Contents

Understandings, Politics, and Institutions

A VIEW FROM THE END

Social arrangements in decline often look farcical. They produce events that just a little while ago were literally inconceivable. They engender plots that are, judging by the received wisdom of their time and space, whimsical, indeed improbable in the dramatic sense of the word. Analytically such events are revealing. They confront the desperate assertion of an order as present, with its open rejection as passé; they feature the bold flotation of a presupposed future that is suddenly allowed to slip by as if it were already well established. Thus they also reveal clashes of political understandings in which the still presupposed commonplace is destabilized by views unthinkable only yesterday. Sitting at the crossroads between a past that is still there and a future that is little more than audacious anticipation, they perform the undoing of one social order while toying with another. I want to open this chapter by reporting just such an event from the fall of 1989 that has become emblematic for the decline and final disintegration of socialism in East Germany.

The punch line of the event as it is remembered is but a historical trifle. An octogenarian minister of secret police retorts criticism of his style of address to a moribund parliamentarian assembly with the words: *Ich liebe Euch doch alle!* (But I love you all!). That's it, or perhaps better: there is little more to it. And yet, this short phrase captured the public imagination. To many, these words spoken by this particular man in this particular context crystallized what socialism was, and as such it became a trope, a key to the memory of state socialism in the GDR. To understand how so little could do so much, some background is necessary. The protagonist is Erich Mielke, since 1957 head of the Ministry of State Security, the secret police, bureaucratically known under its official acronym MfS, and popularly referred to as the Stasi. A member of the politburo, a close confidant of the country's leader, Erich Honecker, a cabinet minister, and a four-star general, Mielke commanded

an army of 91,000[1] full-time secret police employees and almost twice that many unofficial helpers of various categories.[2] With regard to his biography, Mielke was what an ideal GDR leader was supposed to be: of proletarian origin, *ein einfacher Arbeiterjunge* (a simple worker's kid), in his case from Berlin's poor Wedding district; and someone who appeared to have made the right decision when history called, someone with antifascist credentials acquired chiefly by participating in the Spanish Civil War.

The Background

During GDR times, nobody knew much about Stasi and its minister, not even the Stasi employees. The Stasi's size, its concrete range of tasks, its organizational structure, its methods were cautiously guarded state secrets. And yet, precisely because it was hiding, it was imagined to be everywhere. That, of course, meant different things to different people. Those in sympathy with the party were prone to see it as a necessary institution of national defense effectively protecting the GDR from its enemies. For many of them the Stasi was also an object of pride, mostly owing to its fabled foreign espionage prowess. Some even regarded it as an organization with more direct access to power and thus capable of circumventing regrettable bureaucratic stalemate. To the population not committed to socialism, the Stasi was mysterious and intimidating, something to stay clear of even as it became the butt of popular jokes targeting its supposed omniscience and power. For people with thoughts, interests, and desires deviating from the party's proscribed path, Stasi was a threat, the epitome of a powerful political machine ever ready to stamp out the very conditions for the possibility of their difference.

The scene for the event I want to report is the People's Chamber, the GDR's parliament that was integrated into the Palace of the Republic, the country's largest sociocultural center sporting several restaurants, bowling alleys, and a number of performance spaces that together made it the closest thing to a piazza in East Berlin's cityscape. It is important to remember that the People's Chamber was not what such an institution would be in a western parliamentarian democracy. It debated and finally promulgated the laws of the country. Yet, not only was law institutionalized in a different way (e.g., Dilcher 1994; Mollnau 1999), playing a different role in the political administrative make-up of socialist states, but these laws were drafted by the Apparat, the bureaucracy of the Central Committee (Uschner 1993; Modrow 1995). Once they arrived at the doorsteps of the People's Chamber they were already approved by the politburo, the most significant group of political decision makers in the country. Minor amendments were possible, but in principle the task of parliament was to acclaim them. Biannual meetings were sufficient for this work. The People's Chamber remained formally a multiparty assembly that included, besides the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), also a Christian, a liberal, a national, and a farmers' party in addition to representatives of the socialist mass organizations (youth, women, union, etc.). These parties and mass organizations were united and effectively controlled by the SED through the means of a "national front." Accordingly, elections were, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, unitary list elections. Therefore, members of parliament without other higher party functions were, although carefully screened, rather removed from power, and as far as the non-SED members were concerned, even symbolically separated from it.

The time of the event is November 13, 1989. Since the preceding late summer months, tens of thousands of GDR citizens had fled westward through the newly opened Hungarian border or by spectacular occupations of West German embassies in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw. That the GDR seemed to have nothing left to retain them was widely read as an indicator for the severity of the economic and political crisis of the country. The government's response to those fleeing had already produced one of the lines that began to galvanize the public imagination (and social memory afterward). In the prime newscast of the GDR, Die *Aktuelle Kamera*, a commentary of the state news agency (ADN) was read, declaring: "They [the refugees] have trampled all moral values locking themselves out of our society. Thus, no tears should be shed about them."[3]

The refugee crisis, the silence of government, and the widespread interest of the people in it provided a new, significant push for opposition groups in the GDR. So far they had operated only in limited circles. Now they saw a chance to reorganize themselves as open, countrywide citizen, discussion, and action platforms. The first one to get off the ground on September 10 was the Neue Forum ("New Forum") with a memorandum titled "Departure 89." As an absolute novelty in the GDR, it applied on September 19 for legalization that was, not unexpectedly, declined just a few days later. Nevertheless, soon others followed, some even with the open intention to establish themselves

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1. All Stasi employment figures used throughout the book are, unless otherwise noted, from Gieseke 2000.

2. Throughout the book, all figures about secret informants (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*) are, unless otherwise noted, from Müller-Enbergs 1995.

3. *Aktuelle Kamera*, October 1, 1989. Krenz (1999, 74) suspects that this very line was formulated by Honecker himself. This is not implausible given what we know about the deep, micromanagerial interference of the party leadership, especially of Honecker and Herrmann, the politburo member in charge of the mass media (see Boyer 2001, 2005, 110–12).

as alternative political parties.[4] All of these new groupings were carried by a growing wave of public interest in political reform, which also found other forms of expression. On September 25, peace prayers in Leipzig's Nikolai Church led to a public demonstration with about a thousand participants. This was the birth hour of the famous "Monday demonstrations," which from now on were to convene weekly with ever-growing numbers of participants.

Just five weeks before Mielke's speech in the People's Chamber, the GDR had celebrated its fortieth anniversary with great pomp. Here another line was spoken that ended up sticking. In an address in the Palace of the Republic on the eve of the anniversary, the general secretary summarized the state of the party's project with an old labor movement ditty: "Socialism in its course can not be stopped by either donkey or horse."[5] At the same time, however, festivities took place amid increasingly voiced discontent among its population, which for the first time since 1953 burst across the country into a string of grassroots demonstrations. These provoked the party state into its most visible display of internally applied force since the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Thousands of people were temporarily arrested. Subsequent reports of police abuse spread widely throughout the country. In consequence of what even the most loyal of party members perceived as complacent anniversary celebrations that significantly dampened hopes for reforms from within the party, the Monday demonstrations in the city of Leipzig had swelled to 70,000—and neither did the demonstrators use violence, nor did the party state try to dissolve it by force. Only three weeks before the Stasi minister's speech, Honecker, the GDR's leader since 1971,

had been deposed and replaced with his heir apparent. A little over one week prior to the event in question, East Berlin, a city of 1.6 million, had witnessed a demonstration for democratic renewal/socialism with a human face that attracted about half a million participants. Initiated by the Berlin theater companies, it featured a panoply of speakers ranging from civil rights activists Jens Reich and Marianne Birthler, who represented emerging new parties, over critical but essentially loyal artists such as Stefan Heym and Christa Wolf to more critical representatives of the GDR's political elites such as the former Stasi espionage chief Markus Wolf and stalwarts of the new younger party leadership represented by the Berlin district chief and politburo member Günter Schabowski. The latter two's voices, however, were drowned in catcalls. It was an ominous sign. Most significantly, however, a mere four days before the event I am about to narrate, the Berlin Wall had been opened in an attempt to stem the flood of refugees. In the intervening three days about 2 million GDR citizens[6] visited West Berlin or West Germany to get a firsthand glimpse of the consumption possibilities in "the other Germany."

Mielke's Speech

On this November 13, 1989, the People's Chamber assembled to vote for a new prime minister and a new speaker, to complement on the state side the previous changes at the head of the party's politburo.[7] Just before Mielke descended from the government bench to the speaker's podium the parliamentarians heard for the first time *officially* from the finance minister as well as from the head of the central planning commission about the extent of the GDR's foreign debt.[8] The reaction of the members to these revelations ranged from boundless amazement and disbelief to shocked sadness and muffled anger. Responding to prior written inquiries of parliamentar-

4. Historical overviews over the citizen platforms emerging in the fall of 1989 are provided by Müller-Enbergs et al. 1991, Haufe and Bruckmeier 1993, Neubert 1998, Timmer 2000, Neubert and Eisenfeld 2001. A fascinating account in the Stasi documents tracing the emergence of this group is provided by Mitter and Wolle 1991.

5. Honecker had used the same slogan in a speech celebrating the first 32-bit chip manufactured in the GDR. On August 15, 1989, the ZK paper, *Neues Deutschland*, featured it on the title page. There is a photograph from 1959 that shows this slogan in a slightly different form on a billboard just across the border with West Berlin in the area of Potsdamer Platz. There, ox and donkey are replaced by the then mayor of Berlin (later chancellor of West Germany), Willy Brandt, and then American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles. The oldest historical records of the slogan seem to date back to 1886 when a socialist carpenter signed it into the visitors' book of a popular Berlin weekend hangout under the false name of Berlin's chief of police. It was popularized then through the ensuing forgery trial against him. Another famous line supposedly uttered in the same context is this one attributed to Gorbachev: "Those who come too late are punished by life" (*Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben!*). In his memoirs Gorbachev claims to have used these words in a conversation with Honecker. On public record is only the following line uttered at Flughafen Schönefeld upon his arrival: "I think dangers are only waiting for those who do not react to life!" (*Aktuelle Kamera*, October 5, 1989) (*Die Zeit* no. 41, 1999, "'Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben' hat Gorbatschow gesagt. Stimmt's?").

6. Number reported on Berliner Rundfunk, news, August 13, 1989.

7. Somewhat frustrated by the discrepancies between the two circulating transcriptions of Mielke's speech (besides the official records of the *Volkskammer* reprinted in relevant parts in Otto 2000, 699–700, there is a transcript originally published by *Frankfurter Rundschau* on November 16, 1989, which was reprinted later in *Deutschland Archiv*, vol. 23.1, 121ff.), I have obtained a copy of the telecast of the People's Chamber session including Mielke's speech made by GDR television and transcribed it myself. This tape was especially valuable as the cameramen were interspersing views of the speaker with glances across the assembly to capture the reaction of the audience. I was thus much better able to form an impression of the emotions of the speaker as well as those of the audience.

8. Although the Western media had always reported about the latest Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) credit to the GDR, it would have been hard for the members to assemble from such reports a complete picture, especially about the accumulated extent of the GDR's hard currency debt.

ians, Erich Mielke followed to deliver his first and only speech in the parliament to which he belonged since 1957 (i.e., as long as he was minister). No doubt exhausted from the preceding week's events, no doubt deeply worried that his life's work of building socialism in Germany was in grave danger, the eighty-one-year-old Mielke spoke extemporaneously—against well-established socialist practice and personal habit. I present this speech in some length, not only to contextualize the famous quote, but also because his speech offers an excellent overview over the Stasi's self-understanding and the means by which the party state GDR made sense of itself.

