatre had to be harnessed to try to win over the East German population to *Aufbau* and the SED’s path to socialism.

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particularly as the SED’s own Politburo had a degree of distrust for GDR theatregoers. Furthermore, as the border with the West was still open, East German theatres also had to find ways of combating the political scepticism of Western audience members.

In a letter written on 24 March 1959 from Alfred Kurella, the Secretary of the Culture Commission of the SED Politburo, to Hagen Mueller-Stahl, then a director and actor at the Volksbühne, East Berlin, Kurella indicates the Commission’s belief that there is no socialist ‘neue[r] Mensch’ in the audience: instead, he fears in 1959, the theatre has to compete with ‘jenem Teil der Zuschauer […], der gar zu bereitwillig wiehert und klatscht, sobald sich ein Vorgang oder eine Anspielung auf der Bühne gegen Einrichtungen unseres Staates deuten läßt, und der gelangweilt dasitzt, sobald unser neues Leben positiv dargestellt wird’. Indeed, in 1961, Kurella wrote to the playwright Helmut Baierl, criticising the ‘offene Dramaturgie’ of Müller’s plays. He particularly criticised Der Lohndrücker for not presenting a clear, teacherly message, perhaps fearing all along that Der Lohndrücker’s openness could become a subversive tool. As we shall see, it is barely surprising that Kurella maintained he was against the first performances of Der Lohndrücker in Leipzig and Berlin. Notwithstanding Kurella’s alleged opposition, Mäde’s production of Der Lohndrücker went ahead with a newly edited version of Die Korrektur, in an effort to make it fall more clearly into line with what the cultural authorities deemed to be East Berlin society’s theatrical needs.

While we can see what the Cultural Commission considered to be the makeup of theatre audiences in East Berlin, and the sort of education required from the theatre, we need to look closer at the audiences themselves and their horizon of expectations. This was formed in part by prior expectations of theatregoing. Theatre repertoires of the early GDR were dominated by the classics: the most-performed plays at East German theatres in the 1950s included Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s Nathan der Weise (1779), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Iphigenie auf Tauris (1786) and Egmont (1788), and Friedrich Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell (1804). Indeed, in a survey of 252 performances across 62 GDR theatres in the week of 10 to 16 September 1956, Fritz Raddatz discovers that 36.8% of all performances were classics and only 19.5% of performances were works from the GDR, although there was a

48 Ibid., p. 2.
49 Letter from Kurella to Helmut Baierl, 17 October 1961, BArch, DY 30/IV 2/2.026/72, p. 2.
50 See: Kurella to Mueller-Stahl, 24 March 1959, p. 3.
51 See: Emmerich, Kleine Literaturgeschichte, p. 85.
very slow upward trend in the latter between 1955 and 1959.\textsuperscript{53} A play by a living GDR writer was most likely something of a rarity.

In the Maxim Gorki Theater, the Intendant Maxim Vallentin’s own commitment to the naturalist Stanislavskian tradition was reinforced by a commitment to producing almost purely Soviet theatre. The Maxim Gorki Theater was established in 1952 as a ‘sozialistisches Modelltheater’,\textsuperscript{54} acting as a counterpoint to Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble, established in 1949.\textsuperscript{55} Notably, the theatre, which Vallentin dubbed as a theatre of democratic authors in his opening speech on 14 August 1952,\textsuperscript{56} made great efforts to showcase Soviet talent: in the six years between the theatre’s foundation and the première of Der Lohndrücker and Die Korrektur, almost a third of productions at the theatre were of plays by Soviet dramatists, accompanied by the likes of Goethe, Schiller, Molière, Henrik Ibsen, and Gerhart Hauptmann.\textsuperscript{57} To audiences acquainted with the Maxim Gorki Theater and the works produced there, the appearance of a new play by a non-Soviet, no less GDR, playwright would have doubtless come as a surprise; startlingly, as many reviewers commented, even the presence of workers on stage was itself something entirely new, and much needed.\textsuperscript{58} As we shall see below, however, Mäde’s Stanislavskian approach to theatre doubtless made this play slightly less surprising to the Maxim Gorki Theatre’s audiences.

So much for possible audience expectations, but who were the audiences who attended performances of Der Lohndrücker at the Maxim Gorki Theater from 1958-60? Kalb asserts that theatre audiences in the late 1950s ‘consisted almost exclusively of an urban intellectual and artistic elite, following the long-standing pattern of bourgeois theatre’.\textsuperscript{59} Yet this seems somewhat off the mark in a state that heavily subsidised theatre seats in an attempt to gain influence in all reaches of social life and to combat the rapid decline in

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 407.

\textsuperscript{54} Christoph Funke, “‘Wenn wir uns nicht selbst befreien...’ Über Albert Hetterle”, in Maxim Gorki Theater, pp. 122-8 (p. 122). The phrase ‘sozialistisches Modelltheater’ is also adopted by Klaus Völker to describe the Maxim Gorki Theater in its early years. See: Klaus Völker, ‘Zwei Versuche, die Gorki-Festung zu stürmen’, in Maxim Gorki Theater, pp. 140-2 (p. 140).

\textsuperscript{55} Heinz Klunker, ‘Seitwärts Unter den Linden’, in Maxim Gorki Theater, pp. 134-8 (p. 134); and Völker, ‘Zwei Versuche’, p. 140.

\textsuperscript{56} See: Excerpt from Maxim Vallentin’s speech at opening of the Maxim Gorki Theater, 14 August 1952, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste [=AdK], Maxim-Vallentin-Archiv [=MVA] 657, unpaginated.

\textsuperscript{57} See: Maxim Gorki Theater, pp. 180-1.


\textsuperscript{59} Kalb, Theater of Heiner Müller, p. 60.
Indeed, in January 1958 the Berlin Stadtrat reduced ticket prices for workers by a further 20% and made it easier for workers to decide when they might attend performances. The Maxim Gorki Theater, much like its fellow theatres throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, witnessed its own fall in attendance with the advent of television, which caused some uncertainty about its future. Nonetheless, as we shall see, Der Lohndrücker attracted spectators from both sides of the East-West ideological divide. In the spirit of the SED’s desire to bridge the gap between art and life, attempts were made well before April 1959’s Bitterfelder Konferenz to bring workers to the theatre; in the case of Der Lohndrücker, in June 1959 the theatre was brought to the workers, whose experiences of working life in the GDR informed their readings of Der Lohndrücker and Die Korrektur.

With this information in mind, we can now begin to examine the various strategies of Müller’s text and Mäde’s production for guiding audience reaction, and gain an insight into the responses of the various spectators of Der Lohndrücker.

### 2.4 The Silent Voice of German History

As indicated above, the events which occur in the text clearly refer to the East German situation since 1949, particularly addressing the Soviet mould of Aufbau in 1956. Der Lohndrücker emphasises why this Soviet-style Aufbau is of particular concern in a German state, with a German history. The second part of Müller’s introductory note to the play reads: ‘Die Geschichte des Ringofens ist bekannt. Die Personen und ihre Geschichten sind erfunden’ (L, 116). Read in one sense, it may seem that Müller claims to be supplementing historical reality with fictional histories; indeed, Theo Girshausen reads this comment as a statement of intention on Müller’s part to create a form of Verfremdungseffekt for the recipient, whereby the historical case of Garbe is made strange through its fictionalisation.

It is notable, however, that Müller uses the same word ‘Geschichte’, to describe both ‘Geschichten’ in Der Lohndrücker: at one and the same time, this word can mean ‘history’, i.e. historical factuality, and ‘story’, i.e. a tale that may be still be non-fictional. Furthermore, he contrasts the ‘erfunden[e]’ stories of the characters with a story which is ‘bekannt’, rather

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60 See: Raddatz, Traditionen und Tendenzen, p. 409. Raddatz notes a fall in GDR theatre attendance from approximately 17,900,900 in the 1955/6 season to approximately 13,869,300 in the 1961/2 season.
62 See: Summary of discussion between Alfred Kurella and Jochen Mückenberger, 17 June 1960, Adk, MVA 691, unpaginated.
64 See: Girshausen, Realismus und Utopie, pp. 128-31.
than stating that it is historically true. In doing so, Müller alludes to a certain constructedness of the GDR historical narrative of the prevalent *partage du sensible*, which is fictional insofar as Germanness has been written out of it.

The GDR was initially established with the founding myth that it was an anti-fascist state. Immediately following the Second World War, the Soviet Occupation Zone undertook an intense process of ousting former National Socialists from all areas of life, particularly political, administrative, economic, and educational.65 By 1953, the GDR authorities argued that such a thorough job had been done of excluding former Nazis from East German society, that Nazism itself was a phenomenon essentially confined to the West: the official interpretation of the 17 June Uprising, for example, was that it was perpetrated by Western fascist agitators.66 By the mid-1950s, the state-sanctioned history of the peoples inhabiting the GDR was that they had not been the capitalist aggressors of the Second World War, but rather followed the lineage of communist anti-fascist revolutionaries, such as Ernst Thälmann. They therefore need not bear the yoke of collective guilt of the German peoples. German historical experience had been effectively whitewashed over.

The image of a whitewash occurs in a poem by Müller from the early 1950s, ‘L.E. oder Das Loch im Strumpf’. Here, Müller comments on the case of another *Held der Arbeit*, Luise Ermisch, who organised efforts to improve the quality of goods produced in a textile factory in 1949. The fifth to eighth lines read:

Platz: eine Strumpffabrik, vor wenig Wochen
Von Arbeitern Arbeitern zugesprochen
Die Tünche auf der Wand war frisch
In der Kantine. […]67

That Müller juxtaposes the nationalisation of the factory with an indication of the freshness of the whitewash in the canteen is telling. In these early days, the whitewash over German history, and the agency of ordinary Germans in it, had only just been applied, and was merely linguistic: VEBs were handed over by ‘workers’ to ‘workers’. This is a rhetorical device we find throughout *Der Lohndrücker*, in which the word ‘Arbeiter’ is spoken some thirty-five times in a relatively short text, mimicking the rhetoric of the state in a way eminently recognisable to East Germans in the 1950s. The very first scene, for example, presents Geschke and Stettiner drinking the ‘Arbeiterbier’, ‘was der Arbeiterstaat ausschenkt’ (L, 116); and in scene 6b, Kolbe assures Geschke: ‘Im Direktorzimmer sitzt ein

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Arbeiter am Schreibtisch. Du bist auch ein Arbeiter und kannst mit ihm reden’ (L, 127). Yet in both cases, this promise of equality is instantly undermined, and the whitewash begins to wash off. In the first scene, a Geheimrat sits silently in the bar with Geschke and Stettiner, and sniggers mockingly at the landlord’s mentions of ‘Arbeiterbier’, before silently refusing to take a drink of it himself (L, 116). In the case of scene 6b, we have already seen Lerka be slapped by the director and lose his job for questioning the methods employed in ‘euer[em] Arbeiterstaat’ (L, 124); this demonstrates a hierarchy which is not reflected in the language of the VEB.

As the case of Lerka demonstrates, figures of authority in *Der Lohndrücker* are all too ready to repress German Nazi history, pinning the blame for failure on anti-socialist fervour. In scene 5, Lerka delivers the news that his first attempt to repair the kiln has failed because he used bricks which were not dry. The union representative, Schurek, instantly accuses Lerka of an act of sabotage. In the following scene, we hear the director tell Schorn, the new Party Secretary, ‘Der Arbeiter hat kein Vertrauen zur Partei. Der Faschismus steckt ihm in den Knochen. Wenn du mich fragst: trau ich keinem’ (L, 125). This lack of trust for the workers, however, serves to question the official interpretation of GDR history, as it concedes that fascism was still alive and well in the East German public. The mistrust of the population demonstrates that the state’s chosen path to socialism requires a society which will willingly oblige to do whatever the state decrees. This is not the case with the German public inherited by the GDR. Their embeddedness in German history is deemed so dangerous to the building of socialism that it must be whitewashed in order for the state to progress towards a socialist utopia. As Brecht ironically comments after the 17 June Uprising in his poem ‘Die Lösung’, ‘Wäre es da | Nicht doch einfacher, Die Regierung | Löste das Volk auf und | Wählte ein anderes?’

In *Der Lohndrücker*, Müller appeals to the historical consciousness of his German audiences in the 1950s, by introducing them to characters with histories not unlike their own. By introducing the histories of the workers in *Der Lohndrücker*, Müller illustrates the continuity of German history, showing that the GDR’s population were once agents in a German history which consisted of Nazis, as well as non-Nazis. This is in an attempt to question the way in which the historical experience of the GDR has been monopolised by a single, state-sanctioned interpretation, and as Karl-Heinz Schoeps suggests, to deconstruct

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69 Tom Biburger interprets the dramatis personae of *Der Lohndrücker* as types which would have been immediately recognisable to the play’s audiences, but, as we shall see below, even this simplification of characters to types, is not tenable: Biburger, *Sprengsätze*, pp. 40-90.
the myth of the GDR as an anti-fascist state.\textsuperscript{70} Balke, for example, once denounced Schorn to the Nazis for sabotaging the production of hand grenades (\textit{L}, 127). Another worker, Zemke, left a communist organisation to join the SA, and is completely disaffected with both (\textit{L}, 135). Almost every worker in \textit{Der Lohndrücker} has some prior involvement with the National Socialists. This lends credence to the factory director’s statement that he cannot trust the workers, particularly as we see consecutive attempts to sabotage Balke’s work. In this sense, the text illustrates the difficulties of building socialism and a new socialist consciousness in the GDR so long as it follows a Soviet trajectory, and not one which draws on the historical experience of its population. History cannot be so easily overwritten. After Schorn has confronted Balke with the latter’s Nazi past, Balke asks him, ‘Was gewesen ist, kannst du das begraben?’; Schorn answers bluntly: ‘Nein’ (\textit{L}, 128).\textsuperscript{71}

Mäde’s production made every effort to shape the spectators’ experience of the piece as part of an historical continuity. The slim programme plots a trajectory from the end of the Second World War and the destruction of East German industry to 1957. In doing so, it situates the play within a narrative of the rebuilding of German industry. Printed on a photograph depicting a destroyed factory, we read: ‘1946. Durch Volksentscheid in Sachsen werden Betriebe der Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher Volkseigentum.’\textsuperscript{72} This caption nicely illustrates the façade of democracy in the GDR: it presents the nationalisation of local (and national) industry as a quasi-democratic, regional process, not imposed by a centralised state. The trajectory follows Garbe’s achievement, and superimposes a facsimile of an anonymous death threat he received on top of an image of a fire on Potsdamer Platz during the 17 June Uprising. The caption for this photo follows the state-sanctioned interpretation of the Uprising, calling it ‘[e]in Putschversuch faschistischer Provokateure und Agenten ausländischer Mächte’. In so doing, it draws a fascist affinity between the author of Garbe’s death threat and the Western agitators of 17 June. This story finishes at the building of ‘Schwarze Pumpe’, the subject of \textit{Die Korrektur}. In the middle of the programme, we find photographs of Max Grundig, a Western industrialist, who greatly profited from producing electrical goods during the war and then continued to profit thereafter,\textsuperscript{73} alongside cuttings from an article about the harsh reality of working in his factories from the West German magazine, \textit{Der Spiegel}. Through the addition of this material, we can see more clearly that

\textsuperscript{70} Schoeps, \textit{‘Der Lohndrücker Revisited’}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{71} This exchange is so central to \textit{Der Lohndrücker}, that it was later adopted as the tag-line for Müller’s 1988 production of \textit{Der Lohndrücker}.
\textsuperscript{72} Der Lohndrücker. \textit{Die Korrektur}. Theatre Programme (East Berlin: Maxim Gorki Theater, 1958), unpaginated.
the producer of the programme for the performance wished to follow the SED’s line in closing the gap between Westerners and Nazis, and explaining away the Western Wirtschaftswunder in these terms, claiming the moral high ground.

Despite these efforts, however, there is some room within the programme to see through its attempt at presenting the official model of GDR history. In 1958, the 17 June Uprising was still a fairly recent occurrence which had involved many committed East Germans and not just Western fascist provocateurs; in this light, the caption about a free choice amongst the electorate to nationalise industry may have seemed yet another case of historical whitewashing. Indeed, to some, a note contained in the programme asking for audience feedback on the production may have appeared no more than an ironic gesture given the distinct lack of a public voice involved in the narrative depicted in the programme.

The programme seems clearly to identify historical continuity, but only within the GDR, and between 1946 and 1957, confining fascism and capitalism to the West. As we can see from the majority of East German reviews of this production, this had the presumably intended effect of affirming the state-endorsed interpretation of history. According to reviewers, those resisting the path towards socialism demonstrated in the play came across as no better than fascist agitators, stuck in the old ways. Indeed, many reviewers noted that the combination of Der Lohndrücker and Die Korrektur provided a history of the development of the improvement of the mentality of the workforce in the GDR.\(^74\) Alfredo Maderno commented that Der Lohndrücker is about overcoming ‘die Verfälschung des Sozialismus durch den Faschismus’,\(^75\) which, for Rainer Kerndl, was all the more urgent, given the ‘bis zum Haß reichende Feindschaft seiner [Balkes] vom Kapitalismus und Faschismus verwirrten Kollegen’\(^76\). While we must be careful with newspaper reviews in the context of the GDR, owing to degrees of self-censorship and alignment with the Party narrative amongst journalists, we can, however, reach one conclusion: the methods employed in Mäde’s production served to steer some spectators’ responses towards the prevailing, state-endorsed historical consciousness, and not to address the clear presence of myriad legitimate German histories within the text. I shall investigate further below how it is that Mäde’s production further served to achieve this effect through acting style and other means.

Given the way in which Müller treats German history in Der Lohndrücker, we can see that he is clearly making an attempt to communicate with German audiences. Through


his subject matter, he wishes to create an opportunity for German history to re-enter debates regarding the construction of socialism in the GDR. Furthermore, Müller’s text is full of the potential for engaging audience members in discussion and therefore engendering a new audience. This audience has the possibility to participate in politics and change its reality, unlike the workers depicted in *Der Lohndrücker*. It is in this context that *Produktion* is of importance.

2.5 ‘Eine Geschichte aus der Produktion’

The first edition of *Der Lohndrücker* carries a brief preface, the first half of which talks of a new audience:

> Das Stück versucht nicht, den Kampf zwischen Altem und Neuem, den ein Stückschreiber nicht entscheiden kann, als mit dem Sieg des Neuen vor dem letzten Vorhang abgeschlossen darzustellen; es versucht, ihn in das neue Publikum zu tragen, das ihn entscheidet. (L, 116)

From the very start, Müller sets out the play’s rhetorical position: *Der Lohndrücker* has nothing to teach an audience; rather, it calls for audience members to actively engage in the work and the conflict between old and new within it, making their own decisions about the material presented to them. In this respect, the text attests to a level of openness which, as noted above, ran contrary to the state-endorsed understanding of the political efficacy of theatre as a means to educating and homogenising an audience.

Müller is clearly concerned with the production of an audience which is not homogeneous or committed to the Party line, but punctuated by difference. The notion of *Produktion* is central to understanding Müller’s aesthetic in *Der Lohndrücker*. *Produktion* must be understood, as Janine Ludwig notes, in the sense of ‘die Produktion des Menschen im Übergang aus seiner Vorgeschichte in seine Geschichte’; that is, producing people who are the subjects of history, its agents, as opposed to its objects. *Der Lohndrücker* was subsequently published in the first volume of collected texts by Müller, *Geschichten aus der Produktion 1* in 1974, confirming its concern with *Produktion*.

In an East German interview in 1966, Müller states:

> Wenn bei uns [in der DDR] etwas gebaut wird, ein Kraftwerk oder ein Wohnblock, dann wird mehr gebaut als nur ein Kraftwerk oder ein

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78 Heiner Müller, *Der Lohndrücker*, in *Geschichten aus der Produktion 1*, pp. 15-44.
In an age in which the role of the East German populace is to rescue the GDR’s economy and build socialism, there needs to be a new sort of socialist person to do so; this person is created through his/her own act of producing. Yet, as Müller writes in 1953: ‘Die das Neue schaffen, sind noch nicht neue Menschen. Erst das von ihnen Geschaffene formt sie selbst.’ That is, the new person can only be produced by what s/he produces in turn. As the longer citation above illustrates, this is because the act of producing itself generates the new consciousness, rendering the person undertaking it new. But, we may ask, how does Müller attempt to achieve this in his audience? As we shall see, it is through creating spaces for the spectators to undertake their own interpretative work, and therefore produce their own readings of their collective experience. These spaces come about in two major ways: firstly, the rendering of ambiguity through the combination of that which appears on stage with historical reality; and secondly, in the form of silence.

### 2.5.1 Ambiguity and Ambivalence

As a text, _Der Lohndrücker_ attempts to disturb the hegemonic way of viewing historical reality in the GDR, and one means by which it does so is by treating history as material, which has no singular interpretation. The strategies employed within _Der Lohndrücker_ clearly set out to open GDR history to varying interpretations from different spectators, and the clearest example of this strategy is the story of Balke. Given Müller’s references to old and new, and the _Produktion_ of new people, it would be fair to presume that Balke, the protagonist of the play, demonstrates one such figure, and, to this extent, serves as an example of an exemplary _Neuerer_. Balke’s character is, however, not so easily decipherable.

Balke’s actions are cast in the discourse of _Aufbau_ and are clearly new, breaking the boundaries of what his colleagues deem possible. Balke’s intentions for undertaking his repair of the kiln are, however, not clear. In scene 2, Balke answers his co-workers’ complaints regarding the high cost of butter with the assertion: ‘Wir müssen die Butter billiger machen’ (_L_, 119). Challenged by Karras to tell them how to lower the costs of consumer goods, Balke simply answers, ‘Besser arbeiten’ (_L_, 119), which is what he endeavours to do in the rest of the play. Audiences of _Der Lohndrücker_ at the Maxim Gorki

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80 Heiner Müller, ‘Sieg des Realismus’, in _W8_, pp. 52-6 (p. 54).
Theater were well aware of the historical example of Garbe; this link was further strengthened in the programme, which gave the setting for the play as ‘1949/50’, as opposed to the ‘1948/49’ \((L, 116)\) offered by the original text. Furthermore, an article previewing the production for what was initially to be its première in April 1958 outlines certain processes involved in bringing the production to the stage; this article includes a sketch of Garbe, whom it describes as ‘das Vorbild für den Haupthelden des Stückes’, who has taught the actors about his historical achievement.\(^{81}\) Faced with this, it would seem reasonable that the audience might reflect that Balke is entirely right: indeed, immediately following Garbe’s achievement, according to the East German women’s magazine, \textit{Die Frau von heute}, the price of butter fell by a staggering 79% from 65DM to 14DM per 500g between November 1948 and July 1950.\(^{82}\) This improvement continued into the late 1950s, at which time the GDR economy was on an upward trajectory, and appeared to be challenging that of the FRG.\(^{83}\)

Then again, given the state’s aims to engender a socialist consciousness in its public, we might ask: does the text show Balke to be driven by the moral of \textit{Aufbau} or something else? As many commentators have noticed, the language uttered by the characters of \textit{Der Lohndrücker} clearly avoids psychologisation;\(^{84}\) the motives for Balke’s actions cannot, therefore, be read from his psychology, rather from his material situation.\(^{85}\) In not presenting the psychologies of his characters, Müller demonstrates an affinity with Brecht. In Brechtian Epic theatre, rather than experiencing (‘miterleben’), the spectator studies the activities on stage, reducing the role of \textit{Einfühlung}.\(^{86}\) As we hear in the very first scene, Balke has ‘eine Prämie eingesteckt’ \((L, 116)\), and thus is paid more than his co-workers as an incentive to increase his productivity. This inequality between workers was, however, an integral part of the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of socialism, as endorsed by both the SED and the CPSU. For Lenin himself, inequality was a necessary stage on the path to communism,\(^{87}\) as ‘the society which is emerging from the womb of capitalism’ bears many of the latter’s traits.\(^{88}\)

\(^{85}\) See: Greiner, \textit{Allegorie zur Idylle}, p. 88.
\(^{86}\) See: Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper \textit{Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny}’, \textit{BFA} 24, p. 78.
\(^{87}\) Lenin, \textit{State and Revolution}, p. 341.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., p. 346. Emphasis in original.
As the play develops, Balke’s actions appear to be more influenced by the possibility of material gain. In a telling dialogue with the factory accountant in scene 6a, Balke demands a premium for his work:

**BUCHHALTER (zu Balke):** Ihnen soll ich 400 Prozent auszahlen. Da kriegen Sie wohl das Geld für Herrn Lerka mit?
**BALKE:** Ja, 400. Nach der alten Norm. *(Zu Kant:)* Das muß ich verlangen. Sonst kriegen wir die neue Norm nicht, die wir brauchen. Wenn mans ihnen schwer macht, machen sie sichs leicht. *(L, 125)*

Just before this, the text has presented Lerka’s altercation with the director, which has cost the former his job. The accountant’s question regarding whether Balke is collecting Lerka’s pay goes unanswered, so is left to the audience’s imagination. Furthermore, although Balke has previously stated that consumer prices can only be lowered if new norms are established, he wishes to receive his pay according to the old norm, giving him a pay rise of 400%. Balke is the only person to receive this premium for his work, and so has a material advantage over his co-workers. But is Balke asking for the old norm to be kept in order to incentivise his co-workers to pursue similar achievements and an improvement of their material conditions? Or does he have his own relative material well-being in mind?

Only three short scenes later, in scene 7b, we see Balke at home with his wife in a setting which clearly indicates a poor standard of living: ‘Zimmer Balkes mit rissiger Wand. Trübes Licht’ *(L, 128).* The following exchange takes place between the two:

**DIE FRAU:** Die Wand hat Risse, daß der Wind durchgeht. Du bist Maurer. Willst du warten, bis wir ganz im Freien wohnen?
**BALKE:** Im Betrieb ist ein Ofen gerissen. Er darf nicht ausfallen. Ich muß ausrechnen, wie ich es machen kann. *(L, 128)*

Balke’s wife’s mention of their desperate circumstances highlights their material hardship. She appeals to Balke’s professional capabilities in order to repair their own wall, but Balke’s response appears a non-sequitur: he does not mention why the repair of the kiln at the factory bears any relation to the hole in his wall at home. Clearly, he implies that productivity at the work-place must be prioritised over his personal material concerns. But again, it is unclear whether Balke prioritises the one over the other out of a desire to increase living standards for all, or whether to make his life more habitable: in the latter case he would not be a *Held der Arbe* possessing a new socialist consciousness, but rather a canny opportunist.
While Andreas Keller comments that Müller’s text allows audience members to watch how characters arrive at a certain motivation, Marianne Streisand argues that *Der Lohndrücker* offers neither Balke’s motivation nor a process of change in his consciousness. As we have seen above, Streisand’s reading is closer to the mark: Müller’s text enables numerous contrasting readings, allowing audience members to form their own interpretations of Balke’s motives. Moreover, in the light of Krüger’s explanation to his university-educated son in scene 12b, ‘Ihr habt kein Buch vor der Nase, wenn wir nicht mit allen vierlen arbeiten’ (*L*, 137), Balke’s deeds may appear to be relatively short-sighted in that he fails to appeal to a future generation’s well-being to justify his actions.

Müller very clearly fills *Der Lohndrücker* with the potential to elicit varying, different responses from his audiences. Kalb suggests that this is a technique of giving ‘discrete social and historical dilemmas for dialectical consideration by “the new public”’, and, as we have seen, the dilemma of Balke/Garbe draws on a good deal of historical material of which spectators were aware. Müller’s choice of title for the play is itself a means of engaging audience members to question the prevalent interpretation of historical reality: is Balke, and, by extension, was Garbe, as the title of the play suggests, a *Lohndrücker*, or is he a *Held der Arbeit*, or both?

Balke is not the only character who is ambiguous. *Der Lohndrücker*’s dramatis personae as a whole are highly dialectical figures who resist easy synthesis. Brillenträger, for example, wears glasses, although he is clearly indicated in the text as ‘kurzsichtig’ (*L*, 117). Biburger therefore reads Brillenträger as a type, who is ‘unmündig und unpolitisch’ and potentially destructive through his ‘Dummheit und Kurzsichtigkeit’. Yet while the glasses may be a purely dramaturgical measure to denote that Brillenträger is short-sighted, and grant him the allegorical dimension of political short-sightedness, it may be an indication to some spectators that, despite his vision being corrected, he still cannot take a long view on the development of socialism. In this sense, we can even chart certain similarities between Brillenträger and Balke. The very end of the play is perhaps the most ambiguous moment of all. As Balke and Karras go off to work in the kilns together, their animosity towards one another is still fresh from the previous scene. But have they put their enmity aside for the sake of socialism, or as a result of realising that they must make some material gain for their own good? Furthermore, they are followed by Kolbe, who has announced his refusal to work

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92 Biburger, *Sprengsätze*, p. 44.
‘mit einem Denunzianten’ (L, 141) in the penultimate scene: does Kolbe join Balke and Karras to help in repairing the kilns, or does another act of sabotage lurk around the corner? This potential within the text to invite multiple readings clearly contributed to Kurella’s insistence that Der Lohndrücker was dramaturgically too open for East Berlin audiences. Mäde’s production, however, appeared to present a teacherly stance, which ironically led to its falling out of favour with the SED following Ulbricht’s attack on so-called ‘didaktisches Lehrtheater’ in 1959. This is a result of Mäde’s method in staging the piece as a piece of naturalist theatre: the set appears to have portrayed a realistic scene of a dilapidated factory and made every attempt to provide realistic depictions of the surroundings, such as the factory’s shop and the kiln being built throughout the play (see figure 2.1). In terms of

Fig. 2.1. Werner Schulz-Wittan as Krüger, Manfred Borges as Kolbe, and Erich Mirek as Balke (Eva Kemlein, Stadtmuseum Berlin)

costumes, it is clear from photographs, that these were typical of their time inasmuch as the workers wore the sort of clothing that would have been characteristic of factory workers in the GDR. As for acting, Mäde made every attempt to steer his actors towards Stanislavskian techniques: Hilmar Thate, who played the reporter in the production, claims in his 2006 autobiography that, when rehearsing for this production he attempted to deliver a monologue
in the style of a Brechtian actor and without emphasis, only to be made to attend an
ensemble meeting in which Brecht’s techniques were damned and Stanislavski’s system
praised.\(^{93}\) Indeed, according to the theatre critic Martin Linzer, Mäde had begun to develop a
‘Dramaturgie des Positiven’, which relied heavily on Stanislavskian and Soviet techniques in
the presentation of SED-friendly presentations of social conflict.\(^{94}\) The resultant production,
therefore, was thoroughly naturalistic,\(^{95}\) and sought to provide motivations to characters’
actions and steer its audience’s responses accordingly.

Visitors to the Maxim Gorki Theater found the same artwork used for the poster of
the production as for the front cover of the programme: this consisted of a background of a
list, showing the amounts of pay received by the workers depicted in the play (see figure 2.2). In this list, one row stands out in particular: Balke, written in bold, is to be paid
362,27DM, whereas his co-workers will receive in the region of 87,12DM to 89,23DM, with
the exception of Lerka, who has received 104,80DM. Printed over the top of this are the
titles of the two plays, Der Lohndrücker and Die Korrektur, in a reddish pink. These are
written in the style of graffiti, which anticipates the writing on the death threat delivered to
Garbe, printed inside. To this extent, the advertising and programme indicate an attempt to
steer an audience towards reading the title Der Lohndrücker as expressing the fascist,
capitalist opinion of the workers who sabotage Balke’s work. Against the backdrop of the
wages of the factory employees, the title instantly becomes questionable: the far left column
shows that the ‘Abschlag’, that is the anticipated payment for each employee, is 75DM,
which all have exceeded. Balke has merely exceeded this payment to a much higher degree
than any of his co-workers, so cannot be seen as a ‘Lohndrücker’. Furthermore, the title of
Die Korrektur printed below this indicates a potential correction in the work force; this is
demonstrated in the second draft of Die Korrektur, which finishes with a clear affirmation of
the SED’s economic policies:

Links und links im Schritt der Fünfjahrpläne
Reißen wir aus der krepierenden alten
Die neue Welt.\(^{96}\)

\(^{93}\) See: Hilmar Thate, Neulich, als ich noch Kind war. Autobiografie – Versuch eines Zeitgenossen
\(^{94}\) Martin Linzer, ‘Ich war immer ein Opportunist... ’ 12 Gespräche über Theater und das Leben in der
DDR, über geliebte und ungeliebte Zeitgenossen, aufgezeichnet von Nikolaus Merck (Berlin: Theater
\(^{95}\) See: Marianne Streisand, ‘Der Lohndrücker. Rezeptionsgeschichte als Entdeckungsgeschichte von
Text-Schichten’, Blätter des Deutschen Theaters 10 (March 1988): 276-89 (pp. 280-2); and Streisand,
\(^{96}\) Heiner Müller, Die Korrektur [II], in W3, pp. 127-46 (p. 146).
Not only did the programme and poster for the production prepare audiences for an experience which affirmed the historical role of figures such as Garbe in the building of socialism in Germany, but press previews and reviews had a part to play too. Photographs printed in newspapers to publicise Mäde’s production tended to present Erich Mirek in the role of Balke, posing as if deep in thought and resolute (see figure 2.3). This concentration on Balke as the main character, and, as a thoughtful hero, was reinforced by his appearance as the first named character in the dramatis personae printed in the programme. Given the

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Fig. 2.3. Publicity photo for Der Lohndrücker, showing Erich Mirek as Balke on the right (Abraham Pisarek, Stadtmuseum Berlin)
naturalist, Stanislavskian methods usually deployed in productions at the Maxim Gorki Theater, audiences acquainted with the productions at this theatre would doubtless have attempted to find a psychologically-motivated hero in the piece. Furthermore, those spectators familiar with Socialist Realist theatre of the time would have expected to find in *Der Lohndrücker* and *Die Korrektur* a positive hero who would overcome the contradictions inherent in a developing socialist society. As stage manuscripts for the production show, Mäde clearly attempted to cast Balke as a positive hero, leading his comrades to a socialist future: at the very end of the play, Balke was to be three steps ahead of his colleagues when walking into the gates of the factory to resume work on the kilns. In this sense, Mäde’s production attempted to drive much of the ambiguity out of the play. Previews of both the Leipzig and Berlin productions of *Der Lohndrücker* emphasised the positive outcome of the play, describing Balke’s role as a *Neuerer*, who changes the consciousness of those around him.

Given the influences of reviews, previews, marketing, programmes, and the acting style adopted at the Maxim Gorki Theater, was there room for multiple, differing interpretations of Balke? Some reviewers of the play regarded *Der Lohndrücker* as optimistic about the building of a new socialist consciousness, with Balke as a clear hero, teaching his co-workers that they must work together for the building of socialism. Lothar Kusche connected the education of Balke’s colleagues with that of the audience: in the production, he saw ‘wie das Bewußtsein der Arbeiter gebildet wurde’, further forming ‘– wo notwendig – das der Zuschauer’. Dieter Kranz writes that, despite their initial opposition to his efforts, Balke’s co-workers begin to see, ‘daß Balke richtig gehandelt hat’. Referring to Mäde, Kranz adds, in every scene ‘spürt man […] die Parteilichkeit des Marxisten’, showing he understood the production to be dedicated to the SED’s brand of socialism. Notably, a Western reviewer read the production as putting Ulbricht’s socialist vision on

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98 There is not space at present to formulate a longer discussion of Socialist Realism in the GDR, particularly given its internal variation, owing to the lack of a consensus on what constituted a socialist realist aesthetic in the GDR, unlike in the Soviet Union: Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 121. For examples of contemporary discussions of Socialist Realism within the GDR, see: Peter Hacks, Harald Hauser, Joachim Knauth, Hans Pfeiffer, and Hedda Zinner, ‘Das Theater der Gegenwart’, *NDL* 5/4 (1957): 127–34; Peter Hacks, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, *NDL* 5/10 (1957): 90–104; and Hans Kaufmann, ‘Ästhetische Probleme der ältesten und der jüngsten sozialistischen deutschen Literatur’, *Junge Kunst* 1958/12: 76–80.