> Dear Delegates! I want to begin by clarifying the duties of our employees in the Ministry of State Security vis-à-vis the working people, vis-à-vis our people. We are sons and daughters of the working class, we come from all social strata . . . We represent the interests of the working people. This is our highest charge from the People's Chamber and we have always, we have always tried to fulfill it.[9]

To Mielke's subsequent assertion that the Stasi has an "extraordinarily high contact with the working people," the assembly responded with laughter, to which he replied, visibly surprised and slightly irritated:

> Yes we have the contact, we have that contact, you [intimate form][10] will see, you will see in a second why. I am not afraid of answering here without notes. That's democracy too. I have not worked out my speech before hand . . . We have had first the task, this was the most important thing, to uncover everything that was directed against peace. And we have supplied first-rate information about the development which has led us to where we stand now [the accomplishments of the GDR], comrades, not just for the GDR, but for the socialist camp as a whole. Second, and I say this only briefly, one of the most important tasks was the strengthening of our socialist economy . . . and many in the hall agree that we do excellent work in this regard. More

9. This sentence is interesting. The Stasi called itself the "sword and the shield of the party," and it took orders not from parliament, but from the party. The German original of the sentence is a bit more ambiguous with regard to the connections between charge and charging agency. Although this may reflect a momentary insight into rhetorical exigencies (taking parliament more seriously and treating it as independent), this appears hardly as the execution of some grand strategy, as the ensuing exchange amply illustrates.

10. Party members shared a stipulated intimacy regarding their commitment to an overarching goal in the face of which they were all equals, that is, "comrades." This was reflected in public by the use of the intimate, second person singular form of address. Accordingly, Mielke could be understood as implying that everybody present was sharing in that intimacy bestowed by a common goal, that for all practical purposes everybody assembled was a party member, or that conversely nonmembers did not matter. The reaction of the audience bears out this interpretation.

I need not say, I think. We have contributed extraordinarily, comrades, to the strengthening of our economy.

At this point Mielke had to face a heckler, who said:

> Rising to order, I request that it be respected, not all members of this chamber are comrades, I request . . . [tumultuous noise in the background].

To that Mielke replied:

> My apologies, this is only a . . . this is only natural love for humankind (*natürliche Menschenliebe*) . . . [applause] this is just a formality . . . [tumultuous protest] I love . . . [tumultuous protest] but I love all . . . [loud protest] all human beings . . . [loud laughter] well, but I love, but I commit myself to this.

Mielke then went on to explain that the Stasi, since its inception in 1950, continuously tried to address the problems of the GDR by operating as a kind of problem identification and information transmission system that informed the right people and frequently made suggestions for improvement. He especially mentioned problems with people fleeing the country, naming physicians and teachers as particularly important cases. He beseeched the audience to believe him that the Stasi did in fact report about all of these problems, adding that regrettably not all information provided found appropriate consideration. So he closed:

> We have in this respect always seen what is important: maintenance of peace, the strengthening of the economy of the GDR, to see to it that the working people can communicate their troubles and problems.

Since then, in social memory, this speech has shrunk to the words *Ich liebe Euch doch alle!* (But I love you all!).[11] This phrase more than any other became a trope signifying the utter senility of the GDR leadership to some, its unbelievable aloofness to others, and its sheer cynicism to yet others. However, by the end of this book it will become clear, I hope, why it was probably none of these, as Mielke, not in the word sense alone but in that of the social arrangements that were GDR socialism, is likely to have meant what he said. For him as for the officers I interviewed, Stasi work was work for the party that was at the same time an expression of love for humanity even if the Stasi tried to uproot the most tender sprouting of extraparty civil society, even if it prepared

11. None of the more widely circulated transcripts report Mielke to have said "But I love you all!" Probably picked up for reasons of prosodic memorability these words got further popularized in the title of one of the first collections of Stasi documents published in 1990 (Mitter and Wolle 1990).

to imprison in times of war thousands of GDR citizens who were deemed unreliable and thus perceived as an acute security burden.

Mielke enacted in this speech particular understandings about the political institutions and organizations in the GDR, his personal role in it, and that of the bureaucracy and the party he represented. So did the ADN news commentary lambasting the refugees in early October, and Honecker in his unfazed, flat expression of confidence in the victory of socialism in his fortieth anniversary speech. Parliamentarians calling upon Mielke to justify the Stasi, or shouting or laughing at him during his speech, enacted what at least in this particular public location were absolutely *novel* understandings of the polity GDR. And so did the snowballing number of people taking the courage to participate in demonstrations first only in Leipzig and Berlin and then throughout the country (on the day of Mielke's speech alone, so estimated the police, a record 1 million). The refugees who took their two-stroke engine Trabbis across the Hungarian-Austrian border in late summer with nothing but what they had packed for their annual vacation at Lake Balaton had enacted their understandings of party, state, and country by seizing the first opportunity to flee. The people interpreting any of the events I just described, homing in on Mielke's words or Honecker's or the commentary on the evening news, ventured theirs.

Bill Sewell (2005, 127) argues that "events should be conceived of as sequences of occurrences that result in transformations of structures. Such sequences begin with a rupture of some kind—that is, a surprising break with routine practice. . . . But whatever the nature of the initial rupture, an occurrence only becomes a historical event, in the sense in which I use the term, when it touches off a chain of occurrences that durably transforms pervious structures and practices." What made the fall of 1989 "hot" in Eastern Europe, a "transformational event" in Sewell's sense, is precisely such a string of occurrences (or more basic events) building on each other in an amplifying manner to what Abbott (2001b, chap. 8) calls a "turning point." At the end stood the demise of an institutional order (or structure). Political epistemology, as I defined it in the preface, is a particular way of looking at such institutional transformations by focusing on processes of understanding. In all of the events building up to the dissolution of socialism, understandings were deployed in action or verbally or both. What was new or disruptive about these deployments was that understandings were, as in Mielke's speech, all of a sudden met with a challenge, an unexpected reaction or response. These had effects on the understandings themselves in the sense that some got weakened, others strengthened, background assumptions came to be problematized, new understandings emerged, old ones got transformed. And all of this had an effect on the reproduction of socialism as an institutional arrangement. In the remainder of the chapter I

will enter a more theoretical mode of analysis, drawing on Mielke's speech as an example. What I will explore is, first, what I mean by understanding and by institutions as well as their interrelation. An important question in all of this will be how we can imagine these events to build onto each other, in what today is frequently called a "path-dependent manner" (Pierson 2004, 20ff.), both in maintaining and altering institutional arrangements.

TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF UNDERSTANDING

In the preface I defined political epistemology as a particular field of inquiry. As such it needs a suitable method of analysis. For the purposes of political epistemology it is important that a method is chosen that does not lead to a simple mapping between types of polities and types of knowledge making. That would lead us straight back to the comparison of forms that I argued should be avoided if we want to remain open to the possibility to learn from the socialist experience. Instead, it is important to find a method of inquiry allowing for a genuinely dynamic analysis of the interactions between institutions and understandings. What is equally important is to devise an analytical framework in which the relationship between power and understanding can actually by problematized. Now that I have talked about it so much, the obvious question to begin with is, "What is understanding?"

Understanding and Its Modes

We say "I understand," for example, when we want to emphasize that we got the meaning of a communication: when we feel we know what the world looks like from another's perspective; when we grasp the significance of an event, a person, or an object; when we begin to see through other persons' intentions and expectations; or when we finally know how to play a particular phrase on the piano. We say "now I understand!" when we just had an insight, when we tried to fit the pieces of a puzzle together (game, murder mystery, office intrigue . . .) and finally have come to see how everything hangs together. In all of these cases, understanding is achieved in a process of *orientation*; it emerges in the realization of what is what, and where located in relation to one another. This process is at once analytical and synthetic. It involves the *differentiation* of a totality into elements and simultaneously their qualitative *integration*. Orientation is principally indexical; it cannot be sought in the abstract but must be undertaken relative to specific goals, desires, intentions, interests, or pursuits, that is, from a particular point of view.[12] As some-

12. Even when understanding itself becomes the pursuit, or an entertaining parlor game, either previous endeavors of a similar kind (an ongoing practice, a tradition) or some form of simulation ("let us assume . . .") is needed to root and situate the process of understanding.

thing we do, understanding can also be seen as an interdependent two-level *ordering* of the world into a nonrelevant, blurry background and a *relevant* foreground thrown into sharp relief by specifying its configuration. In consequence, understandings necessarily stipulate a particular *form* in which the world *exists*. In sum: *Understanding is a process of orientation from within a particular pursuit in a specific context, which orders relevant aspects of the world by simultaneously differentiating and integrating it, thus stipulating a practical ontology.*[13] Understanding can be undertaken for its own sake, for the curiosity it satisfies, and for the pleasure it affords. Yet, the preponderant reason why we seek understanding is, as the hermeneutic tradition has argued time and again, that in the absence of instinctual determination we need it because it enables us to act (e.g., Herder 1953, 745ff.; Gehlen 1997, 32ff.).

In practice, understanding comes about in a number of different modes deeply intertwined with each other. Analytically, however, it is useful to distinguish them because they achieve their constitutive ordering in different ways, perhaps one could even say in different media offering—like oil, watercolor, or pastel for the painter, or compass, sextant, clock, and map for the navigator—characteristic possibilities and limitations with regard to how they enable processes of differentiation and integration. Technically speaking, each mode has its own way of producing understanding, its own poetics, which makes it relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the others. Each of our five senses, for example, differentiates and integrates the world in characteristic ways. And each sense can comment on the other in the production of a synthetic impression of an object. For instance, something that looks like snow but tastes sweet is in all likelihood rather powder sugar; somebody who speaks like a communist but wears a designer suit is in all likelihood a salon socialist (for a spy would not make so simple a mistake). The various symbolic media in which we think—images, the natural and the various formal

languages—order the world according to different principles. Here, too, mutual qualification is important: a newspaper article that discursively strives to provide a "balanced" account of the relative merits and demerits of two electoral candidates can become partisan through the supplementary photographs; a difficult text can become more transparent through a graph, and so forth.

This wealth of possibilities notwithstanding, in what follows I will limit myself to only three modes, that is, discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings. To see how they are different and yet conjointly constitutive of certain objects, consider the theory of history as a succession of epoch defining class conflicts. This discursive understanding may find an emotional counterpart in the actual hatred of people who are considered to be members of the opposing class and the loving solidarity for members of one's own class. Corresponding kinesthetic understandings may be embodied in certain patterns of movement through a cityscape, such that the territory of the class enemy is avoided wherever possible while one's bodily posture changes with home and enemy territory and the senses are exposed to some parts of the world rather than to others. Friend-foe distinctions are thus made simultaneously in three different dimensions.