101 See: Edel, ‘“Der Lohndrücker” und “Die Korrektur”’.


103 Kranz, ‘Zwei produktive Versuche’, p. 44.

104 Ibid., p. 45.
stage, and as wishful thinking, whereby only Balke is ‘immun gegen den allgemeinen Mißmut’ of his time. While we may be tempted to explain some of these reactions as partly the result of self-censorship, their conclusions are by no means unfounded: according to Linzer, Mäde was a dedicated SED member and a favourite of Ulbricht, and Mäde’s production went down in the official SED-sanctioned history of GDR theatre as a piece of ‘responsible’ theatre, which would aid in society’s progress towards socialism and increase productivity. The use of Stanislavkian techniques and combination with Die Korrektur had driven out the problematic openness of Müller’s text.

While some reviewers saw a clear hero and message in Mäde’s production, others complained of difficulty in locating a heroic character. Evidently expecting to find a hero in the production, an East German reviewer, A. Kossert, protested that, ‘der Zuschauer, der bereit ist, mit dem Helden zu fühlen, sich für ihn zu begeistern, hat kaum einmal Gelegenheit dazu’. Fritz Erpenbeck complained that the character of Balke was not developed enough, resulting in a lack of clarity about his motives, which Walther Pollatschek found to be a weakness of Müller’s writing. Kerndl followed this criticism, noting that Balke’s motives were not clear, and that the production lacked characterisation of the figures within it, because of Müller’s writing style; yet, Kerndl lauded the production’s creation of a collective of actors. The socialist utopia of collective work was noted by some critics, who found that the lack of characterisation of the production showed, in one reviewer’s words, the ‘revolutionäre Kraft der Arbeiterklasse’ as a whole. As Rolf-Dieter Eichler wrote for the East Berlin National-Zeitung: ‘Es steht ein Kollektiv auf der Bühne. Jede der durchweg sehr profiliert aufgefaßten Rollen […] lebt von den anderen.’ This comment is striking both for the fact that Eichler read the performance as producing sufficient personalities for the characters, and for its mention of this individualisation as being essential to the building of a collective on stage.

108 Kossert, ‘Lohndrücker und Korrektur’.
110 See: Pollatschek, ‘Vom sicheren Sieg’.
111 See: Kerndl, ‘Das ist neue, junge Dramatik!’.
112 Anon., ‘“Der Lohndrücker” und “Die Korrektur”’.
Willi Köhler, writing for *Neues Deutschland*, the newspaper affiliated to the Central Committee of the SED, found the collective built on the stage in Mäde’s production so convincing, and the message within it of the need to increase working norms and build a socialist workforce so clear, that he pleads to the reader: ‘Sorgt dafür, daß sich die Arbeiter diese beiden Stücke ansehen. Sie werden sich alle in diesem oder jenem Arbeiter auf der Bühne wiedererkennen, und sie werden das Theater nicht ohne Nutzen verlassen.’ Mäde’s production was indeed performed before a group of workers on 15 June 1959. Given the announcement of the Seven Year Plan in 1959, the need to increase productivity norms and the dangers of ‘Normenschaukelei’ were recognised by many workers, and discussed during the interval and after the performance. According to the documentation of this performance, which solely consists of newspaper reviews, most of the discussion between the workers centred on the question of how realistic a portrayal of working life it was. One worker, for example, complained that it could be boring for people who work in factories, while another lauded this realism, saying: ‘Auf der Bühne wurde richtig gezeigt, wie es im Leben zugeht.’ There is no mention of the character of Balke and his relationship to Garbe; combined with the degree to which the performance faithfully depicted work in a factory, this perhaps attests to the lack of individuality and the focus on collective work in the workers’ own labour. Nonetheless, one worker commented, ‘[w]er ein kleines bissel mitdenkt, der begreift, das ist die Richtung, in der wir marschieren’, indicating that it required very little effort to gain a lesson from the performance, and that it was true to the direction in which industry was developing as it edged closer to the Soviet Union’s industrial model at the end of the 1950s. We must keep in mind, however, that any politically controversial utterances from audience members at this performance would not have been printed. Moreover, comments may even have been fabricated by the authors of these reviews; they can, therefore, tell us only little about what the workers thought about the production.

As we can see from the above discussion of the audiences of Mäde’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* and *Die Korrektur*, there was no consensus amongst interpretations of Balke. This demonstrates one example of the extent to which the techniques employed to create ambiguity in Müller’s text shone through Mäde’s production. Yet, an over-riding positivity was seen in the production, given how the spectators’ experiences were guided by

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117 Ibid.
dramaturgical techniques both on and off the stage, including the marketing, acting-style, and programme; this was duly noted by the one Western reviewer cited above. This positivity was clearly influenced by the nature of public discourse at the time, in which the pursuit of further Soviet-style economic policy decisions may have appeared to be historically justified, due to the SED’s apparent success in raising living conditions since 1949.

2.5.2 The Sound of Silence

The openness of Müller’s text is enhanced by the insertion of silences and pauses into it. On one level, the language of the workers itself is mimetic of the silencing of discourse and the inability to discuss reality.\(^\text{118}\) On another level, the silences within the text further create the possibility for discussion about what has been portrayed on stage and its relationship to German history and the project of Aufbau. Indeed, silence lies at the heart of Der Lohndrücker’s potential to instigate dialogue with its audiences: through encouraging its spectators to develop different possible responses at every turn, Der Lohndrücker attempts to produce an audience which is characterised by internal variation and discussion. As we shall see, these elements of the textual politics of Der Lohndrücker borrow from Brechtian Epic theatrical techniques.\(^\text{119}\)

Formally, Der Lohndrücker is composed of a series of short scenes. For Loren Kruger, these scenes are linked conceptually, rather than by an effort to immediately advance the plot.\(^\text{120}\) This may be true to some extent of the 1988 staged edition that Krüger examines, but it does not apply to the text in its original and performed versions, in which there are clear plot links between scenes. Nonetheless, the play is indeed structured to incorporate silences between its scenes. In this respect, it shares much with Brecht’s Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches (1935-43), a montage of thematically connected, yet otherwise disparate scenes, exploring conditions in the Third Reich.\(^\text{121}\)

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\(^\text{118}\) There is no space at present to discuss this facet of the text further, but, for a more in-depth discussion of the language of Der Lohndrücker, see: Michael Wood, “‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat [nur] genannt werden darf’: The Language of Participation in Heiner Müller’s Der Lohndrücker”, Modern Language Review 109/1 (2014): 160-77.

\(^\text{119}\) The link between Epic devices and Der Lohndrücker has been noted by some critics, but barely elucidated. See, for example: Emmerich, Kleine Literaturgeschichte, pp. 159-61; and Hans-Thies Lehmann, ‘Ästhetik des Textes – Ästhetik des Theaters. Heiner Müller’s Der Lohndrücker in Ostberlin’, in Spiele und Spiegelungen, pp. 51-62 (p. 53).


\(^\text{121}\) See: Bertolt Brecht, Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches, in BFA 4, pp. 339-455.
Lohndrücker, the possible tensions are further heightened and increased in number: rather than providing resolution, Müller invites audience reflection, in turn allowing for the construction of meaning. In scene 4, for example, in which Balke and Lerka undertake their first attempt to repair the kiln, Balke challenges Lerka’s working method, which he deems to be inefficient, and questions Lerka on his use of bricks which are not yet dry. The scene ends:

BALKE: Lerka, weißt du, was du machst, wenn du mit feuchten Steinen mauerst?
(Brillenträger bringt feuchte Steine, Lerka mauert.)
LERKA: Tempo oder Qualität. Alles können sie nicht haben.
LERKA (nervös): Wer hat mir was zu sagen? Der Laden hier ist volkseigen, stimmt’s? Ich bin das Volk, verstehst du.
BALKE (schweigt.) (L, 121)

The ending of this scene poses more questions than it could hope to answer: is it possible for both the tempo and the quality of production to be at a high level? If so, at what cost to the person performing the action? Furthermore, does Lerka’s claim of ‘Ich bin das Volk’ demonstrate his commitment to socialism, or is it a category mistake on his behalf, whereby he fallaciously considers his purely individual interests to be one and the same as those of the societal whole? The ambiguity of this scene is further heightened by the fact that it is Brillenträger, already an ambiguous character, who brings the damp bricks. In the next scene, we move from the fire of the kilns to the director’s office, in which we meet a conceptual link to scene 4 in the form of low-quality consumer goods and a shortage of necessary goods: the director’s secretary, Fräulein Matz constantly reapplies her lipstick, complaining to the director, ‘Kann ich dafür, daß der Lippenstift nichts taugt? (L, 122); the director has difficulty in producing a lather from his shaving soap (L, 123); and Geschke is told by Schurek that it is not possible for him to acquire a pair of work shoes at the moment, so he must work barefoot (L, 122). These conceptual links supplement the advancement of the plot: the scene moves towards Kant announcing that the attempt to rebuild the kiln has failed, and Lerka is eventually accused of sabotage. The pause between the scenes enables the audience to consider the material of the previous scene before its outcome is shown and further problematised in the next.

Spaces between scenes are not the only form of silence in the text: the dialogue is also punctuated by silences or pauses indicated in the stage directions, or necessitated

through the presentation of purely physical action. After Schorn has approached Balke about 
having denounced him during the war in scene 7a, Balke attempts to defend himself. The 
resulting conversation is filled with directions for silence:

BALKE: [...] Ich war auch dafür, daß man den Krieg abkürzt, aber mich 
hätten sie den Kopf abgekürzt, wenns ohne mich herauskam.

SCHORN (kalt): Vielleicht. (Schweigen.) Was war da für ein Streit in der 
Kantine heute mittag?

BALKE: Das ging gegen mich. Lohndrücker, Arbeiterverräter und 
dergleichen. (Pause.)

SCHORN: Sag es mir, wenn sie dir Schwierigkeiten machen. (Pause.)

BALKE: Was gewesen ist, kannst du das begraben?

SCHORN: Nein. (L, 127-8)

Each of the silences indicated in the stage directions opens a space for the input of the 
audience, inviting spectators to think about what is happening in all of its complexity. In this 
sense, the silences both within and between scenes function as spaces for the entry of the 
spectators into the play; silences between scenes disrupt any potential for theatrical illusion, 
thus, in Brecht’s terminology, enhancing the ‘Diskutierbarkeit’ of the piece.123

It is not purely for its montage structure that Furcht und Elend serves as a good point 
of comparison for Der Lohndrücker: for John and Ann White, the main Epic device 
employed in the former is silence.124 In his essay on the première of Furcht und Elend in 
Paris in 1938, Walter Benjamin regards the piece as exemplary of the Epic form, although, 
he finds, this cannot be gleaned from reading the text.125 Considering Epic theatre, Benjamin 
writes:

Das epische Theater seinerseits rückt [...] in Stöße vor. [...] Die Songs, die 
Beschriftungen im Bühnenbilde, die gestischen Konventionen der Spielenden 
heben die eine Situation von der andern ab. So entstehen überall Intervalle, 
die die Illusion des Publikums eher beeinträchtigen. Diese Intervalle sind 
seiner kritischen Stellungnahme, seinem Nachdenken reserviert.126

While Der Lohndrücker contains neither songs nor placards announcing what is to come in 
the following scene, the moments of silence serve as intervals in Benjamin’s sense. That is,

123 Brecht, ‘Anmerkung zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny’, BFA 24, p. 81. See also: 

124 John J. White and Ann White, Bertolt Brecht’s Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches. A German 
Exile Drama in the Struggle against Fascism (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 84-5.

125 See: Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf. Zur 
Uraufführung von acht Einaktern Brechts’, in Gesammelte Schriften in 7 vols, ed. by Rolf Tiedmann 
and Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972-1991) [=BGS], vol. 2.2: Aufsätze, 

126 Ibid., pp. 515-6.
the silences in Müller’s text disrupt the plot’s movement forward, awakening interest in the audience and inviting response. In this sense, the silences form part of a movement between history and the future within the text, whereby silence figures as a necessary part in a trajectory forward.

A model for this movement can be located in Müller’s image of ‘Der glücklose Engel’ from the 1950s. Here, Müller presents an image of history, taking his lead from Benjamin’s ‘Engel der Geschichte’. Unlike Benjamin’s angel, Müller’s hapless angel faces the future, as the debris of history piles up on its wings, slowing its flight along the way. Moreover, the future faced by ‘Der glücklose Engel’ is not the paradise promised in Benjamin’s model: in Arlene Teraoka’s words, ‘Müller’s figure is threatened, oppressed, suffocated by both past and future.’ Yet, Müller’s angel comes to a pause:

Dann schließt sich über ihm der Augenblick: auf dem schnell verschütteten Stehplatz kommt der glücklose Engel zur Ruhe, wartend auf Geschichte in der Versteinerung von Flug Blick Atem. Bis das erneute Rauschen mächtiger Flügelschläge sich in Wellen durch den Stein fortpflanzt und seinen Flug anzeigt.

Weighted down by history, the angel comes to a halt, and waits for history before it can resume its difficult trajectory towards the future. The pauses in Der Lohndrücker, too, work to this effect. As we have seen, Müller fills the text with the German histories of its characters, which are embedded in the German history shared by the audience: in the pauses and silences of Der Lohndrücker, audience members are asked to recognise their experiences of pre-GDR German history. They are also asked to question their relationship to the present building of socialism in the GDR and how it has been historically constructed to avoid the pan-German experience of the first half of the twentieth century. It is only once the past has been considered that there can be a future for socialism. In the case of the historical moments addressed in the text, through the insertion of silences, Müller grants spectators the opportunities for dialogue, which he saw as otherwise lacking in the aftermath of the 17 June Uprising, and, no doubt, of Hungary. In this light, the workers’ silence reflects and represents the way in which there was no opportunity for organised or individual opposition to the SED’s Soviet-styled economic and cultural policies after the 17 June Uprising; indeed, this lack of opportunity remained so in the late 1950s, as the suppressions in 1956 both

128 See: Walter Benjamin, Über den Begriff der Geschichte, in BGS 1.1, pp. 691-704 (pp. 697-8).
129 Teraoka, The Silence of Entropy, p.133.
130 Heiner Müller, ‘Der glücklose Engel’, in W1, p. 53.
within and outside of the GDR made clear. In the penultimate scene of *Der Lohndrücker*, the workers’ strike is instantly suppressed by the factory authorities, through words rather than physical force: Schorn and the director merely have to issue orders, such as ‘Das Bier wird bezahlt’ and ‘Geht an die Arbeit’ (*L*, 140) for them to be obediently followed.

The possibility for discourse, and therefore for the creation of a public which is qualitatively distinct from that of the everyday GDR cultural and political realm, is clearly anchored in the structure of Müller’s text, which creates numerous opportunities for audience reflection. Indeed, many previewers’ concerns that the text would offer a challenge to the technical capabilities of the theatre proved to be an overwhelmingly productive aspect of the piece, as it necessitated pauses between scenes. Mäde’s treatment of silences not necessitated by scene changes seems to indicate his own intentions for the reading of certain scenes in his production. In scene 7a, for example, in the exchange between Schorn and Balke regarding Balke’s previous denunciation of Schorn, while Müller’s text contains three silences, Mäde’s production removed all three. This suggests that Mäde was not concerned with highlighting Balke’s Nazi history and offering that to audience contemplation, preferring to advance the plot instead. Furthermore, in scene 12a, where the doctor asks Balke, ‘Was ist mit Ihrem Schädel, Balke? Wollten Sie wieder mit dem Kopf durch die Wand? Die Wand war stärker, wie?’ (*L*, 137), Mäde had the cast insert a two second pause between Balke’s answer, ‘Die Wand war ich’ (*L*, 137) and Krüger’s removal from the scene. Mäde’s insertion of silence at this point appears to have been intended to emphasise Balke’s inhuman effort in sacrificing his own physical health for the sake of building socialism.

The majority of silences and pauses in Mäde’s production were provided by the scene changes themselves, and, combined with the form of the language, were seen as opportunities for the audience to engage in thought, and used as such. Even though GDR audiences may have been familiar with Epic techniques partly through the popularity of *Furcht und Elend* following the Second World War, Kusche claimed that many spectators bemoaned the use of such techniques in *Der Lohndrücker*. Indeed, he wrote that many audience members complained, that ‘[d]as Publikum muß zuviel mitdenken.’ The overwhelming consensus amongst reviewers was, however, that the precision of the language engaged spectators in an overall healthy amount of intellectual participation. Peter

133 Stage manuscript, p. 16.
Edel found it to be ‘ein Genuß für den Mitdenkenden, die Dialektik solcher pointierten Dispute zu verfolgen, die mitunter in ein paar Zeilen den Gehalt einer ganzen Lektion konzentrieren’,\textsuperscript{137} and for a reviewer writing for \textit{Neue Zeit}, the concentration of the language of the play ‘ermöglicht es viele Fragen zu stellen, weil immer auch eine Antwort gefunden wird.’\textsuperscript{138} Notably, this second reviewer found the answers to be already within the play, rather than left open to the audience.

While reviewers tended to emphasise the quality of the language and its ability to engage the active participation of the audience in the form of thought, we find evidence that the production did lead to audiences discussing the production during the intervals. In the case of the performance shown to workers in June 1959, the short scenes facilitated conversation amongst the workers between scene changes, which grew ‘zu lebhaften Gesprächen’ during the interval between \textit{Der Lohndrücker} and \textit{Die Korrektur}.

The inclusion of a note asking for audience feedback in the programme for performances at the Maxim Gorki Theater helped to produce an atmosphere of free discussion in the audience, and this may have played a part in the amount of discussion apparently occurring between audience members.\textsuperscript{140} An audience member from the Wilmersdorf district of West Berlin commented that s/he could clearly see Brecht’s influence on the composition of the piece.\textsuperscript{141} Notably, this Western audience member believed the play to be socially critical, implying that some of the efforts to steer audience reception towards a lesson of political affirmation were of little effect on him/her; this is possibly because s/he had a different frame of reference regarding East German politics and society, given the presence of coverage critical of the GDR in West Berlin. Furthermore, s/he noted that the audience was captivated right until the end, indicating perhaps that s/he had some means of gauging this sustained interest.

This impression is confirmed by an East German spectator who took a group of school children to watch \textit{Der Lohndrücker} and \textit{Die Korrektur} on 23 November 1958. The spectator commented that, while during the scenes themselves there was utter silence, ‘[w]ährend des Szenenwechsels gab es selbstverständlich Gespräche – über die eben abgelaufene Szene. Das bestätigten alle Begleiter’.\textsuperscript{142} The author of this letter emphasised the sheer amount of discussion the performance provoked, stating, ‘Die Vorstellung war im Inhalt verständlich,\textsuperscript{137} Edel, ‘“Der Lohndrücker” und “Die Korrektur”’.


\textsuperscript{138} Stie, ‘Sie sahen ihre eigenen Probleme’.

\textsuperscript{139} See: Letter from F.C.S. to Artistic Directorship of the Maxim Gorki Theater, 30 November 1958, Maxim Gorki Theater Archiv [=MGTA], Lfd Nr. 38/39, unpaginated. For the sake of anonymity, the names of individual, unpublished audience members have been abbreviated.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{141} See: Letter from K.L. to Artistic Directorship of the Maxim Gorki Theater, 30 November 1958, MGTA Lfd Nr. 38/39, unpaginated.
die Kinder fühlten sich gefesselt und das Geschehen war für sie auf dem Heimweg Diskussionsstoff, although not relating the contents of these discussions. While these individual audience reactions tell us rather little about the details of their responses, they do tell us that the production proved productive in establishing the foundations for discussion amongst audience members.

2.6 Produktion and the Text

As we have seen through an exploration of Müller’s text of Der Lohndrücker and Mäde’s production of it, the possibilities for creating space for dialogue within the audience are strongly anchored in the text. In the years of the composition of Der Lohndrücker, public debates within the GDR signalled popular desire for a departure from the Soviet model of socialism and the path to it. Müller clearly thematises the absence of German history and German concerns in the prevailing partage du sensible in the East, and poses questions regarding how socialism might be built under these conditions. Furthermore, Der Lohndrücker attempts to create not an homogeneous ‘neue[s] Publikum’, but rather one which is characterised by dissensus, and thus lays the foundations for dialogue about the role of German history and German concerns in the project of Aufbau in the East. In this sense, Müller encourages an audience to become qualitatively different from the everyday experience of socialism in the East. While the critics and spectators of Mäde’s production provide us with limited insight into the intricacies of audiences’ thoughts and experiences, we can see that Mäde’s production could not avoid realising much of the political potential in Müller’s text: despite the production’s efforts to produce a pro-SED vision of the path to socialism, in which the atrocities of German history were attributed to the West, it still produced some differing responses and paved the way for discussion within the audience. Clearly the inclusion of an appeal to the audience for feedback in the programme signalled a desire on Mäde’s part to provoke discussion, but, as we have seen, Mäde’s idea of the form this discussion should take differs from that of Müller. Despite the instigation of debate in the late 1950s, Müller was to meet a similar concern in the wake of the Prague Spring of 1968, as Eastern European politics continued to march onwards on the path to Sovietized, undemocratic socialism.

143 Ibid.
Romans Watching Romans Watching Romans: Process and the Public Forum in *Der Horatier*, 1968-73

3.1 Heroes and Villains

While *Der Lohndrücker*’s protagonist Balke toes a fine line between hero and traitor, Müller places a wholly paradoxical being at the centre of *Der Horatier*. And like *Der Lohndrücker*, *Der Horatier* explores questions regarding democracy and attempts to render the recipient a productive participant in the theatre. *Der Horatier* was written twelve years later in 1968, however, and Müller’s concerns and methods are somewhat different to those of 1956-57.

*Der Horatier* appears to have been received hesitantly in the GDR: although a stage manuscript of the play for professional use was printed by the East German Henschel Verlag in 1969, it was another decade before its East German première at the Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater in Schwerin in 1979. Instead, *Der Horatier* was first printed for a wider public in the theatre programme accompanying its première in West Berlin in March 1973, and was first published in book format in the FRG in 1978. The delay in the first GDR staging of the text does not, however, necessarily indicate that *Der Horatier* is critical of Eastern European socialist society. While, according to Müller, most of *Der Horatier* was written in August and September 1968, and therefore against the backdrop of the quelling of the Prague Spring, the significance of this historic moment and the text’s treatment of it was not confined to the East. *Der Horatier* clearly attempts to encourage audiences to question the prevailing *partage du sensible* regarding the relationship between the individual and society in both capitalist and socialist or communist social realities, and to consider further just how democracy could work; this is most likely a reaction to the failure of the reform movement in Prague, which sought to carve out a new form of socialist democracy distinct from both Western democracy and traditional Eastern European democratic centralism. As we shall

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see, Müller had audience interaction in mind from the very beginning of his work on Der Horatier, and employs aspects of Brechtian Lehrstücke in inviting the audience into a process of public decision-making depicted on stage.

Müller adopts a story first recorded by the Roman historian Livy in his History of Rome (Ab Urbe Condita Libri, ca. 27-25 BC), which had since been treated in literary works including Pierre Corneille’s Horace (1640) and Brecht’s Lehrstück, Die Horatier und die Kuriatier (1933-34), to name but a few. Like Corneille and Brecht, Müller presents his version as a theatrical text, although his adaptation does not have the immediate appearance of a play: being devoid of dramatis personae or character attribution, it reads more like a piece of epic poetry in the style of Homer.

In Müller’s text, Rome and Alba stand ready to do battle. Both are threatened with imminent invasion by the Etruscans, so rather than both sacrificing their armies and leaving themselves defenceless, they cast lots to find one man from each army to fight in single combat; thus a Roman Horatian is chosen to fight an Alban Curiatian. As it turns out, the Curiatian is engaged to the Horatian’s sister, but neither combatant allows this to forbid the fight, in which the Horatian kills the Curiatian. He is then welcomed back to Rome as a hero. The Horatian’s sister, however, greets his return by mourning her fiancé, and so he kills her too. The Horatian has therefore saved his city and murdered his sister, and unrest breaks out amongst the Romans regarding whether the Horatian is to be treated as a ‘Sieger’ or a ‘Mörder’.

In order to prevent civil war and provide a united front against the Etruscans, representatives are chosen from amongst the Romans to argue for the Horatian’s fate. This occurs in three stages. First of all, should he be celebrated as a victor or executed as a murderer? He is first lauded with a laurel leaf, and then executed. Secondly, should his corpse be raised on their shields as that of a hero fallen in battle, or should it be cast to the dogs, as that of a villain? Again, both take place. Finally comes the question of posterity: ‘Wie soll der Horatier genannt werden der Nachwelt?’ (H, 84). It is decided that so neither of his deeds be forgotten, he must be known as the executor of these two very different actions, and be named both hero and villain. The Romans return to their everyday lives, having used the public forum to reach a conclusion, whereby the now dead Horatian embodies a paradox.

Given the historical moment in which the text was written, Hauschild reads Der Horatier as a commentary on the quashing of the Prague Spring and the dangers of the

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6 Heiner Müller, Der Horatier, in W4, pp. 73-86 (p. 77 and passim). The edition of Der Horatier printed in the Suhrkamp Werkausgabe is textually identical to the Henschel stage manuscript and the first publication of the text in 1973. Therefore, hereafter, all bracketed page references containing the abbreviation ‘H’ in the main text will refer to this edition.

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manipulation of reality and information by a ruling party. Many critics focus on the larger phenomenon of Stalinism: for Lehmann, the paradoxical Horatian serves as an allegory for Stalin; and in some interpretations, the text criticises the Stalinist models of both dialectics and history, which forbid the possibility for any antithesis other than that contained within the Stalinist reading of history and contemporary reality. Indeed, a common trend in the secondary literature is to read Der Horatier as a critique of political violence and the ensuing destruction of the individual. Fernando Suárez Sánchez situates his analysis of Der Horatier within GDR discourse regarding the individual in the 1960s, interpreting Müller’s text as pessimistic about the building of socialism in the GDR under the conditions of a society which requires the individual to be sacrificed for the good of the collective. While the conclusions reached by the aforementioned studies are by and large compelling, they tend to approach the text as one concerned with considering the individual as a sovereign being in need of salvation from a destructive collective: such an approach runs the risk of aligning Müller with Western liberal discourses of the individual, and fails to recognise the full problematic nature of the Romans’ treatment of the Horatian. Drawing on Die Hamletmaschine, Barnett reminds us that we would do well to read Müller as providing a challenge to Western discourses of the individual, albeit from a Marxist perspective, something that has not been considered in relation to Der Horatier.

As we shall see below, most critics read the text’s productivity as similar to that of Brecht’s Lehrstück Die Maßnahme (1930-31), and in doing so present a limited discussion of Der Horatier as a text which provides a solution to a problem. It is, however, without a doubt that Müller’s text thrives from its lack of closure, and for Marc Silberman, the paradoxical character of the Horatian is a prompt for the audience, ‘die eigenen Handlungs- und Entscheidungsmöglichkeiten außerhalb traditioneller Konzepte der Subjektivität zu

7 See: Hauschild, Heiner Müller, p. 262.
As Silberman suggests, it is in this lack of closure that we can recognise Müller’s attempt to unsettle both Western liberal and Eastern socialist interpretations of the individual in society. In considering the moment of historical upheaval in which Der Horatier was written, we shall also begin to see what traditional notions of subjectivity Müller’s text questions, and how it sets out to do so. More attention must also be given to the process of public decision-making, and the means contained within this process for instigating dialogue between stage and audience. The final section of this chapter will provide an analysis of Der Horatier’s 1973 première at the Werkstatt of the Schiller Theater in West Berlin. Despite the significance of its director, Hans Lietzau, this production, named simply Horatier, has been overlooked by scholarship to date.

3.2 Democracy and Disappointment

In his autobiography, Müller claims that Der Horatier was his ‘Reaktion auf Prag 1968, ein Kommentar zu Prag’. Müller is not merely referring to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, but to the whole phenomenon of ‘Prag’, which includes the period of political, social, and economic reform of the Prague Spring. This is further suggested in a preface he wrote for the first English-language translation of Der Horatier, printed in The Minnesota Review in 1976, in which Müller asserts that he had had earlier plans to write Der Horatier, but that, by the end of 1968, these plans had changed. What, therefore, happened in 1968, and what relevance did it have for Müller and for East Germans in general?

3.2.1 Prague and All That

Since 1956, there had been a strong sense within Czechoslovakia of a need to reform its political and social institutions, and the election of Alexander Dubček to the position of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) in January 1968 signalled that this path to reform could finally be trod. Throughout the first few months of 1968, Dubček set about enacting a series of reforms, taking into account the various different

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14 Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht, W9, p. 203.
15 See: Müller, ‘Author’s Preface’, W8, p. 185.
interests present in Czechoslovakia’s populace, to create a ‘socialist democracy’, which would be ‘more than a copy of the parliamentarianism typical of formal democracies’. These were intended to increase freedom of speech and movement and tap in to Western markets, not as a rejection of socialism, but as a fulfilment of it. Demand for democratisation within the Politburo of the CPC was accompanied by vocal demands for even more reform via public platforms.

GDR citizens were well aware of the reform programme in Czechoslovakia, the majority having access to Western television, German broadcasts on Radio Prague, and the German-language Czechoslovak newspaper *Der Volkswille*. By 1968, press censorship in Czechoslovakia had been practically abolished, and by early summer 1968, general liberalisation was already visible in the Czechoslovak economy, and the CPC was no longer co-extensive with the State. GDR citizens therefore returned from their summer holidays with stories of the reforms, flyers and pamphlets, and newspapers. Müller, like most of his contemporaries, would have been well aware of the seemingly successful attempt within Czechoslovakia to build a socialism unlike the GDR’s, and a democracy unlike the West’s.

Hopes for a more outwardly democratic form of socialism in the GDR were still alive and well throughout the 1960s, and indeed, the ideals of the Prague Spring were both foreshadowed and shared by many intellectuals in the GDR. From 1962, the domestic situation initially looked promising as Ulbricht demonstrated his own desire to reform the GDR. Eventually in April 1967, socialism as both a political and economic system distinct from communism was announced, and with it came a plan for decreased centralism and

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18 Ibid., p. 102.
21 See: Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 75.
23 See: ibid., p. 65.
increased profitability of the East German economy. It is here that we can understand Müller’s comment in 1976, that *Der Horatier* was written, both temporally and causally, ‘after an earlier plan’. Ulbricht’s posturing towards a democratising programme had rekindled hopes in the GDR for change to its political and social constitution and the creation of a socialist democracy, but the final death knell of this was the alleged involvement of the GDR’s own military forces in the suppression of the Prague Spring, a role played up by SED propaganda. Moreover, the MfS banned several Czechoslovak German-language newspapers and increased its monitoring and censorship of the literary and cultural spheres, in an attempt to curb the spreading of counterrevolutionary, reformist ideas in the GDR. When Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968, therefore, large swathes of its population, including Müller, saw their dreams of political and social reform and, importantly, democracy, vanish; moreover, the GDR’s 1968 constitution reaffirmed the leading role of the SED in democratic centralist politics and forbade the emergence of an opposition party.

3.2.2 Prague in Rome

Events in Czechoslovakia and the GDR are clearly reflected in the text. Müller’s choice of material places a strong emphasis on the involvement of the Roman public, clearly demonstrating his desire to focus on public participation in politics and democracy. Initially, the lictors, who represent and dispatch the justice of the Roman king, are ready to punish the Horatian for the murder of his sister, but the intervention of the populace holds up this decision. By stating, ‘einer rief’ and ‘ein andrer entgegnete’ (*H*, 77), the narrative introduces the participation of the Romans on an individual basis. To prevent the ensuing civil disorder from escalating, the lictors ask the Romans to choose representatives to speak for them. Duly, ‘das Volk bestimmte aus seiner Mitte zwei | Recht zu sprechen über den Horatier’ (*H*, 26).

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28 It is, however, now known that there was no official involvement of the GDR military in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. See: Wenzke, *Die NVA und der ‘Prager Frühling’*, pp. 148-59.
The individual’s ability to partake in the debate has been deferred by the choosing of representatives speaking and acting on the behalf of others. Thus, what might have become a public discussion, consisting of many different perspectives and positions regarding the Horatian’s fate, quickly becomes a two-way debate between two representatives. Clearly, however, there is still a level of participation by the Roman public; the recurring refrain, ‘Und das Volk antwortete mit einer Stimme’ (H, 81 and passim), emphasises unanimity within the populace.

The text raises an awareness of the relationship between the individual and the collective in the context of public discourse; yet it refuses to prescribe a solution, instead suggesting that the difficulties with prevailing understandings of the place of the individual might have to be overcome in a new way altogether. This is perhaps the text’s most significant relationship to the reforming mood in Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the 1960s and its failure: attempts to build a new form of democratic socialism, devoid of centralism and unlike Western ‘formal democracy’, had been quashed as soon as Dubček’s reforms had begun to point a possible way forward. Müller presents a conflict that has the potential to place both contemporary Eastern and Western models of sociality under scrutiny.

The Horatian himself embodies the very dilemma of the individual’s place within society. In providing a Roman victory over Alba, the Horatian has represented the interests of Rome, and his victory over the Curiatian in single-handed combat symbolises Rome’s victory. This is borne out in the Horatian’s language when he meets his sister: ‘Rom hat gesiegt. Vor dir steht der Sieger.’ (H, 76). In the first of these sentences, the Horatian grants himself the symbolic quality with which his victory over the Curiatian has endowed him. Yet he immediately undermines this, calling himself the victor. The Horatian’s victory toes an uneasy line between symbolic, collective activity, and individual achievement. The murder of his sister is likewise ambiguous: the Roman populace maintains that the Horatian committed this murder ‘Ohne Notwendigkeit’ (H, 80 and passim), demonstrating that its motivation was other than the collective good; at the same time, however, by mourning the Curiatian, the representative of Alba and its interests, the sister symbolically mourns the defeat of Alba. Separating these two mournings is an individual emotional attachment to the Curiatian, which appears to the Horatian to stand in the way of the collective interest.

This single being, the Horatian, ends up figuring as the unification of a dialectical opposition. Müller had studied Livy’s text, but made some considerable changes, including reducing the battle between three Curiatians and three Horatians in Livy’s account to a duel.

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32 See, for example: AdK, Heiner-Müller-Archiv [=HMA] 3251. This holding contains a document consisting of the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii from Livy’s account copied out, bearing Müller’s marginalia.
between one of each. Müller’s reduction of the combat to a battle between one Horatian and one Curiatian can be clearly identified as a means to heighten the tension created by the figure of the Horatian, and highlight the conflict of individual and collective. While the death of the Curiatian appears to be the result of the will of the collective, the murder of his sister is a crime committed in contradiction to the laws of this selfsame collective. Nonetheless, the Horatian sees himself as acting still in the interests of Rome in committing this second murder. The Horatian has become the ‘Mordinstrument der Gemeinschaft’, but cannot make a clear distinction between necessary and unnecessary killing.

In many senses, Müller’s text can be understood to place a centralised, collectivised model of society under scrutiny, criticising the exercising of power in the controlling of political choice and action. The lictors instigate the process to decide on the treatment of the Horatian. It is once the lictors ‘Trennten die Streitenden mit Rutenbündel und Beil | Und beriefen das Volk in die Versammlung’ (H, 77) that the Romans choose their representatives to debate whether the Horatian should be treated as a murderer or a hero. Müller’s text does not definitively denote that the choice of representatives is the outcome of the lictors’ intervention, using merely the conjunction ‘Und’ (H, 78) to link these two occurrences; we might therefore read this moment as the lictors attempting to re-establish order through offering the populace the possibility to be represented along the lines of the two interpretations available in the Romans’ partage du sensible. As we hear later, the Roman public appears to require knowledge out of fear of the unknown: ‘Tödlich dem Menschen ist das Unkenntntliche’ (H, 84). Therefore, it is important that the Horatian can be known, using the possibilities of discourse available to the Romans, sanctioned by the lictors.

In achieving consensus in the Roman public at the end, this process of representative democracy meets a moment in which a closed system is formed, rendering everything within it known: the Horatian is made known through deciding that he is to be forever remembered as murderer and victor. Nevertheless, the text suggests that there might have been more to this debate, but that it has been suppressed by the Romans. The Romans do not appear to fear the ‘unreine Wahrheit’ (H, 84) of their decision, and do not react to ‘den Rest | Der nicht aufging im unaufhaltbaren Wand’ (H, 85). It would seem, therefore, that the Romans have preferred to keep their categories clean at the cost of an impure truth: through maintaining their words, they have been unable to provide a nuanced interpretation of the Horatian that might have led to a greater number of possibilities in public discourse. In this sense, the

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33 See: Fiebach, Inseln der Unordnung, p. 60. Notably, Müller’s plans for Der Horatier from earlier in 1968 indicate that he had initially conceived of the battle as being between three Horatians and three Curiatians. See: AdK, HMA 3252; AdK, HMA 3253; and AdK, HMA 3257.

34 Lehmann ‘Der Horatier’, p. 93.
‘Rest’ might signify this multitude of possibilities for discourse, which have been forsaken for the sake of Roman unity. If we go further, as Silberman does, we might interpret the ‘Rest’ as the subjectivity of individuals, otherwise closed off from a form of public discourse in which only the social dimension is of concern. In short, we can understand Müller to be showing that this process is not so democratic after all.

The reading above interprets Der Horatier as a text about the necessity to allow for individual input into the public realm, and therefore as a critique of the form of society that negates the individual to the end of promoting social consensus. We can of course see why this may have been a concern for Müller in the wake of the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. Even after the failure of Dubček’s reforms in Czechoslovakia, Western liberal democracy was not a viable option for Müller, not least because it was thought of as merely a formal democracy in the East, and because this same ‘democracy’ had led to a war in Vietnam, albeit against the will of the majority of the American population; in this sense, Western liberal society could also be seen to be criticised in the above reading. Indeed, this reading chimes with the form of Systemkritik undertaken by the likes of Theodor W. Adorno at the time. Yet this possible reading is tempered by a concern for the collective in Müller’s text.

A certainty at the beginning of the text is that Rome and Alba are threatened by another more powerful force, against which they will have to unite. Although this union will come about as a result of the ‘Herrschaft’ (H, 75) of one city over the other, they both recognise the need for unity. Furthermore, Rome itself requires unity throughout, as the Etruscan invasion looms in the background. From the very beginning of the text, it is clear that society itself cannot be divided, but must stand together.

This question of divisibility and indivisibility lies at the heart of Der Horatier. In a note for the composition of the text, we find:

Frage der Unteilbarkeit
Teilbarkeit des Ind[ividuums].

Müller begins by considering the indivisibility of the individual, but replaces this with the question of the individual’s divisibility. According to Marxist theory, the individual must be interpreted as a socially composite being. Marx writes: ‘das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem

37 ‘zu Horat.’, AdK, HMA 3254, p. 1.
einzelnen Individuum innewohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.\textsuperscript{38} In a short piece, ‘Individuum und Masse’, written in 1929, Brecht argues that, given the individual’s sociality, we might rethink the individual as something divisible: ‘am einzelnen ist gerade seine Teilbarkeit zu betonen (als Zugehörigkeit zu mehreren Kollektiven).’\textsuperscript{39} The text of Der Horatier reports at many points that the Horatian, as one man, is ‘unteilbar’ (H, 80), and yet, paraphrasing Brecht’s Die Horatier und die Kuriatier,\textsuperscript{40} the Romans say in unison:

\begin{quote}
Viele Männer sind in einem Mann.
Einer hat gesiegt für Rom im Schwertkampf.
Ein anderer hat seine Schwester getötet (H, 80)
\end{quote}

Each of the Horatian’s two actions has a different meaning to the society in which he exists. Thus, in order to deal with the Horatian appropriately, this one individual must be treated as two separate individuals: ‘Da ist der Sieger. Sein Name: Horatius. | Da ist der Mörder. Sein Name: Horatius’ (H, 80). Yet this leads to the apparent paradox of having one physical entity being treated as two different beings.

Here, public commemoration is instantly made difficult, as the entire public celebrates this man in this moment as a hero, although he raises the emblem of his two apparently qualitatively different murders, ‘Das zweimal blutige Schwert’ (H, 80), as a sign of his victory. The ‘Beilträger’, who has represented the case for treating the Horatian as a murderer, lays down the symbol of recognising the Horatian as a murderer and exercising the appropriate form of justice, in order to celebrate the Horatian as a hero. Further to this, Müller’s text purposefully confuses the designators used to denote the Horatian throughout. After his corpse has been approximately reattached and raised in celebration of his heroic deeds, for example, the text reads: ‘Und der Lorbeer wurde dem Sieger abgenommen’ (H, 83). This, however, is surely unthinkable: the laurel leaf would not be taken from the head of the victor, as it would only be the murderer, or the disgraced victor at that, who would have this symbol of victory removed.

According to this reading of Der Horatier, the sovereignty of the individual has actually been preserved through this division, and what has been ignored is not the indivisibility of the individual, rather any consideration for the complexity of the Horatian’s

\textsuperscript{38} Karl Marx, ‘[Thesen über Feuerbach]’, in MEW 3, pp. 533-5 (p. 534).
\textsuperscript{40} Here, it is the Horatian who states: ‘Viele Dinge sind in einem Ding.’: Bertolt Brecht, Die Horatier und die Kuriatier, in BFA 4, pp. 279-303 (p. 292).
social being and motivations, i.e. his divisibility. Der Horatier therefore problematises the ontology of the individual according to Western liberal discourses, in which the individual is an indivisible, individually motivated being, and which forces a hasty, provisional distinction between two individual doers of two individual actions. If we interpret the problematic of the individual in Der Horatier in this light, then the paradox of the Horatian would seem to be a paradox caused by trying to create two individuals out of one socially complex entity, but killing both in the process. The ‘dividuum’, it seems, can be separated into someone with numerous differing motivations, but not into two simple individuals. In this respect, both ways of understanding the individual’s contribution to society as examined in Der Horatier seem to go quite badly awry and result in bloody death. Through exploring the limitations of the two prevalent ways of understanding the individual in industrialised societies, Müller’s text signals a desire for a third way between the two, which might treat the individual as a necessarily socially complex being. No doubt, this being was lost in the aftermath of the Prague Spring and its repercussions in the GDR.

3.3 East meets West

Above, we have seen that Der Horatier contains the seeds of critiques of two separate interpretations of the role of the individual in society: both the collectivist state, in which the individual is bound by social necessity, and the individualist state, which prioritises the individual as sovereign, create a paradox in their treatment of the Horatian, ignore individual or social complexity, and thus turn to brutal measures in exercising justice. While Müller is concerned with questions raised by debate within the GDR and the Prague Spring about a possible, more democratic future for socialism, Der Horatier does not leave Western discourses alone. Indeed, the text clearly indicates that Der Horatier is not merely of relevance to East Germans or Eastern Europeans, but to post-Enlightenment society at large.41

We can find explicit reference to the relevance of Der Horatier outside of the confines of the GDR context in Müller’s allusion to a shared history of terror. When the

41 There is also a good deal of circumstantial evidence to support the notion that Müller was well aware that he might have a greater possibility of a West German audience than an East German audience at this time. After the ban imposed on Die Umsiedlerin oder Das Leben auf dem Lande in 1961, for example, Müller was a persona non grata in the GDR’s cultural arena for some time. At the same time, his adaptations of Sophocles and Shakespeare were quickly gaining him a reputation in the FRG as a very capable dramatist and when Philoktet was premièred in Munich in 1968, Müller no doubt identified the possibility of a greater audience in the West than in the East. There is, however, no space here at present to discuss this further.
Horatian arrives home, the Romans greet him, shouting ‘Heil’ (H, 77); and when he is to be celebrated for his victory, the Roman populace does so ‘Mit gestrecktem Arm’ (H, 81). The raising of the arm in this form of salute, and the shouting of ‘Heil’ is clearly an allusion to the salute afforded by enthusiastic crowds to Adolf Hitler. This fascist history is further evoked in the Romans’ declaration, ‘Jedem das Seine’ (H, 80), the motto on the entrance gates of Buchenwald concentration camp. The Roman history therefore displays an historical parallel between these two temporally distant, yet socio-politically similar societies: rather than Stalin and Stalinism being the root of all evil, the fascism of National Socialist Germany also enters the frame of reference.

Yet this gesture transcends the German context altogether through a mythical dimension: the salute eventually adopted by the Nazis is depicted in the French painter Jacques-Louis David’s treatment of the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii in his Oath of the Horatii (Le Serment des Horaces, 1784), which portrays the three Horatian brothers with outstretched arms, swearing an oath to their father. Notably, the gesture depicted in David’s painting is then repeated in his 1789 sketch, Tennis Court Oath (Serment du jeu de paume), which portrays the beginnings of the French Revolution, in which the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii is referenced as a founding myth of the French Revolution. In this respect, Müller traces the lineage of fascism, national duty, and political brutality back to the cradle of European civilisation in Rome and, at that, to the very story of Der Horatier, while stopping at the terror of the French Revolution on the way. Antiquity, the Enlightenment, and all of their offspring are therefore implicated in Der Horatier’s analysis of democracy and political brutality: indeed, for Müller, every instance of the modern industrial society, including the GDR and the FRG, suppresses difference and aims at total consensus and conformity. In its lack of direct references to contemporary material reality, Der Horatier appears to indicate that its implied audience is one which is on either side of the Iron Curtain and is prepared to participate in a form of thought experiment.

As Der Horatier clearly considers questions of relevance in both the East and the West at the time, we should look to its textual politics to see how its formal composition attempts to set up a dialogue with its audiences. This will be a crucial first step in understanding how Der Horatier’s première was received, and whether Lietzau’s production served to reduce the possibilities for audience interaction or keep them intact; indeed, what did West Germans see as the core questions of Müller’s text and Lietzau’s production? Before taking these enquiries further, however, I shall take a closer look at the audiences of

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Lietzau’s *Horatier* in 1973 and the horizon of expectations and mood they most likely took with them to the theatre.

### 3.3.1 Unrest in the West

When *Horatier* was premièred in West Berlin on 3 March 1973, it encountered a West German public which had also just experienced large-scale disappointment with democracy. As with their cousins in the GDR, West Germans had been questioning the makeup of their democracy, only to experience a return to the status quo. The period immediately following the Second World War was characterised by general political conservatism and massive economic growth in the FRG, as successive Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) governments under Konrad Adenauer held the political reins, and the Social Democrats (SPD) aligned themselves with many of the former’s policies. The increasingly centre-right make-up of FRG politics caused immense frustration within the radical left and youth, leading to the growth of an Außerparlamentarische Opposition (APO) out of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS). Throughout the mid-1960s a young political class emerged, which was disaffected with the shape of West German society, and therefore demanded changes to the fundamentals of the FRG, calling for greater democracy, equality of opportunity, and an end to what it perceived as the machinations of Western imperialism abroad. According to Hermann Glaser, the APO and the SDS regarded capitalism as the source of all evil in the West.

The discourse of democracy and anti-capitalism in the FRG tended to be informed by the ideas of the Neo-Marxist philosophers and sociologists of the Frankfurt School: the likes of Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), Herbert Marcuse’s *Der eindimensionale Mensch* (1964), and Adorno’s *Negative Dialektik* (1966) became increasingly popular with a political left which found consumer capitalism to be nothing more than a form of totalitarianism which sets out to suppress the will of the individual and create an homogeneous mass of obedient capitalist consumers. As time went by, however,

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the APO became ever more factionalised, and the activities of some factions ever more radical, leading to the introduction of emergency laws that kerbed many civil liberties in May 1968. Much of the West German populace to become increasingly frustrated with radical organisations; in turn, large swathes of the critical left felt estranged from the APO’s demands.47 After the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, many young, socialist-inclined activists began to be alienated from their cause altogether.48 The election of the SPD’s Willy Brandt to the position of Chancellor of the FRG in October 1969 signalled a new beginning in the FRG, and received due support from West German leftist intellectuals.49 Brandt carried the baton from the anti-authoritarian movement in calling for more democracy in the FRG and the enactment of fundamental institutional changes.50 Thus, the beginning of the 1970s witnessed a quieting of protest, and West German society returned to its relative conservatism, and extra-parliamentary forces took the form of less radical Bürgerinitiativen.51 For all intents and purposes, a revolutionary mood in certain areas of the FRG’s public had given way to an acceptance that its democracy functioned well enough; the revolutionary fervour of the 1960s did not, however, leave the theatre untouched.

3.3.2 Audiences of Horatier

Theatre had to respond to the upheaval of the 1960s in two respects: it had to politicise both its contents and the structural organisations of the theatre. In the case of the latter, the political upheavals of 1968 brought many theatres to question the role of an all-powerful Intendant; as a result, the Mitbestimmung model of theatre was born, which introduced a form of collective leadership in certain theatres, responding to demands for the ‘Demokratisierung’ of existing structures.52

47 See: Burns and van der Will, Protest and Democracy, p. 56; and Glaser, Kleine Kulturgeschichte, p. 313.
48 See: Fulbrook, History of Germany, p. 137.
50 Ibid., p. 335.
51 See: Burns and van der Will, Protest and Democracy, pp. 164-66.
This atmosphere of political engagement had a marked effect on the possible horizon of expectations of West German theatregoers at the time. In terms of the external communicative means of the theatre, in the 1960s West Germans witnessed a resurgence in overtly political theatre and the development of forms such as documentary theatre, exemplified by Rolf Hochhuth’s Der Stellvertreter (1963) and Peter Weiss’s Die Ermittlung (1965). Weiss’s highly experimental Marat/Sade (1964) paved the way for political agitation in the theatre, challenging audiences and proving immensely popular with the West German public. Despite the political engagement taking place on the stage, there was still a lurking sense that West German bourgeois theatregoers were gladly sitting back in the theatre, uncritically enjoying a fundamentally bourgeois pastime. As a result, the German stage went a step further in challenging the sensibilities of its audiences: Publikumsbeschimpfung (1966) by the young Austrian playwright Peter Handke, for example, set out to provoke its audiences, addressing them directly and, in doing so, attempted to awaken them out of their supposed passivity. But, we may ask: what section of the West German public was going to the theatre in the first place?

While Michael Patterson claims that theatre audiences in the FRG tended to consist of the cultured middle-classes, West Berlin’s theatre scene reacted to the political movements of the 1960s, and thus attracted a younger, politically motivated audience. This is perhaps indicated in the average increase in spectatorship of 4.5% across 49 municipal theatres between the 1971-72 and 1972-73 seasons, which has been attributed to a younger generation of Intendanten taking over the theatre scene at this time. The Spielpläne of West German theatres still featured a great deal of the classics, including works by Goethe, William Shakespeare, Schiller, Molière, Anton Chekhov, George Bernard Shaw, and Brecht, which amounted to about 20% of all productions. Nonetheless, the extensive subsidy system rendered the theatre a space almost immune to the effect of market forces. Rather than following a bums-on-seats policy of pandering to an audience’s desires to see classics conventionally performed, directors were able to confront their audiences with daring, new productions of the classics, and to offer a vast array of challenging productions by new

54 Ibid., p. 13.
57 See: Patterson, German Theatre Today, p. 6.
According to Barnett, West German audiences consequently became ‘more discerning towards the sophisticated fare on offer and indeed weary of “traditional” interpretations of playtexts’. This is not to say that this renewal was to everyone’s taste: West Berlin’s Freie Volksbühne suffered in the 1971-72 season, when its audiences walked out of successive productions deemed to be too experimental.

The Schiller Theater was no exception to these general trends. It was located at the heart of West Berlin’s commercial centre, Charlottenburg, and was part of the Staatliche Schauspielbühnen Berlins (SSB), along with the Schloßpark-Theater in Steglitz. Perhaps owing to the Schiller Theater’s geographical location, it could rely on attracting a relatively affluent regular audience. With the arrival of Lietzau as the new Intendant of the SSB in 1972, audiences of the Schiller Theater grew by 5,000 spectators (5%) from the 1971-72 season, and the Werkstatt of the Schiller Theater likewise saw an increase of 4,000 spectators. The SSB benefited from huge subsidies from the state: in 1971-72, it received a subsidy of 10,091,000 DM, which had increased to 14,840,600 DM in 1972-73, bringing with it a dramatic increase in the theatres’ budget and in the degree to which their directors could experiment.

Not surprisingly, audiences of the Schiller Theater would have been used to a diet consisting of the classics. Indeed, in October 1972, just months before Horatier premièred, the Schiller Theater was showing Molière’s Tartuffe (1664), Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe (1784), Heinrich von Kleist’s Prinz Friedrich von Homburg (1809-10), and Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar (1599). However, in the years prior to this, the Werkstatt had focused on presenting works by recent or living playwrights and had acquired a reputation for being a space for experimental theatre, showcasing new and challenging works and productions. At the Werkstatt in that same month, Konrad Beyer’s kasperl am elektrischen stuhl (1968) was

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61 See: Rolf Michaelis, ‘Ein neuer Ernst ist spürbar’, Theater 1973: 107-8 (p. 107). No percentage increase for the Werkstatt is given by Michaelis, owing to the differing numbers of spectators allowed at each production, as a result of varying seating plans.
63 LAB, B Rep. 127 Nr. 4810-4817 (Reviews of productions at Schiller-Theater Berlin, 1972/73), unpaginated.
showing alongside Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958). In terms of Lietzau’s work as a director, it is hard to gauge expectations, as he was capable of a great diversity in style. He had already directed the première of Müller’s *Philoktet* (1958/64) at Munich’s Residenztheater in July 1968, which was such a critical success, that it featured in the 1969 Berliner Theatertreffen, and was produced in March 1970 in Hamburg. This launched Müller into the West German theatre scene, where he was praised for the power of his language, and was quickly gaining a reputation for being a socialist classic, capable of partaking in a critical analysis of both Eastern and Western society. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that when audiences visited *Horatier* in 1973, they fully expected a masterful, experimental production of an equally masterful, politically provocative text. If Müller’s text was, indeed, to be politically provocative, we must ask: how is Müller’s text attempting to interact with an audience? And how was its investigation of the relationship between the individual and the collective treated on stage to have relevance for a Western audience as well as an Eastern audience?

3.4 The Lehrstück and the Collective

As we have seen above, *Der Horatier* asks many more questions than it seeks to answer. This is very much a function of the form of Müller’s play, which could well be seen as a Lehrstück of sorts. While *Der Horatier* has been critically received as an interaction with the Brechtian Lehrstück, however, we need to re-evaluate this relationship. Müller seeks to enhance the discussion quality of the Lehrstück, something integral to how he understood democracy in the theatre at the time, and so *Der Horatier* invites the audience to partake in a process of public discourse, which can be questioned by the audience at every stage; to this extent, Müller engages his audience not to draw a moral from his play, but rather to begin to question the partage du sensible regarding the status of the individual in their own cultural context and offer the possibility for dissensus.

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65 Ibid.
3.4.1 ‘Was wir hier zeigen, hat keine Moral’

The aim of enabling audience interaction played a role from the very start of *Der Horatier*’s composition. In an undated note for the text from 1968, Müller writes: ‘Das Publikum ist mit Ja + Nein-Tafeln auszurufen[,] Soll er geehrt werden? Soll er getötet werden?’ That is, in Müller’s earlier inception of the play, audience productivity was to be formally the same as the decision between polar opposites which the Romans undertake in the finished text. The final draft of *Der Horatier*, however, is much more open: not only does Müller’s text end with a conclusion which, in Jonathan Kalb’s words, provides ‘a strategic frame for contemplation […] of the unbalanceable’, but the process into which the audience is drawn questions the very basis for this dichotomy from the start. This forms an important step in Müller’s engagement with the *Lehrstück*.

*Der Horatier* clearly references *Lehrstück* methods; not least, Müller’s ‘Anmerkung’ at the end of the text recommends that a production of *Der Horatier* would look very much like a *Lehrstück*, as roles are swapped between actors, and no sense of illusion is to be given in the presentation of the material (*H*, 86). Due to the prominence of literature dealing with Müller’s 1970 play *Mauser* and Müller’s own comment at the end of *Mauser* relating *Der Horatier* to the *Lehrstücke*, *Der Horatier* is regularly compared with Brecht’s *Die Maßnahme*, which is often taken to be exemplary of the *Lehrstück* form. As a result, many commentators have expected *Der Horatier* to deploy the same means as *Die Maßnahme* in order to activate an audience. Brecht explained in the programme notes to the première of *Die Maßnahme* in Berlin in 1930: ‘Der Zweck des Lehrstückes ist also, politisch unrichtiges Verhalten zu zeigen und dadurch richtiges Verhalten zu lehren.’ In the context of *Die Maßnahme*, this amounts to identifying the Junge Genosse’s actions as politically wrong: his comrades deem his readiness to respond to individual cases and incite small-scale rebellion as a failure of his capacity for reason, and therefore as potentially jeopardising the spreading...
of revolutionary communist propaganda in China; as a result, the audience is asked for its Einverständnis with the necessity of the Junge Genosse’s death. Most commentators of Der Horatier are therefore tempted to focus on the ending of Der Horatier as the source of a lesson. But to focus our attention on Die Maßnahme is misleading. Even comparison with Die Horatier und die Kuriatier, with its model of learning through positive example, is not adequate in explaining the productivity of Der Horatier. We may need to have another look at the Lehrstücke and Müller’s understanding of their productivity altogether.

It is clear from Brecht’s own comments on the Lehrstücke that there is no single theory behind them, rather that they were means of experimenting with the productivity of the theatre. When asked in 1977 if he regarded his play Die Schlacht (1951/74) as a Lehrstück, Müller answered: ‘Ich weiß nicht, ich verwende sehr ungern diesen Begriff, weil er so mißverständlich ist.’ We must therefore be careful not to ascribe to Müller a fixed belief in the workings of the Lehrstücke. We can, however, see that Müller understands the Lehrstücke as plays created to overturn the distinction between audience and actor. In 1969, commenting on his own practice in Horizonte (1969), he stated: ‘Das Kollektiv, von dem und auf das wir zunächst ausgehen mußten, ist das Kollektiv Publikum-Schauspieler.’ Although he does not explicitly refer to the Lehrstück here, Müller’s primary concern is to collapse the distance between actors and audience, and, much like the Lehrstücke, engage the audience to become actors.

Der Horatier is structured in such a way as to thematise the act of participation in the theatre. After the Horatian has killed his sister, the Romans are referred to as a ‘zuschauende[…] Menge’ (77) and we are told of some of their responses, emphasising their role as observers. The narrative consciously evokes the language of the theatre, referring to the ‘hinteren Reihen’ (77), who cannot so easily see what is happening, much like in an auditorium itself. The theatre audience is at yet another remove from the action, now watching the onstage audience make the transition from observers to participants in the political process. In this sense, the Romans depicted on stage serve as a certain model of politically active spectators, and the contemporary audience in the theatre as the spectators of these spectators.

79 See: ibid., p. 103. In Brecht’s own words, the Lehrstück ‘hebt das System Spieler und Zuschauer auf’. Bertolt Brecht, ‘[Die Grosse und die Kleine Pädagogik]’, in BF4 21, p. 396.
Here we can recognise a distinct parallel between *Der Horatier* and Brecht’s 1931 pair of *Lehrstücke, Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager*. While the first of these portrays behaviour in order to achieve the self-same *Einverständnis* in the audience as is depicted in the text,\(^{81}\) in *Der Neinsager*, the lack of *Einverständnis* amongst the characters depicted leads to recognition of the need for new rules and ways of acting, ‘entgegen der Schmähung | Entgegen dem Gelächter, mit offenen Augen | Kein feiger als sein Nachbar’.\(^{82}\) The Romans’ discussion follows the form of *Der Jasager*, as it searches for a moment whereby consensus is achieved. The theatre audience is invited to watch how the Romans have acted, to imagine themselves in that position, and to question what has been decided, much as in *Der Neinsager*. Indeed, *Der Horatier* finishes with an ending not dissimilar to that of *Der Neinsager*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{So stellten sie auf, nicht fürchtend die unreine Wahrheit} \\
\text{In Erwartung des Feinds ein vorläufiges Beispiel} \\
\text{Reinlicher Scheidung, nicht verbergend den Rest} \\
\text{Der nicht aufging im unaufhaltbaren Wandel (H, 84-5)}
\end{align*}
\]

While Hans-Thies Lehmann reads the voice at the end as Müller’s own, breaking in to give us his evaluation of the Romans’ situation, and thus present us with a moral,\(^{83}\) it cannot be read so simply. The narrator presents an evaluation of the situation without a moral judgement attached, subtly asking whether something needs to be changed in the activity which has been shown; only a few years later, in 1977, Müller criticised theatrical pieces which have an unambiguous ending: ‘Es wird also dem Publikum die Arbeit abgenommen, dadurch daß man ihm vortäuscht, die Sache hat einen Anfang und ein klares Ende. Und es bleibt nicht offen für Wirkungen.’\(^{84}\) It is notable too that Müller here talks of the audience undertaking productive labour, something which, as we have seen, is fundamental to his understanding of democracy in the theatre.

While the Romans’ conclusion regarding the Horatian’s status as both hero and villain leads most commentators to view the ending of *Der Horatier* as the aspect which grants it its productivity, we should pay more attention to the process of public decision-making. Almost 75% of this short text consists of the Roman public’s debate regarding the Horatian, giving good reason to expect more from this process than simply a means to an end. This is duly noted by Corinna Mieth, but she does not offer analysis of the process

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\(^{81}\) Bertolt Brecht, *Der Jasager. Der Neinsager*, in *BFA* 3, pp. 57-72.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{83}\) Lehmann, ‘*Der Horatier*’, p. 97. See also: Fuhrmann, *Warten auf ‘Geschichte’*, p. 49.
depicted. Process over product is clearly part of Müller’s desires for the efficacy of theatre at this time: in 1975, Müller stated in an interview that ‘[e]s geht um Kunst als Diskussion, bei völliger Gleichberechtigung von Produzenten und Konsumenten. Das erst wäre auch, im umfassenden Sinne, die wirkliche Demokratie im Theater.’ Although this comment was made some seven years after Der Horatier was written and two years after its première, we can see the roots of Müller’s statement at the end of the 1960s, discussing Ruth Berghaus’s directorial work:

Die Regie diskutiert mit der Musik (statt sie zu illustrieren), die Geste kommentiert den Gesang (statt ihn zu begleiten), das Bühnenbild kommentiert [die] Handlung (statt [sie] zu umrahmen). Es handelt sich um Arbeitsteilung, politisch gesprochen, um Demokratie. […] Es wird ein Prozeß vorgeführt, nicht ein Resultat abgeliefert (bzw. eine Ware), das Publikum nimmt an der Produktion teil, statt daß es ein Produkt konsumiert usw.

Here, Müller demonstrates a clear concern for a relationship between the parts of a production and between the stage and the audience as one of discussion and commentary, as opposed to giving meaning and a lesson. In this sense, for Müller at the end of the 1960s, democratic theatre is theatre that involves the spectator in a process and presents commentary, allowing for audience input.

This very thing can be seen in Der Horatier, which clearly leads its recipient through a problematic process. The very premise of the Roman public’s debate, i.e. that the Horatian is the cause of one necessary death as well as one unnecessary death, is repeatedly called into question throughout. On one level, Müller achieves this by reproducing the level of violence involved in each death. When the Horatian kills the Curiatian, the text reads: ‘Und der Horatier stieß dem Kuriatier | Sein Schwert in den Hals, daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel’ (H, 75). The death of his sister is reported thus: he ‘Stieß das Schwert, auf dem das Blut des Beweinten | noch nicht getrocknet war | In die Brust der Weinenden | Daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel’ (H, 76). Not only does the repetition of ‘Daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel’ recommend a parallel between these two actions, but it is a violent, bloody death in each case. Moreover, the apparently unnecessary murder is committed using a sword covered in the blood of the Horatian’s previous victim. This blurs the distinction between the two deaths, as they are both the result of an act of seemingly gratuitous violence. The same phrase is repeated following the Horatian’s execution, emphasising the potential to read all

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85 Mieth, ‘Von der teleologischen zur postteleologischen Utopie’, p. 218.
86 Heiner Müller, ‘[Ja, das auf jeden Fall…]’, in W10, pp. 644-52 (p. 651).
87 Müller, ‘[Nach der Theatersituation in der DDR gefragt]’, W8, p. 539.
three deaths as excessively violent \((H, 81)\). Even before the death of the Curiatian, however, Müller’s text invites us to question whether or not victory for Rome requires death. As the Curiatian lies wounded, he implores the Horatian: ‘Schone den Besiegten. Ich bin | Deiner Schwester verlobt’ \((H, 75)\). If the Curiatian already regards himself as conquered, is there any need to kill him? The only answer offered appears to be the Horatian’s sense of duty to Rome. The ethical question of whether the Romans are confronted with the doer of one necessary and one unnecessary action is further complicated by the repeated juxtaposition of bloody violence and its result for Rome. For example, ‘Auf den Schilden der unverwundeten Mannschaft’, which emphasises that the Horatian’s victory has spared the lives of many others, is followed only three lines later by ‘Am Gürtel das Beuteschwert, in Händen das blutige eigne’ \((H, 76)\), connecting this apparent good deed to the taking of bounty and the bloodshed that brought it about. The ‘zweimal blutige Schwert’ \((H, 77\text{ and passim})\) of the Horatian serves as a reminder throughout Der Horatier that a necessary/unnecessary distinction cannot be so easily made as the Romans’ behaviour might have us believe. 

Der Horatier does not contain a single moral, nor offer an answer to the paradox of the Horatian, rather it is written so as to be open to the activity of the audience. This is not purely borne out in the paradoxical ending of the piece, but is woven into the very fabric of the play: in problematising every step of the Romans’ debate, Der Horatier asks for dialogue with an audience throughout. Certain features of Der Horatier owe much to Brecht’s Lehrstücke, and it would appear that Lietzau’s production interpreted Der Horatier as a Lehrstück. As a few reviewers commented, Lietzau’s production was aesthetically similar to the work of the director Peter Stein at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, not far away in the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin. From a cursory glance at the stage manuscript and the numerous reviews of the production, we can see its affinities with notable West Berlin productions of Lehrstücke at the time.

In Lietzau’s production, scant use was made of props and costumes: apart from Gisela Stein in the role of the Horatian’s sister, every other member of the cast wore their normal everyday clothes; and the few props used included red tissues, signifying blood, a mannequin to represent the corpse of the Horatian, a gauntlet, worn by Ulrich Pleitgen playing the part of the Horatian, and fasces and axes. The stage itself was bare, aside from an

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88 See: Christoph, ‘Der Horatier, Aeneas und das Exempel’, p. 196.
91 For a description and analysis of Peter Stein’s production of Brecht’s Die Mutter as a Lehrstück at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer in 1970, see: Laura Bradley, Brecht and Political Theatre: ‘The Mother’ on Stage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 94-120.
arrangement of small stars in a geometrical pattern, and two chalk circles drawn on the stage by the cast. According to Constantin Chelmis, one of the two Regieassistenten on the production, this was in an attempt to create ‘einen Bühnenraum […], der als Denk- und Spielfläche die Abstraktion des Sujet-Inhalts veranschaulicht’.92 The cast consisted of twenty-four actors, who spoke at times in chorus and sometimes solo, and during a large proportion of the performance, scripts were carried on stage. The production was accompanied throughout by music by Peter Fischer, played live in the theatre by a small group of musicians.

In his rehearsal notes, Chelmis stated that the production was to be presented as a process,93 and the final production itself seemingly emphasised the processual nature of the text by repeating large sections of it and interweaving these sections with one another. This was in part an attempt to achieve a ‘sinnliche Durchdringung’ of the text, in order not to overload it with meaning, as the production sought to concentrate more on the sonic aspects of voices and music, and the physicality of the actors.94 Indeed, Chelmis notes the use of language in Der Horatier to report events, ‘die mit einer Imaginationsabsicht verbunden sind’.95 In this sense, we can understand many of the techniques used in the production as means to creating what Lehmann calls a ‘Klanglandschaft’, i.e. one which does not reproduce a reality on the stage, ‘sondern stellt einen Assoziationsraum im Bewußtsein des Zuschauers her’.96 Not only were large amounts of the text spoken and repeated in chorus and in solo, but some were then represented through action in pantomimes, which portrayed the action described in the text. While Lietzau’s production of Horatier clearly followed the predominant West Berlin trends in staging Lehrstücke, we can see that it made a very conscious effort to undermine the space of the stage as representing reality, and attempted to heighten the sensual qualities of the text to the end of creating a space of free association for the audience; part of this was to explode the temporal setting of the piece, to allow even greater possibilities of association.97

Lietzau’s treatment of the text through repetition and experimentation with different voices and choral groupings led to a performance that lasted about an hour. According to one reviewer, Ingvelde Geleng, Müller thought the production team had found ‘eine ebenso überzeugende wie ungewöhnliche szenische Lösung’ for Der Horatier.98 This comment

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93 Constantin Chelmis, ‘Horatier (Notizen aus der Probenarbeit II)’, AdK, HLA 62, p. 3.
94 Constantin Chelmis, ‘Horatier (Notizen aus der Probenarbeit [I])’, AdK, HLA 62, p. 3.
95 Chelmis, ‘Horatier (Notizen aus der Probenarbeit II)’, p. 1.
Fig. 3.1. *Horatier* at the Werkstatt of the Schiller Theater (Horst Güldemeister, Stadtmuseum Berlin)
does, however, tell us very little about Müller’s aesthetic assessment of the première. But what of the responses of the West German audience members? While theatre reviewers are by no means metonymic for theatre audiences, given the lack of documentation of actual audience responses and the relative press freedom in the FRG at the time, we can still gain an insight into the production’s workings on a West German public from studying reviews. The audience of the production sat in a scaffold balcony constructed around the four sides of the room, approximately two metres above the stage (see figure 3.1). For some reviewers, this gave the distinct impression that a Lehrstück was taking place beneath them and that they were to expect a moral from the Der Horatier. Friedrich Luft, for example, begins his review by calling Der Horatier ‘[e]in Lehrgedicht, eine Moralie’, commenting on the spatial arrangement of the audience.⁹⁹ This seating arrangement gave Heinz Ritter the sensation that the spectators were ‘eingeladen als Prozeßbeobachter, als Theatergeschworene’ to take part in what he saw as a ‘Lehrspiel’, explicitly drawing parallels between Der Horatier and Die Maßnahme.¹⁰⁰ Most reviewers regarded the piece as a Lehrstück or a ‘Lehrgedicht’, intended to teach a lesson to the audience. Roland Wiegenstein found the production successful in teaching an audience, as the text was repeated, ‘bis jeder Vers zur Lehre geworden ist’.¹⁰¹ While for one reviewer the text itself did not represent a Lehrstück but became one through Lietzau’s production,¹⁰² most reviewers saw the moral in the text and not in the production, in which, in the words of Karl Kurt Ziegler, ‘kam […] nicht viel heraus’.¹⁰³ The staging of Lietzau’s production was seen by some to confuse the lesson of Müller’s text through what Henning Rischbieter criticised as the production’s ‘straffe[…] Kunstgewerblichkeit’,¹⁰⁴ leading, in Hagmut Brockmann’s words, ‘zu kunstgewerblich verschleierter Leere’.¹⁰⁵ Having expected a lesson and not received it through the production, a great deal of reviewers expressed their disappointment at the lack of clear moral in Lietzau’s production;

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some even suggested that Der Horatier would perhaps be better not staged at all, but heard as a Hörstück or just read as a ‘Lehrgedicht’. ¹⁰⁶

For some reviewers, however, the treatment of the text was seen as making it open and creating what Karina Niehoff called a ‘Denkraum’. ¹⁰⁷ For these reviewers, the audience was invited to partake in a process which ‘den Intellekt mobilisiert’, ¹⁰⁸ and any confusion created by the production was seen as a means to make the audience ‘nachdenklich’. ¹⁰⁹ Crucially, Ilse Urbach read the text as ‘Müllers Lehrgedicht’, and recognised an ‘Ambivalenz’ in both the text and the production, that ‘spaltet das Volk’. ¹¹⁰ While the language of dividing the audience clearly has its roots in regarding Müller as a Brechtian dramatist, it comes closer to grasping the function of Der Horatier than most of the reviewers who saw Lietzau’s production as a deficient treatment of a Lehrstück. The reactions of most critics to Horatier indicate that there were certain preconceptions of the productivity and intentions of the Lehrstück in West Germany at the time. Reiner Steinweg’s unifying theory of the Lehrstück had only been published a year before Lietzau’s production took to the stage, ¹¹¹ so it is unlikely that this played a part in moulding the expectations of audience members, apart from among those at the cutting edge of Theaterwissenschaft. Rather, these expectations were perhaps a result of general Western criticism of Brecht. In his Ästhetische Theorie (first published 1970), for example, Adorno portrayed Brecht’s aesthetics as authoritarian: ‘Sein didaktischer Gestus […] ist intolerant gegen die Mehrdeutigkeit, an der Denken sich entzündet: er ist autoritär.’ ¹¹² This reading of Brecht is clearly visible in the expectations of most of the reviewers of Horatier, who were searching for the play’s moral. Notwithstanding the search for a moral, however, as we can see above, almost all reviewers of Lietzau’s production looked to the end of Müller’s text, as opposed to

¹¹² Theodor W. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, in AGS 7, pp. 7-533 (p. 360).
attempting to engage with the unfolding, questionable process. As we shall see below, the
moral reviewers tended to draw from the production was one in which Horatier appeared to
take a particularly Western liberal stance on individuality; indeed, on closer inspection, this
appears to have been the result of theatregoers’ expectations and the mood of West Germans
in general as well as Lietzau’s staging techniques.