The restriction to a distinction between discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings owes itself, to some degree, to judgments of relevance for the historical context under investigation in this book. It will become apparent that the interaction between emotive and discursive understandings is important to appreciate the biographical trajectories of both communist functionaries and dissidents. Close attention to kinesthetic understandings is analytically also revealing in this particular case. In a city and a former nation-state divided by a wall severing family and friendship networks arbitrarily into an eastern and a western half restrictions on movement are important. In a country where activities in public spaces are tightly controlled, the freedom to go or not to go to certain places and to do or not to do certain things, the ability to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch certain things becomes one of the ultimate sources of value. However, this study's limitation to discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings also owes itself to the data-gathering possibilities open to a historical ethnographer. Even where I wish I could have differentiated sensory modes of understanding more directly, as for example in experiences of imprisonment, I could not do so for lack of sufficiently detailed or sufficiently plentiful data. A differentiation into various kinds of symbolic media is not necessary, because the people I studied have used mostly different registers of German (rather than game theory, for example) to understand discursively the political world in which they lived. However, where necessary I will differentiate ordinary spoken German from the technical jargon of the party and that of the secret police. Since my pri-

13. As I have indicated in the preface, the concept of understanding as I use it here stands in the tradition of hermeneutic social thought. Nevertheless, as stated here it bears resemblance with W. I. Thomas's notion of "the definition of a situation" (1923, 42). In conjunction with the "Thomas theorem" (1928, 572) it was coined and used with the same constitutive intentions as "understanding" in the older tradition. I will maintain the older language here not only because it has seniority rights, but also because Thomas's recourse to the verb "to define" introduces undesirable voluntaristic connotations. I also prefer the term understanding to "schema" as the latter term, much like "knowledge" (see the discussion on pp. xxii–xxiii), obscures the processual character, the becoming and necessary maintenance of what it purports to depict. The term "frame" was originally used by Goffmann (1974) in a very different sense. Its recent appropriation in the movement's literature (e.g., Snow et al. 1986) is problematic where it aims to do more than emphasize the instrumental character of deploying certain understandings. Using it as a synonym for "schema" or "understanding" brings into play a rather misleading metaphor.

mary access point to the past is discourse, even the identification of emotive and kinesthetic understandings poses methodological challenges that force me to consider them to a much lesser degree than I should have liked and would have been possible in a participant observation study.

What are, then, some of the fundamental differences between the poetics of discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings? As a fully symbolic medium, *discourse* is more flexible than any other in making complex distinctions between a plentitude of elements, their qualitative characteristics, ways of existence, forms of connection, and so on. Precisely because they are so versatile in enabling the kinds of understandings we need for our everyday pursuits, natural languages often seem to blend with the world. Their limits come to the fore only in moments where we seem to "bump up against our languages," for example, when we become aware of lexical restrictions (compelling us to borrow from other languages, or to forge neologisms), suddenly bothersome conventions of language use (which we then might feel tempted to transgress), as well as limiting grammatical forms (which may urge us to think up noncanonical discourse or even to invent alternatives, for example, formal languages).

Michael Silverstein (e.g., 2004) has pointed out that the flexibility and versatility of discourse owes itself to the fact that it is perhaps better understood as a plurality of intersecting and interacting poetics that are projected onto a singular strand of discursive behavior. He places this insight into a longer linguistic tradition in which various authors have proposed to grasp this poetic complexity in different ways. Jakobson (e.g., 1960) has provided a much-cited approach in which he distinguishes six "functions" or levels of semiotic operations characterizing every linguistic utterance in varying degrees. He argues that besides communicating a particular content, utterances are arranged more or less artfully; that they open channels of communication while containing information about how to decode the message; that they communicate something about the emotive and cognitive state of the speaker while addressing the hearer in a particular way. More recently, much interest has been garnered by Bakhtin's (e.g., 1981) notions of the "dialogic" character of discourse, which he also describes as an immanent "heteroglossia" analyzable in terms of a simultaneity of different "voices" within one and the same text. The point of his analysis is to show that one and the same text often sets various, possibly even contradictory, perspectives in relationship to one another. It is the particular merit of linguistic anthropology to have explored the significance of the interactions of these multiple poetics for the dynamics of interaction and ultimately the macrocultural context (e.g., Silverstein 1993, 2004; Gal and Irvine 2000; Keane 2003).

A number of intellectual traditions have expounded on the ways in which

symbols — and a fortiori discursive understandings — enable human beings to escape the strictures of the immediate context of action.[14] Their common denominator is that symbols allow human beings the (re-)presentation of the absent, both in terms of time and space. Symbols can translate the there and then into the here and now or conversely open the here and now to a there and then. Thus symbols do not only expand our spatial horizon beyond eyesight and earshot. They also span up temporality as we know it, with a past bleeding into the present constantly ready to leap ahead of itself into a future. In this way, symbols afford humans a world besides the world, a fifth dimension, if you like, in which they can play with ifs and ors, combinations and recombinations. Symbols and with it discourse afford human beings imagination, fantasy, counterfactuals, pure fiction. In the realm of discourse, the world can be differentiated and integrated in the lofty modality of the "as-if."

The poetics of *emotive understandings* cannot even be thematized as long as emotions are seen as erratic unsystematic eruptions. For rationalists, the very term emotive understanding is but a contradiction in terms.[15] Even though the sentimentalists, the romantics, and other critics of the Enlightenment had already emphasized "passion," "sentiment," or "affection" as a valuable source of orientation different and yet connected to reason, a real breakthrough came only with the work of Freud. In his wake it became commonplace that our actions are only poorly comprehended as oriented by discursive understandings alone. Instead he has shown how they are just as much guided by our (partially unconscious) wishes and fears, desires and aversions (2000e). What is more, our discursive understandings of the world, our very rationality along with our efforts to maintain ourselves and our social standing, all need to be sponsored by desires to become effective (2000f).[16] Thus, emotive understandings structure the world in the first instance into variously desirable and undesirable components that attain

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14. Among them are, besides the already mentioned classics of hermeneutic social thought, American pragmatism (e.g., James 1956, 1975; Dewey 1997), early Soviet psychology and linguistics (esp. Vygotsky 1975, 1986; Volosinov 1973), the German philosophical anthropology of the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., Cassirer 1997; Gehlen 1997), and phenomenology (e.g., Schütz and Luckmann 1984, 1981).

15. In his ideal-typical scheme of action, even Weber (1980) still considers "affective" and "traditional" (i.e., habituated) action to hover at the margin of what can be called meaningful.

16. Freud has called our ordering of the world through desire the *pleasure principle*. He emphasized that we cannot live by desire alone, because we come to understand that following up on pleasure and displeasure may actually hurt us in the long run. He called *reality principle* the formation of meta-understandings allowing us to ponder whether or not we should follow our desires. Even though the latter may take shape in the form of discursive exhortations (internalized as a voice of authority) these, Freud makes clear, would remain ineffective if they were not themselves invested with desire.

their particular quality in the course of experience. According to Freud, desires and aversions orient action by directing it. But they do not do so in an unambiguous fashion; instead, they can quickly draw us into a maelstrom of different directions. The possibility of therapy shows that these configurations of desire can be rearranged not only in ordinary lived life but also by systematic efforts to work with them (2000b).

I understand emotions as the specific qualitative forms desire and aversion can take. The pioneering work of Silvan Tomkins (1962; 1963) on individual emotions ("shame," "fear," "anger," etc.) has yielded valuable insights about their poetics (Nathanson 1992). In comparison with discursive understanding, the poetics of emotion follows a much more limited, less differentiable, but also a much more immediate and thus forceful, way of understanding. Emotions differentiate between four classes of elements: feeling subjects, objects (which can literally be anything including things, fantasies, other people, self, thoughts, other feelings, activities, situations), emotive connectors (e.g., shame, love, hate, fear, curiosity, anger, frustration, nostalgia),[17] and finally triggers. They integrate these elements in the form of episodes such that the trigger gives rise to an emotive connection between subject and object, which becomes available to the subject in altered states of mind and body.[18] This ordering is oriented in two ways. Emotions, their strength and clarity, highlight the *relevance* of the object to the subject. And by virtue of the fact that emotions are experienced as pleasurable or displeasurable, they create powerful *motives* for the subject to seek more or less exposure to the object in the future. Emotions are immediately available to us through altered bodily states that make us present in our bodies and in the here and now. Even though there is still much controversy over what emotions are and how they work (and even whether they do constitute a unified set of phenomena (e.g., Griffith 1997), there is little disagreement today that emotions are key in signaling the relevance of various elements of the world to us (Frijda, Manstead, and Bern 2000; Reddy 2001). Thereby (acknowledged

or not), newer emotions research comes back to the older Freudian insight that emotions, that is, qualitatively differentiated desires and aversions, motivationally hook us to the world.

The poetic limits of modes of understanding are often the flipsides of their strengths. Emotions are always focused on the subject. I cannot feel (without intervening symbols) the relationship between two arbitrary objects, let us say two people, unless I identify with one of them. Otherwise I can only feel how their relationship affects me, from which I can then draw inferences in some symbolic medium about their relationship. In this sense (and only this sense) the adage that emotions are wholly subjective, that is, incapable of objective ways of looking at the world, is quite to the point. Although emotive understanding has in its unfolding its own temporality, and although it can acquire temporality in the sense that one particular emotional episode connects us to similar episodes in the past while also creating expectations about the future, such temporality can only be attained through symbolic mediation. The current fear of bears can only become a fear of future encounters with bears through symbolic intervention (minimally one needs the image of a bear). A fortiori, and perhaps even more importantly, emotions do not have a subjunctive mode, that is, they cannot be entertained hypothetically. They are there or they are not, and if they are not, they can only be represented symbolically. Feeling an emotion is, however, very different from symbolizing it.[19] Yet, often the process of representing emotions in discourse goes hand in hand with profound transformations of what we feel. As a first step this typically goes hand in hand with a shift in the object of the current emotive understanding away from the world to the represented emotion. In this sense we use words to entertain regrets about emotions past or hopes about better feelings. In effect, then, emotive understandings are firmly rooted in the present, much more so than discursive understandings whose mediation between here and there, then and now may also make us feel lost in the nowhere. The space of imagination, the fifth dimension of human life, can quickly turn into the limbo of neither here nor there, neither now nor then. These two characteristics of emotive understandings, their subject-centricity and embodied presentism, allow them to be especially effective indicators of relevance for the presence. Emotions, not discourse, make us feel alive.

The poetics of *kinesthetic understandings* arranges bodies or parts of bodies, most importantly our five senses, in time and space (Gehlen 1997, 175; Gebauer and Wulf 1992, chap. 2). Its differentiating principle is the play

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17. The question of whether or not there are biologically encoded "basic emotions" (e.g., Tomkins 1962, 1963; Izard 1971; Ekman 1972) that can be usefully distinguished from culturally variant "higher" or "cognitive" emotions is mute for the purposes of this study (see Ekman and Davidson [1994] for a positive and Reddy [2001] and Griffith [1997] for a critical evaluation of this claim). All that matters here is the much less controversial proposition that emotions can provide orientations that are at least partially autonomous from discourse (for a support of this claim see especially Damasio 1994, 1999; and Ledoux 1996).

18. Often the object is the trigger, for example, when lovers see their beloved and embrace them in love. But this is not necessarily the case. Lovers might become awash in feelings of love for their beloved while being reminded of them through the gestures of a third person. Emotions also do not always have a specific object or trigger; sometimes objects and triggers become generalized (everything feels the same way), in which case we speak of moods.