3.4.2 The Denial of the ‘Individuum’?

Above, we saw that Der Horatier places both Western liberal and communist or socialist
interpretations of the relationship between the individual and the collective under scrutiny:
the prioritising of individual and collective sovereignty both lead to political brutality in their
attempts to form some form of consensus, albeit provisionally. It appears that Müller’s text
suggests that while the individual’s interests cannot be forgotten, neither can the individual’s
status as a ‘dividuum’, that is, a socially complex being.

The concatenation of the individual in the collective is clearly contained in the form
of Müller’s text. While Müller had experimented with character attribution in earlier drafts
of Der Horatier, \(^\text{113}\) in the final version, we find one continuous text that contains direct
speech that is not denoted through character attribution or quotation marks. His stage
directions recommend that certain lines may be given to particular speakers, according to the
description in the text. Nonetheless, he further recommends that ‘[w]er seinen Text
gesprochen oder sein Spiel gespielt hat, geht in seine Ausgangsposition zurück, bzw.
wechselt die Rolle’ (H, 86): while there may be individual actors acting and individual
actions occurring, these take place within the collective setting of a chorus; furthermore, true
to Brecht’s Lehrstücke, the actors are to swap roles throughout. The lack of individual
psychology in Müller’s text is not a reduction of the individuals to their mere social roles,
but a means to emphasise the sociality of the characters in the play, and engage recipients in
the dialectical material unfolding before them: in Silberman’s words, this creates ‘eine
Art Textmaschine für die kollektive Einübung von Haltungen’. \(^\text{114}\)

In many respects, Lietzau’s production of Horatier was relatively true to the form of
Müller’s text. According to Lietzau’s biographer Klaus Völker, since the late 1960s, Lietzau
had pursued an aesthetic programme of form over content. \(^\text{115}\) In Der Horatier, these two are
very much intertwined. Even in the programme for Horatier, the choral nature of Lietzau’s

\(^{113}\) See: AdK, HMA 3257; and AdK, HMA 3258.
\(^{115}\) Völker, Hans Lietzau, p. 200.
production was emphasised, as no roles were attributed to the actors, rather they were listed alphabetically, and according to gender. True to the general practice of the Schiller Theater at the time, the programme itself has a spartan design, entirely white except for photographs of Müller on the inside front cover and the inside back cover. There is, therefore, no artwork to play a part in shaping the audience’s expectations of the piece. The title of the production itself is notable: rather than printing the play’s whole title, Der Horatier, the programme carried the title Horatier. The use of the definite article in Müller’s title for the play emphasises a single individual, perhaps the hero or anti-hero of the piece, who will be in the foreground; without the definite article, the word ‘Horatier’ can either refer to a single name, or it may be read as the plural, signalling that there are multiple Horatians in the piece. While the ambiguity of singularity and plurality was clearly present in the production’s title, it remains to be seen whether it also played a part in the performance.

According to Chelmis’s rehearsal notes, the production trod a fine line between being devoid of individual psychology and attempting to preserve a level of individual variation between the members of the cast.116 Regarding the chorus, Chelmis writes: ‘Die Aufgabe besteht zunächst einmal darin, den Text unter den Spielern so aufzuteilen, daß die Hauptfiguren in entscheidenden Momenten zwar solistisch agieren können, während des ganzen Ablaufs des Spiels jedoch zum anonymen Volk gehören.’117 Furthermore, the speech of the chorus was to be uttered in such a way that it would avoid total homogeneity.118 Chelmis’s writing about the production demonstrates a clear desire for individuation and differentiation of voices within the collective of the chorus. Tellingly, collectivity here appears to imply a certain anonymity from which the individual must stand out.

Lietzau’s production made extensive use of chorus work. Choruses were formed from the twenty-four actors in different groupings throughout, at times speaking in unison, and at times in a rhythmic polyphony. When two voices emerge from the Roman populace in Müller’s text, offering the alternatives ‘Ehrt den Sieger’ and ‘Richtet den Mörder’ (H, 77), the chorus repeated these words rhythmically in unison, with a solo voice saying ‘Ehrt den Sieger’ slowly underneath, with short bursts of percussion in between the words.119 This section then built with the addition of another soloist, saying ‘Richtet den Mörder’ slowly, and the chorus breaking out of unison, to present a cacophony of different voices.120 In so doing, Lietzau’s production emphasised the collectivity of the chorus, showing at the same

117 Ibid., p. 1.
118 Chelmis, ‘Horatier (Notizen aus der Probenarbeit II)’, p. 2.
120 Ibid., p. 8.
time its divisibility into parts, giving sonic form to this near civil meltdown. When ‘das Volk bestimmte aus seiner Mitte zwei Recht zu sprechen über den Horatier’ (H, 78), one actor spoke the words ‘Das Volk’ before the rest of this passage was spoken in an eight-part polyphonic speech chorus. In this case, the chorus represented the Volk, presenting a collective constituted from varying choral voices.

Moments of homogeneity were attempted by the chorus: for example, the first time that the Horatian was confronted by his sister, this meeting was spoken out loud by the chorus. This climaxed in the chorus speaking ‘Rom hat gesiegt. Vor dir steht der Sieger’ (H, 76) in unison, underlining the interests of a unified collective. The second time that this meeting between the sister and the Horatian occurred, the actors playing the parts of the sister and the Horatian spoke them. So far, it appears that Lietzau’s production attempted to problematise the relationship between the individual and the collective in a similar way to Müller’s text. Indeed, the drawing of chalk circles on the stage at the beginning of the performance may have been in an attempt to emphasise the question of divisibility through an allusion to the final scene of Brecht’s Der kaukasische Kreidekreis (1948). Yet, Lietzau’s production highlighted the demands of society and perhaps showed these to be the source of the Horatian’s murderous deeds. The first three times that the duel between the Horatian and the Curiatian was presented, for example, the words attributed to them in the narrative were spoken by other actors, while Pleitgen and the actor playing the Curiatian mimed, so that the individual was separated from his actions.

The individual turned out to be no more than a puppet for social use, and this was strengthened by the presentation of this conflict on an individual basis (see figure 3.2): at the end of the third duel scene, the actor playing the part of the Curiatian spoke the lines, ‘Schone den Besiegten. Ich bin Deiner Schwester verlobt’ (H, 75), and was followed by Pleitgen saying ‘Meine Braut heißt Rom’ (H, 4). These lines had already been delivered by other members of the ensemble, but the action returned to the individual perpetrator of the deed. Emotional conflict was introduced by Gisela Stein, yet to appear in the role of the sister, saying the words of the Curiatian, ‘Ich bin deiner Schwester verlobt’ (H, 75), and later reappearing, spectre-like, to announce that ‘von den Römern ein andrer entgegnete: | Er

121 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
122 Ibid., p. 5.
123 Ibid.
124 See: Bertolt Brecht, Der kaukasische Kreidekreis, in BFA 8, pp. 7-92 (pp. 89-92).
126 Ibid., p. 4.
127 Ibid.
hat seine Schwester getötet’ (H, 77). While there was an effort to assess questions of collectivity in Horatier, the production tended to emphasise the fate of the individual at the hands of the brutal society depicted: the very choice of having individual actors playing particular parts throughout further support this reading. Indeed, Lietzau’s apparent interest in the collective as a space of different voices seems to have been contradicted by a degree of emotional content by the presentation of the Horatian as a tool of his society.

Fig. 3.2. Ulrich Pleitgen as the Horatian and Gisela Stein as his sister (Ludwig Binder, Stadtmuseum Berlin)

128 Ibid., p. 7.
There were only two previews of *Horatier* in the press, but one of these announced the production with a photograph of a chorus arrangement, naming certain actors featuring in it, including Gisela Stein and Christoph Felsenstein. This already gives us an impression of the sort of expectations that audiences of *Horatier* may have had: despite the preview presenting an image of the chorus, it also names some of the individuals featuring in it, possibly in order to attract audiences to the Schiller Theater to watch some of their favourite actors. While only one reviewer congratulated the ensemble for successfully building an homogeneous chorus, a great many reviewers found the chorus somewhat lacking. Peter Hans Göpfert found the chorus formations visually impressive, but incredibly monotonous, while Ritter complained that the chorus lacked ‘einige persönlichkeitsstarke Akzente’. These two comments illustrate that particular West German theatre critics expected individuation in the theatre as elsewhere in life, and thus wanted individual human voices to rise from the chorus. This is perhaps for fear of what Luft felt he had experienced: ‘Der Mensch kann gemeinsam singen, gemeinsam sprechen nicht! Stimmen, aufeinandergelegt, werden nicht deutlicher, schöner gar nicht; sie werden unmenschlich.’ As a result, many reviewers took the opportunity of writing their review to congratulate certain actors for their individual performances, such as Pleitgen, Rolf Schult, Felsenstein, and Gisela Stein, whose voices emerged from the chorus.

The West Berlin audience’s clear predilection for the strengths of particular actors appears to have influenced their understanding of the play. A handful of reviewers understood *Horatier* as evincing the position that reality in its complexity needs to be addressed in both thought and language. Many reviewers read the production as being concerned with the status of the individual in society, and, at that, as presenting a world in which individual subjectivity has been sacrificed to the end of collective cohesion. Georg Lenz, for example, states that the Horatian’s sister is killed, ‘weil sie ihre menschliche

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130 Wiegenstein, ‘Nach dem Sieg der Partei’.


132 Ritter, ‘Das zweigeteilte Schwert’.

133 Luft, ‘Acht Seiten fester Verse nur’.


Indeed, Ritter interprets the text and the production as showing a nightmarish example of ‘die Position des Individuums in einer Welt der Gewalt und Brutalität’, in which the individual is turned into a ‘Tötungsmaschine, die sich nicht abstellen läßt’, and Rischbieter understood the production as showing the harsh reality of a collective society, which pushes humanity to its very limits. Here we see once again that these reviewers read a moral to the play, and one regarding the dangers to the individual if the needs of the collective are prioritised over and above all else.

Indeed, it would appear that the reviewers’ interpretations of the conflict presented in *Horatier* might have been in no small part due to their expectations of the relevance of the piece. As we saw above, Müller’s text is clearly of relevance to societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain through both its theme and its allusions to a shared history of terror. Notably, in his essays in the publicity material for the SSB the theatre critic Ernst Wendt attempted to move beyond the GDR context of Müller’s plays dealing with antiquity in the 1960s: while, for Wendt, Müller’s earlier plays were clearly about the difficulties of Aufbau in the East,

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\text{[i]n seinen Bearbeitungen der antiken Stoffe während der sechziger Jahre zieht sich Müller aus der konkreten gesellschaftlichen Gegenwart seines Landes zurück und exemplifiziert den großen Widerspruch zwischen dem in Einsamkeit verbohrten Einzelnen und einer auf ‘Einverständnis’ drängenden Gemeinschaft.}^{139}
\]

Wendt seemingly implies that the problems encountered in Müller’s antiquity texts are not exclusive to the GDR, and Müller is exploring the pressure for consensus in the social realm in the abstract. Nonetheless, the programme included the full texts of both *Der Lohndrücker* and *Die Korrektur*, suggesting perhaps to some viewers that the ‘auf “Einverständnis” drängende[…] Gemeinschaft’ to which Wendt refers was in fact the GDR.

We find some indication of this in the reviews: Wiegenstein, for example, read the historical situation as examining a GDR problem of the ‘Auseinandersetzung um Gerechtigkeit und Wahrheit nach Errichtung der “Diktatur des Proletariats”’. Jürgen Beckelmann recommended that *Der Horatier* is a play, ‘das freilich eher in die DDR als

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138 Rischbieter, ‘Unreine Wahrheit’.
hiezulande hingehörte’. Indeed, Günther Grack’s faith in Western parliamentary democracy is so firm, that he felt that the problems introduced in Horatier have little to do with anyone in the West. One reviewer for the Swiss St. Galler Tageblatt commented on the rarity of a GDR playwright on a West Berlin stage, and suggested that Der Horatier was ‘ein schwieriges Stück für die DDR’.

Some reviewers, however, saw the play as relevant for both Eastern and Western societies. Rischbieter highlights the fact that Müller’s career in the GDR had been beset by controversy, but that Horatier treats a problem to be found ‘in unserer (östlichen und westlichen) Gegenwart’. Indeed, Niehoff comments that, while others around her read the play as dealing with Stalin, she saw the play as asking more general questions about the contradictions in the behaviour of individuals. Göpfert found that, because of the staging techniques deployed, ‘das Bezugssystem der verklausulierten Fabel [bleibt] unkenntlich’. Likewise, Thomas Reiche comments that ‘[d]ie Frage, weshalb dieses Werk nicht von einer DDR-Bühne angenommen wurde, kann auch nach der Westberliner Aufführung nicht beantwortet werden. Ideologische Gründe werden es kaum sein.’

While reviewers were by no means in agreement regarding the relevance of the production, this emphasis on the individual in the audience responses to Horatier is not surprising. Not only did Lietzau’s production clearly prioritise the interests of the individual, but the status of the individual was a major concern in West German society at the time. As Peter Iden notes in his résumé of the 1972-73 theatre season in the FRG, that year saw a renewed interest in the individual in two respects: directors were now taking the limelight in the theatre; and this was further manifested in an emphasis on the individual in the performances on stage. Iden does not see this as a bad thing by any means, but rather as a means to make spectators think about ‘wer sie selber sind’. Regarding Iden’s observation of the rise of the director, there was some controversy, mentioned in a large number of the reviews, regarding complaints made about Lietzau’s directorial style: he apparently refused to discuss the production with his ensemble, and tended to sit on a raised chair, overlooking rehearsals (see figure 3.3) either to gain the audience’s perspective of the piece or to

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140 Beckelmann, ‘Ein Ballett mit Sprache’.
141 Grack, ‘Eine faule Geschichte’.
144 Niehoff, ‘Ist es tödlich dem Menschen, das Unkenntliche?’.
146 Reiche, ‘Lehrstück eines DDR-Autors in Westberlin’.
148 Ibid., p. 61.
demonstrate his full control over proceedings. Nonetheless, his allegedly tyrannical rule over all aspects of the production may indeed have filtered into the presentation of individuality in his production.149

Fig. 3.3. Hans Lietzau rehearsing Horatier (Horst Güldemeister, Stadtmuseum Berlin)

The landscape outside of the theatre may have further informed this emphasis on the individual found in the reviews of Horatier. We need look no further than the West German concept of the Leistungsgesellschaft, which encouraged individual initiative in the accumulation of wealth and the advancement of social status,150 and which had led to the unbounded success of the FRG’s economy. Given the Schiller Theater’s location in an affluent part of West Berlin, it is very likely that its regular audiences would have been particularly aware of and enthusiastic about individual achievement. This contrasted quite

150 See: Childs and Johnson, West Germany, p. 64 and p. 93.
considerably with East German notions of the public space; as Fulbrook writes, ‘[m]any East Germans […] took a more collectivist view of society than did West Germans, seeing more clearly the drawbacks of a market economy […], whereas West Germans took a more individualist view of merit and mobility’.\textsuperscript{151} This different perspective was integral to the one East German review of Lietzau’s production: Friedrich Hain considered the production a failure, primarily because it lacked understanding of collectivity, and as a result, it was not prepared to confront what he deemed to be the real questions involved in politics.\textsuperscript{152}

3.5 Challenging Sensibilities

Through the above analysis of \textit{Der Horatier}, we can see that it clearly problematises discourses of the individual in both the Western, capitalist world and its Eastern, communist or socialist counterpart. The Prague Spring and its suppression provided the backdrop to the production of the text, but we have seen that the hopes for democratic reforms in the GDR preceding the Prague Spring also informed \textit{Der Horatier}’s composition. Müller’s interest in democracy and the form of public discourse is not confined to problems in the East, but rather problems raised in the Eastern bloc, which were relevant to so-called democratic industrial societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

\textit{Der Horatier} deploys certain techniques of Brecht’s \textit{Lehrstücke} in asking for the involvement of its audiences to question the prevalent \textit{partage du sensible} regarding the place of the individual in their societies. By not presenting a moral or a meaning, it invites a number of responses. The audience watching the Roman public is very different to these Romans: rather than \textit{Einverständnis}, \textit{Der Horatier} seeks to encourage the possibility for \textit{dissensus} in the audience, and perhaps the creation of new interpretations of the relationship between the individual and the collective, and therefore a new form of democracy. Despite the openness of the text and the apparent attempts in Lietzau’s production to encourage multiple responses from the problematic of the text, the West Berlin première tended to be seen less as problematising discourses of the individual, and more as presenting a moralising critique of the collectivist society to which Müller belonged. In this light then, it might be fair to say that Müller’s text misfired to some extent: both its director and its audiences were perhaps unwilling to undertake a reappraisal of the very foundations of democracy; moreover, there seems to be a fallout between his implied audience and the real audiences his play would receive on either side of the Iron Curtain. This may be part of the cause of his

\textsuperscript{151} Fulbrook, \textit{History of Germany}, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{152} Friedrich S. Hain, ‘\textit{Der Horatier} von Heiner Müller’, \textit{TdZ} 28/5 (1973): 60.
later reluctance to use the *Lehrstück* form, writing in 1977, ‘daß wir uns vom LEHRSTÜCK bis zum nächsten Erdbeben verabschieden müssen.’ This next earthquake did in fact arrive in the late 1980s.

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4
A Satyr Play about Woodworm: *Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauren*, 1986

4.1 Of Desks and Men

Just as was the case in the composition of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1956-57 and *Der Horatier* in 1968, again Müller found himself responding to a politically charged situation when writing *Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauren* in August 1986. Once again, Müller’s text shows a distinct concern for the question of democracy and public participation in politics, and attempts to transpose this into a form of audience engagement with the theatrical event.

Müller composed *Kentauren* as the fourth part of his *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* cycle, which began with *Russische Eröffnung* in 1983-84 and finished with *Der Findling* in 1987. Although new plays often waited many years before being premiered, this was not the case with *Kentauren*. On 29 January 1988, it received its world première in two theatres simultaneously, both within the GDR: Müller incorporated it into his production of *Der Lohndrücker* at the Deutsches Theater; and Christoph Schroth directed a production of *Kentauren* and the third part of *Wolokolamsker Chaussee, Das Duell* (1985-86) at the Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater in Schwerin. Not only was *Kentauren* performed in the GDR very soon after its composition, but it was also published in the February edition of *Theater der Zeit* in 1988.¹ Only one month later, it was also published in the pages of *Theater der Zeit*’s Western counterpart, *Theater heute*.² As a result, within eighteen months of its composition, it received a potentially very large audience both within and outside of the theatre. We shall return to Müller’s production of *Kentauren* in the context of 1988 and beyond in the following chapter, but for now I shall focus on *Kentauren*’s textual politics and the way in which it responds to the political context of the GDR in 1986; I shall also briefly refer to Schroth’s treatment of the thematic content of the text in his production in Schwerin.

After Gorbachev’s accession to the position of General Secretary of the CPSU in March 1985, hopes were renewed within certain sections of the East German public for the introduction of democratising and liberalising reforms in the GDR, modelled on glasnost and perestroika in the USSR. Nonetheless, while by 1986 the SED leadership had raised no clear opposition to Gorbachev’s domestic reforms, there was also no clear indication of willingness to reform the cultural and political machinery of the GDR.

As I shall argue here, Kentauren presents an open challenge to the SED’s brand of socialism. While it may appear at odds with a system of literary and theatre censorship aimed at silencing overt political opposition that Kentauren received so much attention, we cannot be entirely surprised by its relatively speedy staging or its composition at this time. Indeed, already in November 1985, prominent voices at the Fifth Congress of the Verband der Theaterschaffenden der DDR spoke out against the unacknowledged system of theatre censorship, and the Ministerium für Kultur (MfK) was placed under pressure to allow productions of new GDR texts. Müller had acquired a degree of cultural invincibility at this time, which he had gain through rumours that he was on the shortlist for the Nobel Prize for Literature and, as he himself believed, from being awarded the prestigious Nationalpreis der DDR 1. Klasse für Literatur und Kunst in October 1986. Notwithstanding this prestige and the privileges its afforded him, Müller clearly deemed Kentauren to be too overtly critical to be performed at this point: although successive drafts of Kentauren indicate that it was written on 22 August 1986, at readings of the first three Wolokolamsker Chaussee texts at the Volksbühne in East Berlin between 24 and 30 November 1986, Müller claimed to have not yet written a fourth part of the cycle.

Kentauren is formally very similar to the other four parts of the Wolokolamsker Chaussee cycle: it is written in the form of a verse monologue with no character attribution, seemingly spoken by a first-person narrator and lacks all forms of punctuation. The text opens with an announcement by the narrator that he has had a nightmare, and it goes on to present a situation in which one bureaucrat believes that an utterly orderly society has been produced. His interlocutor, however, tells him that that cannot be the case, as order requires a dialectical opposite, disorder; he therefore orders him to drive through a red light at a

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4 Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht, pp. 279-80.
5 See: AdK, HMA 3672; AdK, HMA 3673; AdK, HMA 3674; AdK, HMA 3675; and AdK, HMA 3676.
crossing. The speaker, perhaps a Stasi officer and one more senior than the functionary who has driven through a red light, is then met by the ghost of the latter, and congratulates him for having succeeded in re-establishing dialectics. Following this exchange, the speaker attempts to stand up and cannot: he has now become a composite being, half-man/half-desk, in a ‘Hochzeit von Funktion und Funktionär’.  

Given Kentauren’s concatenation in a series of five texts, it tends to be treated only in the context of the other four parts of the Wolokolamsker Chaussee cycle. Some commentators regard the whole cycle as a study of the limits of Stalinism and its relationship to German Socialism, particularly given the relevance of the title, as the road which linked Moscow and Berlin during the Second World War. Norbert Otto Eke explicitly links the centralism of the Stalinist state to the question of needing the input of individual subjects in the building of socialism, although he addresses this only in relation to the first two plays in the cycle. Following such thematic analyses, some studies understand the cycle as exploring the loss of the individual in history, and therefore the lack of any possibility for human discourse. Indeed, Helmut Fuhrmann and Rainer Schmitt identify a process of the loss of individuality and of alienation in Kentauren itself. Much space is given over to reading the Wolokolamsker Chaussee plays as Lehrstücke. In the previous chapter, we saw some of the ways in which this is a difficult term to apply to many of Müller’s texts, yet Hans-Thies Lehmann and Fuhrmann tend to adopt the term as a descriptor for these texts without asking why they may be Lehrstücke or indeed investigating the term. The subject matter and form of Russische Eröffnung is indeed remarkably similar to that of Mauser and Die Maßnahme, but these texts are by no means formally identical. David Barnett provides a nuanced discussion of the Lehrstück and assesses the ways in which these plays may be considered Lehrstücke. Yet Barnett finds little collective function for actors or audience in Kentauren,

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7 Heiner Müller, Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauren, in W5, pp. 229-36 (p. 235). Hereafter, all bracketed page references containing the abbreviation ‘K’ in the main text will refer to this edition.  
thus leaving us to wonder how it may serve a purpose other than a politically relevant ‘flat satire’.  

With the exceptions of Fuhrmann, Barnett, and Schmitt, critics have generally paid minimal attention to Kentauren and have given it unfairly short shrift, claiming to have good reason for doing so. Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, for example, states that Kentauren is ‘nicht exportfähig’ and casts it to one side as nothing more than a ‘Satyrspiel’. It is rarely seen as more than what Lehmann labels an ‘intermittierendes Satyrspiel’, lacking autonomy, which, in Rainer Emig’s words, is merely present to ‘provide relief’ from the tragedy depicted in the previous three parts of the cycle. Not only do these above-cited critics grossly misunderstand the role of the satyr play, to which we shall return below, but they refuse to analyse Kentauren as a work in its own right. Müller himself expressed a level of flexibility regarding the status of each text, calling them ‘Texte also, die für sich stehen können, die aber auch in Zusammenhang stehen können, wobei die Reihenfolge auch auswechselbar ist’. Given Müller’s ambivalence regarding the performance of the Wolokolamsker Chaussee texts, and his decision to stage Kentauren on its own, we may want to begin an analysis from Kentauren and, where useful, relate it to the other texts in the cycle. Furthermore, the potential productivity of the text has barely been addressed; nor has the significance of the historical context in which it was written. While Hauschild notes that each Wolokolamsker Chaussee play was written ‘Stück für Stück haltend mit dem politischen Wandlungsprozess’, only two critics consider the situation of the mid-1980s: Fuhrmann describes Kentauren as a ‘groteske Satire’ of the GDR’s statecraft and mentions Gorbachev, but does not assess the text’s relation to this context in any detail; Schmitt, however, considers Kentauren loosely in relation to Gorbachev’s reforms, but understands the text as pessimistic that any reform will come about in the GDR.

In this chapter, I shall provide a close reading of Kentauren within its historical setting. In the light of the context of 1985-86, we can begin to understand the issues addressed in Kentauren and thus the relationship between the text’s form and content. Müller’s assessment of the historical situation in 1986 is by no means a cloaked attack on the

19 Hauschild, Heiner Müller, p. 423.
20 Fuhrmann, Warten auf ‘Geschichte’, p. 162; and Schmitt, Geschichte und Mythisierung, p. 156.
SED’s brand of *real existierender Sozialismus*: here, he challenges both the form and the historical lineage of the GDR’s statecraft and questions the public’s role in its maintenance through superficial conformity. As I shall demonstrate, Müller is ultimately concerned with the tragedy of German Socialism, and, through the presentation of a satyr drama, attempts to offer the audience the means with which to harness the potential productivity of tragedy.

### 4.2 New Thinking vs Old Ways

If Müller’s text engages with and challenges the state of socialism in the GDR in the mid-1980s, we must first ask: why was this a concern at that time? Furthermore, what may have provoked such concerns in the first place? In the two previous chapters, we have seen that *Der Lohndrücker* and *Der Horatier* react to and express a desire for the democratisation of the GDR’s cultural and political fabric: in the latter half of the 1980s, Gorbachev’s reform programmes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* brought hope for reform within the GDR to some sections of the East German populace. As we shall see, however, even by the latter half of 1986, nothing had changed within the GDR: culturally and politically, the GDR appeared to be in stasis, and its populace was once again in the mood for change.

#### 4.2.1 Looking East

Despite the intentions of those who appointed him to the position, when Gorbachev began his leadership of the Central Committee of the CPSU, reform of the Soviet Union’s economic and political institutions stood at the top of his agenda. Notably, both Khrushchev’s 1956 ‘Secret Speech’ and the Prague Spring informed Gorbachev’s ideals.21 Through *perestroika*, (‘restructuring’) and *glasnost* (‘openness’),22 Gorbachev sought to bring about reforms which would enable the possibility for open discussion within and between all sectors of Soviet civil society, and ‘take into consideration the diverse interests of people, work collectives, public bodies, and various social groups’.23 While, on one level, the processes of restructuring were effected out of a desire to rescue a stagnant Soviet

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22 These translations are recommended by Gorbachev himself, although there is no space at present to consider alternative translations for the terms, especially *glasnost*, which could be roughly translated as ‘voice-ness’. See: Gorbachev, *Perestroika*.

23 Ibid., p. 29.
economy, central to Gorbachev’s ‘New Thinking’ were multilateral nuclear disarmament, an end to animosity across the Iron Curtain, and the improvement of trade relations between the East and the West. Although within Western discourse, Gorbachev’s policies may appear to be aimed at ‘westernising’ or ‘liberalising’ socialist structures, he saw them as part of a larger development of socialist society at the time; Gorbachev could claim that he had been working within the Leninist interpretation of socialism, seeing his role as developing Lenin’s notion of the ‘living creative activity of the masses’.

Reportage on Gorbachev’s accession within the pages of Neues Deutschland initially made mention of his domestic reform programme. The newspaper published his inaugural speech, in which he stated a commitment to democratisation: ‘Die Partei betrachtet die weitere Vervollkommnung und Entwicklung der Demokratie, des gesamten Systems der sozialistischen Selbstbestimmung des Volkes als eine Schlüsselaufgabe ihrer Innenpolitik.’ Again, at the end of October, a seven-page reproduction of the CPSU’s policy programme iterates a need for the workforce to participate in the ‘Lösung der Fragen des staatlichen und gesellschaftlichen Lebens’. After years of stagnation since Erich Honecker had succeeded Ulbricht as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED in 1971, to many sectors of the East German population old enough to remember, Gorbachev’s reforms may have been reminiscent of the Prague Spring and of Ulbricht’s gestures towards reforming the machinery of the GDR in the mid-1960s. Indeed, according to Fulbrook, ‘many believed that the GDR too would begin to engage in a process of domestic restructuring and democratization’. Rather than looking to the West for democratic models, even regional SED leaders looked to the Kremlin for the possibility and shape of reform.

Gorbachev’s commitment to ‘democratic’ reform was reiterated in Neues Deutschland, in which his closing speech at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress of the CPSU in March 1986 talked of encouraging more democracy and making public media a more transparent body.

While Poland and Hungary were quick to enact reforms similar to Gorbachev’s in their own domestic spheres, the SED Politburo responded with caution. Its initial reaction appeared to take the form of either brushing the CPSU’s domestic reforms under the carpet

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24 Ibid., p. 17 and p. 32.
25 Gorbachev and Mlynář, Conversations with Gorbachev, p. 98.
28 Fulbrook, Anatomy of a Dictatorship, p. 234.
and merely congratulating Gorbachev for his methods for loosening international tensions, or of adopting a policy of Schönfärberei and claiming to its public that they were already living in the democratic society to which the Soviet Union aspired.³² Whereas vast numbers of East German citizens appeared happy to live in a culture of Anpassung, some were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with conditions in the GDR;³³ not only did emigration applications rise staggeringly between 1984 and 1987 with an 87% increase in applications from 1986 to 1987 alone,³⁴ but 1984-87 witnessed a distinct upsurge in the production of oppositional periodicals calling for democratic reform, particularly in East Berlin.³⁵

4.2.2 Hope on Ice

If Müller’s statements on the matter are anything to go by, he was a clear yet characteristically sceptical advocate of Gorbachev’s policies in the USSR and their potential application to the GDR. In 1987, for example, he stated in an interview in the FRG: ‘Für mich ist Gorbatschow bei aller Skepsis die einzige Hoffnung, nicht nur in der Abrüstungsfrage. Wenn er scheitert, ist der Kommunismus für immer erledigt.’³⁶ While he uttered this in the West, in the same year he stated in East Berlin:

Was jetzt in der Sowjetunion versucht wird, ist eine ungeheure Korrektur, die Renaissance einer Hoffnung, die mit den Namen Lenin und Trotzki verbunden war und von Stalin auf Eis gelegt wurde. […] Die westliche Umarmung für das Gorbatschow-Programm, was seinen Innenpolitischen Teil angeht […], sollte uns nicht blind machen für die Tatsache, daß es dabei nicht um eine Annäherung an den Westen geht, sondern im Gegenteil um die Herausbildung des anderen, um die wirkliche Alternative zum Kapitalismus […].³⁷

Here, Müller expresses not only an enthusiasm for Gorbachev’s reforms, but his belief that they are the only way in which the hard-fought project of communism can be saved. Furthermore, there is a distinct affinity in his thought here with that of Gorbachev himself:

³⁴ See: ibid., pp. 30-31.
³⁶ Heiner Müller, ‘[So abgründig ist das gar nicht…]’, in W10, pp. 580-603 (p. 595).
for both, *perestroika* and *glasnost* were stages in a Marxist-Leninist process towards communism, which had, however, been put on hold by Stalinism.

*Kentauren* is entirely scathing about the current shape of socialism in the GDR. Not only is *real existierender Sozialismus* shown to be utterly devoid of democracy, but it is depicted as a self-perpetuating system, bereft of any desire to move forward. The text demonstrates a distinct lack of input from the GDR population in governing their state. Indeed, the absence of voices other than those of the functionaries in the text is mimetic of the absence of the voices of the East German public in daily political life. Not only is this text purely populated by bureaucrats, but these are also functionaries with little if any regard for the masses: ‘Nicht alles was den Massen dient verstehn | Die Massen Jedenfalls nicht gleich’ (*K*, 234). In stating this, the functionary implies that there is no point in asking the people what they think, as they do not necessarily understand their reality and therefore cannot be trusted. Regulating the public and producing order appears to be prioritised over letting people participate in their own governance: ‘Ordnung und Sicherheit das war es doch | In jeder Schulung unser Produktionsziel’ (*K*, 231). This is telling: not only does the state machinery strip the public of a voice, but it also harks back to the East German political situation in the 1950s, when the authorities displayed a clear lack of trust in their workforce to build socialism.

As opposed to portraying a state in which the public may participate and have a say in its own future, the text depicts a situation in which the state only desires its own maintenance. This arises from a tricky relationship between *Schönfärberei* and the need for a dialectical opposite in order to justify its own existence. One functionary’s comment, that ‘alles ist in Ordnung | […] Unsre Menschen sind | Wie sie im Buch und in der Zeitung stehn’ (*K*, 231), is met with his senior bureaucrat fearing the end of the dialectic through which power can be maintained:

Kurz Räuber und Gendarm sind eine dia  
Lektische Einheit Unser täglich Brot  
Ist das Delikt Mord unter Sonntagskuchen  
Der Staat ist eine Mühle die muß mahlen  
Der Staat braucht Feinde wie die Mühle Korn braucht  
Der Staat der keinen Feind hat ist kein Staat mehr (*K*, 231-2)

In order for a state to exist, it must have enemies; that is, in order for its existence to be justified, it must have a role to play in quelling dissent and disorder. As a result, the senior functionary orders his junior to commit an offence at the potential cost of life (*K*, 233). This act results in the now deceased junior bureaucrat returning to declare: ‘Genosse Ober Alles
ist in Ordnung | Die Dialektik wiederhergestellt’ (K, 234). While Müller saw the only future for communism in Gorbachev’s reforms, so long as the current situation of the state is allowed to perpetuate itself, there is no possibility for progress, but merely an eternal recurrence of real existierender Sozialismus.