19. Seen from this perspective, there is a gap left by the extant anthropology (e.g., Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1980) and sociology of emotions (e.g., Hochschild 1989) by having focused much more on local discourses about emotions than on their actual feeling. Given the enormous methodological difficulties involved in studying the feeling of emotions this is, of course, not surprising.

of presences and absences, of a spatial "here, but not there," and a temporal "now, but not then" for a body or any of its parts. The integrating principle of kinesthetic understandings is the sequencing of the "now-heres," or "chronotopes" (Bakhtin 1981), in front of an undifferentiated background of relevant temporal and spatial extensions, of inaccessible now-theres, then-theres, here-thens (which can be made visible through symbolic mediation). There is an old saw that illustrates in a flash what I mean. It goes something like this. "Playing the piano is totally simple: you just have to hit the right keys, at the right moment, for the right duration with the correct fingers and do this again and again." For the purposes of this study it is important to see that kinesthetic understanding is not only manifest in the skills of musicians, artisans, or sportswomen, it is for example also part of seating arrangements at dinner tables, the walking patterns of tourists, shoppers, or workers. What is particularly interesting about these larger scale sequences is that they ground the body in a particular sensual perspective. They govern what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. In other words, they spatially and temporally structure experience. At the same time, contingent events produce orderings of people and objects invested with particular understandings. They associate people and/or objects in complementary proximity; they also juxtapose people and/or objects becoming obstacles for each other, triggering related emotive understandings. Thus the very kinesthetic aspect of events can become a wellspring of new understandings, forming the root of what Sewell (2005) has emphasized as the transformational character of events. Since bodily movements are part of almost every action, kinesthetic understandings play a significant role in the development of agency, which becomes actually performing the differentiations and sequencing in question. In the case of East Germans, the significance of kinesthetic understandings for a sense of agency was for many citizens dramatically highlighted by the fact that spatial mobility was limited not only by the Wall but also by a number of other spatial regimes enforced through the allotment of apartments, vacation spots, means and speed of travel, and the like.

These different poetics enable a number of interesting dynamic relationships or dialectics between discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings. First, there is mutual commenting, which may be both amplifying and/or differentiating. On the one hand the mutually amplifying coordination of discourse, emotion, and bodily movement is central to any successful ritual; it is the mutually supportive coordination of many layers of understanding as an encompassing experience that lends it reproductive or transformative epistemic force. In chapter 1, I will show how such an alignment was moralized as the ideal of the new socialist human being, and how state propaganda did in fact try to create it intentionally not only within designated

propaganda events but also as a general condition of socialist life. On the other hand, we all know that those who watch us take our postures, gestures, and emotional displays as qualifications of what we say. The simultaneous performance of different modes of understanding can reveal ambiguities or even contradictions that might take us by surprise if we could see them side by side. Now imagine a truly Shakespearean plot. What happens to the exemplary communist who talks, feels, and walks class warfare, if, perhaps at first unbeknownst to her, she falls in love with a bourgeois beauty? The question is, then, under what circumstances would the emotive understanding prevail or fail? Under what conditions would this love lead to the transformation of the kinesthetic and discursive understandings? What would the social arrangements have to look like for contradictory understandings to continue to coexist reasonably peacefully?

Second, changes in understandings sometimes begin in one modality to spread only later to others. Discourse can be both leader and trailer for kinesthetic and emotive understandings. To stay within the above example: class-hatred can be cultivated in response to the theory of history as class warfare. And yet, that theory may make sense precisely because one felt first uncomfortable encountering certain kinds of people in certain locations. Such lags in the ordering of the world produced by different modes of understanding will be significant in later chapters plotting the dynamics of political understandings among Stasi officers, opposition members, and secret informants.

Mielke again

Armed with this set of theoretical understandings about understandings, we can now orient ourselves in Mielke's speech by differentiating and integrating it according to the principles just discussed. I have already described the situation in which he speaks. The pursuit from within which Mielke performs his understandings is a justification of the Stasi in the face of two main lines of attack. There are party-internal critics who have voiced their concern that the secret police continued as a Stalinist holdout after the dictator's death, a "state within a state" that has been chiefly responsible for corrupting the good intentions of well-meaning communists. Their critique converges with that of a wider population not necessarily committed to socialism, which has come to see in the Stasi the agency that epitomizes the abuses of governmental power—as manifested most recently in the mass arrests and police brutality in the context of the fortieth anniversary celebrations. Mielke answers these criticisms with a speech that is, although short and anything but beautiful, a virtual enactment of the party's social
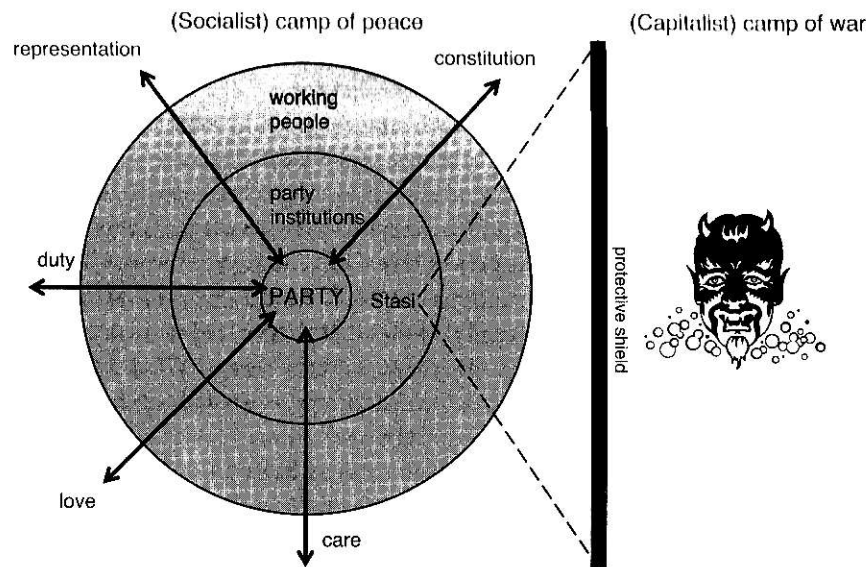
Figure 0.1. The socialist social imaginary according to Mielke

imaginary.[20] Mielke discursively differentiates his political world into a number of relevant players: There is a shifting "we"; there are the "employees in the Ministry of State Security," the "People's Chamber," the "working people," the "socialist camp" (also known as the "camp of peace") and, without naming it, the nonsocialist world (implicitly identified with the "camp of war"). At its core, this is a concentrically structured order in whose focal point rests the party, the root of the "we," the target of his actually performed and until quite recently normatively prescribed identification and self-location. From this center radiate party state organizations, such as the People's Chamber and the Stasi. Mielke frequently identifies both of these organizations through their link to the center. Members of both organizations are to him comrades in arms through and with the party for a shared goal. And thus to him anybody in this second circle can be naturally addressed in the informal second person.[21] The outer circle, finally, is made up of "the (working) people." This order specifies the fundamental claim of the socialist government to legitimacy as *of* the proletariat *through* the party *for* the proletariat *against* the capitalist exploiters.

20. The term imaginary is of Lacanian origin and was introduced into the social sciences by Castoriadis (1987). Recently Charles Taylor (2004) has renewed interest in it. What I mean by "social imaginary" is an integrated (but not necessarily coherent) set of discursive, emotive and kinesthetic understandings about social life. As such it is more encompassing than ideology.
21. In standard German, formal address calls for the use of the third person plural in connection with "Herr," "Frau," or title.

Mielke does not specify all the relationships between the various players directly. But given the indexical logic of the overall order, the unnamed ones can easily be inferred from his description of center-periphery relations. The notions of duty and care figure prominently in this respect. Mielke characterizes the relationship of the Stasi to the working people as a dedicated form of caregiving encompassing the maintenance of peace, the strengthening of the economy, the representation of interests, the lending of voice. The relationship of caring obtains an interesting note through the repeated use of the possessive in describing the center's ownership of the periphery: "our [i.e., the party's] employees in the Ministry . . ." and "our [i.e., the Stasi's] people."[22] In the other direction Mielke invokes the duty of the Stasi to provide "first-rate information" to the center here and elsewhere in the socialist world. By presenting the Stasi as a duty-bound caregiver, he indirectly presents an expectation of the party to behave likewise vis-à-vis the secret police. Feeling increasingly singled out and put on the spot, this is what his own officers expected him to demand when they watched him give this speech on television. Finally, using the standard socialist trope of the "sons and daughters of the working people," Mielke describes the center as generated by the periphery in such a way that the center can truthfully be seen as a part capable of representing the whole.

Mielke emotionally situates himself vis-à-vis this discursively constructed order. He presents his model of care and duty relations with solemnity; the possessives are saturated with pride. And so is his enumeration of the achievements of the Stasi. There is also exasperation in Mielke's voice, accessible to the observer through a number of ellipses carrying a sense of "you know already," "all of this is self-evident," "why do I need to tell you now." There seems to be some unacknowledged fear in his hyperbole of insisting on the contact with "the people," or when he repeatedly emphasizes that the Stasi has transmitted all the relevant information about the country's problems to the appropriate places. Yet, there also appears to be hope in Mielke, that reminding everybody of the common core assumptions has the power to hold together what seems to fall apart. What is remarkable in watching the speech is its emotional arch: he begins with solemn calm, and through the challenges he works himself into a desperate passion, to then finally vacate the podium disoriented by the lacking applause that just weeks ago would have been certain to come forth.

When Mielke describes the relationship between the Stasi and the work-

22. Interestingly, this combination of duty, care, and possession mirrors Prussian king Frederic the Great's "I am the first servant of my state," which is, as an article of faith in German nationalism (demonstrating superiority over Louis XIV's "L'état c'est moi"). Whether Mielke or anybody watching him then had associations of this kind is hard to tell.

ing people emphatically as one of "extraordinarily high contact," his speech becomes derailed for the first time. The intervention at this precise moment is, in keeping with the historical situation, at once surprising and predictable. On the one hand, Mielke's claim is no more than a much-repeated adage of the party—a credo central to its legitimacy. Had it been presented to the same assembly on January 13 of the same year, it would have passed without further comment; had it been made on September 13, careful observers might have noticed a number of raised eyebrows, furrowed foreheads, or pained smiles in the hall. On the other hand, making it now, on November 13, simply makes his performed understandings appear so inadequate to enough members of the audience that they laugh it off publicly. The reason is simple: the connection between the party-state, its organs, and the people has been at issue during the last four weeks of political turmoil. As Mielke is speaking 1 million people are gathering in several bigger cities throughout the country to participate in this day's Monday demonstrations, the biggest so far on record, to press for the continuation and deepening of political reforms. The slogan galvanizing these demonstrations is *Wir sind das Volk!* (We are the people!), indicating that the government claiming to represent the people has lost contact with it. Yet to Mielke this point of contact to the working people is central. He emphasizes this gesturally by putting his hand to his heart while he is responding to his critics.

When Mielke goes on to celebrate the successes of the Stasi in maintaining peace and strengthening the economy, when he presents these successes as commonly shared knowledge among comrades in the hub of his concentric socialist universe, he gets interrupted again. Interestingly the heckler does not attack Mielke's substantive claims, both of which have been challenged by the events of the preceding weeks as well as through the debates in the People's Chamber immediately preceding his speech. The very notion of the "maintenance of peace" obtained a different ring in wider circles of the population through the thousands of arrests and allegations of police abuse for which the Stasi was often thought to be responsible. As for the situation of the economy, the party leadership just had to undergo a sobering reconsideration of its actual state (cf. Schürer 1996; Krenz 1999), which led to the demise of Günter Mittag, the politburo member in charge of economic affairs who was, together with Mielke, one of Honecker's closest confidants. And in the barely four days in which the Wall has been open, 2 million of the GDR's nearly 17 million citizens, who in their majority scarcely harbored illusions about the economic situation in their country to begin with, have felt compelled to revise their comparative assessment of the standard of living in East Germany further downward. In view of this, the heckler's call to order insisting that not every member of the People's Chamber is a party member might sound rather harmless, because it does not seem to challenge

Mielke's claims about the Stasi's contributions to the GDR's economy, which is once again presented as an achievement. And yet, the heckler's intervention is *in potentia* already a full-blown attack on the very core of Mielke's understandings, because it denies the taken-for-granted unity of the center, the *communitas* between the heckler and Mielke, between the SED and the block parties, and by extension between the People's Chamber and the Stasi, and in the last instance between the party and the people. Even if these consequences might not have been fully discursively articulable by the heckler, he certainly began to make this break in his emotive understandings, which come most clearly to the fore in the fact that he is obviously vexed by Mielke's speech and what it implies about him.