As indicated, the functionaries’ distrust in the GDR populace is a leftover from the days of Aufbau and, like much else, has failed to develop and change over time. Indeed, the state itself still has a distinctly Stalinist shape. The potential death of the junior functionary is justified using the Stalinist principle of human sacrifice in the name of political power: ‘Wir alle müssen Opfer bringen’ (K, 233). Stalin himself is cast as an all-powerful devil, who could intervene at any time: ‘Und Stalin soll mich holen wenn ich weiß | Was es bedeuten sollte’ (K, 234). Yet Kentauren does not merely indicate that the SED state has maintained its adherence to Stalinist modes of governance, but also that if there has been some form of development in GDR statecraft, this has been achieved through adopting other historical means of oppression, with a particularly Prussian flavour. But what do Prussia and bureaucrats have to do with oppression and why would this have been a concern at the time?

Geographically, the GDR consisted of Saxony, Mecklenburg, and lands that were formally Prussian. Historically speaking, the ‘Prussian’ character had been interpreted by the National Socialists as one of strength and power, and was therefore incorporated into the mythology of the new Aryan German.38 While the SED had initially rejected Prussia as part of its specifically East German cultural inheritance in the 1950s and had indeed abolished the old Länder, in the 1970s, it began a project of reclaiming this heritage for the GDR.39 Müller’s own treatment of the legacy of Prussia in the 1970s indicates his belief in a historical trajectory from Prussia to the GDR, via Nazism;40 one need, perhaps, look no further than the ‘Brandenburgisches Konzert’ scenes of Germania Tod in Berlin (1954/71) or Leben Gundlings Friedrich von Preußen Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei (1976).41 In the 1980s, the SED increased its appropriation of Prussian history: not only was the statue of Frederick the Great on Unter den Linden restored in 1983, but in late July 1986, only a

41 Heiner Müller, Germania Tod in Berlin, in W4, pp. 325-77 (pp. 332-40); and Heiner Müller, Leben Gundlings Friedrich von Preußen Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei, in W4, pp. 509-37.
month before Müller composed Kentauren, Frederick the Great’s body had also been reinterred in the palace of Sanssouci in Potsdam; an exhibition regarding his relationship with the arts and culture was opened with a programme of lectures, including one entitled ‘Mißbrauch Friedrich II. im deutschen Film – Ein Weg zu Hitler’.\(^{42}\) As we can see from the title of this lecture, the SED Politburo was as concerned with embracing its Prussian heritage as it was with cleaning up Prussia’s image.

Writing in 1982, Johannes von Bieberstein states that this assimilation of Prussia into the official East German historical consciousness ‘hat […] etwas mit den autoritär-staatsbürokratischen Strukturen zu tun, die sowohl Alt- als auch Rot-Preußen charakterisieren’.\(^{43}\) It is this authoritarian and bureaucratic side of Prussia which is portrayed in the text as existent in the GDR and which was no doubt clear to GDR citizens in their everyday life. The senior functionary refers to himself at one point as an ‘alter Preuße’ (K, 235), and both bureaucrats demonstrate their solid commitment to their ‘Diensteid’ (K, 233), constantly referring to the need to fulfil their ‘Dienst’ (K, 232 and passim). Müller draws an association between bureaucracy and Prussia, showing that those exercising power in the SED state are doing so in a thoroughly Prussian manner; moreover the motivations for control are characteristically Prussian. In this sense, Kentauren appears to recommend that, while the Soviet Union can progress so long as it shrugs off the legacy of Stalin, the GDR’s statecraft must unburden itself of a legacy which is both nicely compatible with Stalinism and shows no signs of disappearing any time soon.

Left to its own devices, therefore, the GDR seems set on a firm trajectory towards becoming a Red Prussia. Rather than developing towards communism or democratising the political structures of the state, the future towards which the situation depicted in Kentauren would necessarily lead is utterly dystopian: ‘Den Feierabend können wir vergessen | Arbeit und Freizeit beißen sich nicht mehr | Das ist Kapitel Drei der Weltgeschichte’ (K, 236). Human beings have become replaced by mechanical bureaucratic centaurs operating out of nothing but duty. It is here that a comment made about the first two parts of the Wolokolamsker Chaussee cycle is of significance. In the GDR in 1985, Müller stated: ‘Die Existenz der Sowjetunion ist die Voraussetzung für Geschichte, für Zukunft. Deswegen auch diese Texte. Solange wir an unsere Zukunft glauben, brauchen wir uns vor unserer Vergangenheit nicht zu fürchten.’\(^{44}\) Although Müller made this pronouncement before composing Kentauren, we can see this as a major concern in the text. The present state of the

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\(^{44}\) Müller, ‘Solange wir an unsere Zukunft glauben’, W10, p. 461.
GDR as portrayed in *Kentauren* offers no direction forward and there is therefore no future to be believed in, as the GDR continues to be haunted by the fearful presence of its Prussian past. Nonetheless, while there is no future offered by the text, Müller farcicalises this tragic situation in order to provide the audience with the means for having a future to believe in. Although we shall turn to Müller’s production of *Kentauren* in the context of 1988 in the following chapter, a glance at Schroth’s staging of *Kentauren* as part of *Entdeckungen 7* in Schwerin in 1988 demonstrates that the particularly Prussian character of the SED state was topical enough in the late 1980s to be given visual form on stage and bear meaning for GDR audiences. Schroth combined *Kentauren* with *Das Duell*, thus linking the bureaucratic Stalinism of the 1950s, and particularly the fallout of the 1953 17 June Uprising, with the Prussianised state of the 1980s in an attempt to address the current manifestation of the abuse of power. In the staging of *Kentauren*, Schroth used two actors, dressed as Prussian clowns, in a small, circus-like pen, filled with copies of *Neues Deutschland*, the symbol of SED propaganda and *Schönfärberei* (see figure 4.1). Most critics, including those from the FRG, saw this production as being in the comic tradition and amusing, but containing something much darker and tragic, whereby laughter served as a means of confronting reality and would cease in the face of the bureaucratic means of oppression addressed on the stage.

We must, therefore, take a look at the role of farcicalisation in *Kentauren*. Not least, Müller is not only concerned with presenting historical material as farce, but also with demonstrating that tragedy has itself become farce to some extent.

4.3 Tragedy ± Farce

In recognising the political situation in 1985-86 and *Kentauren*’s response to this in terms of its subject matter, we can see how this text serves not merely to question the GDR’s political machinery, but also to overtly criticise its historical lineage and lack of development in a way recognisable to its populace. The SED’s statecraft is self-perpetuating and leads to nothing but the maintenance of a bureaucratic state security service. In this sense, we could


see *Kentauren* as a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense: for Aristotle, the tragedian presents ‘what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity’. There is, however, a much more nuanced treatment of tragedy in this text. In the postscript to *Der Findling*, Müller calls the *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* cycle ‘der dritte Versuch in der Proletarischen Tragödie im Zeitalter der Konterrevolution’, and goes on to write that ‘Das Satyrspiel *Kentauren* beschreibt die Tragödie als Farce.’ Notably, here Müller does not call *Kentauren* a farce, but states that it describes tragedy as farce. *Kentauren* is a text packed with humour and traditionally comedic elements in both the images it presents and the language in which it does so, and this leads many critics to expect laughter to be the most productive element of the text. Yet to understand the text in these terms radically misunderstands Müller’s usage of the terms ‘farce’, ‘tragedy’, and, as we shall see below, ‘Satyrspiel’. Farce, for one, is not

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See, for example: Fiebach, *Inseln der Unordnung*, p. 240.
meant here in terms of a comedic category that violates taboos whilst avoiding social critique.\(^5^1\) Rather, for Müller, tragedy and farce are terms which describe moments in history. In January 1990, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Müller stated in an interview: ‘Wir sind jetzt in der Phase der Farce, nach der Tragödie, jetzt ist keine Tragödie im Gange. Da kommt auch keine mehr.’\(^5^2\) While Lehmann has taken this later historical resignation to signal that, in Kentauren, tragedy has been made impossible by the farce of capitalism,\(^5^3\) we would do well to take another look at these terms.

Müller’s usage of the terms tragedy and farce is clearly influenced by Marx. At the very opening of *Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Napoleon* (1852), Marx writes: ‘Hegel bemerkt irgendwo, daß alle großen weltgeschichtlichen Tatsachen und Personen sich sozusagen zweimal ereignen. Er hat vergessen, hinzuzufügen: das eine Mal als Tragödie, das andere Mal als Farce.’\(^5^4\) For Müller, tragedy appears to be less concerned with showing the inescapability of a situation than about a situation packed with conflict and contradiction, out of which ideas and ideals arise. In farce, however, it is these ideas and ideals that are lacking: for Müller in 1990, ‘wenn es keine Ideen mehr gibt, gibt es auch keine Tragödie.’\(^5^5\)

Even so, there appears to be a level of ambivalence in Müller’s usage of the terms tragedy and farce. In an unpublished and undated note on *Kentauren*, Müller writes:

‘Farce in Kostüm of tragedy  
+ reversed ———
vice versa’\(^5^6\)

Here we can identify a dual movement within Kentauren: rather than rendering tragedy a farce and therefore removing all ideals and ideas in the historical moment depicted, the farce is also rendered tragedy. This in turn reintroduces the possibility for conflict, contradiction, and the generation of ideas and ideals. Kentauren explicitly addresses the apparent lack of ideals and progress in the GDR in order to urge the audience to generate conflict and new ideas; and it does so by criticising the GDR’s present state as a seeming disavowal of Marxism-Leninism, and by formally returning farce to tragedy.

\(^{56}\) AdK, HMA 3656, p. 3.
4.3.1 Beyond Utopia

There is a clear indication in *Kentauren* that the state is engaging in some form of *Schöpffärberei*. While the authorities wish to present to the public an image of a society perfectly conforming to the state-endorsed line, living in freedom and peace, this is identified by the senior functionary as a ruse to keep the people in line. He therefore accuses the junior functionary of stupidity for claiming that everything is orderly as it is represented in the news: ‘Das muß ein Irrtum sein’ (*K*, 231); ‘Durch blinden Glauben an den Augenschein | Denn kein Fakt ist ein Fakt eh er auf uns hört’ (*K*, 232). This leads to a degree of uncertainty as to whether there is or is not total order and overtly criticises the use of the press to report on the GDR as a society possessed of citizens willingly following the party line.

The SED’s *Schöpffärberei* of events may not, however, have been quite so unfounded. *Schöpffärberei* was only made possible to an extent by the superficially conformist behaviour of the GDR population: a tacit pact for outward conformity in return for better living standards rendered the creation of genuine socialist consciousness amongst the GDR’s populace secondary if not redundant. This practice is questioned in *Kentauren*, in which the functionaries talk of a need to produce ‘Bewußtsein’ (*K*, 231). Yet while Marxian analysis regards the ways in which people live their lives as leading to the formation of the requisite consciousness, this is inverted in *Kentauren*: ‘Sein | Bestimmt Bewußtsein in der Vorgeschichte | Im Sozialismus ist es umgekehrt’ (*K*, 232). Marx’s cornerstone of dialectical materialism is consigned to prehistory, and now, its inversion, ‘Bewußtsein bestimmt Sein’, applies. Rather than having produced a population ideologically attached to socialism, the SED’s leadership has produced a population living in false consciousness, but acting out of obedience. Now that socialism has been achieved, anything beforehand was merely prehistory. This, however, is a blatant departure from Marxism-Leninism, the supposed ideology of the SED, and a sound indication that Marxist-Leninist ideals have been forsaken.

Further to this, the Prussian character of the GDR as portrayed in *Kentauren* turns out to be a means for suffocating the creative capacities of its citizens. While Schmitt recognises an essential difference between the Prussian bureaucratic centaur of *Kentauren* and the unruly, lustful centaurs of the battle between the centaurs and the Lapiths in Book 12

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of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (ca. 2-8AD), one crucial similarity between these centaurs goes completely unremarked in all secondary criticism of this text: faced with a hero, Caeneus, whose skin cannot be punctured by any weapon, the centaurs resort to suffocating him under a pile of trees. It is perhaps no coincidence that *Kentauren* was composed little more than a week after the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Berlin Wall, a physical manifestation of a state’s means to the suffocation of a people. This, however, points to yet another break from Marxism-Leninism: Lenin’s model of the development from capitalism to communism posits the future communist utopia as one in which the state has eventually withered away. Rather than following the Marxist-Leninist model of historical progress towards communism, however, *Kentauren*’s criticism of East German Socialism demonstrates that this is a system which is purely set on maintaining its own existence, and at that, the existence of oppressive statecraft. Thus, yet another cornerstone of Marxism-Leninism has been abandoned. In depicting a departure from both dialectical materialist foundation and eventual utopia, *Kentauren* quite clearly criticises the SED and its statecraft for not being Marxist enough. The ideals of communism have been forsaken for the sake of control and stasis: the tragedy of the history and present of German Socialism has become a farce, devoid of the very ideas and ideals to which it apparently attests. In its state as farce, it has destroyed any possibility for conflict or dissensus.

4.4 Tragedy → Farce → Satyr Drama

If the text is overtly critical of the lack of historical progress of the SED state and its farcical form, then does it serve a collective function beyond merely being critical of the contemporary shape of the GDR? It is here that the notion of satyr drama is key to understanding *Kentauren*’s textual politics. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, due to Müller’s own description of *Kentauren* as a ‘Satyrspiel’, critics tend to leave this text to one side as a supplement to tragedy and, at that, as something which serves as nothing but light relief. Although only one satyr play, Euripides’ *Cyclops* (ca. 412BC), has survived in full, twenty-five per cent of the output of the Attic tragedians would have been satyr plays; nevertheless, in the words of George Harrison, they too have been ‘[d]ismissed too often as a

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flip *coda* to weightier and more important tragedies*. Yet while tragedy and the satyr play are distinct, their themes, material, and style are very similar; not least, the satyr play is characterised by repetition and plays on intertextual references to previous tragedies, and does so in order to ask the audience to ‘reflect on its own conduct and values’. According to C.W. Marshall, satyr drama was a means of discussing and interpreting tragedy:

Satyr drama can explore in broad brush strokes and sometimes react to aspects of tragedy, or it can explore tragic themes in novel ways. Sequence too is important: since satyr drama follows tragedy, it provides the audience with an interpretative gauge for what has preceded.

Given Müller’s interest in classical literature and particularly Euripides, it would not be going too far to suggest that he had not only read *Cyclops*, but also had this very satyr play in mind when describing *Kentauren* as belonging to that genre. *Cyclops* functions as a re-telling of the story of Odysseus’ confrontation with Polyphemus, but introduces a chorus of satyrs and their leader, Silenus, imprisoned by Polyphemus. In the Greek tradition, the satyr play finishes with a happy ending in which the satyrs are released from captivity, and the audience collectively identifies with the heroes and the now liberated satyrs; *Kentauren*, however, does not end with an act of liberation in any strict sense. Lacking both a positive outcome and a figure with which to identify, Müller’s text requires a form of audience engagement that asks the audience to reflect on its own complicity in maintaining the status quo in the GDR. In order to do so, it emphasises the historicity of tragedy and seeks out the possibility for a form of dissensus.

### 4.4.1 Playing with Tragedy

Formally, *Kentauren* stages confrontations with historical tragedies in which ideals and ideas may have been at stake and opens them to a new form of critical reflection. In his *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (1948-49), Brecht finds that classical tragedy (epitomised by Sophocles’ *Oedipus*) presented man in conflict with the will of the gods, while

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Shakespearean tragedy depicted a struggle between the individual and his/her fate; as a result, rather than setting out to criticise societal machinery, tragedy was a means for eliciting feelings in an audience.\textsuperscript{69} Brecht argues that earlier tragic moulds ensured that the forces at play against characters, such as gods, fate, etc., were placed beyond criticism. He therefore states that what is needed is an awareness of the historicity of the structures underlying human experience and the patterns produced by them, in order for these to be viewed critically.\textsuperscript{70} While Fuhrmann regards Müller’s usage of intertextual references in \textit{Kentauren} as a form of \textit{Verfremdung},\textsuperscript{71} as we shall see, this process is much more about repeating tragedy to create historicised caricature. Indeed, where Marx talks of farce, he goes on to describe it as ‘Karikatur’,\textsuperscript{72} and this holds for \textit{Kentauren}.

In \textit{Kentauren}, Müller takes quotations from previous tragedies and recontextualises them in the current political climate to render the structures guiding existence in the GDR context visible. Richard III’s final cry at the battle of Bosworth Field, ‘A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!’ (V.iv.13),\textsuperscript{73} is caricatured in the line, ‘Ein Königreich für ein Staatsfeind’ (\textit{K}, 232), showing yet another desperate attempt for the state to keep its life at all costs; and Hamlet’s philosophical monologue, ‘To be or not to be, that is the question’ (III.i.55),\textsuperscript{74} is brought up-to-date with the ironic choice of the bureaucrat: ‘Kopf oder Kragen das ist hier die Frage’ (\textit{K}, 231). Mephisto’s eternal words in Goethe’s \textit{Faust I}, ‘Blut ist ein ganz besonderer Saft’ (I. 1740),\textsuperscript{75} reappear in \textit{Kentauren} as ‘Tinte ist ein ganz besonderer Saft’ (\textit{K}, 236), in which the substitution of ink for blood casts the SED’s desperate bureaucratic clinging to power as a Faustian pact with the devil, at the cost of a future; in this case, the earlier reference to Stalin in place of the devil renders Mephisto the agent of Stalin. If former tragic characters were at the will and whim of the gods or fate, GDR citizens are made aware that they are at the whim of a bureaucratic god. This bureaucratic god, however, is not indestructible.

\textsuperscript{69}Bertolt Brecht, \textit{Kleines Organon für das Theater}, in BFA 23, pp. 65-97 (p. 78).
\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., pp. 78-9.
\textsuperscript{71}Fuhrmann, \textit{Warten auf ‘Geschichte’}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{72}Marx, \textit{18. Brumaire}, MEW 8, p. 115.
4.4.2 A Case of Woodworm?

The forces governing life in the GDR are shown to have lost control over themselves to some degree. The senior bureaucrat, now a centaur, was not in control of his metamorphosis, which appears to have been a surprise to him: ‘Und als ich aufstehn wollte und ihm [dem teuren Toten] nachsehn | […] | Durchzuckte mich ein Schmerz wie ein Schweißnaht | Ich war mit meinem Schreibtisch fest verwachsen’ (K, 234). He does not understand what he has become, and even asks if it is possible for desks to reproduce and, if so, what the result of procreation might be (K, 235-6). Furthermore, there appears to be no going back for the bureaucrat. The subtitle of the play, ‘Ein Greuelmärchen aus dem Sächsischen des Gregor Samsa’ (K, 229) is telling in this respect. If Prussia symbolises oppressive and authoritarian statecraft through bureaucracy, what, then, is the role of the reference to Saxony? Barnett suggests that Saxony could be seen in opposition to Prussia, and therefore, that Saxony here has the role of being the ‘site of resistance’ to Prussian ways.6 While this is an attractive reading, we must be careful with it: Müller was himself a Saxon, but so too was Ulbricht, the initial importer of Stalinism to German soil. Nonetheless, we may read Saxony and the notion of a Saxon language as a now defeated possibility for resisting the authoritarianism of Red-Prussian society.

Müller’s evocation of Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Franz Kafka’s Die Verwandlung (1915), bears certain affinities with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s interpretation of Die Verwandlung in Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature (1975; first German edition, 1976); indeed, Müller explicitly refers to this book and its concept of ‘becoming-animal’ in Krieg ohne Schlacht only six years later.7 According to Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Die Verwandlung, Samsa’s transformation into an animal is one through which he begins to plot a ‘line of flight’,8 escaping the rigid control of authoritarian bureaucracy. Samsa’s escape ultimately fails;9 the bureaucrat in Kentauren, however, does not even have a possibility of escape and has been doomed to failure from the start: his transformation within the bureaucratic system renders him a ‘Personalunion von Holz und Fleisch’ (K, 235), which turns him into nothing but a machine at the disposal of the state:

Ich und mein Schreibtisch Wer gehört jetzt wem
Der Schreibtisch ist volkeigen Was bin ich

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6 Barnett, Literature versus Theatre, p. 132.
7 Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht, W9, p. 247.
While Emig interprets the desk as a sign of possible resistance, as it is where the act of artistic production takes place, here it clearly serves to weigh the speaker down and prevent him from escaping his predicament: ‘Der Schreibtisch um den Bauch kein Rettungsring’ (K, 235). There is no possibility for the speaker to escape, given his transformation into a half-man/half-desk centaur. Following Deleuze and Guattari again, the notion that this text was originally written in Saxon dialect, and so a work of minor literature, is important: once a possible site for subverting the established order, it has since been reterritorialised by or subsumed into Hochdeutsch, thus barring the possibilities for resistance.

As the functionaries in the text find only (superficial) conformity, they have to create their own disorder. This disorder is not, however, the sort that would lead to the questioning of the state’s power, but rather consists of the small everyday act of driving through a red light, ‘Und zwar | In Uniform’ (K, 233). Yet this is only so that order may be maintained, and society kept in stasis. The silence of the East German population, being ruled, rather than doing their own ruling, means that there can be no dissensus, and no challenge to SED authority. As we have seen, however, the text draws our attention to the conformity of ordinary GDR citizens, thus suggesting that their current patterns of behaviour cannot question the shape of the state. What Kentauren requires of GDR citizens, therefore, is that they find a space in the system to attempt to try to subvert the state in its attempts to use their activities as a means of exercising more control and find ways of acting which cannot be subsumed by the self-perpetuating power of bureaucracy.

At the very end of Kentauren, the bureaucratic centaur appears to malfunction:

Besondere Vorkommnisse keine Ordnung
Und Sauberkeit und Sicherheit Und Sau
Bedienung Eine Akte zum Verzehr
Und einen Schreibtisch zur Reproduktion
Berkeit und Sicherheit und Sau Was knackt
In unserem Holz He ist der Wurm drin Hilfe (K, 236)

Here, the speaker is no longer able to complete full statements, but constantly interrupts himself. Glimpses of other concerns still make it through the repeated mantra ‘Und

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80 Emig, ‘Wars Without Battle’, p. 82.
Sauberkeit und Sicherheit’. Ultimately, however, the centaur’s malfunction is cast in the language of SED statecraft, doubtless recognisable to those who lived in the GDR.\(^{81}\)

This malfunction of an eternally self-repeating machine recalls the possibility for escape from the circularity of history in Müller’s 1984 text, *Bildbeschreibung*: ‘die Lücke im Ablauf, das Andre in der Wiederkehr des Gleichen, das Stottern im sprachlosen Text, das Loch in der Ewigkeit, der vielleicht erlösende FEHLER[.]’\(^{82}\) In *Kentauren*, this hole or mistake is cast as a possible case of woodworm, and therefore, as something that may be eating the GDR in its current state from inside; but as this is cast as a question, the actuality of woodworm is left ambiguous. Similarly ambiguous is the functionary’s call for help, which may be a call for help to cure the woodworm, thus allowing bureaucracy to carry on functioning, or to help him escape the woodworm, and thus reform and dismantle the bureaucratic means by which the status quo is being maintained. What is clear, however, is that *Kentauren* indicates that, by grasping the mistakes and contradictions in the state and in ordinary people’s behaviour, the audience of *Kentauren* must respond in some sense to explode this stasis from the inside. While German Socialism in its current state will try to keep itself going, it will also throw open possibilities for change which, when recognised, must be seized upon and raised by an otherwise silent public as a means to creating a more democratic socialism. Once the possibility for *Schönfärberei* is gone, reform might stand on the agenda.

Despite clearly maintaining his utopian beliefs in the possibility of socialism and communism, Müller does not prescribe how it is that his audience is to react. It is up to each individual to harness his/her own productive creativity in challenging the SED’s monopoly on power and ideology to have his/her own voice heard in a democratic East German state. A first step in process of bringing about *dissensus*, however, will be for the GDR public to recognise its own complicity in its lack of voice: while outward conformity was once a means to evade persecution, from 1985-86, it was preventing the majority of the East German public from demanding *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the GDR and taking steps towards democracy and, perhaps eventually, communism.

4.5 Remedying Woodworm?

*Kentauren* not only challenges the stasis of political and cultural life in the GDR, but also refuses to leave the East German public beyond reproach. Müller’s text confronts its

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audience with the tragedy of German Socialism and its use of both Prussian and Stalinist means of maintaining power for the sake of its own survival. At the same time, it addresses a GDR public which, rather than rallying for Gorbachev-style democratic reforms, had largely remained silent. The text operates as a form of satyr play, in which the tragedy of German Socialism is treated as a farce, as it is devoid of ideas and ideals. Nonetheless, this farce is still much like a tragedy: the text still posits a field of potential conflict and contradiction which can be used for the generation of dissensus and the entering of East Germans into a new partage du sensible.

By late 1987, the East German state of affairs had changed dramatically, as the SED Politburo’s tactic of Schönfärberei to counter demand for reform had evolved into flat-out rejection: chief Politburo ideologue and cultural functionary Kurt Hager had dismissed the relevance of perestroika and glasnost for the GDR by equating it to one’s next door neighbour changing his/her wallpaper in April 1987.83 A further concern for the Politburo, however, was that Gorbachev’s policies amounted to a re-evaluation of Soviet history, in which, quite in the spirit of Khrushchev, Stalin was to atone for his crimes and Stalinist models of governance were to be questioned. As a result, all dissemination of thought passing from the Soviet Union to the GDR was put under the closest scrutiny,84 and in 1988 the Soviet publication Sputnik and several issues of the Soviet German-language newspaper Neue Zeit were withdrawn from circulation in the GDR.85 In early 1987, Honecker had gestured towards reforms and had eased travel restrictions for East German citizens, but by late 1987, hopes for long-lasting reforms had been dashed,86 and applications for emigration increased exponentially.87 It is in this mood of widespread disillusion and disappointment that Müller staged his production of Der Lohndrücker at the Deutsches Theater. As we shall see in the following chapter, the Politburo’s rejection of reform only served to give Kentauren even greater relevance in the ailing East German state.

86 See: Fulbrook, Anatomy of a Dictatorship, pp. 234-5.
87 See: Grix, The Role of the Masses, p. 30
5 ‘SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE’: \(^1\) Der Lohndrücker at the Deutsches Theater, 1988-91

5.1 Removing the Topsoil

As we have seen in the previous chapter, widespread calls for democratic reform within the GDR in the mid-1980s were initially met with silence on the part of the SED Politburo before being rejected outright as of April 1987. The SED leadership regarded Gorbachev’s reforms in the USSR to be inapplicable to the East German situation. As a result, while many voices within the GDR public sphere continued to express a need for fundamental alterations to the fabric of German Socialism, huge swathes of the populace favoured exiting the GDR altogether to seek solace in the formal democracy of the FRG. Müller fits very clearly into the former category as someone who still saw a future for socialism on German soil, but one that might be democratic and live up to its purported Marxist-Leninist ideological objectives.

It is within this climate that Müller staged Der Lohndrücker at the Deutsches Theater.\(^2\) This production contained a mass of material, not only of texts by Müller, but including music by Luigi Nono and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, as well as film clips (see figure 5.1). During its run of 72 performances from 29 January 1988 to 17 September 1991, Der Lohndrücker spanned a period of mass disillusionment with the political structures of the GDR, which eventually resulted in the dissolution of socialist society in both East Germany and Eastern Europe as a whole. It is no surprise that the question of democracy and the participation of ordinary East Germans in the governing of their so-called Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat lies at the heart of Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker. In its combination with Der Horatier and Kentauren, Der Lohndrücker served to question not only the history of the GDR, but also the present and future of a socialist state under SED rule. Müller’s concerns for democracy within the GDR are situated within a production which attempted to create a performance in two senses already identified to be crucial to Müller’s understanding

\(^1\) Müller, Die Hamletmaschine, W4, p. 545.
\(^2\) In the main body of this chapter, unless clearly indicated otherwise, ‘Der Lohndrücker’ will be used to refer exclusively to Müller’s production at the Deutsches Theater with its three constituent texts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene/event in production</th>
<th>Corresponding scene in text</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Film: ‘Atlantik’</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>‘Arbeiterbier’</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><em>Der Horatier</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>‘Arbeiterbier’</td>
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<td>‘Das Lied von der HO’</td>
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<td>‘Barfuss in den Sozialismus’</td>
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<td>‘Das beste Pferd’</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>‘Chor der Geharnischten’</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td><strong>INTERVAL</strong></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Film: ‘Empedokles’</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>‘Die Jacke’</td>
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<td>‘Zeitungsschau’</td>
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<td>‘Die Macht im Staat’</td>
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<td>‘Arbeitermacht’</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td><em>Kentauren</em></td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>‘Arbeitermacht’ (continued)</td>
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**Fig. 5.1.** Table of contents of Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker*, comparing it to the published text. Approximate timings have been omitted, due to variations in the running time of the performance.

of the form and function of a democratic theatre: first and foremost, it set out to produce the *Trennung der Elemente* integral to Brecht’s Epic theatre; and it aimed to engage its audience with material which is bound to be interpreted in various ways, according to the interpretative practices of each individual audience member. As we shall see, while critical of the official SED version of GDR history, Müller’s production still, however, refuses to damn the project of building socialism or to teach its audience where the state’s failures lie.

By the late 1980s, Müller’s treatment of GDR history exposes a mythological quality to the construction of East German historical consciousness, and *Der Lohndrücker* therefore sets

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3 Müller, *Der Lohndrücker*, W3, pp. 27-64.
4 Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny’, BFA 24, p. 79.
out to provide an archaeological excavation of it; an excavation which ultimately requires the participation of its audience.

Despite the enormous critical success of Der Lohndrücker from 1988-91, there is very little secondary literature which deals exclusively with this production. There is, of course, a vast array of newspaper and magazine reviews, but given their role as a means of providing a brief aesthetic (and, in many cases, ideological) judgement to the ends of informing a lay readership, I shall not count them as scholarly analyses, but turn to them further below when discussing the contemporary reception of the piece.

Commentators on Der Lohndrücker in production almost unanimously interpret it as a reaction to the contemporary state of affairs in the GDR. Such studies read the production as a statement of lost hope in a socialist utopia guided by the SED. Karl-Heinz Schoeps, for example, writes that ‘[t]he revolutionary ideals of progress, genuine collective, and humanity, envisioned in 1956, have become distorted and mired in empty rhetoric in 1988’.\(^5\) Schoeps further states that Müller is concerned here with the lasting heritage of both fascism and Stalinism, which he views as having caused the failure of the present socialist system,\(^6\) while other commentators tend to concentrate on readings of Der Lohndrücker as a critique of Stalinism alone.\(^7\) Given the production’s timing in 1988, critics remark on the significance of Gorbachev’s reforms as a background,\(^8\) with Loren Kruger noting the distance between the SED’s policies and Gorbachev’s line in Moscow,\(^9\) and Marc Silberman suggesting that the production alerts its audiences to the need for glasnost.\(^10\) Furthermore, Hugh Rorrison astutely notes that the production is entirely concerned with ‘die Vereinbarkeit von Produktion und Demokratie’.\(^11\) Apart from in the case of Müller’s biographer, Jan-Christoph Hauschild, however, there is no detailed investigation of the particular influences Gorbachev’s reforms in the Soviet Union may have had on Müller and Der Lohndrücker’s audiences at the time.

As GDR history is a key concern in the production, some criticism considers the way in which Der Lohndrücker provides a mythological investigation of GDR historical consciousness. For Heinz Hillmann, the myth of the ideal socialist worker is removed from a

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5 Schoeps, ‘Der Lohndrücker Revisited’, p. 47.
6 Ibid., p. 45.
treatment of working life,\textsuperscript{12} and ‘[d]er Mythos der fortgeschrittenen Klasse, die den Sozialismus aufbaut […], wird dekonstruiert.’\textsuperscript{13} In Silberman’s reading, the production plays up the distance between the GDR’s alleged mythological history, and the present state of affairs.\textsuperscript{14} Stefan Schnabel goes to some lengths to illustrate the various mythological materials at play in the production. He argues that Müller’s approach is to provide an archaeology of socialism, whereby the myths of the early days of the GDR are laid bare, providing a panacea to the ailing socialist state; much like Müller himself,\textsuperscript{15} Schnabel draws upon psychoanalytical theories of repression to assert that in the production GDR history needs to be ‘erinnert, wiederholt und durchgearbeitet’.\textsuperscript{16} As we shall see below, the notion of archaeology is central to an understanding of Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker and, as Martin Linzer rightly suggests, the state in which East German Socialism found itself necessitated an archaeological approach from Müller with regard to GDR history.\textsuperscript{17} In Kruger’s words, the ‘archaeological performance’ of 1988 set out to present ‘figures from a history buried by dominant ideologies, practices, or prohibitions’.\textsuperscript{18}

It is clear from the above discussion that the situation of the GDR in the mid-1980s is so central to Müller’s 1988 production of Der Lohndrücker that it could be seen to be incapable of transcending the GDR context. Nonetheless, Schnabel recognises some convergences between Müller’s treatment of mythology and the practice of Zivilisationskritik, particularly regarding man’s mastery of nature.\textsuperscript{19} As Andreas Keller suggests, when ‘losgelöst vom speziellen DDR-Hintergrund’, the production raises issues connected to post-Enlightenment Western civilisation, such as mankind’s mastery of nature and its effect on social relations and the extent to which theories of history can adequately grasp the development of the man-made world.\textsuperscript{20} To this extent, some commentators appear to recognise Der Lohndrücker’s relevance for societies both East and West of the Iron Curtain.

In terms of the formal aspects of the text and production of 1988, much is made of what Grischa Meyer calls ‘die historische und ästhetische Differenz zwischen Text und

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Hillmann, ‘Arbeiterheld oder Lohndrücker’, p. 222.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 224.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Silberman, ‘Heiner Müller’s Der Lohndrücker’, p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Kruger, ‘Positive Heroes and Abject Bodies’, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Schnabel, ‘Szenische Mythographie’, p. 125.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Keller, \textit{Drama und Dramaturgie}, p. 283.
\end{itemize}
Theater’. As Keller writes, in the thirty years since the composition of the text, Müller had developed as both an artist and a thinker; he broke with his older text, bringing new questions to his audience. Hans-Thies Lehmann reads Müller’s work as the director of this production as a reaction against himself as author, in which he creates ‘eine szenische Lektüre, die den Abstand von 30 Jahren in sich aufnimmt und verborgene Qualitäten des Textes an die Oberfläche bringt, die der Mehrzahl der Interpreten entgangen sind.’ In this sense, the production consists of ‘eine neue Lektüre, eine klare Umdeutung’, and represents a discontinuity between the younger Müller and the Müller of 1988. As we shall see, this discontinuity between the two is perhaps not as strong as Lehmann indicates. David Barnett argues that Müller set out to stage his own text after trying to forget it and distance himself from it, and he gives a detailed account of how this discontinuity led to the recognition of new productive capabilities within Der Lohndrücker. For Barnett, Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker invites the audience to create new associations and interpretations of the material presented on stage through combining Brechtian techniques with a flat acting style and densely metaphorical material, over which not even Müller is in control. Brechtian techniques are also identified by Rorrison, who investigates the potential within the use of montage in Der Lohndrücker, and states that this technique ‘einerseits bisher verborgen gebliebene Inhalte freilegte und andererseits neue Bezüge zur DDR-Gegenwart herstellte.’ While montage and a flat acting style are integral to this production, we shall look more closely at other strategies deployed in the production to the ends of engaging an audience.

Aside from Barnett and Rorrison, few critics engage in detailed analyses of the strategies deployed in Müller’s production for audience response. Furthermore, while history and myth are given substantial treatment in the secondary literature, there is no examination of the relationship between archaeology and what Müller regards as the central political, democratic function of theatre. Given Müller’s concerns regarding the possibilities of audience response, this appears to be an astounding omission. In placing Der Lohndrücker in the context of the late 1980s and considering the specificities of its route to the stage and its performance, we can approach the central issues of both the production and the audiences who reacted to it. Not only is the process of staging Der Lohndrücker well documented, but there is also a wealth of material to which we can refer when we want to know what Der

22 Keller, Drama und Dramaturgie, p. 283.
24 Ibid., p. 27.
25 Barnett, “I have to change myself instead of interpreting myself”, p. 15.
26 Ibid., p. 18.
Lohndrücker sounded and looked like: a video recording of Der Lohndrücker taken at the Freie Volksbühne in West Berlin in May 1989 and a sound recording made at the Deutsches Theater can be found at the Archiv der Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Furthermore, alongside the Dokumentation 2 volume produced by the Deutsches Theater in 1988, photographs and details of the production can be found in a number of volumes published since as well as in further primary materials in the archives. As we shall see below, the process of selecting the material for this production and the resultant performance itself converge with matters arising out of debate within the GDR at that time. Through the deployment of a whole arsenal of means of inviting audience response, Müller leaves the question of the GDR’s future open to the audience, rather than presenting an answer.

5.2 Dig for History!

It is clear that in 1988 Der Lohndrücker was very much aimed at addressing both the history and the present of the GDR. But we need to take a closer look at the circumstances surrounding the decision to stage Der Lohndrücker and to include various other materials in this production. Not least, while the SED’s open rejection of perestroika and glasnost is clear from April 1987, Müller was given the contract to stage Der Lohndrücker by the Deutsches Theater in June 1986. This is enough to tell us that we must be more historically specific when talking about the political context within which Der Lohndrücker was staged.

5.2.1 Negotiations

In 1986, Müller was asked to direct a production for the Deutsches Theater in its future season dedicated to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. According to Alexander Weigel, then dramaturge at the Deutsches Theater and dramaturge for Der Lohndrücker, Dieter Mann, Intendant at the Deutsches Theater, had expected Müller to suggest staging Leben Gundlings, given its treatment of Lessing. Much to Mann’s surprise, however, Müller recommended Der Lohndrücker. This surprise stems from the reception of the text in the GDR since 1959: after Ulbricht’s damning of so-called ‘didaktisches Lehrtheater’ in January

28 AdK, AVM Theater 33.8144a 1-3; AdK, AVM Theater 32.8526/1-3.
30 See: Hauschild, Heiner Müller, p. 446.
1959, *Der Lohndrücker* fell foul of the SED’s cultural policies, and in the ensuing decades was consigned to the history books as a harmless piece of theatre about the difficult *Aufbau* years;\(^{32}\) for theatre practitioners, it appeared out-dated and of little relevance, especially in the light of Müller’s output since the 1960s. The East Berlin SED-*Bezirksleitung* appears to have approved *Der Lohndrücker*’s performance at the Deutsches Theater, seeing it as a work about the ‘Probleme[…] des sozialistischen Aufbaues [*sic*] in der DDR’; in combination with the other works in the Deutsches Theater’s programme, it would call for audiences to take another look at the present.\(^{33}\) As Weigel writes, a production of *Der Lohndrücker* could go ahead von außen und im wesentlichen ungestört, da man den *Lohndrücker* als die harmloseste und konformste aller Möglichkeiten ansah. Es wurde vom Ministerium für Kultur nur ab und zu die Erwartung geäußert, daß Müller sein altes Stück ‘hoffentlich nicht umschreibt’.\(^{34}\)

Despite the general feeling within the MfK, the Berlin *Bezirksleitung*, and the Deutsches Theater that *Der Lohndrücker* would be politically inoffensive as long as it remained unedited or adapted, for Müller it was the ‘aktuellste Stück im Moment’ that he had written, because of its treatment of the themes of discipline and democracy.\(^{35}\) We shall turn to an examination of these themes in due course, but it is notable that the contract to stage *Der Lohndrücker* was obtained in the same month as the election of the ninth Volkskammer. This election which was designed to demonstrate support for the policies of the SED-led Nationale Front under the auspices of participatory democracy, while, true to democratic centralism, ceding no power from the SED Politburo.\(^{36}\) According to Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, the fixing of these elections was perhaps one of the worst kept secrets of GDR public life.\(^{37}\)

\(^{32}\) On the reception of *Der Lohndrücker* in the decades following its composition, see: Streisand, ‘Heiner Müllers *Der Lohndrücker*’; and Streisand, ‘*Der Lohndrücker*. Rezeptionsgeschichte als Entdeckungsgeschichte von Text-Schichten’.


\(^{35}\) Heiner Müller, ‘[Darf ich’s noch mal sagen?]’, in *W11*, pp.19-43 (pp. 33-4).


It is in the inclusion of material such as *Der Horatier* and *Kentauren*, composed only two months later that the specific historical context of the production of *Der Lohndrücker* becomes more illuminating. Already in June 1987, Johanna Schall, Helene Weigel and Brecht’s granddaughter and an actor in the production, suggested including *Der Horatier*, and in September 1987, it was decided that *Der Horatier* would make a good prologue to the production as a whole. This was only a few months following Kurt Hager’s rejection of Gorbachev-style reforms in the GDR and, in a period in which hopes for change, stoked earlier in the year, were destroyed. Tellingly, Mann wrote to the MfK for permission to stage *Der Horatier* on 28 September 1987. The timing of this document is significant, because it demonstrates that the definite decision to stage *Der Horatier* was reached before Gorbachev’s open denunciation of Stalin in October 1987. Of course, there are many ways in which *Der Horatier* can be read as thematically dealing with the legacy of Stalin in the socialist world. But once freed from being merely a parable about Stalin, *Der Horatier* has a much more significant contribution to the production of *Der Lohndrücker* as a whole, particularly in relation to questions of the uses and abuses of history. As for *Kentauren*, Ulrich Mühe suggested this as an epilogue to the production in September 1987, and Mann duly sought permission for its performance on 6 November 1987. Again, the sense of stagnation felt in the latter half of 1987 made the choice of *Kentauren* particularly relevant; Hager’s assertion that the GDR’s situation rendered the likes of glasnost and perestroika inapplicable to the GDR then appeared to receive the green light from Moscow: on 2 November, Gorbachev had announced that each socialist state should pursue its own path, as one size of socialism would not fit all. That is, the relentlessly self-perpetuating state depicted in *Kentauren* appeared to be legitimately stagnant.

Little archival material has yet come to light regarding the MfK’s stance on the inclusion of *Der Horatier* and *Kentauren*. *Der Horatier* had been performed in the GDR at the Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater, Schwerin, in 1979 and, as we have seen in Chapter 3, may not necessarily have been viewed within the GDR as politically suspect. The acceptance of *Kentauren*, however, presents a great many questions. In November 1986 Müller lied about its composition, perhaps for fear of the reprisals he might have faced for writing a

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40 Letter from Dieter Mann to Hans-Joachim Hoffmann, 28 September 1987, DTA, uncatalogued file, unpaginated.
41 ‘9.9.87’.
42 Letter from Dieter Mann to Hans-Joachim Hoffmann, 6 November 1987, DTA, uncatalogued file, unpaginated.
piece which so openly challenged the shape of real existierender Sozialismus. Indeed, there was some concern within the upper echelons of the East Berlin SED-Bezirksleitung that a reading of Das Duell was allowed at the Volksbühne in November 1986, owing to its handling of the 17 June Uprising, Stalin, and the cult of personality.\(^4\) Given the 17 June Uprising’s status as a taboo subject, it is surprising that Der Lohndrücker made it to the stage at all, as the penultimate scene makes clear allusions to 1953. Why, however, did Kentauern make it to the stage without any problem? We may conjecture here that Müller’s status as an internationally renowned, leading GDR playwright afforded him many privileges which allowed him to bypass certain legal restrictions,\(^5\) due to help from particular senior SED cultural functionaries such as Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Klaus Hüpcke.\(^6\) Hager himself expressed an interest in early October 1986 that more works by Müller make it to the stage.\(^7\) Another possible answer appears to be that no one within the party administration had read Kentauern too closely: on 1 February 1988, only days after Der Lohndrücker opened at the Deutsches Theater, a report written by someone within the Bezirksleitung raised concerns regarding the possible negative connotations of Kentauern in relation to the historical reality explored in Der Lohndrücker, concluding that Kentauern might have to be subject to a close reading to discover its political content.\(^8\) As a result of these circumstances, not only could work on Der Lohndrücker go ahead undisturbed in the run up to its première, but even with the inclusion of Der Horatier and Kentauern, there was neither guidance nor interference from the state regarding the ideological position advanced by the piece.\(^9\) Yet we might ask: what was the specific relevance of these three texts in 1988, and how did the cultural-political situation in the GDR from 1986-88 affect the texts themselves?

5.2.2 Discipline and Democracy

As we have seen above, Müller claimed that Der Lohndrücker was his most topical play in 1986, and despite this, the SED leadership regarded it as belonging in the history of the

\(^{4}\) See: Letter from Günter Schabowski to Kurt Hager, 28 October 1986, in BArch, DY 30/27518.
\(^{6}\) See, for example: letter from Hans-Joachim Hoffmann to Kurt Hager, 14 July 1982, in BArch, DR 1/16.914, p. 31; letter from Klaus Hüpcke to Karlheinz Selle, 6 June 1984, in BArch, DR 1/16.914, p. 14; and letter from Klaus Hüpcke to Günter Arndt, 5 June 1984, in BArch, DR 1/16.914, p. 15.
GDR, serving no political purpose for a contemporary audience. Nonetheless, in the context of the mid- to late 1980s, Müller’s production addresses the state of democracy both within and outside of the theatre. As Weigel notes in an interview with Müller that was eventually printed in the programme for the production, Der Lohndrücker demonstrates: ‘Es werden die materiellen Dinge entwickelt, aber was noch dazu gehört, Demokratie zum Beispiel, fällt unter den Tisch.’

50 With the sham election of the Volkskammer in June 1986 and the utter lack of any sign of structural change in the GDR, the question of democracy under socialism became all the more urgent.

Although it took place some three years after Müller gained the contract to stage Der Lohndrücker, Müller’s appearance at the 4 November 1989 demonstration on Alexanderplatz is potentially illuminating regarding his views on the state of democracy in the GDR in the latter half of the 1980s. At the demonstration, Müller read an open letter on behalf of the Initiatifte für unabhängige Gewerkschaften,51 representing the interests of a group of workers in front of a crowd numbering anything between 500,000 and a million GDR citizens.52 Müller’s contribution to this mass gathering was met with boos from the majority of demonstrators.53 In his own defence of reading this letter, Müller jokes that his only mistake was to have understood ‘den strapazierten Begriff DIALOG so […], daß er niemanden ausschließen sollte’.54 He goes on to quip that this event was a theatre practitioner’s dream situation, as it enabled him to hear the audience’s reactions: it clearly had ‘Wirkung’.55 At the heart of Müller’s concerns here, however, is the relationship between democracy and the possibility for open dialogue.

The possibility for dialogue within all parts of the GDR public is of clear significance in his staging. In the production of Der Lohndrücker certain voices have been removed from discourse. While in the original text the workers have no way of partaking in their society, this sensation is heightened in the production through the use of a chorus of students from the Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch. In an interview in 1988, Müller states:

Am Text selbst haben wir ja sehr wenig geändert. Und der einzige wirkliche Eingriff […] besteht darin, daß alle Texte […] die von nicht namentlich bezeichneten Arbeitern gesprochen werden, chorisch gesprochen werden. Das klang zuerst erschreckend unlogisch, weil der Chor mal diese, mal jene

53 Part of this appearance at the 4 November 1989 demonstration can be seen in: Die Zeit ist aus den Fugen, dir. by Christoph Rüter (Frankfurt/M: filmedition suhrkamp, 2009) [DVD].
55 Ibid.
Meinung vertritt. Aber ich glaube, es stimmt doch, weil wir nun zeigen können, daß diese schweigende und schwankende Mehrheit einmal so denkt und redet und einmal so.\textsuperscript{56}

As Müller’s comment suggests, the chorus of workers does indeed appear to contradict itself. In the final strike scene of the production, the workers present two moments in which their speech represents more than one side of the debate. The first occurs at the beginning of the scene:

\begin{quote}
\textsc{Zemke:} Erst Lerka, jetzt der Brillenträger. Das ist zuviel.
\textsc{Siettiner:} Das ist die Arbeitermacht.
\textsc{Geschke:} Ja, das lassen wir uns nicht gefallen.
\textsc{Chor:} Was können wir machen?
\hspace{1em} Wir streiken.
\hspace{1em} Wir schneiden uns ins eigne Fleisch.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

In this passage, the workers ask collectively what to do, but provide a collective answer which states both that a strike is the solution, and that a strike will be to their own detriment. Later in the same scene, we find a similar formulation: ‘Ich will meine ruhige Kugel schieben, das ist alles. Akkord ist Mord’ (\textit{Ld}, 76). The chorus of workers represents a body of people, possessed of a degree of internal variation. Nonetheless, it is an entirely homogenised body of people, speaking in a clear, homogeneous voice, physically present in a tightly choreographed mass. The presentation of the chorus of workers suggests that, although they are physically present, they have been made to be homogeneous, at the expense of having a voice; as the chorus states in the election scene: ‘Wir können nichts machen’ (\textit{Ld}, 40). Much like in the tragedies of Euripides, the chorus of \textit{Der Lohndrücker} is a collective of the oppressed or subaltern,\textsuperscript{58} which can do little to alter its reality. The sensation of having no possibility to alter social reality is emphasised in the presence of a portrait of Stalin, projected on the back of the stage throughout the election scene. The Stalinist approach to government is an ever-present force in GDR social reality; as we have

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Heiner Müller, \textit{Der Lohndrücker}, in \textit{Dokumentation 2}, pp. 26-85 (p. 76). Aside from the absence of all stage directions and the addition of other sections of text (including \textit{Der Horatier} and \textit{Kentauren}), the text of \textit{Der Lohndrücker} printed as the play-script in this edition is textually identical to that published in the Suhrkamp \textit{Werkausgabe}. Given the textual variations and the sheer volume of material in \textit{Dokumentation 2}, all bracketed page references containing the abbreviation ‘\textit{Ld}’ in the main text will be to this edition.
\item[58] Many of Euripides’ tragedies that are still available to us today contain a chorus of the subaltern in the form of prisoners, old men, or women. Take, for example, the chorus of captive Trojan women in \textit{Hecuba}, or of Greek slave women in \textit{Iphigenia in Tauris}.
\end{footnotes}
seen, while Gorbachev was undertaking an effort to redress a lack of democracy in the USSR, the SED Politburo reacted to such apparent revisionism with great reserve.

For Müller, the text of *Der Lohndrücker* illustrates a situation in which people’s energies have been disciplined to fulfil specific projects. In an interview in 1987, he stated: ‘diese Disziplin konnte benutzt werden jetzt für den Wiederaufbau. Das DDR-Problem ist nur, diese Disziplin, die läßt sich jetzt nicht mehr benutzen zur Demokratisierung.’\(^59\) The play depicts workers disciplined under Nazism, whose energies were then channelled to achieve socialist goals, thus illustrating continuity between fascism and SED-Socialism. In 1988, Müller explicitly links this question to Gorbachev’s reforms, stating, ‘[e]s geht um die Frage des Verhältnisses von Disziplin und Demokratie.’\(^60\) The power structures of the GDR have adopted the course of discipline for the sake of maintaining the shape of its institutions. As Müller states in the interview printed in the programme:

> Institutionen tendieren zur Konservierung ihrer Struktur, d. h., sie verhindern oder behindern Neues. Und neues Denken ist Denken in noch nicht bestimmmbaren Kategorien, d. h. neues Denken tritt auf als verworrenes Denken, ist also nicht kontrollierbar oder entzieht sich der Kontrolle.\(^61\)

Through the ordering and disciplining of the populace, the SED Politburo has attempted to eradicate all possibility for different ways of thinking and acting. As Müller suggests, what is needed is ‘Unordnung zu schaffen und Ordnung zu verhindern’.\(^62\) Through new ways of thinking, ordinary citizens have the possibility to introduce new modes of discourse into the public realm, allowing each voice to be heard. The possibility for *dissensus* is clearly integral to Müller’s understanding of the democratic function of theatre at this time. Before turning to discuss the particular strategies employed in *Der Lohndrücker* to evoke a ‘democratic’ audience response, and the ways in which contemporary audiences reacted to the production, we must gain an insight into the horizon of expectations and mood of East German theatre audiences in 1988.

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\(^{59}\) Müller, ‘[Darf ich’s noch mal sagen?]’, *W11*, p. 33.


\(^{62}\) Ibid.
5.3 Spectatorship Before the Curtain Fell

Despite demands from the Berlin Bezirksleitung that Müller make no changes to the text of Der Lohndrücker, Müller’s first move was to remove all stage directions, creating, according to Weigel, almost a new work in itself.\(^{63}\) Needless to say, Müller’s work on every aspect of this production demonstrates a desire to craft a piece of politically engaging theatre. He regarded the audience for which he wrote as very capable of interpreting material on stage within political frameworks. In 1982, Müller had stated in an interview with the French literary critic and cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer, that ‘[a]lles, was man im Osten schreibt, ist für die Gesellschaft sehr wichtig, oder die Gesellschaft glaubt, daß es sehr wichtig ist. Man hat es schwer, etwas zu publizieren, weil alles eine so große Wirkung hat.’\(^{64}\)

Comparing East German audiences to those in the FRG, he stated in 1988: ‘Die [DDR-Zuschauer] verstehen auch sehr viel mehr. […] Es gibt in der DDR natürlich ein Publikum, das viel genauer sieht und rezipiert und beobachtet als hier.’\(^{65}\)

In the 1980s, the theatre in the GDR represented, according to Anthony Meech, ‘a major medium for communication within society’.\(^{66}\) It had also assumed the role of being one of the only public forums available for the discussion of contemporary reality.\(^{67}\)

Regarding audience numbers, theatre in the GDR was still in a form of crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, with stiff competition from television and film mopping up much of the potential theatregoing public; still, the GDR sported a much larger spectatorship than the FRG.\(^{68}\) In 1986, the theatres of the GDR could boast of a total of 28,190 performances of some 1,813 productions, with no less than 9.183 million theatre visits.\(^{69}\) Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact social composition of the East German theatregoing public, the state still attempted to make theatre available to the entirety of its population: in 1988, each theatre visit in the GDR was subsidised by as much as 46.24 East German Marks;\(^{70}\) and even as late


\(^{64}\) Müller, ‘Ich glaube an Konflikt’, W10, p. 177.


\(^{68}\) See: Emmerich, Kleine Literaturgeschichte, p. 348.


as the 1988-89 season, visitors to the Deutsches Theater could make good use of the subsidised seating, with tickets selling for anything between 2 and 12 DDR-Marks.\textsuperscript{71} Furthermore, the system of \textit{Anrechtspartner} made it easy for groups of school pupils and workers to visit the theatre who may have otherwise been unlikely to afford it.

While Ralph Hammerthaler contends that GDR audiences mainly sought relaxation, entertainment, and an escape from political reality in the theatre,\textsuperscript{72} this does not mean that the theatre was a de-politicised space. Indeed, the social function of theatre in the GDR led to the creation of a politically engaged audience, ready to associate occurrences on the stage with their own present material reality.\textsuperscript{73} This comes perhaps as no surprise towards the end of the decade, given the role that theatre practitioners and theatrical spaces played in demanding reforms in the GDR: the ensemble of the Dresden Schauspielhaus, for example, began reading a set of demands including freedom of knowledge, freedom of dialogue, and pluralistic thinking, each night from 4 October 1989.\textsuperscript{74} Even before this, the 1980s proved to be a period in which audiences were being both aesthetically challenged by the stage and engaged by politically provocative works.

A look at the shape of the most significant East German theatres in the mid-1980s can begin to give us an impression of the probable horizon of expectations of this politically sensitive and numerically substantial theatre audience. From the latter half of the 1980s, playwrights and theatre practitioners in the GDR were concerned with both the dearth of plays by GDR playwrights reaching the stage and the level of censorship that their texts underwent before having a hope of being produced. According to Michael Patterson, of 744 theatrical premières in the GDR in 1986, only 182 were of works by GDR playwrights.\textsuperscript{75} Even in the pages of \textit{Theater der Zeit}, many theatre critics complained not only that there was insufficient work by GDR playwrights on the stage, but also that, according to Ingrid Seyfarth, where they did reach the stage, the quality of the productions did not match the quality of the texts.\textsuperscript{76} Nonetheless, a new breed of East German directors were creating performances which challenged the traditional approaches to the classics, and attempted to render them more open to their recipients: Frank Castorf and Jo Fabian particularly come to

\textsuperscript{72} Hammerthaler, ‘Die Position des Theaters in der DDR’, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{74} See: Patterson, ‘The German Theatre’, pp. 263-4.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 265.
mind in this context. This followed a trajectory, established in the 1970s, in which the directors such as Alexander Lang and Wolfgang Engel began deploying aesthetic techniques which removed the text as the locus of meaning and attempted to open the classics up to numerous interpretations. According to Linzer, Lang’s interpretations of the classics consciously referred to GDR reality and attempted to use them as a means of open discussion with their audiences. As a result, from the end of the 1970s, Linzer states that certain sections of the GDR public ceased visiting the theatre on the promise of seeing their favourite playwrights or plays, and instead became interested in the work of particular directors. While leading directors such as B.K. Tragelehn and Adolf Dresen eventually left for the FRG in the late 1970s, the young avant-garde received an enthusiastic reception in academic circles and, through the level of abstraction in their presentation of theatrical works, gained a great deal of freedom in what they were able to stage.

While GDR plays were still finding the transition from page to stage difficult, a new wave of glasnost-era Soviet playwrights had already emerged in the East German theatre in the 1980s. Mikhail Shatrov’s *Diktatur des Gewissens* (Диктатура совести, 1986), for example, received its German-language première in Leipzig in November 1987, before being performed at the Deutsches Theater in 1988, while his *Blaue Pferde auf rotem Gras* (Синие кони на красной траве, 1979) had been staged at the BE in 1980, directed by Christoph Schroth, where it remained in the repertoire for ten years. Shatrov’s plays were overtly critical of the state of communism in Eastern Europe at the time and demanded the sorts of reforms called for by Gorbachev from 1985 onwards. Alexander Gelman had been popular in the GDR since the 1970s, and his 1979 play, *Wir, die Endesunterzeichnenden* (Мы, нижеподписавшиеся), was very successful at the Maxim Gorki Theater, stoking the flames of hopes for glasnost and perestroika in the GDR. Of course, the official reaction to such plays was to explain them away as showing social and individual problems to be potentially difficult, but placing the responsibility to correct society with the audience member, that is, the new ‘positive[r] Held’. Notably, however, by the time Müller’s production of *Der

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81 Ibid., p. 231.
Lohndrücker was performed before audiences in the Deutsches Theater at the beginning of 1988, controversial works such as Volker Braun’s Die Übergangsgesellschaft (1982) and Christoph Hein’s Die Ritter der Tafelrunde (1985-6) had not yet been staged, and no one knew that the GDR itself would come to an end.

More specifically, the Deutsches Theater was viewed as the pinnacle of the East German stage in the 1980s, where it was to offer the classics of European theatre. Indeed, Hager wrote to Honecker with some enthusiasm in recommending Mann for the position of Intendant in 1984, partly due to Mann’s stated belief that the Deutsches Theater was for classics, while the Kammerspiele was for new works of theatre.86 As noted above, this was a period in which directors within the GDR challenged the traditions of dealing with the classics, and the Deutsches Theater was no exception: Lang’s revolutionary production of Georg Büchner’s Dantons Tod (1835) had premièred in April 1981 and was to achieve a run of 95 performances. Since Mann’s instalment as the Intendant, in the three seasons running up to 1987-88, the Deutsches Theater featured premières of works by Chekhov, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Euripides, amongst others, but with a distinctly contemporary twist: Lang’s production of Johannes R. Becher’s Winterschlacht (1953) in 1985, for example, featured Müller’s Russische Eröffnung as a prologue; and the 1986-87 season saw plays by Thomas Bernhard and Sean O’Casey on the main stage.87 According to Weigel, while the authorities wanted to place emphasis on the classics, from 1984-87 a number of previously rarely performed pieces made it to the Kammerspiele, aside, notably, from works by Braun and Müller.88 In this respect, a work by Heiner Müller at the Deutsches Theater was likely to awaken great audience interest, and this was duly advanced by photographs of and updates regarding the rehearsal process in the East German press from as early as December 1987.89

When Der Lohndrücker opened at the Deutsches Theater in January, theatregoers in the GDR were perhaps less accustomed to seeing works by contemporary GDR playwrights than to seeing re-workings of the classics or adaptations of GDR novels for the stage. Even so, given the substantial interest in plays by Shatrov and Gelman, which openly questioned the form of socialism and the historical lineage of the current communist systems of Eastern

85 See: Irmer and Schmidt, Die Bühnenrepublik, p. 240.
86 Letter from Kurt Hager to Erich Honecker, 1 February 1984, in BArch DY 30/27518, pp. 10-11 (p. 10).
87 See: Weigel, Das Deutsche Theater, pp. 389-90.
88 Ibid., p. 302.
Europe, audiences, which were already adept at reading the contemporary political significance of theatrical productions, were also prepared for both politically provocative and aesthetically challenging performances. Müller’s production of *Macbeth* at the Volksbühne in 1982-85 was, in Linzer’s words, ‘wohl die spektakulärste Inszenierung der frühen achtziger Jahren in Berlin’, and confronted its audiences with a challenging piece of theatre, clearly set in a rear courtyard in the Prenzlauer Berg district of East Berlin. It is beyond doubt that, although *Der Lohndrücker* had been consigned to the realm of history and academia by the early 1960s, GDR audience members were well prepared to receive this piece of theatre as something which, in 1988 to 1991, was going to confront their contemporary historical reality head-on; indeed, this was the very audience for which Müller claimed to be working. Moreover, given the general level of dissatisfaction in the GDR at the time, East German theatregoers were likely to have been in a mood to interpret *Der Lohndrücker* as overtly critical of the SED state.

5.4 Myth and Consensus

Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* is clearly concerned with the question of democracy in the GDR and with disrupting the consensus of the political realm. It is in this respect that the treatment of myth in *Der Lohndrücker* is particularly relevant. As we saw above, secondary critics have commented a great deal on the practice of archaeology in Müller’s production. Nonetheless, undertaking an archaeological interpretation of *Der Lohndrücker* is more than an artistic practice on Müller’s part: it is rather a mode of stimulating interaction on the part of the audience.

Myth takes centre stage in *Der Lohndrücker*. The story centres not only on the myth of the socialist worker hero in the form of Balke, but also on the myths of the conditions and achievements of the *Aufbau* period. The production itself contained abundant mythological material, such as *Der Horatier* and the bureaucratic chimera of *Kentauren*, and allusions to myths constitutive of European society: the motif of fire ran throughout the production, serving in one sense as a reference to the myth of Prometheus. The production of *Der Lohndrücker* demonstrates that the generation of these myths has attempted to construct a

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90 Linzer, *Ich war immer ein Opportunist...*, p. 156.
91 For more analysis of this production, see: Barnett, “I have to change myself rather than interpreting myself”.
consensual society in which citizens, including former Nazis, have been willing agents in the construction of socialism: according to this understanding of GDR historical reality, those people who have the possibility of introducing new ways of thinking and acting have been rendered invisible, and those in power have actively sought to banish them. For Müller, myth is thus a clear means for homogenising a society or a culture. In an interview in 1986, Müller states that myths are

Formulierungen von kollektiven Erfahrungen, die also immer wieder neu interpretiert werden können. [...] Und dann kann man immer noch davon ausgehen, daß diese Mythen, vor allem die griechischen Mythen, denn um die geht’s ja dabei, daß die so eine gemeinsame Basis sind – jedenfalls für die europäische Kultur, die Kultur der europäischen Länder.  

While the above citation appears to express a level of optimism in the possibilities inherent within myth, and especially Greek myth, Müller is also more than aware of the darker, didactic side of myth. For Adorno and Horkheimer, ‘[d]er Mythos wollte berichten, nennen, den Ursprung sagen: damit aber darstellen, festhalten, erklären. [...] Sie [die Mythen] wurden früh aus dem Bericht zur Lehre.’  

That is, the collective function of myth, as something that binds different and varied peoples, is used for the purpose of control and forming consensus, and Müller’s production explores this aspect of myth.

The use of a mythological history for the maintenance of the status quo and for controlling a population is clearly foregrounded in Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker, and can be seen in the presentation of Der Horatier near the very beginning. As we saw in Chapter 3, Der Horatier questions the status of the individual in both Eastern and Western societies and is not necessarily to be read as a parable about Stalin and/or Stalinism. In the secondary criticism on Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker, Der Horatier tends to be interpreted as a prologue which, in Barnett’s words, for example, ‘set the scene for the complex of relations that was to follow’. While this assertion is correct on one level, to which we shall return below, the method of staging Der Horatier translated it into a piece which consciously emphasised the role of telling history as myth. Initially, Müller attempted to stage Der Horatier using members of the cast, following the stage directions printed at the

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95 This remains Hauschild’s interpretation of the role of Der Horatier in Der Lohndrücker. See: Hauschild, Heiner Müller, p. 448.
end of the text (H, 86). He then tried it with choruses of students from the Ernst Busch acting school, but this method of staging *Der Horatier* was shelved that self-same day for fear of the piece losing its ‘Prologcharakter’. Instead, *Der Horatier* featured Johanna Schall and Ulrich Mühe, not following the action described in the text. The stage lit up on Schall sitting on a chair at the front of the stage right, demonstratively holding a book, with Mühe standing behind her with one leg over her shoulder (see figure 5.2).

Much like the histories of the GDR, much is left out of the myth reported in *Der Horatier*: the only discursive possibilities open to the Roman populace are those offered by the lictors. Amongst the seventy pages of reading materials given to the actors in preparation for *Der Lohndrücker*, Müller and Weigel included the sixth to fourteenth parts of Benjamin’s *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Given that Schall is seemingly reading from a book, it would not be unreasonable to suggest an affinity here with Benjamin, who writes in the seventh thesis: ‘Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein.’ Those behind the historical document use it for its collectivising mythical qualities, selecting material from which they want the supposedly objective document’s recipients to learn; in doing so, the document excludes those elements which would question the interpretation it offers. Although this material did not make it into the final performance of *Der Lohndrücker*, Müller set up the ideal worker in relation to his contemporary and opposite, Werner Gladow, who, with his criminal gang, unleashed a crime wave in 1949-50 in East Berlin, culminating in murder. The mythical, historical positive hero, Garbe was therefore contrasted with the negative hero, Gladow, who, having been forced from the official history of the GDR, became part of a collective memory of the early days of socialism. This opposition between the official mythical hero worker and the repressed tale of the young criminal mastermind was treated in the programme to *Der Lohndrücker* in the form of excerpts from his trial, as well as in an exhibition in the foyer of the Deutsches Theater, which featured artefacts relating to Gladow’s crimes and selections

98 Stephan Suschke, ‘Am 11.12.87 fand die erste Probe zu “Der Horatier” mit den Schauspielstudenten und Johanna Schall statt.’, in AdK, ID 703a, unpaginated.
100 ‘Walter Benjamin, aus: Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen’, in AdK, ID 703a, unpaginated.
Fig. 5.2. ‘Der Horatier’: Johanna Schall and Ulrich Műhe (Sibylle Bergemann, Akademie der Künste)
from broadcast speeches delivered by Ulbricht regarding the successes of Aufbau initiatives.103

5.4.1 Taking the Scenic Route

In order to challenge the myths of socialism in East Germany, Müller presents an archaeological treatment of Der Lohndrücker. He explicitly borrows his understanding of archaeology from Michel Foucault, for whom archaeology serves as a means of uncovering the ‘sedimentary strata’ of a discourse.104 In Weigel’s words, in the production Müller’s method consisted of an archaeology in which ‘[e]s galt, die Verhältnisse nicht in ihren verschleiernden Erscheinungsformen, sondern in ihrem status nascendi zu fassen.’105 Thus, Müller wishes to uncover the layers that have accrued on top of historical experience and been turned into myth, therefore silencing the voices of those who did not figure within the state’s own idealised model of the history of the GDR. For Foucault, by uncovering contradictions and inconsistencies in history, the archaeologist creates what he calls ‘spaces of dissension’.106 For Müller, this archaeological method has everything to do with the political function of theatre, as archaeology’s role is to render the object under scrutiny open to new interpretations; it is about creating a new way of accessing historical material, whereby a route other than that provided by the prevalent partage du sensible is adopted: ‘Es gibt eine Autobahn, aber du mußt nicht Autobahn fahren, sondern kannst auch Landstraße fahren, und wir nehmen die Landstraße. Das ist auch ganz wichtig, weil alles Augenmerk auf die Autobahn gelenkt ist.’107 This metaphor has a striking similarity to one adopted by Deleuze and Guattari, with whom we find certain affinities at this point in Müller’s artistic production.

When discussing the ways in which to approach an interpretation of Kafka’s works, Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka’s output as ‘a rhizome, a burrow’.108 Being possessed of multiple entrances and exits, many of which are unknown and presumed inaccessible, the rhizome enables an approach in which one can enter ‘by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse, a tight

103 For information regarding the exhibition in the foyer of the Deutsches Theater, see: Grischa Meyer, ‘GARBEGLADOW (1987)’, in Das Fallbeil, pp. 31-3; and Grischa Meyer, ‘Maulwurfs-Archäologie’, in Müller macht Theater, pp. 104-5.
106 Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 170. Emphasis in original.
108 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka, p. 3.
passage, a siphon’. Through Müller’s use of archaeology and his metaphor about travelling on country roads as opposed to the motorway, we could go so far as to say that his production of Der Lohndrücker sets out to render both history and the present which has emerged from it rhizomatic, challenging the consensual version of the GDR’s history and present. For Müller, this has the express purpose of laying the structure of the GDR’s future open to new possibilities. In this respect, it is telling that Müller included Brecht’s 1937 text, ‘Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks’ in the materials for the actors. The first sentence of Brecht’s text states: ‘Das Lehrstück lehrt dadurch, daß es gespielt, nicht dadurch, daß es gesehen wird.’ In rendering the prevalent partage du sensible rhizomatic, Der Lohndrücker invites the audience to produce new interpretations of social reality and challenge the orthodox collective self-understanding through dissensus. To this extent, the audience member is involved in the activity of archaeology.

5.4.2 Doing Archaeology

As the archaeological method is concerned with excavating that which has been covered over with layers of sediment, we must look to the ways in which the audience itself was encouraged to look at the relationship between the repressed history of the GDR and its present. As with the 1956-57 text, Müller’s production situates the play’s characters within a recent fascist past. In the opening scene, Stettiner, played by Mühe, raises a Nazi salute at Geschke’s mention of ‘die Nazis mit Pauken und Trompeten’ (Ld, 26). Geschke’s reaction to this is to slowly lower Stettiner’s hand, as if to silence any outward manifestation of Nazism on his comrade’s part. The silencing of National Socialist history is given further physical form in the scene ‘Der Denunziant’ in which Schorn confronts Balke regarding the latter’s accusation during the war that Schorn had sabotaged grenade production: the stage is almost fully blacked out, and the light only just bright enough for the audience to see that the two characters are on the stage, but Schorn enters with a torch, shining it on Balke’s face. Here, the use of lighting is allegorical for the state of East German historical consciousness: the repressed history of Germans from before the foundation of the GDR is left as a gloomy, murky truth, which can only be illuminated when a torch is shone directly upon it. The programme contains a wealth of material, plotting a historical trajectory from a Nazi past to the GDR of Der Lohndrücker, beginning with photographs of Nazi soldiers and ending in

109 Ibid.
images of Garbe and Gladow, and workers sitting in front of a banner reading ‘Der Sozialismus wird siegen’. Nonetheless, it is not necessarily Balke’s Nazi past which is of central significance in this production, rather the present state of the GDR.