The understandings inherent in Mielke's retort to the heckler can perhaps best be described as those of a "loving but misunderstood father" who intertwines two lines of defense. The first addresses what to him appears as the correction of the facts underlying the, in his eyes, unjust withdrawal of affection by the heckler who is treated like an errant son. Mielke argues that the differentiation insisted upon by the heckler is in fact merely a nominal one. No doubt, until quite recently this was true. The other parties represented in the People's Chamber were completely assimilated into the national front dominated by the ruling SED.[23] That fact is even documented in practice during the very same session of the People's Chamber. When time comes to elect a new prime minister (*Vorsitzender des Ministerrates*), everything goes ahead according to the old script: The SED nominated a candidate of its own (Hans Modrow, the Dresden party chief who has the reputation to be a reformer), and the chamber votes in his favor—if not entirely unanimously this time, for *one* member votes against him.[24] The outcome of this election was therefore preordained in the old sense. And yet, the fact that Mielke's insinuation leads to tumultuous protest indicates that the heckler's understanding of a real difference between the parties is in fact more widely shared in the house. The unity at the hub of a concentric model of socialism shows cracks in performance. And it is noteworthy that there was a second election this day. The house needed a new speaker. This election became

23. This does not mean that the block parties were not, in the early years of the GDR, kept separate precisely because this distinction could be taken as a real distinction by outside observers. But then the ideology of the party also still assumed that there were de facto different classes in the GDR needing their own representation even if in alliance with the party of the proletariat. However, later it was assumed that the GDR had established the basic structures of socialism that entailed that there were no longer any real class differences. Hence, there was no need for representational differentiation.
24. This made for an awkward moment as the video recording of the session shows. The parliamentarians voted by open hand sign. Once the newly elected speaker announced the result, everybody turned around to find out who had voted no.

contrary to custom a fully competitive process with alternative candidates, second rounds, and all. The outcome of that election was contingent, opening new vistas of possibilities.[25] The People's Chamber session as a whole shows understandings on the move.

It is Mielke's second line of defense, however, that makes his last public act as a GDR leader appear farcical in the eyes of so many observers. He fleshes out his political understandings by adding a further relational dimension to his concentric model of socialism. He insists that addressing the parliamentarians as comrades is an expression of "natural love for humankind" (*natürliche Menschenliebe*). And for that he earns applause from some quarters. Obviously, that too struck a chord with some members of the assembly, not least, perhaps, because it was an antidivisional move. The next two times Mielke gears up to continue with his speech by invoking his love, he is answered with uproar, which may still be mostly the echo of the reaction to his argument that the distinction between comrades and members of other parties is merely formal in nature. When he adds, increasing volume, pitch, and emphasis, "all human beings," many in the hall burst into laughter. Mielke's understanding is thus branded as an absurdity, and right into his face by men and women who just weeks ago would have fallen head over heels to assure him of their solidarity. And all Mielke knows to do in this moment is to repeat the same understanding and connect it with a public declaration of commitment in an effort to authenticate it. But then he catches himself; with an apology accompanied by humorous gestures, he tries to stitch together what has so obviously come apart.

Forms of Validation

Mielke's speech, and in particular his exchange with the audience, shows an interesting contrasting deployment of political understandings, some discursive and some emotional, some kinesthetic. This exchange is notable because it catches a moment when several people's understandings, which were not too long ago still aligned with one another, begin to show clear signs of differentiation. The commonplaces of yesterday, the array of taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, become challenged. Mielke's claims about the Stasi's successes, his declaration of love for humankind, appear absurd—but only relative to some newer understandings that for some reason seem more adequate to the current historical moment. From the perspective of those

whose understandings become rapidly transformed, some parliamentarians included, Mielke appears stuck. And thus, yesterday's powerful man who instilled respect and fear in many becomes an object of ridicule. Of course, the contrast between the old and the new is fully indexical, for all of the members of parliament together seemed stuck, too, in the eyes of those whose understandings moved still faster. This includes the wider population who never quite saw the world as the party did and many of whom had already visited West Berlin. In fact, this very People's Chamber debate confirmed for many outside observers that the system was incapable of truly reforming itself. The near unanimous vote for the new prime minister was commonly cited as proof for this assessment. Given this glimpse into a process of transformation the question appears, how could we possibly account for such a movement in understanding? How could we begin to think about the influence of an event such as this People's Chamber debate on the understandings of those who participated in it or followed in it in the media?

The embodied participation in an event, its perception through the senses, the feelings it triggers, and the attempt to interpret discursively what is going on may suggest differentiations and/or integrations other than the ones brought into the event. In Marshall Sahlins' (e.g., 1987, 145) felicitous expression, they are put at "risk." Whatever the individual member of parliament or GDR citizen may have thought or felt about Mielke before the televised November 13 session of the People's Chamber, their very witnessing of Mielke heckled, laughed at, and sent from the podium without even as much as a final applause, their experience that these occurrences were no longer marked and reacted to as unwanted "incidences" (e.g., by immediately reprimanding hecklers, interrupting proceedings, or at least their broadcasting) may have suggested to people new understandings of the man Mielke (e.g., as "ridiculous" rather than "powerful") and the organization he represented (e.g., as "no longer in control" rather than "omnipresent"). Although events may suggest a restructuring of understandings in progress, these suggestions do not necessarily crowd out previous understandings. Instead, the process of transformation is typically more gradual; neither are older understandings given up right away, nor are newer differentiations and integrations transpiring from events accepted instantaneously.

The best way to think about such transformations is to see understandings as having two basic dimensions. Besides the ordering dimension saying something about the world (the dimension I have discussed so far), there is an ownership dimension indicating how "reliable," "useful," or "certain" this ordering appears to us. This distinction about degrees and quality of ownership is reflected by lexical differentiations we feel compelled to make regarding our discursive understandings. In present-day standard English, for example, people may choose carefully between the phrases "I understand

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25. It would be quite interesting to find out what led the members of the house to proceed during different parts of the session according to different procedural logics mixing old ritual with the entirely unheard of. Alas, living far away from archives and participants, I had no opportunity to pursue it "on the side."

that," "I suspect that," "I believe that," or "I know that." While "understanding" implies little more than grasping the significance of the ordering at hand (possibly uttered with sympathy for why one may end up ordering the world thus), "knowing" conveys trust that the ordering is indeed "true" in conjunction with the belief that this could be demonstrated in some acceptable way. These discursive differentiations are also used as metaphors to designate degrees of certainty in emotive or kinesthetic understandings. Accordingly, we speak of "uncertain," "lukewarm," or "strong" feelings as well as of a "wavering," "steady," or "sure" hand in accomplishing a kinesthetic task. In other words, if people thought before that "Stasi is the most powerful organization in the country" their witnessing of the People's Chamber session has certainly raised doubts.

Thinking in terms of various degrees and/or kinds of certainty directs our attention to understandings that do not have this characteristic, that is, understandings we think are "misguided," "misplaced," "inappropriate," "implausible," "merely hypothetical," or even plain "false." What we need to differentiate, then, are *actual* understandings, that is, those we do in fact hold in some way, using them to orient our actions and merely *possible* understandings, that is, those we do not enact because their orientational benefits are suspect. What we need to comprehend, then, is how our understandings do become actualized with various kinds and degrees of certainty (cf. Swidler 2001). The theoretical framework to answer this question is the cornerstone of chapters 3 and 4, but I will provide a brief summary of it here.

My central argument is that understandings come to be actualized or deactualized (if you like inhabited) through processes of *validation*. Analytically I distinguish three different kinds of engagements with the world producing three distinct forms of events with validating effects that de facto produce various kinds and degrees of ownership in understandings. There are, first, our interactions with other human beings in which we check their understandings against ours. Not everybody's approval or disapproval, belief, knowledge, or sense of reality matters to us. Instead, we make a number of distinctions about whom we are taking seriously in what way and in which context. This is to say that we are enmeshed in highly differentiated networks of authority relations with other human beings whose performance of their own understanding or direct verbal validation of ours we endow with validating force.[26] I call this form of validation *recognition*. Take Erich Mielke's speech before the People's Chamber again. His discursively and emotionally relevant understanding that Stasi had a close relationship with the people

was laughed away by some members who thus ventured to recognize it negatively. The fact that Mielke reacted to the laughter in a defensive way shows that he accepted the laughing parliamentarians as authorities, or at least that he feared that others might take them as such.

Second, there is the experience of the relative success and failure of our actions that are always structured by more or less explicit understandings of the world. Understandings become validated because they are seen retrospectively as useful guides to achieve what we wanted to accomplish. In other words, the "as if" implicit in understanding appears to be "true." Understanding and world seem to melt into each other. Conversely, if we fail we may account for this failure by pointing to misunderstandings we think now might have led us astray. Moreover, we often undertake little tests that we invest with validating power. Scientific experiments are tests of this sort as much as trials of courage, or probes of the limits of friendship or love. I call this form of validation *direct corroboration*. Through the course of events in the People's Chamber, Mielke's implicit understanding about the distribution of roles between him and the parliamentarians was negatively corroborated. The effect was quite visible in his discombobulation. When we draw conclusions from an event on whose unfolding we had no significant influence (say a historical event) for the validity of our understandings, *indirect corroboration* occurs. During his speech he argued that economic success and the maintenance of peace during the past forty years positively corroborated the work of the Stasi and ipso facto the understandings on and through which it proceeded. The kind of corroboration at stake here is indirect. One of the central problems of political understandings is that the most interesting ones can only be corroborated indirectly.

Finally, there is a "holding up" of particular understandings against what else we believe, know, or take for real against our desires as well as against our values. Understandings are rendered more credible by showing consistency with our existing knowledge, by answering to our desires, and by being compatible with our values; in cases where they are inconsistent, unanswerable, or incompatible, credibility is lost. I call this complex of validations *resonance*. The parliamentarians' new understanding that it is their right or even their role to call upon Mielke to defend the Stasi is sure to have resonated negatively with the departing minister. In his world, the general secretary had such authority, and so did the politburo, but the People's Chamber? Conversely, Mielke's attempt to invoke the unity of all present by invoking the old socialist order resonated negatively with the members who were laughing, heckling, or questioning him.

In sum, then, we come to inhabit our understandings through the encounter with others whose authoritative judgment recognizes ours; through the interactions with people and the material world in which success gives

26. That these networks can not simply be taken as determining "structure," but must be understood as processes in various degrees of institutionalization will become apparent below and especially in chapter 4.

us confidence in our ways of ordering the world; and finally by checking understandings against our established knowledge, our values, feelings, desires, and skills.[27] Here is a very simple example to illustrate the differences characterizing these three forms. You believe that $2 \times 3 = 6$. Yet, you have some remaining doubt about your ability to multiply correctly. Asking your best friend, whom you respect as a math wiz, whether you are right is asking for recognition of your understanding. Translating the equation into action by putting twice three marbles into a bowl and counting them out one by one is a way to corroborate it directly. Remembering finally that multiplying a number by two is like adding that number to itself while being absolutely certain about your adding capabilities you perform the operation $3 + 3 = 6$ thus validating your belief qua resonance.

Meta-Understandings

From the historical and ethnographic records about how people produce knowledge about the world, it is clear that recognition, corroboration, and resonance can be thought of, felt about, and handled in astonishingly different ways. Performing an ordeal or a chicken oracle (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1937) is a very different form of judicially accepted corroboration than a mental status exam or a DNA test, for example. The three forces can also be combined and distributed quite differently over different kinds of knowledge-producing practices in the same society. Present-day academic philosophers or mathematicians do not value direct corroboration very much; they do not try to validate their arguments by translating them into a domain of action that is markedly different from the manipulation of symbols. Instead, they highly value consistency, which is a particular form of resonance.[28] People who identify themselves as "experimental scientists" claim to have the inverse inclinations. Action outside of the realm of the manipulation of symbols is afforded primacy, which does not deny the fact that the systematic translation of what happens in this realm into symbols is not key to their enterprise. Even though the modern natural sciences may agree about the importance of corroboration, the ways in which it is produced and interpreted and the ways in which it interacts with the production of resonances are very different, for example in high energy physics and in molecular biology (Knorr-Cetina 1999). Finally, the very same natural scientist who hails corroboration in producing knowledge about the world of matter can have very different ideas about how relevant political knowledge ought to be produced. We will get to know in Robert Havemann just such a man. He was not only a GDR science celebrity but also a Stalinist and later became the pivot of the GDR opposition in the 1970s and early 1980s.

What is needed, then, is a concept to capture *the ways in which we think, talk, feel, and do validity*, a concept addressing the fact that we have understandings about how appropriate understandings are made, actualized, and lost. A similar kind of reflexivity has been addressed in linguistics and in linguistic anthropology. The term that has won acceptance, denoting ideas about how language works, what about it matters, and how it ought to be properly deployed, is *linguistic ideology* (Silverstein 1979, 1993; Gal 1993; Gal and Irvine 2000).[29] Wherever discursive understandings explicitly address the making of all three forms of understanding, I will therefore speak in analogy of "epistemic ideologies."[30] However, the processes of generating, maintaining, changing, and distributing understandings are also regulated by practices, they are inscribed kinesthetically. The proverbial ostrich who is burying its head in the sand, or the popular imagery of the "three wise monkeys" (seeing no evil, hearing no evil, speaking no evil) remind us that the cultivation of particular understandings is contingent on bodily attunement. Many of these practices are by their very nature not explicit, not even consciously available. Finally, we often have acute feelings about our understandings, feelings that are not just spontaneous and momentary, but are also regularly attached to the process of crafting and validating them. The actualization of some understandings may be thought to entail happiness, while that of others may be understood to devastate. Advances in the certification of some understandings may be subject to pride, while the mere encounter with others may be seen as contaminating and shameful. While we fear the attainment of some understandings, we ardently desire others. Indeed, we may be afflicted with some kind of general dread at the loss of some understanding (Nietzsche's "horror vacui"), even if we may also feel

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27. It bears mentioning here that although resonances and corroborations are crucially dependent on ongoing communicative interactions and thus recognitions, the former two are not reducible to the latter. I will elaborate this issue in chapter 3.

28. What philosophers and mathematicians do is an active, systematic production of resonances in the process of writing out (or merely thinking through step by step) an argument or a proof. This said, even philosophers and mathematicians cultivate understandings of what it means to practice their craft. Since these meta-philosophical and meta-mathematical ideas (e.g., of how to proceed in a proof) can be put to the test in practice, they can become corroborated.

29. The idea that we should all spell the same word in the same way, even though our system of literation is far from unambiguous and in spite of the fact that we might, due to dialectal or idiosyncratic variations pronounce it differently, is such a linguistic ideology; and so is the romantic notion that languages express the soul of a people or the idea that language is a neutral medium fit to transport any information without shaping it.

30. The notion has proved fertile. Likewise in analogy—if closer to the original, Keane (2003) speaks of "semiotic ideologies," Hull (2003) of "graphic ideologies."

the better once certain understandings become deactualized (e.g., stigmata). Because emotions feel good or bad, because they carry what psychologists call a "hedonic tone," they can become motives to get, hold onto, change, or forget understandings, which translates into a motive to look for or avoid validation. These epistemic feelings, therefore, govern the way we come to understand the world with more or less certainty at least as much as our epistemic practices and ideologies. Therefore, where I speak more generally about understandings, organizing processes of understanding and validation, I shall speak of meta-understandings.

Meta-understandings are not necessarily a special class of understandings immediately recognizable as such. They may simply be other "substantive" understandings that organize the constitution of others. To illustrate what I mean I want to return once more to Mielke's speech. Parliaments everywhere play a role in the validation and invalidation of political understandings. Where taken seriously, deliberation is an effort to take stock of and develop recognitions, corroborations, and resonances of particular understandings; the rituals of debate lead to majority recognition; investigative committees are supposed to corroborate certain facts. In an important sense, then, differential validation is what parliament is about. Particular parliamentarian procedures are in this sense epistemic practices because they have considerable influence on how understandings come to be validated; a particular theory of parliamentarianism operates in this sense as an epistemic ideology by supplying parliamentarians and those who judge them with ideas about what members ought to do, thus helping to shape their behavior. The session of the People's Chamber in which Mielke gave his speech is a wonderful example for a transition from one set of meta-understandings to another. The parliament as an acclamatory organ, that is, a body that asserts that there is massive recognition for particular understandings, cautiously began to transmogrify itself into an investigative one. Instead of working predominantly with recognitions, it ventured, if still rather timidly, into the business of producing corroborations.

TOWARD A HERMENEUTIC INSTITUTIONALISM

The major empirical argument of this book is that socialism in the GDR failed primarily because the party state had instituted highly problematic ways of generating and validating understandings about itself in the world. Put differently, the party state failed for its political epistemics. This overarching argument follows two sublines. First, I argue that GDR socialism failed because it was institutionalized in such a way that the state was unable to produce understandings adequate for what I will call at the end of this chapter *self-politics*, that is, the management of the conditions of its own

institutional reproduction. Empirically, I will make this argument especially in chapter 9 where I will show how and why the party state was unable to understand and therefore unable to even create the conditions for the possibility to deal successfully with the phenomenon of political dissidence. I will demonstrate that the understandings produced by the state were inadequate in the sense that the actions based on them actually exacerbated the very problem the state aspired to control. In effect, the party state was institutionalized in such a way that it could not come to a realistic understanding of the consequences of its own actions. That this is by no means only true for socialism makes it an interesting case to learn from. Second, I argue, GDR socialism failed because the administrative and political elites of the country lost confidence in the political understandings they helped to produce and propagate. Especially in the concluding chapter I will show how their confidence, especially in the party's leadership to address key problems of the country, came to be eroded during the late 1980s.

Framing the main argument of this book in terms of the failure of institutional self-maintenance and subsequent disintegration based on inadequate and weakening understandings of a particular kind presupposes that I explain more clearly what I mean by institutions and how understandings play into processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. This is what I will begin to do in the following two subsections. A fuller treatment of the dialectics between institutions and understandings will follow in chapter 4.

Weaving Action-Reaction Effect Flows into Institutions

The ontological centerpiece of the sociological imaginary is the idea that the social world is not only human made, but also that it exists exclusively in the *process* of making and remaking it through our actions. Hence, social phenomena never gain an existence apart from our living bodies and minds. Even the material objects we mobilize or produce have a social reality only to the degree that they continue to play a role in the ongoing actions of people. Due to their existence in actions, which are physically grounded in human bodies, social phenomena are always local and temporally specific, even if, as I shall argue below, this is typically a distributed specificity. This specificity in the *here* and *now* is the first ontological characteristic of the social (three more are to follow further below). The question that thus occurs is how we can *imagine* the process of making and remaking the social world to yield interesting insights into *how* social life takes a particular form at a particular time. And since we have no choice but to participate in these processes, this imagination should also provide clues about how we could participate in them such that we enable ourselves to lead a life we deem worth living.

Social processes

At the roots of social processes lie the fundamental need, capacity, and effort of human beings to affect and be affected by others. Simmel tries to capture this phenomenon of interpersonal effect flows as "interaction" (*Wechselwirkung*) (Simmel 1992, chap. 1); his paradigmatic case is exchange (Simmel 1989). This formulation was not only influential (e.g., setting the discursive frame for the Chicago school as well as for symbolic interactionism), but also very productive, leading to many important insights culminating in Mead's (1934) theory of self-construction, Goffman's brilliant oeuvre on self-presentation and self-management in public places (1955; 1959), Schütz and Luckmann's (1984) account of intersubjectivity, and Garfinkel's (1967) dazzling pieces on reality construction. Yet, there is nothing about the social flow of effect that limits it to mutuality or reciprocity. Effects can flow from one person's action to be picked up by another without there being any reverse flow. In fact, the actions can be spatiotemporally separated, and actor and reactor need not—and very often and in highly complex societies typically do not—know each other. What makes this possible are sociotechnical means of projectively articulating actions across space and time through mediating communication, transportation, and storage. Techniques of projective articulation do not only enable one person to influence faraway others, they even empower the dead to have a continuing impact on the living. All that matters to spark the flow of social process is that someone reacts, picks up, or attunes to the actions of another. For this reason, and even though the expression is cumbersome, it is better to talk about *interlinked or interwoven action-reaction effect flows*[31] rather than interaction. The latter is merely a special case of the former where the interlinking is produced by spatiotemporal copresence and mutual attunement. In the sense that there is no action that is not also a reaction to antecedent actions that have taken place at other times in other places, *social phenomena are always translocal and transtemporal.*[32] This *there* and *then* spans up the second ontological dimension of the social. And thus one can say, only seemingly paradoxically, that the social is always here and there as well as now and then. Elsewhere (Glaeser 2005), I have called *consequent processualism* the imagination of the social in terms of a dense thicket of processes analyzable

31. Minimally the effect is the reaction. However, most importantly for this book, action reaction sequences have, as I will show especially in chapter 4, effects on the validity of understandings, including understandings of self (identity) and of relationships.

32. This also means that whether we would want to call something an action or a reaction is merely a matter of perspective. It is an action if we look forward and it is a reaction if we look backward. Also calling something a reaction by no means implies that it is not creative.

in terms of interconnected, often projectively articulated action-reaction effect flows.

Over the last century and a half a long list of authors has contributed significant pieces to the refinement of this imagination. I can only highlight a few central contributions here. With his fundamental distinction between "social action" (any orientation toward others), "intended meaning," and "unintended consequences," Max Weber (e.g., 1980) enriches our comprehension of social processes in two ways. He follows the hermeneutic tradition in arguing that although we need to understand *why* people act the way they do because actions form institutions, social processes cannot be comprehended satisfactorily by recourse to motives (intentions, meanings, affects, habits) alone, because all actions face the possibility of principally unforeseeable reactions that are not only outside of the actors' control, but also may or may not be in line with their intentions (1988b). Yet, these unintended reactions are, where regularized, constitutive of the institutional order as much as intentional, affective, or habitual actions. Therefore, according to Weber only a simultaneous attention to the principles of action *and* the principles underpinning the interlacing of their effects can lead to satisfying accounts of institutions.