While the action of Der Lohndrücker itself is set in 1948-49, the image of working life in the GDR presented in the production was not dissimilar to that of the present; according to Meyer, when Müller and the ensemble visited VEB Elektrokohle on 30 December 1987, nothing had changed since Garbe had worked at the factory some forty years previously. Der Lohndrücker in 1988-91 demonstrated a very real continuity with the historical material reality represented in the play: Christine Stromberg’s largely realist costumes, for example, depicted, in Müller’s words, ‘der deutsche Arbeiter aus der Zeitung’. A further connection to the present was created in Erich Wonder’s stage design, which featured an image in a band around the stage of the East Berlin of the present, complete with its iconic Fernsehturm.

Printed on the back of the programme is the final passage of Der Horatier, in which the question of the Horatian’s status in posterity is asked and answered with the need to remember him as both murderer and hero. The duality of the character of Balke as traitor and hero is paralleled in the figure of the Horatian, so much so that in a rehearsal for the first conception of Der Horatier, Müller states that Dieter Montag, who played the part of Balke was not to take part, ‘[w]eil es um ihn geht. Es ist ein Kommentar auch zu der Figur […]’. This staging was, however, dropped. Instead, the character of the Horatian parallels the GDR population: in answering the question, how are the people of East Germany to be remembered, the production suggests that a history must take more into account than merely the options offered by those in power. In this production, we are reminded of the oppressive abilities of power, as each time Johanna Schall uttered the word ‘Liktoren’, she shouted it, and Mühe froze to attention.

Müller’s production, however, does not wish to provide easy answers to the questions it poses. Rather, it asks its audience to engage with heavily dialectical historical material. The staging includes an image of the GDR of the late 1980s, including the Fernsehturm, in many senses emblematic of the industrial and technical progress made in the

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112 The cast list for the production still carried the lines, ‘Das Stück spielt 1948/49 in der DDR. Die Geschichte des Ringofens ist bekannt. Die Personen und ihre Geschichten sind erfunden’.
1960s. This is juxtaposed with material such as ‘Das Lied von der HO’ (*Ld*, 37),\(^{116}\) sung from a box by Margit Bendokat in a golden hat and apron, representing both the myths and dreams of plenty of a bygone era. The HO-song is immediately followed by the second scene, ‘Aktivistenbutter’, in which high prices and a lack of consumer goods are at the centre of the workers’ discussion, while an image of amassed fruit – including bananas! – is projected on to the side of the stage (see figure 5.3). For an audience in the late 1980s, shortages of consumer goods were still a daily problem, and thus the juxtaposition of this material may have served as an humorous parallel between life in the early days of the GDR and in the 1980s, which unmasked the myth of relentless progress in the GDR as mere fiction. Yet Müller had misgivings about merely poking fun at the dreams of yesteryear:

\[\text{Fig. 5.3. The workers in a world of plenty (Sibylle Bergemann, Akademie der Künste)}\]

in 1988, he stated, ‘[d]as Lied erschien uns wichtig als Beispiel für den ganz unreflektierten Optimismus von damals, der ja einfach lächerlich ist. Man merkt auch, daß da inszwischen Impulse verlorengegangen sind, die jetzt sehr fehlen.’\(^{117}\) Müller was not alone in wanting to ask his audiences to consider the optimistic state-sanctioned songs of the GDR: Schroth’s

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\(^{116}\) The HO (Handelsorganisation) was a nationalised retail enterprise, founded in the Soviet Occupation Zone in 1948 and then directed by the GDR administration as of 1949.

\(^{117}\) Müller, ‘Gespräch […] [zu Der Lohndrücker], *W11*, p. 300.
‘FDJ [Freie deutsche Jugend]-Liederabend’, which premièred as part of Entdeckungen 7 at the Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater on the same night as Der Lohndrücker premièred in Berlin, asked its Schwerin audiences to consider where the optimism of the past had been lost and whether and how it could be recovered.118

While the audience of the Deutsches Theater laughed heartily at the singing of ‘Das Lied von der HO’, the continuous projection of the contemporary East Berlin skyline complicates the possibility of seeing this purely humorously. It would be easy for us to thus damn the historical image of the GDR presented by SED propaganda as empty rhetoric, but Müller’s staging in this case suggests a much more nuanced treatment of history. Indeed, the optimism of the early days of the GDR seemed a means of silencing discussion of the material hardship experienced by real GDR citizens in the 1950s, and the relative well-being of the East German economy throughout the 1960s and 70s in comparison to the 1950s was only possible in conditions which pushed the physical possibilities of its workforce to their limits, even though low productivity remained a problem. But we would do well to recognise that Müller’s selection of material draws the spectator’s attention to an image of actual material progress, reflecting the utopian desires of both state and citizens: as Müller states, the impulse to set about building a socialist utopia appeared in the 1980s to be all but gone; as we saw in the previous chapter, not only had the SED Politburo lost a great deal of legitimacy, but its public preferred to approach daily life with non-committal Anpassung. In this light, the audience’s laughter may be seen in a different way: rather than laughing at past hopes, this was a people more than capable of laughing at its own present reality and the conditions under which life was led.119

Müller’s archaeological method here presents the audience with numerous layers of sediment, but at no time does it tell the audience member how to conduct his/her archaeological investigation of the GDR. Moreover, in 1988 Der Lohndrücker shone a torch into the recesses of the historical reality of the GDR. Whilst presenting its audience members with the means to challenge the shape of history and the present, it does so whilst affirming the need for socialism or some form of utopia other than consumer capitalism. Indeed, Müller’s insertion of Kentauren towards the very end is telling in this respect: Michael Gwisdek, in the role of the Party Secretary Schorn, sat motionless at the front of the stage, while the text of Kentauren was played over the loudspeaker, delivered without emphasis by Gwisdek and Mühe; as such, Kentauren figured as the party functionary’s own nightmare of

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a dystopian future devoid of ideals, which should be avoided. The audience is therefore asked not to condemn the project of building socialism on German soil, but to consider what it could do to improve it: in removing the final scene of the original text of *Der Lohndrücker*, Müller refuses to prescribe socialism’s future, but asks the audience members to find new ways in and new routes out of the present historical impasse.

When *Der Lohndrücker* opened on 29 January 1988, the dust had barely settled after the 1988 Liebknecht-Luxemburg demonstrations of 17 January, and East Berlin still had an enormous police presence. Ordinary GDR citizens had taken to the streets, carrying placards citing Rosa Luxemburg herself with the slogan ‘Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden’. Only a day after *Der Lohndrücker*’s première, Müller took part in a reading of texts with Volker Braun at a matinee at the Deutsches Theater. Amongst other texts, Müller read passages of *Zement* (1972) and the fifth part of the *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* cycle, *Der Findling*. According to Weigel, the audience of this reading was stunned into silence by the sheer fact that Müller was reading a text so overtly critical of the GDR and of the SED’s approach to historical events such as the 17 June Uprising. A Berlin Bezirksleitung report of this matinee found not only that *Der Findling* was politically problematic for the SED, but commented: ‘Offensichtlich hatte das Publikum diese bzw. dieser Art Texte erwartet.’ While Müller’s texts were clearly so controversial one journalist refrained from mentioning them at all, for Christoph Funke, the texts Müller read were closely linked with his production of *Der Lohndrücker*, not least in that they ‘legten neue Denk-Räume frei, in denen das Einrichten kritisch erarbeitet werden muß’. What, however, did East German reviewers make of *Der Lohndrücker*?

There are, of course, problems involved in taking GDR theatre reviews at face value: not only does a level of press censorship and self-censorship make it difficult to surmise from the theatre review what a reviewer actually thought of a production; but, according to Funke, whose position at *Der Morgen* gave him both a great readership and therefore a high level of responsibility for his readers as well as dramatists and directors, theatre critics would also try to ensure that new works and productions could make it to the stage and partake in social and political debates. We could, indeed, see this as the role of Gerhard Ebert’s review in *Neues Deutschland*: because of *Neues Deutschland*’s status as the newspaper of

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121 Personal interview with Alexander Weigel, Berlin, 20 March 2012.
the SED Central Committee, a good review published within it could signal the green light for a potentially controversial production. Accordingly, in this review, Ebert finds Müller’s production to be a realist work promoting humanist principles, which ‘[k]onstruktiv und kritisch gibt […] Impulse für den heutigen Tag, schärft es unseren Sinn für überwundene Schwierigkeiten und Schwächen’. Neues Deutschland’s preview for the production emphasised the age of Müller’s text and therefore situated the conflicts in Der Lohndrücker ‘in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren’, while other previews merely stated that the production was going to take place and announced particulars such as which actors were involved.

As Der Lohndrücker premièred on a Friday night, the first, short dispatches were printed in weekend editions, which reported on the huge applause following the production, and announced that Müller had managed to make the play relevant to East German society through the introduction of Der Horatier and Kentauren; this observation was noted in successive reviews. For Irma Weinreich, by updating Der Lohndrücker, Müller’s use of images of the contemporary East Berlin skyline lent the production a positive twist: ‘[d]as haben wir geschaffen’. A handful of reviewers interpreted Der Lohndrücker as offering an optimistic vision of the present in the GDR, which, in Henryk Goldberg’s words, constituted ‘Theater von uns, über uns, für uns’. Indeed, for Anne Braun, Müller’s production made clear that the contradictions of the GDR in the present could be overcome in much the same way that they had been overcome in the past. Ernst Schumacher, however, comments that the reference to GDR history in this production is not merely a case of showing history as it was, but presents ‘ein konstruktives Sinnbild für geschichtliches Handeln’, in that contradictions must always be overcome. Nonetheless, Klaus Baschleben explicitly refers

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126 Gerhard Ebert, ‘Ofenbauer Balkes Feuerprobe – realistisches Theater in Aktion’, ND: 2 February 1988. Indeed, Ebert was to write a review for the Dresden première of Christoph Hein’s Ritter der Tafelrunde only a year later, with a similar aim. See: Gerhard Ebert, ‘Parabel auf das Streben nach menschlicher Vervollkommnung’, ND: 3 May 1989.


to Müller’s production as demonstrating that the version of history offered in history books is by no means adequate to capture the density of real historical experience.135 Yet we must ask: did critics and/or audience members see themselves as having an active role in the production? Funke’s review comments not only that GDR history is under discussion, but that the vast array of theatrical means (to which we shall return in more detail below) deployed led to a disruption of normal ways of seeing, and created ‘ein Denk- und Aktionsgehäuse’.136 Der Lohndrücker was understood by many critics to require the activity of an audience,137 and was therefore cast as an ‘Art didaktisches Denkspiel’,138 or, in Braun’s review, ‘eine bedeutsame, zum Mithalten herausfordernde Premiere’.139 While we saw above that many reviewers described Der Lohndrücker with rhetoric that would be acceptable to the SED leadership, declaring to be optimistic about the future of socialism, as new conflicts could be overcome just as old conflicts had been before, some reviewers found the production more open. For Wolfgang Gersch, Der Lohndrücker offers no solutions to the conflicts it depicts, but its relationship to the present state of GDR reality suggests that it is there that answers must be found.140 This is an interesting position, as it refuses to accept East German history as offering a definitive direction forward, and recommends that it is the role of the audience to alter their reality. Indeed, Georg Menchén makes explicit reference to the archaeological method in the production, in which contradictions were presented to an audience whose own historical experience was to provide them with a desire to change the world.141

From the reviews cited above, we can see that theatre critics were by no means united on the role of history and its relationship to the present in Der Lohndrücker. Many reviewers wrote about Der Lohndrücker as a piece of theatre optimistic about the future of the GDR. Weigel sees this as an act of self-censorship on the part of the reviewers, contrasting it with the audience’s reception of the production: ‘Das Publikum war von dem Ernst und dem Mut der Freiheit und Frechheit der Inszenierung beeindruckt. Die Theaterkritik aber wagte es nicht, die Aktualität der Inszenierung zu beschreiben; sie lobte sie als eindrucksvolle Darstellung der Schwierigkeiten früherer Zeiten.’142 As we can see

137 See, for example: Baschleben, ‘Den Widersprüchen im Verhalten nachgespürt’.
139 Braun, ‘Aufbruch in die Zukunft’. See also: Weinreich, ‘Im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte und Gegenwart’.
from the above reviews, Weigel’s assertion is right to an extent: the conflicts of the early
days of the GDR are seen to be solved, but there is sufficient mention of contemporary
contradictions to lead us to the conclusion that many reviewers merely did not spell out
exactly what these contradictions were. This was, of course, a production which, as Müller
remembers in *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, the cast allegedly feared to stage, asking after the dress
rehearsal, ‘ob sie [die Schauspieler] zur Premiere ihre Zahnbürste mitbringen sollten’.  
Anecdotal evidence suggests that *Der Lohndrücker* was also seen by its audiences as
politically incendiary in the East German state: according to Weigel, one audience member
shouted in the foyer of the Deutsches Theater that her brother was in prison for doing what
the ensemble were doing on stage. Nevertheless, while it appears attractive to read *Der
Lohndrücker* as damning of the GDR, there is space within the production to also recognise
positive aspects of life under socialism and a need for a further development of socialism in
the East. After all, it was invited to the Werkstatt-Tage des DDR-Schauspiels in Leipzig in
April 1988 and the Second National Theatre Festival of the GDR in March and April 1989,
which was intended as a space to showcase the successes of the East German theatre system
in producing a ‘hohe Professionalität’ and showing ‘[das] politische
Verantwortungsbewußtsein der Theaterschaffenden’. *Der Lohndrücker* also picked up a
healthy handful of awards in the GDR.

Marianne Streisand, writing in the East, notes that alongside questions of the lineage
of fascism and Stalinism, the alienation of the workforce under capitalism lies too at the
heart of *Der Lohndrücker*. Given the ease with which Western theatregoers, particularly
reviewers, could visit the main East German theatres, we should therefore consider the
reactions of the Western press to this production. By the late 1970s, West German
theatregoers were well acquainted with works by Müller which could fit in the category of
*Zivilisationskritik*; the four most-performed plays by Müller in the FRG between 1978 and
1987 were *Quartett*, *Philoktet*, *Die Hamletmaschine*, and *Die Schlacht*. *Der Lohndrücker*,

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143 Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 275.
144 Interview with Alexander Weigel.
145 Anon., ‘Theaterfestival begann mit “Der Lohndrücker”, *Berliner Zeitung*; 17 April 1989. See also:
Anon., ‘Schauspiel im Brennpunkt’, *Die Union* (Dresden); 7 March 1989; and Ursula Meves and
Hans-Peter Minetti, ‘Bühnenkunst – vorwärtsdrängend und mit unserem Leben im Bunde’, *ND*:
15/16 April 1989.
29 March 1988; Anon., ‘Preise für Meister, Popen, Lohndrücker’, *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*;
29 March 1988; and Anon., ‘5. Leistungsvergleich der Theater beendet’, *Berliner Zeitung*: 29 March
147 Gottfried Fischborn, Frank Hörnigk, Marianne Streisand, and Renate Ullrich, “‘Der Lohndrücker”
however, was still viewed as a GDR ‘Produktionsstück’ in the West, and therefore merely seen as an historical piece critical of the GDR; this interpretation of the play was consolidated by Frank-Patrick Steckel’s production of it at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer in West Berlin in 1975, which concretely situated the action within the GDR. This perspective on Der Lohndrücker in the West appears to have informed the expectations of theatre reviewers. In a lengthy feature on Müller and Der Lohndrücker in Der Spiegel, for example, while praising the production, Wilhelm Bittorf questions whether West German audiences will be able to access the theme of the piece and find any connection to it. Despite his scepticism, the play’s treatment of ordinary working life suggests that it did have a potential relevance for the FRG too. According to Glaser, the 1980s saw an increase in unemployment in the FRG, as human labour was gradually being replaced with mechanical alternatives; in 1988, approximately 2.2 million (7.7%) West Germans were unemployed, although this had fallen from 2.3 million (8.1%) in 1984. While there was a clear fall in joblessness in the late 1980s, enough people were unemployed in the FRG that this would have been a concern for Western audience members at the time.

In a radio discussion on Sender Freies Berlin, Heinz Ritter pronounced that Der Lohndrücker was ‘das beste, spannendste und politisch brisanteste Theater-Aufführung, die es gegenwärtig in Berlin zu sehen gibt – und zwar in beiden Teilen der Stadt’. But he moved on to state that it was concerned with criticising and even parodying the present state of the GDR. Thus, while finding Der Lohndrücker a theatrical sensation, Western critics almost overwhelmingly saw it as critical of the GDR and the GDR’s history, including the legacy of Stalinism;

149 See: Pamperrien, Ideologische Konstanten, p. 57.
150 Wilhelm Bittorf, ‘‘Mein Platz wäre auf beiden Seiten der Front’’, Der Spiegel 42/7 (February 1988): 166-78 (p. 178).
151 Glaser, Kleine Kulturgeschichte, pp. 446-50.
optimism offered in the piece is shrouded in irony.\textsuperscript{155} Wilfried Mommert’s reviews can, however, be seen to understand \textit{Der Lohndrücker} to have a relevance beyond the GDR itself. While Mommert writes about the exhibition in the foyer and the larger considerations of GDR history, he comments that, given the fact that ‘Neues Denken’ is addressed in the programme, the focus of the play is the ‘Gegensatz von Individuum und Gruppe’.\textsuperscript{156} From the Western reviewers discussed above, we can see that, although there was the possibility within Müller’s production, particularly in the inclusion of \textit{Der Horatier}, for it to expand beyond its GDR context, this was felt by very few Western critics.

5.5 Democratic Methods

\textit{Der Lohndrücker} evoked differing responses from GDR theatre critics and its treatment of the GDR’s past was seen as both affirming and questioning the present situation and its relationship to the conflicts of the early days of the East German state. For reviewers, its potential to allow certain readings appears to be a result of the different ways in which they understood the production’s relationship with its audience. A much more fundamental concern in Müller’s production, however, is that it seeks to create the possibility for so many varied meanings. As we have seen above, the participation of ordinary GDR citizens in the government of their state was a clear concern for Müller outside of the theatre, and this filtered into his staging. His convictions regarding the need for open dialogue and discussion played a significant part in the process of bringing \textit{Der Lohndrücker} to the stage.

5.5.1 Distribution of Labour

According to Weigel, since the appointment of Wolfgang Heinz as \textit{Intendant} in 1963, the Deutsches Theater had a tradition of \textit{Mitbestimmung}, which included the input of all parts of the ensemble.\textsuperscript{157} While this situation changed in the 1970s under Hans Anselm Perten and Gerhard Wolfram, by the mid-1980s, the ensemble of the Deutsches Theater had recognised


\textsuperscript{157} Weigel, \textit{Das Deutsche Theater}, pp. 257-63.
the necessity for more democratic working methods: in this vein, more effort was made to
develop techniques within the theatre which started from bottom up rather than top down,
thus toppling the director as the ultimate authority in a production. This more democratic
mould of directing was exemplified by Müller’s technique, and indeed the sheer number
of recorded conversations between Müller and the ensemble demonstrate more than a
willingness on his part to involve his cast in every aspect of the production. Mühe wrote of
Müller’s directing style that it involved ‘RUHE, HÖFALICHKEIT, – VORSICHT,
GEDUHD’. As Mühe’s comment makes clear, rather than having tyrannical control over
the production, Müller’s directorial style showed respect for both actors and technical team
alike. According to Weigel, this would further consist of Müller asking his cast questions
about the piece or about how they were to deliver certain lines, while denying that he knew
how this should be done himself. This is not to claim that Müller had no idea what he
wanted. Mühe states that Müller’s claims to be anything but the ultimate source of
knowledge on Der Lohndrücker were ‘keine Koketterie’, but ‘[z]umindest weiß er dann, wie
er die Szene nicht haben möchte, und leiser als als setzt er sich durch. Meistens.’ Again,
according to Weigel, Müller never shouted but always spoke softly to his cast. As we can
also see from many of the rehearsal notes, the relationship between Müller and the ensemble
was apparently one in which all could speak freely and informally. This democratic
approach to rehearsing and staging Der Lohndrücker appears to have filtered down into the
treatment of all aspects of the performance, not least in the relationships between the
elements of the production and in the presentation of material for the audience’s
contemplation.

Der Lohndrücker was filled with a plethora of different visual and aural materials:
Müller’s texts were combined with Wonder’s lighting and set design, short films by Peter
Voigt, Luigi Nono’s music and sound effects, as well as music from other sources.
Furthermore, outside of the proscenium itself, a model of Stalin sat in the box, and some
seats in the gallery were occupied by models of 1950s GDR citizens. While the text of Der
Lohndrücker figured as the ‘main attraction’ of this production, Müller’s approach with these

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158 Interview with Alexander Weigel.
159 Ibid.
356).
163 Interview with Alexander Weigel. This approach to directing can also be seen in Die Zeit ist aus
den Fugen, in which Müller is rehearsing Hamlet/Maschine at the Deutsches Theater in 1989.
164 One example is provided by an exchange in which Weigel’s mention of ‘Ahle’ (awl) in Der
Horatier leads Müller to pun on ‘Aale’, leading to a lengthy group joke about eels. See: ‘20.10.1987,
various materials was to treat them as equal elements, whose relation to one another was one of discussion and commentary rather than mere illustration.\textsuperscript{165} For Müller, when the separate elements of a theatrical production are autonomous they offer the audience member the possibility to actively attempt to synthesise them:

\begin{quote}
Wichtig ist die Autonomie, die Trennung der Elemente im Theater (was Brecht wollte, aber unter seinen Arbeitsbedingungen nur partiell realisieren konnte). Ballett besteht aus Elementen wie Bewegung – Musik – Licht, auch Text – Choreographie – Dekoration, die unabhängig voneinander existieren. Die Kombination der Elemente sollte weitgehend an den Zuschauer delegiert werden.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

Müller’s comment here, from 1986, has much in common with his comments regarding democracy in the theatre, particularly with regard to the importance of enabling audience members to undertake their own creative process of interpretation. Through his reference to Brecht, we can see that he is concerned with the creation of a work of Epic theatre, but one which goes beyond Brecht’s \textit{Trennung der Elemente}, in which separate elements are harnessed for their dialectical relations to one another, and in which theatrical illusion is interrupted for the purpose of eliciting a response from the audience; the reading of scene titles over a loudspeaker was itself a conscious effort to drive the dramatic out of the production.\textsuperscript{167}

Perhaps one of the most notable facets of \textit{Der Lohndrücker} in the 1988 production is the way in which the text is delivered. Speech is depersonalized and delivered quite flat, rendering it more musical. Here we find a clear convergence between Müller and Robert Wilson, whose working methods and staging techniques provided a starting point for Müller’s 1985 comment regarding the constitution of a democratic theatre (cited in Chapter 1). Müller and Wilson both react against the notion of theatre as a space dominated by speech, culminating, in Andrzej Wirth’s words, in the ‘aesthetic subversion of the institutionalized literary theatre (\textit{Sprechtheater})’.\textsuperscript{168} For Müller, this subversion serves a dual function: not only is removing expression from speech a means of making that speech musical, but it is an attempt to free it, along with the images presented through language.

\textsuperscript{165} See: Müller ‘[Nach der Theatersituation in der DDR gefragt]’, \textit{W8}, p. 539. Quoted in Chapter 3.
from being ideological. This is doubly important in a ‘democratic’ theatre, given that the director’s role is one of not presenting an audience with ideologies which are easily digestible (vorgekaut). In Müller’s words, the spoken text ‘müß eine Melodie sein, die sich frei im Raum bewegt’, and, as such, is to figure as another element of the production, which is not prioritised over other elements as the primary bearer of meaning.

Gesture, too, becomes an equal element in this production: throughout, we find examples of gestural comedy and are confronted with workers whose physicality is meaningful even when the actors are not speaking. The most significant gesture in the production is found at the end of both Der Horatier and the production of Der Lohndrücker as a whole. Near the end of Der Horatier, Schall reports, ‘Und von den Römern einer fragte die andern’, after which Mühe asks, ‘Wie soll der Horatier genannt werden der Nachwelt?’ (L, 34). Mühe motions as if to strangle Schall, before relaxing his grip and half-embracing her. This gesture is then repeated twice more, before the final lines of Der Horatier are spoken by Müller over the loudspeaker. We find exactly this gesture at the end of the performance: at the end of the final scene, Schorn screams: ‘Wer hat mich gefragt, ob ich mit dir arbeiten kann?’, following which he repeats the strangulation (see figure 5.4) and embrace (see figure 5.5) of Der Horatier. Here, Müller explicitly borrows from the Brechtian arsenal of theatrical methods.

For Brecht, Gestus is a means of demonstrating the ways in which physical behaviour is both ideologically and socially encoded. In John J. White’s words, Gestus illustrates ‘who dominates over whom, what class people belong to, the circumstances in which their actions are being performed, and the prehistory and subsequent repercussions of what is being observed.’ As Meg Mumford demonstrates, for Brecht, this is a means of asking the audience to consider whether and indeed how social comportment should be altered. In the case of Müller’s use of Gestus, we might ask what social and ideological structures lie beneath the act of strangling and embracing. Where Balke and Schorn are concerned, there is a clear possibility that for Schorn, Balke is to be both applauded and denounced for his actions, according to the economic and ideological aims of the party; in this way, the Gestus comprises both sides of the dialectical opposition we find in the question of how to treat the Horatian, and thus we may be led to question the structures at

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172 Meg Mumford, Bertolt Brecht (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 53-60.
play in a state in which this is possible. This gesture can, of course, be read, as Weigel states, as ‘eine geniale Schlußmetapher Müllers zur Geschichte der DDR’. However, it refuses to be dialectical in a Brechtian sense: there is no synthesis incorporating parts of dialectical opposites, but rather both are present; *Gestus* here is post-Brechtian, in that it refuses

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Fig. 5.5. Balke and Schorn moving into the last stage of the final Gestus (Ludwig Binder, Stadtmuseum Berlin)

synthesis, maintaining its complexity. Its repetition itself attests to the idea that the conflicts involved within this Gestus will continue to be fought out in societies other than the GDR. As a result, this gesture is open to myriad possible meanings within the production, and crucial to this is that it is an autonomous element in itself, which is repeated not only in one scene, but across the performance as a whole. Rather than illustrating the conflict

between the characters in question each time, it offers a commentary on the production in its entirety. Gesture and speech offer only two examples of the ways in which different elements are presented in Der Lohndrücker as possessing a certain degree of autonomy. But how might the interaction of the various facets of this production have created a ‘democratic’ theatre?

5.5.2 Überschwemmung as Principle

Müller’s production contains an enormous amount of material that resists easy synthesis on the part of the audience member. While some aspects of the staging call others into question, other aspects open space for associations between elements of the production, which are not spelled out to the audience. In this way, we can understand Der Lohndrücker as attempting a form of Überschwemmung. Keller offers a good gloss of Überschwemmung:

Eine […] Dramaturgie der ‘Überschwemmung’, die den Zuschauer mit einer Überfülle theatricalischer Zeichen förmlich überflutet, läßt dem Publikum kaum noch Zeit, alle optischen und akustischen Reize gesondert aufzunehmen und zu verarbeiten. Der Zuschauer ist gezwungen, aus dem Überangebot eine Auswahl zu treffen und aktiv mögliche Sinnzusammenhänge zu erschließen. 176

While the programme for the production presents material relating to the themes of the Nazi past of the GDR and the channelling of the disciplined workforce to the ends of developing socialism, its mode of presenting this material reflects the staging itself: the programme contains three separate columns, which each present different materials, including excerpts from Brecht’s Arbeitsjournal, extracts from texts by Friedrich Nietzsche, shorter texts by Müller, poetry by Friedrich Hölderlin, and photographs, while a transcription of a discussion between Müller and Weigel occupies the left-hand column. Here, the reader is presented with a profusion of material, which cannot possibly be consumed at one glance, yet between which associations can be generated. Indeed, even the poster for the production contains imagery not directly replicated elsewhere: the poster consists of a reproduction of Francisco Goya’s Fight with Cudgels (Duelo a garrotazos, 1819-23), which features two men frozen in battle with clubs. Peter Voigt’s film ‘Atlantis’, which was shown at the very beginning of the production, draws on the central image of this painting, but presents two men beating another with their bare hands. The one-on-one conflict in Goya’s painting therefore becomes a starting point for an interpretation of the production as a whole, but is

176 Keller, Drama und Dramaturgie, p. 71.
instantly complicated by a relation to ‘Atlantis’. Nonetheless, both the film and the painting, which depict very different conflicts, are present in the mind of the audience member when confronted with the conflict described in Der Horatier and in Der Lohndrücker. Indeed, is Der Lohndrücker’s story to be seen as an equal dual between two sides? And what are these two equal sides? The hero versus the villain, or the constructed myth of socialism versus the more nuanced de-mythologised histories which have been written out of history? Or, do we see a conflict between two sides in which one side is much stronger, be it in number or power, than another?

We find yet another example of Überschwemmung at the end of the first half and into the beginning of the second half of the production. Before the interval, in the scene entitled ‘Hilfsarbeiter’, Balke pushes through his plan to repair the kiln in record time and in harsh conditions; he must also enlist the help of his colleagues, and duly receives the backing of Kolbe and Krüger, albeit with a degree of resignation. At the beginning of this scene, the director states: ‘Eine große Sache haben wir vor. Das gibt ein Beispiel für die ganze Produktion. Damit können wir beweisen, was die Arbeiterklasse leisten kann’ (L, 60). At the end of this scene, Balke, Kolbe, and Krüger freeze in the middle of the stage, while the chorus, Schurek, and the director leave, and the ‘Lied der zwei geharnischten Männer’ from Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte (1791) is played over the loudspeaker. Accompanying this is an image of raging fire projected on the side of the stage. The text speaks of the possibilities for self-renewal and the overcoming of the fear of death after walking through the four elements, including fire: ‘Der, welcher wander diese Straß voll Beschwerden, | wird rein durch Feuer, Wasser, Luft und Erden’ (L, 61). The music itself has both the sound and the structure of a typical Bach chorale, suggesting a degree of finality; this finality refers to Krüger’s words at the end of the scene, ‘Wenn’s sein muß’ (L, 60). Thus, through association, it would appear that by working in the kiln, Balke himself will be renewed and will demonstrate to the workforce that it is possible to renew the whole of society. Nonetheless, the introduction of further elements directly after the interval creates further associations, which cannot immediately be synthesised, and complicate the possible reading of what has happened directly before the interval. Here, a 1913 film of the ascent of Mount Etna in Sicily is introduced with the name ‘Empedokles’, spoken over the loudspeaker and after around ten seconds of music, a female voice reads a passage from the fifth scene of Act I of Hölderlin’s Tod des Empedokles (1797-1800). In this passage, Empedocles reacts to the accusations cast at him by the citizens of Agrigento after he has been to the top of Etna (L, 62). Notably, this passage is read without any emphasis whatsoever, so that the text is not prioritised over the images presented in the film. The clips of lava and an ascent of Etna are further overlaid with
images of paper, carrying further text, being burned, before the ending of Der Horatier is read over the loudspeaker by Müller’s voice. There are, of course, numerous connections that can be drawn between the material here, not least in terms of recognising a parallel between Balke and Empedocles: both have made great achievements by what are essentially close runs with fire, while being denounced by those around them. This would therefore justify the position of the ending of Der Horatier. Yet what is the role of the burning paper? And how can this assemblage of audio-visual material after the interval be synthesised with that from before the interval? Regardless of the possibilities for selection and combination of materials here for interpretation, it is crucial that Müller’s choice of material attempts to forbid an immediate interpretation of the production, favouring bombarding his audiences with material that they must interpret of their own accord.

The lack of a pre-packaged synthesis of material is a key facet of Müller’s understanding of the possibilities of a ‘democratic’ theatre, as it leaves the selection, combination, and ultimately the interpretation of material to the audience member to conduct on his/her own. The synthesis of such material, however, is not necessarily the initial goal of Müller’s method here: rather, Müller understands that material must be experienced before it can be interpreted. In an interview in 1985, he states: ‘Theater soll doch immer noch – finde ich – zuerst ein Erlebnis sein, und dann erst etwas zu Verstehendes oder etwas, womit man sich intellektuell auseinandersetzt. Aber erst muß es erlebt werden, sonst hat es auch keine intelligenten Wirkungen.’¹⁷⁷ Just as he attempts to do in relation to the material reality outside of the theatre, Müller wishes to complicate the meanings with which the material on stage is already laden, in order to make this material open to new and varied interpretations, according to the individual strategies for synthesis of its audience members. It is to this end that Wonder’s set is constructed as a space in which associations can be made, freed from having a strong temporal setting.¹⁷⁸ Speaking of his own set design, Wonder states: ‘Die Mittel, die wir dabei verwenden, sind… Zeichen und Andeutungen, die nicht etwas direkt illustrieren. Also die erzählen nicht im ersten Moment was, sondern sie sollen sich erst zusammenfügen im Laufe des Abends oder vielleicht auch nachher im Kopf.’¹⁷⁹ For Wonder, lighting too is a means of constantly creating new tensions between material on stage and forbidding easy resolution or synthesis.¹⁸⁰ Yet, given the likelihood that a large number of East German audience members would interpret Der Lohndrücker as critical with

¹⁷⁸ See: Barnett, “I have to change myself instead of interpreting myself”, p. 17.
¹⁷⁹ Wonder, quoted in: Müller, ‘[Darf ich’s noch mal sagen?]’, W11, p. 22.
regard to their historical reality, can Überschwemmung be seen to have increased the amount of possible readings of the production?

5.5.3 Drowning in Theatre?

The complexity of the various layers of material in Der Lohndrücker became a central concern for many reviewers of the production. Some reviewers, however, maintained that the potential within the production could be very easily synthesised. In her review in the East German satirical magazine, Eulenspiegel, Dagmar Borrmann found that the themes and approaches of the production were very clear, writing: ‘Statt Überschwemmung Transparenz.’\textsuperscript{181} Borrmann’s comment then served as the starting point for Gottfried Fischborn to state that all elements on the stage were ‘von großer Klarheit, auch wo sie – wie zumeist – vielschichtig sind’, and therefore, that there was no Überschwemmung in the production whatsoever.\textsuperscript{182} In a larger piece in Theater der Zeit, Streisand and Bert Koß contended that there was a clear message in Der Lohndrücker, and that the production was characterised, in contrast to Der Auftrag (Volksbühne, East Berlin, 1980-83), and Macbeth, by ‘die relativ deutliche Lesbarkeit theatralischer Zeichen’.\textsuperscript{183} Indeed, Thomas Oberender, writing in Blätter des Deutschen Theaters, comments: ‘In dieser Aufführung wird deutlich gesagt, was deutlich zu sehen ist und zu sehen war: wenn die Augen nicht vor der Realität verschlossen werden.’\textsuperscript{184} Here, Oberender appears to be saying that the visual language of Der Lohndrücker was so overtly referential to the reality outside of the theatre, that one would have to ignore the external world not to be able to clearly see what this production is about. We find this reflected in Günther Bellmann’s assertion that the actors on the stage spoke just like workers in real life.\textsuperscript{185} The impressions of the aforementioned East German reviewers were shared by some Western reviewers. A handful of reviewers commented that the characters’ costumes not only defined their respective social status, but situated the piece within a clear historical moment.\textsuperscript{186} For Linzer, writing in Theater der Zeit, Der Lohndrücker

\textsuperscript{185} Bellmann, ‘Dieser Balke baut Zukunft’.
had clear questions about both the past and the future of the GDR, but, while it left these questions unanswered, ‘[d]er eigenwillige ästhetische Reiz, die künstlerische Geschlossenheit der Inszenierung verschleiern die Fragen nicht. Machen sie auffällig.’\footnote{187} That is, for Linzer, despite the vast array of theatrical signs on stage, these did not detract from the major political concerns of the piece as a whole.