Speech act theory (Austin 1962) radicalizes the Weberian focus on the openness of reactions to the indeterminacy of the act. The central point is that a string of verbal behavior cannot only be seen as made up of different kinds of acts, but also that these become more clearly bounded particular acts only in the "uptake" of others, that is, in their reactions to it. Take the question of what Erich Mielke has done in his speech by addressing the assembly as "comrades," for example. He may have had no particular intention in mind with the use of this locution since it had become a habitualized form of address for party members in party dominated contexts. However, I have shown that in his speech Mielke presented a concentric model of the party state involving certain stipulations of solidarity and order for which the use of "comrade" as an address was not only a symbol but also an invitation to concur. Invitation and answer together helped to recreate the party. The member rising to order clearly understood Mielke to have in fact *appealed* to him to agree with this stipulation of order not only through his wider discourse but also through his form of address. Until quite recently, this member of the Peoples' Chamber might not even have perceived the form of address as an appeal while still answering it in a customary way, but now he does at least emotively understand that he should no longer heed the call to concur with the stipulation of traditional order. A beginning is made for unwinding the party as a socialist vanguard institution (something the heckler may or may not have intended). In response, Mielke then offers an interpretation of what he has done as an act of universal human love—an

interpretation and thus determination of his action that came to be welcomed by some with applause while being brusquely rejected in laughter by others. Thus challenged, Mielke accepts that he has merely made "a mistake in etiquette" in calling everybody "comrade," putatively in order to save his larger point: the validity of the socialist order itself and the role of the secret police in it. In fact, the answer to the question, what has Mielke *done* by addressing the members of the People's Chamber summarily as "comrades," fluctuated in the exchange. The question, what has he done with his universal declaration of love, is still lingering—as the continuing efforts to interpret it here and elsewhere demonstrate. The reason why action is only determined in reaction is that behavior becomes a particular action only once its (discursive, emotive or kinesthetic . . .) intersubjective meaning is established.

Austin participates with his analysis of speech acts in the twentieth-century recovery and further development of the much older insight of the hermeneutic tradition that to speak is in fact not just to describe the world, but also to intervene in the flow of social processes and with it in the making and remaking of its institutions.[33] Austin calls the act of triggering a social effect in speaking a *performative*. His next move is to show that the reaction of others inevitably influences how we would have to describe behavior as a particular kind of act. Action thus understood is not choice, a solipsistic, individual accomplishment. Therefore, unlike the motives giving rise to them, what actions are is never quite determinable as long as they keep triggering reactions that make them into something, and potentially always into something new regardless of their motives. Even if formulating the indeterminacy of action explicitly may sound strange because it violates fundamental presuppositions of modern individualism, it is a thoroughly familiar phenomenon. The indeterminacy of action is the very stuff of our comedies, our satires, our tragedies.[34]

33. For a long time, however, this insight was taken to pertain only to what was thought to be a particular mode of speaking, namely rhetoric. Much like the poetic, which too was thought to pertain to only particular modes of linguistic utterances (Jakobson 1960), the rhetorical came to be understood as an aspect of almost all verbal utterances (as an address to others for the production of an effect) only from about the mid-twentieth century onward (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Burke 1969; Billig 1996).

34. In fact, the everyday use of "intention" and "act" is fully consistent with this view. The reprimand "look what you have done" would make little sense otherwise. It highlights the importance of consequences in the designation of the act that may radically deviate from an actor's intentions. Incidentally, this is also the reason why historians have traditionally been wary to interpret events within a still open process instead favoring the interpretation of events between two epochal bookends. The idea is precisely to wait for a moment in which some major strands of processual flows takes a new direction, which is incidentally the case when institutional

Institutions

This said, life in society does not all appear to us as an open flow that keeps running as long as there are reactions to actions. There are social phenomena that at first glace share a resemblance with stable, solid, seemingly unalterable things, namely *institutions* (e.g., Hughes 1936, 180). They are aspects of social life made and remade in action-reaction effect flows in such a manner that they are seemingly self-same across time.[35] Almost all aspects of social life can become institutionalized: behavior can congeal into habits; thoughts can crystallize into logics or mentalities; contacts can solidify into ongoing social relations; feelings can develop into emotive schemata or transferences; moods can extend into character; injunctions and goals can form into norms and values, dialogues can sediment as selves; and momentary expectations can gel as hopes or even develop into eschatologies. Typically, institutions are bundled into clusters, or better perhaps, thickets that we then call by other names. Among the more prominent ones are groups, organizations, ideologies, parties, states, or even cultures. These institutional clusters are interconnected with one another by sharing in particular elemental institutions, and even more basically by being maintained at least partially by actions located simultaneously in several action-reaction effect chains. For example, the oath of allegiance to the party performed by a Stasi officer does not only contribute to the maintenance of party and Stasi as organizations but also to the maintenance of oaths as cultural form, the language used, and the identities of the participants.

The misleading impression of institutions as objective, unalterable things derives not only from their stability relative to a faster-changing social environment, but also from the fact that it is hard for us to observe a causal connection between our actions and any particular institution. This is so because the process of making and remaking institutions is distributed over minimally two, but typically over many more, sometimes millions of human beings whose actions become interconnected through complex, projectively articulated effect flows. If we endeavor to change institutions, we are therefore faced with a collective action problem the extent of which is dependent on the scope and temporal structure of the tapestry of action-reaction effect flows maintaining institutional self-semblance. This issue is compounded by the fact that except for those institutional thickets we call organizations,

orders consolidate or disintegrate relatively rapidly. See Bearman, Moody, and Faris's (1999) interesting network theoretic attempt to solve this problem of historical bookends.

35. I say "seemingly" because an institution existing in flow only cannot strictly be identical to itself, it is merely self similar. Institutions, as long as they last, are stable only as continuous metaphoric invocations of themselves.

institutions have no orchestrating center. Instead, they come about as articulations of a multiplicity of intentions, deep motivations, as well as of systematically recurring unintended consequences.[36] The more radically decentralized they are the more difficult it is to change them deliberately. The making and remaking of institutions can therefore only imperfectly be described as a process of *production*—the term favored by Marx (and the Marxist tradition), or *construction*—the expression that has won widespread currency not only among the (neo-)Kantians but also in poststructuralist writing. Both of these terms are far too closely aligned with ideas of rational planning, the product of which is known in advance. Elias's (1976) concept of "sociogenesis" avoids these pitfalls. However, it places more of an emphasis on historical emergence than current reproduction. For this reason I prefer the term *formation*. It is wide enough to subsume intention and unintended consequences, it does not presume a pregiven telos, it can accommodate several crosscutting processes, and it allows for an existence that is wholly wrapped up in the processes of making it (as, for example, in the flight formation of geese).

Since we cannot usually make or break institutions at will, and since our actions produce unintended consequences, the social world faces us as an objective reality. This does not only happen to us where the institution in question is clearly maintained in other people's action-reaction effect flows, but also where we are actively implicated in the process of forming it. Marx (1958a, 33) has captured this experience succinctly: "this ossification of social activity, this consolidation of our own product into an objective force which has power over us, outgrows our control, thwarts our expectations, [and] obliterates our calculations." In fact, we are often oblivious to the fact that we too are part of the action-reaction flows forming institutions that appear to us as wholly other. The reasons for this oblivion have been paradigmatically explored by Marx (e.g., 1958a; 1962b, chap. 1; cf. Postone 1996). The most important one is the complexity of the chains of action-reaction flows that are shot through with projective articulations. This complexity has two main effects. On the one hand it prevents us from tracing the consequences of our own participation. Marx has exemplified this point with the division of labor that keeps us from seeing how the various stages of the production process dovetail to make a final product. On the other hand, Marx argues,

36. If the reader is reminded here of Latour's (1999; 2005) actor-network theory (ANT), this is no accident. ANT can very usefully be read as an account of a particular kind of institution formation, namely organization. As a general theory of institutions, however, it is too much focused on intentions, side-tracking unintentional consequences that (as Weber has argued, for example, in his *Protestant Ethic*) often adds as much if not more to stabilizing institutions. For a general theory of institutions, Latour's ANT focuses too much on one organizing center.

the complexity of the effect flow also creates different interests among the various participants in the process of institutionalization. With the different parts people play in the formation and in the utilization of institutions, they begin to occupy different social positions. This has serious consequences for people's understandings and ultimately their subjectivities. It is this double effect—the intractability of the impact of one's own actions in combination with an increasing physical, cultural, and psychological separation from other human beings ossifying into positionalities—that makes up what the young Marx has called alienation.

The older Marx intertwines the same two consequences of distributed institution formation—opaqueness and social estrangement—in his concept of "commodity fetishism," which he defines as the misrecognition of the qualities of goods as inherent in their materiality rather than as the results of the combined effort of many hands (1962b, 86). Marx's analysis can be generalized to a *fetishism of institutions* whose characteristics (e.g., their durability) is taken to inhere in them rather than in their continuous formation in the actions and reactions of diverse sets of people. Given that institutions are formed by webs of regularized action-reaction effect flows, one can immediately see that the flipside of the fetishism of institutions is given by a *fetishization of actors* as autonomous beings, disregarding their formation within a thicket of institutional arrangements of which they are but a part. What we have, then, appears as the third ontological dimension of the social, its simultaneously "subjective" and "objective" character (often referred in reference to Giddens [1984] as "duality"). Alienation as Marx understood it grows in the gap between the polar ends of this third ontological dimension; fetishization naturalizes it.

What is at issue here is the particular qualitative relationship between individuals and social others. The antidote to an alienated subject-object relationship has often been seen in a different relationality, one where the other is a partner with whom one can negotiate. There is a relationality that is dialogic, not just monologic, to borrow Bakhtin's (1984) concept pair. In other words, the other cannot only appear as an objective "it" to the thinking, feeling, acting "I" but also as a "you" (Buber 1995). What characterizes the dialogic for both Buber and Bakhtin is mutuality, the empathetic treatment of the other as a fellow subject, open to being transformed by the dialogic partner. Since there is a plural subjectivity in form of a "we," and since the other can also appear as a dialogic plural "you" as well as a monologic "they," description of the third ontological dimension becomes more complex than stated above. We have to analyze it along a number of constitutive subrelationships, all of which can be monologic or dialogic. We have to look at least how "I" and "we" relate to singular and plural others, as well as to the ways in which collective subjects relate to individual ones.

Against the claims of nationalism or fascism to create at least an unalienated "we" (if against an alien "they"), Marx and his followers have argued that monologicity (objectification) is in fact a constitutive feature of capitalism (Lukács 1923). Only a communist world-encompassing thoroughly dialogic society will overcome alienation. In the experiential world of actually existing socialisms we will also see how the subjective "Is" and "wes" could vanish in staunchly demanded and actually performed self-objectification toward objective "mes" and "thems." This does not mean that the "Is" and "wes" disappeared entirely. But it does mean that they had to find acceptable niches or go underground.

The social's ontological characteristics are these, then: it is at the same time spatially and temporally local and translocal (i.e. here-there, now-then), relationally monologic (I/we-it/they), dialogic (I/we-you) or even completely objectified (me/them-it/they) and finally it is *in actu* and *in posse* (is-might). Understandings play a constituting role for these ontological dimensions of the social. The time and space transcending characteristics of the social are made possible through understandings as much as through relationships and technology (e.g., through millenarian or progress expectations, space related notions of belonging, or emotions such as *Fernweh* ("longing for distant places"). The same holds for relationality (e.g., with ideas of what friendship or love mean, or practices creating networks of "weak-ties"). The *in actu–in posse* dimension of the social is unthinkable without the subjunctivity enabled by symbolic differentiations and integrations. In other words, understandings give these four ontological dimensions a particular, historically specific content.