Just as many critics commented on the density of Müller’s production. While the production’s reference to reality made some reviewers see a clear way of interpreting Der Lohndrücker, Goldberg comments, that ‘die Vorgänge noch konkret erkennbar sind und gleichzeitig über sich selbst hinausweisen’.\footnote{188} For Goldberg, although the production presented the possibility for synthesis according to one interpretative framework, there was always more material that could point elsewhere. Helmut Ullrich, for example, found the production to have a mythical quality and commented on certain different approaches to interpreting the colours of Wonder’s set.\footnote{189} While Renate Ullrich, a representative of Culture Minister Hoffmann, found the production created both a distance from reality and a proximity to it,\footnote{190} Horst Wenderoth argued that the sheer number of different materials on the stage served to forbid the production from having an overt external referent, while still asserting the play’s topicality in relation to the need for economic and political change.\footnote{191} Michael Stone remarked that the production was always full of movement and activity,\footnote{192} and this aspect of the production led Jürgen Bretschneider to call it a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk, das den Geist und die Sinne erregte’, and a ‘Denk-Arbeit’ on the part of the audience member.\footnote{193}

One Western reviewer’s comment, that Der Lohndrücker constituted ‘schwieriges und sperriges Theater’,\footnote{194} is the consensus amongst a handful of reviewers for whom the presentation of so much material on stage was achieved such that it was the role of the audience member to think about synthesising it him/herself.\footnote{195} Regarding the sheer volume of dramaturgical elements in this production, Funke writes: ‘Konsequentes Denken bietet ein Theaterabend an, übersetzt in die sinnliche Vermittlung durch mehrere Ebenen – Film und

\footnote{188} Goldberg, ‘Nicht nur schön, auch wesentlich’.
\footnote{189} Ullrich, ‘Zwei Stücke von Zeiten des Übergangs’.
\footnote{190} Fischborn, Hörnigk, et al., “‘Der Lohndrücker’ von Heiner Müller. Für und Wider”, p. 1194.
\footnote{191} Wenderoth, ‘Eine Reprise als Ereignis’.
\footnote{192} Stone, ‘Lohndrücker und Flüchtling’.
\footnote{193} Bretschneider et. al, ‘Faszinierendes Diskussionsangebot’, p. 54.
Spiel, Licht und Ton, Raum und Fläche, Körpersprache und Figurentheater, Oper und technisch übermittelte [sic] Monolog.\textsuperscript{196}

It is worth noting that, while there was no consensus amongst reviewers of the production as to whether Der Lohndrücker’s use of theatrical signs created a transparent or densely polyvalent piece of theatre, these were all professional reviewers, well-versed in Theaterwissenschaft. In this respect, as professional theatregoers who had presumably performed their research before visiting the theatre, they can be seen in no way as representative of ordinary audiences. Indeed, as Stefan Brecht’s analyses of Wilson’s early work show, a synthesis can always be achieved of any work of art, no matter how dense and complex.\textsuperscript{197} Moreover, a theatre review is written after having visited the theatre, during which time it is possible to synthesise the material one has experienced in selecting and rejecting certain facets of the performance. According to one East German audience member I interviewed, Sabine Zolchow, the overload of material presented on the stage necessitated constant attempts on her part to try to analyse and interpret the various elements during moments of silence.\textsuperscript{198} Although Zolchow was training in Theaterwissenschaft at the time, it would be fair to assume that her experience of Der Lohndrücker can bring us closer to understanding the experiences of non-professional audience members of the production. That said, the differences in the reviews indicate that Müller’s production did both activate its audience members into creatively interpreting the piece, and by no means generated consensus amongst them.

5.6 Der Lohndrücker Goes West

As we can see from the reviews of Der Lohndrücker, it was a major success on the East German stage, and was greatly praised by both Eastern and Western critics. It was regarded as such a great triumph for GDR theatre and was amongst one of the three first ever GDR productions to partake in the Berliner Theatertreffen. When it appeared at the Freie Volksbühne in West Berlin in May 1989, very little was altered in the production, perhaps with the single omission of the exhibition, due to the logistical and financial constraints of transporting the material across Berlin.\textsuperscript{199} Only days before, it had featured at the Théâtre de

\textsuperscript{196} Funke, ‘Die Historie von der Revolution am Ringofen’.
\textsuperscript{198} Personal interview with Sabine Zolchow and Rudolf Mast, Berlin, 17 May 2013.
\textsuperscript{199} Personal interview with Grischa Meyer, Berlin, 16 May 2013.
l’Europe in Paris, where it was apparently very warmly received:\[200\]: not only did it allegedly exemplify political theatre for its French audiences, but it also demonstrated the possibilities of an enviably well-subsidised theatre system.\[201\]

By the time Der Lohndrücker was performed at the Freie Volksbühne in May 1989, little had altered regarding structures within the GDR. Even still, no one could have foreseen the enormous changes about to take place across Europe. Perhaps not surprisingly, the East German press welcomed the appearance of three productions by GDR theatres at the Theatertreffen.\[202\] By and large, Eastern reviewers praised the three GDR productions at the Theatertreffen for their political significance and means of politically activating Western audiences.\[203\] According to Funke, Der Lohndrücker appeared to be ‘eminent wirksam und herausfordernd’ in West Berlin,\[204\] although this may have been more in terms of raising interest in the material conditions of life in the GDR. Nonetheless, the East German press made sure to note that Der Lohndrücker, which had served as the final performance of the 1989 Theatertreffen, received rapturous applause.\[205\] The East German press was not exaggerating the success of Der Lohndrücker at the Theatertreffen. According to Friedrich Luft, ‘[w]ir West-Berliner staunten über die freimütige Ehrlichkeit von Müllers Stück und seine perfekte Inszenierung’.\[206\] West German reviewers tended to find the production critical of societies both sides of the Iron Curtain.\[207\] Indeed, one spectator at the Theatertreffen I


interviewed, Rudolph Mast, likened the production to a tragedy about the status of the individual in both Western and Eastern European societies.\footnote{Interview with Sabine Zolchow and Rudolf Mast.} At the 1989 Theatertreffen, \textit{Der Lohndrücker} was regarded as a masterpiece of theatre for both its aesthetic and political content. In the following month, it appeared at the Theater der Welt festival in Hamburg and again, according to the East German press, it received great praise from the West German public, and was even sold out far in advance of its mid-June performance.\footnote{See: Anon., ‘DDR-Bühnen bei Festival “Theater der Welt”’, \textit{ND}: 20 June 1989; Anon., ‘DDR-Bühnen in Hamburg’, \textit{National-Zeitung}: 21 June 1989; Christoph Funke, “Penthesilea” – nun an der Alster’, \textit{Der Morgen}: 30 June 1989; and Anon., ‘Gast bei Theater der Welt’, \textit{Berliner Zeitung}: 21 June 1989.} While these reviews indicate that \textit{Der Lohndrücker} was triumphant in the FRG, they tell us little about the intricacies of response. Furthermore, the Deutsches Theater, along with East Berlin and the rest of the GDR, was about to become part of the FRG, so what of audience responses to \textit{Der Lohndrücker} through the collapse of socialism and on the road to German reunification?

As East and West German audience members visited \textit{Der Lohndrücker} from the latter half of 1989 into September 1991, we could expect that the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventual reunification might have altered the political impact it had on them. As eyes turned to the potential collapse of the GDR, the production’s questioning of GDR historical reality and the need for socialism, albeit reformed, may have seemed to have little relevance. Throughout its performance run, the Berlin SED-\textit{Bezirksleitung} expressed no fears about \textit{Der Lohndrücker} itself, but was initially concerned about subversive political meetings regarding topics including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and human rights, which had been held at the Deutsches Theater since as early as February 1988.\footnote{See: Ellen Brombacher, ‘Überlegungen zum weiteren Vorgehen am Deutschen Theater [2.1988]’, in LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6811, p. 1; Hilde Hähn, ‘Information über eine Parteileitungssitzung und die Mitgliederversammlung April am Deutschen Theater [13.4.1988]’, in LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6767; Hans Kießig, ‘Kurzer Bericht zur gegenwärtigen Situation am Deutschen Theater [4.2.1988]’, in LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6812; and letter from Peter Przybyski to Günter Schabowski, 27 June 1988, in LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6767.} Perhaps more worried about a protest by the ensemble of the Deutsches Theater, the \textit{Bezirksleitung} only mentions \textit{Der Lohndrücker} in October 1989, suggesting it as a possible reason for the increased politicisation of the ensemble and as a source for their questions relating to the ‘Aufarbeitung der Geschichte der DDR’ and the development of socialism in the GDR and other Eastern European nations.\footnote{Hilde Hähnel, ‘1. Die Grundorganisation des Deutschen Theaters hat eine Stärke von […]’, in LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6773.} Nonetheless, in 1988 and 1989, audiences flooded into the Deutsches Theater to see \textit{Der Lohndrücker}, and even in 1990 and 1991, the
very few performances of Der Lohndrücker continued to sell relatively well (see figure 5.6); indeed, in its first two seasons, Der Lohndrücker remained the most visited production in the repertoire of the Deutsches Theater, only to slip into second place in 1990. There is, however, very little that these figures can tell us: the so-called Tote-Seelen-Quote, a term accounting for the fact that performances in the GDR might be sold out on paper yet full of empty seats, along with the block-booking of seats by Anrechtspartner, may serve to explain why Der Lohndrücker was visited by 10% more audience members in 1988 than the theatre could physically seat. In the absence of newspaper reviews of Der Lohndrücker throughout the entirety of this period, it is not possible to ascertain what theatre critics deemed to be the production’s position in the ailing GDR and the newly reunified FRG.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
<th>Tickets available</th>
<th>Tickets sold</th>
<th>Seat allocation</th>
<th>Rank in theatre's repertoire (in relation to seat allocation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12,534</td>
<td>13,886</td>
<td>110%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8,373</td>
<td>8,404</td>
<td>100.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3,024</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,160</td>
<td>1,723</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5.6. Statistics regarding ticket sales of Der Lohndrücker at the Deutsches Theater, 1989-91.

We can, however, find some indication of audience reactions to Der Lohndrücker in this later period of its performance run. The archive of the Deutsches Theater contains files of reports logged at each performance at the Deutsches Theater throughout this period. While these Vorstellungsberichte were primarily for the purpose of recording technical issues which might need to be addressed for future performances, each features a section bearing the title: ‘Aufnahme und Gesamteindruck der Vorstellung, Aufnahme beim

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Publikum’. These reports were usually completed by dramaturges or assistants; in the case of Der Lohndrücker, each one was written by Petra Segtrop, the directorial assistant for the production. While Segtrop usually recorded very little or nothing regarding the audience’s reception of the piece, two reports are intriguing. At Der Lohndrücker’s fifty-second performance on 31 October 1989, at the height of unrest in the GDR, only days before the 4 November demonstration, and barely over a week before the Berlin Wall was opened, Segtrop recorded: ‘Das Publikum etwas verhalten, wie erwartete [es] wohl mehr in diesen stürmischen Zeiten.’ Here, Segtrop’s comment regarding the audience’s reaction suggests that, at this point in time, Der Lohndrücker was perhaps not living up to its politically provocative reputation, as the political situation outside of the theatre had demanded new questions of the theatre.

Once the border restrictions had been dismantled and East and West Germans could freely move between the GDR and the FRG, Der Lohndrücker seems to have taken on the appearance of a museum piece for some: on 23 September 1990, less than two weeks before reunification, Segtrop recorded that Der Lohndrücker’s sixty-sixth performance ‘stieß auf großes Interesse’, but this was a matter of a touristic interest in different countries of times gone by; she cites what is presumably one West German audience member’s comment: ‘Welch ein exotisches Land!’ Clearly, by this moment in history, Der Lohndrücker’s audiences had concerns which the production could no longer address. Before the GDR had been subsumed into the FRG, Der Lohndrücker resembled a piece of political theatre of relevance to a place which had practically ceased to exist. It is, however, more than likely that Der Lohndrücker maintained its ability to elicit varying responses. While it may have appeared irrelevant for some audience members, its nuanced treatment of socialist society clearly would have doubtless caused many East Germans to reflect on the potential within socialism to build a better, more democratic society, a potential now seemingly lost to a public being increasingly won over by capitalism; furthermore, depending on their investment or attachment to the GDR and the project of building socialism, some East Germans will have felt nostalgic or melancholic about the society presented and scrutinised in Der Lohndrücker.

5.7 Democratic Theatre?

The lively reception of *Der Lohndrücker* amongst both East and West German audiences presents us with a clear indication of the possibilities of Müller’s production. This production foregrounds the concerns of an author and director in the GDR, in which society was stagnant, and the democracy long hoped for looked no closer to being on offer. At the end of the 1980s, the relevance of *Der Lohndrücker* moved above and beyond merely asking what historical foundations the GDR had been built upon; rather, Müller’s production thematises the way in which huge swathes of the East German public had been removed from civil society, and that this had an historical precedent. Through an archaeological investigation of the GDR’s history and present, *Der Lohndrücker* invites its audience members into the process of doing archaeology and thus provides them with the means of questioning the constitution of their society. In excavating the elements of East German society which have been silenced by the prevailing *partage du sensible*, audience members can make them visible once again and perhaps introduce *dissensus* into the public realm. Müller’s attempts to create a democratic theatre do not, however, end there. In the case of *Der Lohndrücker*, both Müller’s working methods and the presentation of material on stage demonstrate a multi-faceted approach to democracy in the theatre: even the equality of all elements of a theatrical production is required for theatre to be ‘democratic’.

As seen through the numerous newspaper reviews analysed above, not only did *Der Lohndrücker* forbid consensus amongst its Eastern reviewers, but its density enabled it to transcend the East German context and allow West Germans to interpret it according to their own socio-political context – if they were willing to do so, that is. In many ways, this is a testament to the democratic possibilities of Müller’s own production of his thirty year-old text. In the light of changing political circumstances in both the GDR and the FRG between the latter part of 1989 and 1991, however, *Der Lohndrücker*’s political content appears to have lost significance for some of its audience members as the collapse of the GDR brought new political concerns to the fore for both East and West Germans alike. Rather than considering the possibility of gaining a voice in the GDR or the status of the individual in all industrial societies, audience members were now interested in issues relating to the death of one state and the integration of its citizens into another state altogether. That is, as Müller’s initial implied audience gradually ceased to exist, so too did the socially committed democratic potential of *Der Lohndrücker*. 
6
Conclusion

6.1 Heiner Müller’s Theatre of Dissensus

At the beginning of this thesis, we saw that Müller states a clear interest in what he calls ‘democratic’ theatre; in his assessment of Wilson’s work in 1985, he speaks of theatrical performances which engage individual spectators to undertake their own interpretative work as both ‘democratic’ and important. As I argued in the introduction, while Müller never refers to his own textual or dramaturgical practice as ‘democratic’, we can find clear indications that he assigns theatre the important political role of being democratic and that his understanding of democracy was a far cry from how the term was officially interpreted in the GDR. At least from the late 1960s to the mid- to late-1980s, Müller speaks and writes of the theatre as the ideal space for individual audience members to generate numerous interpretations of material and find their own ways of relating it to their external reality. When cast in the discourse of radical democracy, Müller’s political understanding of theatre is one in which the theatre strives to generate dissensus as opposed to consensus in its audience, and also collective dissensus regarding the prevailing partage du sensible of material reality outside of the theatre. Müller shows both an acute awareness of an audience’s tendency to relate performances to its own social reality and a willingness to write for such an audience.

In the following, therefore, I shall ask whether this understanding of Müller’s aesthetic provides us with a model for the politics of Müller’s work as a director and as a playwright. This is particularly important given Müller’s status as one of the most pre-eminent European playwright/directors since Brecht. Following this, we may well ask if we can plot any developments in Müller’s aesthetic in the light of this study, and what we can learn through research into past productions and historical audiences. Finally, I shall ask what the method adopted in this thesis can do for us in the future when researching not only Müller, but also political theatre at large.
6.2 Making Democratic Theatre

While Müller’s references to ‘democratic’ theatre per se are never made in relation to his own work, what he designates as ‘democratic’ in the work of Wilson and Berghaus neatly maps on to how he sees his own theatre to a good degree. Indeed, his comment regarding free interpretation in his 1988 production of *Der Lohndrücker*, cited in the introduction, bears a striking similarity to his assessment of Wilson’s ‘demokratisches Theaterkonzept’.

As we saw in Chapter 5, Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* illustrates a range of performance strategies deployed to the end of inviting a multitude of differing audience responses. Not only did Müller approach directing with a refusal to impose his own interpretation and will on the ensemble, but he also attempted to create a piece of theatre which asked its audience members to do the interpretative work: his use of densely polyvalent material both on and off stage was complemented by his insistence on the Brechtian *Trennung der Elemente*. *Der Lohndrücker* in 1988 was staged for an audience experiencing mass dissatisfaction with the current state of the GDR and the SED’s rejection of any reform to its political and cultural institutions, but refused to voice this dissatisfaction for them. Müller’s archaeological method in 1988 was therefore one which necessitated audience participation and encouraged referentiality to material reality while resisting making this referentiality too easy: East German audiences were asked to consider the material in relation to their own political reality, but to produce their own interpretations of how the production related to the present and past in the GDR and what might need changing to the very fabric of the state. In studying the audiences for whom Müller was clearly staging *Der Lohndrücker* and the context in which they existed, I have identified both the artistic and historical conditions underlying Müller’s staging choices and what effect this production had and might have had on its audiences. Its apparent lack of relevance after the fall of the Berlin Wall and into the Wende is a testament to the specificity of Müller’s performance strategies and their contemporary reception.

While we can most definitely identify Müller’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1988 as a ‘democratic’ theatrical performance, at the beginning of this thesis I set out to demonstrate not only that the ‘democratic’ is a way of characterising Müller’s earlier works, but also that an attempt to make ‘democratic’ theatre can be located in his textual politics. Critics tend to state that Müller’s works are open to audience response, but this is most often asserted of his later work and, as I argued in the introduction, made with no reference to the audiences for whom he saw himself as writing. As we have seen, however, not only can we find a clear concern in Müller’s texts for democracy on a thematic level, but we can see that
they are structured to invite numerous differing audience responses and engage with their contemporary audiences’ social realities to ask these audiences to question the composition of their social reality.

In 1956-57, Müller composed Der Lohndrücker against the backdrop of a mood within certain sectors of the GDR public that, while the physically gruelling days of Aufbau had come to a close, East German society was acquiring a clearly Soviet colour and recent historical German experience was being whitewashed, preventing the emergence of a particularly German, democratic form of socialism. Der Lohndrücker makes clear allusions to this historical problem and thematises the lack of input of ordinary East Germans in the governance of their state. As argued in Chapter 2, Müller’s text is composed in such a way that it engages differing audience responses for the purpose of instigating dialogue between audience members about the shape of reality. Through rendering recent German history and the alleged protagonists of the SED state ambiguous, Der Lohndrücker strives to create an audience of engaged yet independent spectators, which can recognise the need for everyday participation in politics. In the insertion of silence both within and between scenes, Müller asks his audience to think about and discuss what they have seen, putting highly dialectical material under scrutiny. The implied audience of Der Lohndrücker is not one necessarily critical of contemporary social reality or sympathetic to socialism, but one aware of the material conditions of life in the East German state since its inception, which might be willing to spot contradictions and discuss how they could be resolved.

Written in 1968, Der Horatier too demonstrates a clear concern with democracy. As we saw in Chapter 3, here Müller is less concerned with asking the audience to be critical of one form of ‘democracy’ and more insistent on the need to question if humans are possessed of a feasible model of democratic society at all. After the quelling of the Prague Spring in 1968, Müller, like many members of the East German public, was disappointed to see the disbanding of any possibility of democratic reform in the GDR. Yet Der Horatier seeks to question the status of the individual in both Eastern and Western societies, engaging its audiences to try to imagine what shape a third way between Eastern socialism/communism and Western capitalism might take: this third way had possibly been lost in Prague in August 1968. Müller’s text presents very few references to contemporary East German society, but alludes to a history of terror and fascism on both sides of the Iron Curtain, thus implying a pan-German/European audience for this work. Drawing on elements of Brecht’s Lehrstücke, Der Horatier is formally constructed to invite its audiences into a problematic process which leads to a paradox and. In recognising the difficulties within this process, the audience is
asked to generate the possibilities for new ways of acting and configuring the status of the individual within a democratic society.

Given the arsenal of ambiguity, ambivalence, silence, paradox, and process which we found in Müller’s textual politics in Chapters 2 and 3, at a first glance, Kentauren may appear to be the odd one out. While it asks for a form of audience involvement in escaping a static historical moment, it does so while being overtly heavily critical of the shape of East German Socialism. When writing in 1986, Müller was reacting to a situation in which the SED Politburo preferred the Schönfärberei of the state of affairs to implementing any Gorbachev-style reforms in the GDR. Müller’s frustration was shared by large swathes of the East German population, including those whose everyday Anpassung served to bolster an increasingly illegitimate regime. Chapter 4 read Kentauren’s textual politics as one of drawing the attention of audience members to the contradictions inherent in both the state and their own behaviour; in confronting these contradictions or mistakes, the audience is set the task of generating behaviour which cannot be subsumed so easily into the logic of a totalitarian bureaucratic machine.

Chapters 2 to 4 sought to analyse Müller’s texts as the source of a democratic political theatre which relies on the activity of the audience. In studying Müller’s texts in tandem with Müller’s most likely implied audiences, we have recognised not only the historical moments to which his texts allude or which they question, but also Müller’s methods for engaging responses from audiences with particular expectations of the theatre. Historical context has therefore provided a rich backdrop for an understanding of how Müller’s texts were composed and why ambiguity, ambivalence, silence, paradox, process, and overt critique are encoded in his texts at these times. Each of the texts under discussion is first and foremost concerned with democracy and written in such a way as to encourage dissensus in the audience; the production in which all three featured in 1988 likewise focused on questions of democracy and participation.

6.3 Developing the Democratic?

By analysing moments in some thirty-two years of Müller’s theatrical production, I have shown that Müller’s entire career as a playwright and director is spanned by a concern for democracy in material reality and for making democratic theatre, whether it be on page or on stage. Indeed, Müller held on to his earlier interpretation of ‘democratic’ theatre presumably until his death, saying as late as July 1994:
Das halte ich für sehr wichtig: die Trennung der Elemente, im Gegensatz zum Mißverständnis vom Gesamtkunstwerk als Eintopf oder als synthetischer Brei. Durch die Trennung hat jeder Zuschauer – und das ist das Demokratische daran – die Möglichkeit, den Zusammenhang mit Hilfe seiner eigenen Erfahrungen herzustellen. Das ist ein absolut anti-diktatorisches Theater.¹

Having taken this long view of Müller’s work, can we see any developments in his approach to textual politics or to democratic theatre? There appears to be a great deal of continuity in Müller’s understanding of the potential political efficacy of the theatre and the methods of making theatre a ‘democratic’ art form. From his comments about Berghaus’s productions in the 1960s to his descriptions of Wilson’s work in the 1990s, Müller regards theatre which places all elements in discussion and engages differing audience responses as democratic. This very thing can be seen in the three texts and Müller’s production of Der Lohndrücker, as discussed in this thesis.

Plotting developments in Müller’s work can be problematic. Not only did many of his texts emerge from long periods of gestation, but he also actively resists the periodisation of his works, stating in 1979 that such a practice amounts to ‘Kolonialpolitik’.² Furthermore, tracing a development in his aesthetic is made difficult by his ability to create new theatrical forms and have recourse to earlier ones. This thesis has illustrated the ways in which Müller’s work is written with his audiences in mind and therefore, at each point, he uses certain textual strategies to politically engage these audiences: in 1956-57, ambiguity, ambivalence, and silence are the means he adopts to this end; in 1968, it is process and paradox; and in 1986, he turns to overt critique and asking his audiences to change their behaviour. But a survey of Müller’s complete oeuvre would doubtless demonstrate that these textual strategies return in different forms throughout his career; moreover, we would see that process over product is a fundamental part in making his audience do the work. In terms of the degree to which his texts refer to specific historical situations, again, we cannot plot a linear development: Der Lohndrücker in 1956-57 and in 1988 and Kentauren in 1986 make very clear allusions and reference to historical reality for the sake of engaging specific audience responses; the historical referentiality of Der Horatier in 1968, however, is more obscure and must therefore be provided by the audience. Again, this sample indicates that Müller’s entire literary output is punctuated by different degrees of reference to material reality outside of the theatre, and this lack of linear development would be confirmed by further analysis of Müller’s plays.

In an undated note, possibly from the early 1990s, Müller writes: ‘Deleuze CB Variationslinien statt Konflikte.’ In Chapters 4 and 5, we identified certain affinities between Müller and Deleuze and Guattari, and here we possibly gain an insight into his own development in terms of configuring audience responses in his texts. That is, from a point, perhaps Müller is concerned with asking for difference and variation in his audiences rather than conflict; in this respect, we may even read ‘CB’ as ‘C[ontra] B[recht]’. This development cannot, however, be so easily gleaned from our interpretations of Müller’s textual politics and performance strategies. Indeed, Der Lohndrücker and Der Horatier appear to be more concerned with instigating their audiences to generate different interpretations which in turn serve as the basis for discourse and discussion between people possessed of conflicting solutions to historical problems; in the case of Kentauren and his production of Der Lohndrücker, however, Müller seems more concerned with the generation of difference. Then again, in Kentauren at least, conflict is necessary for the possibility for tragedy and ideas. Future research into the textual politics of Müller’s texts using a framework like that deployed in this thesis might therefore seek to investigate whether conflict and variation offer a model for Müller’s development or whether they merely mark different strategies in textual and directorial production. As recognised in this thesis, Müller’s texts are each composed at moments in history in which they address particular issues and respond to them using strategies designed for the specific purpose of engaging their audiences in democratic theatre. In this light, one contribution this study has made to research into Müller’s work is the identification that if we want to make more than platitudinous assertions about the political function of Müller’s texts, we need to take a closer look at both what his texts respond to and how he envisages his audience responding in turn; rather than plotting over-arching developments, therefore, research on Müller might want to pay more attention to specificity and therein recognise the political potential of Müller’s textual and performance strategies.

6.4 Looking Back

As stated above, an understanding of past audiences and historical context has been crucial in analysing and situating Müller’s texts and their politics. Through studying the moods in

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1 AdK, HMA 5240.
2 An alternative reading for ‘CB’ may also interpret it as referring to the Italian director Carmelo Bene (1937-2002), who co-authored the two-volume work Superpositions (first published in 1979) with Deleuze. Both readings of this comment are, however, mere speculation, and will not be further discussed here.
which Müller’s works were created, we have been able to come to a closer understanding of the questions addressed in the texts and the ways in which audience members were likely to have responded to productions. This has involved theoretical conjecture based on empirical data, such as prompt books, newspaper reviews, and a whole gambit of archival materials at the theatre researcher’s disposal. In analysing past performances, we have gained further insight into the ways in which contemporary directors and audiences set about their interpretations of Müller’s works. A text’s first performance is a form of reception which cannot be ignored, not least as it serves as the first mediation between the theatre text and the audience. While I have not undertaken a ‘production history’ of *Der Lohndrücker* or any of the texts discussed in this thesis, we have gained an insight into what Laura Bradley calls ‘the historical and aesthetic contingency of dramatic meaning’.\(^5\) That is, we have seen the ways in which the first, and therefore, most historically immediate, recipients of Müller’s works interpreted his plays within their own cultural moods and the parameters of the *partage du sensible* in which they lived.

In the case of Mäde’s *Lohndrücker*, for example, we identified that he staged the text as a piece supporting the SED’s *Aufbau* project; for Mäde and the SED cultural authorities at the time, this was indeed the projected role of theatre. Given the conditions set for Mäde’s production of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1958-60, Mäde made very little change to the printed text, aside from removing pauses and silences. He could bank on his audience’s expectations of pro-Soviet, Stanislavskian theatre, bolstered by previews and promotional materials, while staging *Der Lohndrücker* as a piece responding to the on-going need for East Germans to work towards making the GDR a competitive economic force on the world stage. The myriad possible interpretations for the audience to undertake were therefore limited to an extent by Mäde’s interpretation of the text. Similarly, Lietzau’s *Horatier* in West Berlin in 1973 essentially provided a Western liberal perspective on the questions addressed by Müller’s text, despite making overtures to considering the possibilities of collective action in the chorus; Lietzau’s directing style and his assistant’s rehearsal notes gave us an insight into a cultural mood whereby individuality was sovereign and collectivity an evil banished to the East. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that, while Müller’s text is so open to different responses, his Western audiences in 1973 would largely have seen it as critical of the collectivist, anti-individualist society. Again, in the case of Müller’s own production of *Der Lohndrücker* in 1988, a close analysis of his contemporary audiences demonstrated to us not only the different political potential he found in his earlier text, but also indicates the parameters within which political discourse was happening in the GDR at that time.

In studying the audiences of the premières of Müller’s texts, therefore, we have also gained an insight into the possible limits of textual politics. That is, if politics is encoded in a text and a text can be interpreted by a director and staged accordingly then perhaps that textual politics is not immutable. Then again, this does not render the study of textual politics a necessarily worthless task, and we shall return to this question below. Perhaps more surprisingly, however, we may note here that, despite the interpretations offered by directors of Müller’s texts, the textual politics of his texts can be said to have shone through to some extent. Staging *Der Lohndrücker*, for example, Mäde could not drive out all sources of ambiguity and all moments of silence written into the text. As a result, his clearly Party-line production still generated a lack of consensus about the motivations of the characters and provided silences in which audiences started to talk about what they had seen. Lietzau’s *Horatier*, too, provided Lietzau’s interpretation of the text, but this production proved difficult for Lietzau to stage and reviewers seemed troubled in their interpretation of its theme and function. What we can say about these productions, therefore, is: they have shown that textual politics might indeed have a part in a production if a playwright is well aware of his/her implied audience to the extent of knowing how to instigate dialogue with it and/or a production still incorporates a good deal of the formal composition of the text into performance. As Müller’s own production of *Der Lohndrücker* shows us, an awareness of a text’s one-time politics and a contemporary audience can lead to this politics being harnessed and deployed to new ends. All three productions analysed in this thesis demonstrate that a particularly open form of textual politics of the kind Müller writes can make it easier for directors to offer their own interpretations of a dramatist’s texts without too much textual editing.

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, audience research is still a developing field, and we might want to ask if our methodology has enabled us to move beyond the ‘informed speculation’ about which we heard Davis and Emeljanow express their concerns in the introduction. In the absence of ‘hard proof” in many cases, using a great deal of historical contextualisation we have been able to situate all cultural production and reception within a particular mood and an *Erwartungshorizont*. In each chapter, this mood has presented us with certain parameters within which Müller, the directors of his plays, and his audiences were operating in their respective roles. While we cannot study the moods of individual audience members, the parameters for audience response are particularly fruitful in studying the shape of a particular culture’s *partage du sensible* and the room within that *partage du sensible* for generating individual and collective responses. Indeed, Müller’s plays, productions of these plays, newspaper reviews, and the like serve not only as means of
affecting audience response, but are in themselves articulations of the ways in which people thought within specific cultures and at different times.

A study of cultural mood and *Erwartungshorizont*, as constructed through pre-performance conditions, is of utmost importance when we want to understand ways in which theatregoers encounter a performance and undertake to interpret it. Nonetheless, can such a methodology ever move beyond making general observations about audiences’ reactions and the possible parameters of their responses? An answer might be: perhaps not. But the inability to tie down the responses of individual audience members by no means renders the preceding study insufficient. If we are concerned with analysing methods deployed in texts and performances to the ends of engaging audiences to produce differing interpretations of material, it is precisely the general parameters of audience response that are interesting. Not least, in writing his texts or staging his productions, Müller himself would not have aspired to second-guess how individual audience members might respond. None of the preceding chapters has tried to pin down exact, individual responses, but has studied the potential for differing responses and, indeed, has demonstrated that numerous readings are always readily available, but often limited by the individual spectator’s necessary concatenation in a collective experience.

6.5 Pointing Forward

The study of Müller’s textual politics has shown us not only that his entire career is concerned with creating ‘democratic’ theatre, but that he is constantly striving to develop ways in which his audiences can undertake a free interpretation of his theatrical texts. In noting that Müller’s works are fashioned as works for a ‘democratic’ theatre, we are better placed to determine the politics of Müller’s theatre and Müller’s place in cultural politics on both sides of the Iron Curtain. We have also noted that Müller has much more in his arsenal of means for engaging numerous different audience responses than just densely polysemic images; these no doubt play a part in his textual output, but should not be overestimated as Müller’s primary means of making his audiences work. In offering new insights into Müller’s textual practice through the lens of ‘democratic’ theatre, I have been able to argue that it might be worthwhile to reassess Müller’s oeuvre in this light and pay heed to the multiple strategies deployed in his works to engage his audiences to produce interpretations and relate them to their social existence. Indeed, we have seen that audience participation is central not only to the three texts and one production analysed in this thesis, but also perhaps to all of his work. It is also key to understanding the composition of his texts: this audience

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participation is in turn hoped to be ‘democratic’. We have been able to see this by closely reading Müller’s texts in their historical contexts and against the backdrop of the audiences he most likely had in mind when writing. As such, I have identified what we can do when we combine theories of audience response with close textual analysis; such an approach may indeed provide us with greater insights into the politics of writing for the theatre, an area of theatre research which has albeit lost some ground to the recent prevalence of performance research. When combined, performance research, close textual analysis, historical contextualisation, and audience research serve as an especially adept tool in investigating how text-based political theatre is made and how theatre can be made politically. Indeed, when we remove textual analysis from this list, the insights provided by audience research can shed considerable light on the potential workings of political performance. This is all the more important in the case of new forms of theatre, such as the postdramatic, which emphasise the role of the audience member and the political possibilities of reconfiguring the relationship between stage and auditorium.

It is without a doubt that Müller’s own textual and directorial practice has been heavily influential in the development of postdramatic theatre in the last few decades. In his Postdramatisches Theater, Hans-Thies Lehmann makes continuous reference to Müller in this vein. Not least, there are numerous convergences between the democratic political potential of Müller’s theatre and the politics of the postdramatic: like Müller’s theatre, the postdramatic denies the synthesis of material for the sake of creating an audience punctuated by difference; and, again according to Lehmann, the postdramatic sets out to disrupt the categories by which politics is conducted in the everyday. While the discourse of postdramatic theatre is concerned first and foremost with theatrical performance, Müller’s texts already indicate that the theatre text can be a means through which to generate the politics of the postdramatic: they pointing to the ways in which theatrical texts can disrupt the political implications of the traditionally ‘dramatic’ and offer models for audience engagement.

As we have seen from an analysis of Der Lohndrücker in Chapter 5, however, Müller’s staging techniques appear to fit more closely in Barnett’s category of the post-Brechtian. Not only does Müller use the stage as a space for the audience to undertake its

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6 Lehmann, Postdramatisches Theater. In the amount of times he is mentioned, Müller is only rivalled by Brecht and Wilson.
7 See: ibid., p. 142.
own associative work, but he also deploys Brechtian dialectical materialist strategies not to lead to a single solution, rather ‘to explore the fullness and complexity of reality, which is still understood to exist as a material, dialectical whole’. Müller’s own performance strategies are more eminently post-Brechttian than postdramatic: as Barnett writes, ‘if the post-Brechttian reminds us of the postdramatic, the former distinguishes itself from the latter by virtue of its commitment to a social agenda based on dialectical materialism.’ As argued throughout this thesis, the potential for this form of theatre is already anchored in Müller’s textual politics; the discourse of the post-Brechttian, however, is still very much concerned with the level of performance. If referentiality to material reality is a key facet of the post-Brechttian, then it may be problematic to talk of texts as post-Brechttian, not least because they can be made to refer to any material reality. Nonetheless, as we have seen in this thesis, Müller’s texts are not only committed to engaging audiences regarding their social or political reality, but also rely on audience members bringing their social reality with them to the theatre. In this sense, we could go so far to say that the preceding study into the textual politics of Müller’s democratic theatre has perhaps gone some way in outlining what it might be for a text to be post-Brechttian: Müller’s texts are dialectical while resisting synthesis and are written with social commitment in mind from the start. This thesis has, of course, gone to some lengths to avoid using much Brechtian terminology for fear that it can all too often be adopted uncritically, creating a level of obscurity and outright misinterpretation. But if there were ever a playwright whose work would be most fitting of the post-Brechttian epithet, it is most likely Müller.

11 Ibid., p. 353.
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