Understandings and Institutions

The Socialist Unity Party of the GDR was an institution, or better, a complex of institutions. And unlike what I said about institutions more generally, it endeavored to make itself the center of the even wider institutional fabric of socialism, that is, almost all of public social life in the former GDR. The party existed in the regularized actions and reaction of its members as members, as well as the actions and reactions of outsiders toward members as members. Every time members addressed each other as "comrades," went together to a party meeting or a propaganda event, volunteered for extra shifts at their workplaces or "subotniks" in their apartment complexes, every time they dutifully read the party papers or watched the evening news on television as "theirs," every time they hung up a portrait of the general secretary, every time they swallowed their "subjectivist inclinations" in adjusting their speech, thought, or conduct to the "lines" mandated by they party, they maintained the party as an institution. Every time outsiders offered

admiration of or disdain for the party, triggering an identifying response of the member with the party, the party as institution was reproduced in a particular shape or form.

The actions and reactions forming the institutional fabric of the party state were predicated on a host of different understandings. There were distinctions between members and nonmembers; codes of conduct; a socialist ethic; ideas of short-term goals and long-term missions; understandings about the legitimate divisions of labor within the party; incentive structures and their justification; forms of discourse; forms of inquiry; objects of admiration and love; objects of disdain and hatred; gestures; oratorical forms of listening and speaking; celebrative forms of marching, chanting, shouting, and being silent—just to mention a few. The packaging of these discursive, emotive, kinesthetic, and sensory understandings into ideologies, practices, and rituals was constitutive of the party—through their enactment. Mielke's speech in the People's Chamber is a moment when the old action-reaction effect chains are broken. The episode shows how not only the national front under the leadership of the SED but also ultimately the SED itself began to crumble as a particular thicket of institutions. The reason why they began to crumble is that certain understandings seem to have lost actuality while others were taking their place. The question that thus emerges is how discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings *do* become constitutive of institutions. Since institutions are regularized social processes based in interwoven action-reaction effect flows, one can disaggregate this problem into two steps by asking first how understandings shape action-reaction effect flows to wonder then how they contribute to their stabilization.

Understanding as moments in action-reaction effect flows

It is useful to differentiate at least four different moments in which understandings shape the concatenation of actions and reactions into processes (with something of a division of labor between the different modes): together they *orient, direct, coordinate, explain, and legitimate or justify* action. Seeing them as moments does not imply that they follow each other in any particular temporal order. Instead, they build a complex of dialectical entanglements in which each moment presupposes and constitutes the others in a temporal flow.

The first moment, *orientation*, is wrapped up with the very notion of understanding as I developed it in the preceding pages. Discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings differentiate and integrate the world, thus orienting us vis à vis a natural and/or social environment. In other words, understandings tell us what is what, they indicate in which way phenomena exist, how these are related with one another, and how they matter to us. This

orientation in the world includes a conscious or unconscious interpretation of the past and possible future actions of others. In short, understandings sort out *what we are reacting to and why we are acting at all*; they are the interface through which we interpret and engage with the world, they tie our actions as reactions to various kinds of contexts. Mielke had to figure out before and while giving his speech what he was responding to, what the event in which he acted was about both in terms of the unusual call to appear before the People's Chamber, in terms of the ever more dramatic events unfolding in the fall of 1989, and certainly in his mind in terms of history, that is, the class warfare between the socialist and the capitalist world. His performance indicates that he interpreted the situation as if it was a somewhat quirky and yet in all relevant respects standard socialist event. He seems to have assumed that the party continued to be in full control of what was going on in the People's Chamber, and that the party itself would follow more or less tried standard procedures.

Second, understandings provide a notion of *what to do*, that is, *how* to react to the situation that is already understood to some degree. They supply discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic templates to *direct* action. They give us a sense where we might be able to intervene successfully in the proceedings of the world to shape them in accordance with our interests and values, that is, in accordance with other understandings. Mielke reacted to his orientation within the historical situation with a standard speech reiterating the party's old social imaginary. Mielke's speech departs in this respect considerably from those of other high-ranking party members speaking on November 13, 1989, in the People's Chamber. They tried to respond to the perception of crisis in novel ways by revealing facts, for example about the GDR's hard currency debt, or by offering thoughts that deviated in content and form significantly from existing practice. Like Honecker during the anniversary celebrations, Mielke seems to have thought that business as usual, that yet another reiteration of the old fundamentals, was an apt means to preserve a system that should not and need not be changed. Moments one (orientation) and two (direction) together cover what Weber (1980) had in mind with his notion of a meaning guided "social action," which Geertz (1974, 95) felicitously interpreted with his notion of culture as "model *of* [the world]" and "model *for* [action]." Together they form the basis for what is commonly called agency, that is, human beings' capability to act.

Third, John Searle (1992) picks up an older Rousseauian theme in arguing that symbols are essential for coordinating actions in forming an institution. In his model, the process of institutionalization requires that something, or more often someone, is treated in a particular way by several people at the same time. His favorite example is money. A particular piece of paper becomes money only through the pattern printed on it. It is precisely this mark

that allows it to be used as a medium of exchange because it indicates to all parties involved how to treat it. The same applies to police officers whose uniform or badge facilitates the coordination of action with and toward them.[37] In general, seals, stamps, or insignia, but also forms of behavior, registers of speech, and paraphernalia play this coordinating role. Althusser (1971) has earlier described the same phenomenon as "hailing" people into a particular role through the deployment of a particular sign instantaneously legible as a call for a particular kind of behavior. It bears noticing (especially since Althusser does not make much of it), that hailing is only possible to the degree that people already have orienting and directing understandings telling them what the coordinating symbol is and what it requires them to do. This connection has been explored by linguistic anthropologists, notably Michael Silverstein (e.g., 2004), who have shown us how the denotational deployment of signs in context mobilizes cultural knowledge which facilitates the emergence of formed action-reaction effect sequences. Mielke's speech, his conjuration of the socialist order, his appeal to acknowledge it, can be read as an attempt to hail the assembly into its traditional role. He failed because the underlying orienting and directing understandings had become questionable. Of course, when ultimately the new prime minister was elected the procedure succeeded in hailing everybody but one into their old roles.

Fourth, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that the transgenerational perpetuation of institutions is unthinkable without understandings that *explain, justify, or legitimate* them. The "new institutionalists" in sociology (e.g., Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983) have made the related point that legitimation facilitates or even drives the replication of institutional orders in the present that can lead to the emergence of institutional isomorphism. What both approaches overlook is that justification is not just a natural "given"; it is not something people demand out of inborn curiosity or similarly anchored democratic sensibility. Many institutional arrangements are mimetically acquired within and across generations without the need of explicit explanation or justification. Linguistic phenomena are an all-pervasive case in point. However, in situations where institutional orders become defetishized, when people become aware again that they are anything but natural, which often happens when alternative arrangements become thinkable and for some actors desirable, that justification and

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37. Where the images of people who publicly carry institutions come to be known, formal marking is no longer necessary; the face becomes the coordinating symbol. Today's rulers are for this very reason much less dependent on the symbolism of office than their counterparts before the "time of mechanical reproduction" (Walter Benjamin). Precisely because the use of these coordinating symbols is a semiotic game, it is open to abuse by impostors while generating the possibility for real and fictional comedies (and tragedies) of error.

legitimation becomes important.[38] This can happen not only where conflict emerges, for example, over the unequal distribution of advantages created by an institutional order, but also in situations of an ongoing competition between different social orders, as in the Cold War. The point of the hot fall of 1989 and the November 13 meeting of the People's Chamber was the acknowledgment that the GDR had reached a point of crisis that the old institutional arrangements had not only produced but also had failed to even recognize, thus preventing the timely generation of possible solutions. In this context, Mielke's efforts to justify the Stasi with the help of the established formulas of the Honecker years failed already at the level of his own subordinates who watched him with bewilderment in front of their television sets; it failed at the level of a good number of his fellow deputies; and it certainly fell through with the wider public.

As important as understandings are in directing the flow of effect in social processes, it has to be remembered that they do not determine it completely. There are several reasons why this is so. On the one hand, there are situations in which understandings are not fine-grained or evaluative enough to orient and direct action. On the other hand, people often operate with a plurality of understandings across several modes that may yield equally plausible, possibly even contradictory orderings of the world. What helps in such cases of under- and overdetermination is not just the will to complement, discard, or hierarchize understandings, that is, a set of meta-understandings (Frankfurt 1988; Bieri 2001), but the gift of whim that brings an element of arbitrariness into action-reaction effect flows.[39] Beyond all understanding, action presupposes material resources as well as time. Both the economies and the ultimately irreducible complementarity between both with regard to action have busied political thinkers at least since Aristotle. Following them, contemporary social scientists have tried to understand processes of institutionalization exclusively from a resource perspective. They have overlooked,

however, that neither material resources nor time are useful without understandings. They can do no more than generally enable action. Thus they determine the social world only *in posse*, but not *in actu*. Only understandings give the flow of actions and reactions and thus institutions a particular direction, a qualitatively recognizable shape. In other words, any account of social processes has to take material resources and time into account in their relationship to available or formable understandings (Glaeser 2005).

Finally, it is important to remember that in order to form common institutions, the understandings of the individuals acting and reacting do by no means have to be the same. Nobody has made this point more clearly than Bruno Latour with his actor-network theory (1999; 2005).

Understandings as institutions: Agency

If understanding undergirds the flow of effects between actions and reactions, its stabilization offers a clue to comprehend the regularization and thus institutionalization of social processes. The central questions are then: How is understanding transformed into *an* understanding; how does the continuous become a noun; or how do the processes of differentiating, integrating, orienting, directing, coordinating, justifying, explaining gel into a thinglike state? Put differently: how do understandings become institutionalized?[40] An answer to these questions is important, because the

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38. In this context it is more than odd that one of the most sustained efforts of recent times to theorize the practice of justification and locate its importance in social life, Boltanski and Thévenot's *On Justification* (2006), excludes situations of conflict from explicit consideration. In consequence, this book refuses to engage with the literature on rhetoric (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Burke 1969; Billig 1996), overlooking what especially Burke makes clear, that unity needs to be constructed only where chasms are already perceived as existing. What the book offers is an in-depth exploration of a handful of possible modes of justification, which they derive from what they consider as genre-setting philosophical texts.

39. Whim is a true blessing in as far as it helps us out of situations in which we cannot produce decisive understanding. It does not only help us to avoid the fate of Buridan's ass, who worried himself to starvation over two equally big stacks of hay, but by putting understanding at risk, action allows for the transformation of understanding through the play of further validation to overcome stalemate and to further creativity.

40. Unfortunately, the traditional sociology of knowledge in its Marxian, Durkheimian, and neo-Marxian instantiations offers only a very limited, ultimately unsatisfying answer to this question. To see why this is so it is best to quickly restate their respective approach. Mannheim's (1995) definition of the sociology of knowledge as centrally concerned with the relationship between being and thinking (*Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens*) is useful for this purpose because it provides a simple tool to map the differences between the classical approaches. One only has to compare what each means by being, thinking, and the relationship between the two. For Marx (1958a), being means the struggle between two antagonistic classes, members of which, each in their own way, characteristically misunderstand their situation. Thinking is for Marx first and foremost ideology, that is, the dominant class's systematic misunderstanding of society, which it is able to spread to the rest of society thanks to its power position. The nexus between the two is provided by Marx through commodity exchange, and especially the commodification of labor, which reproduces antagonistic class relations and ideology. For Durkheim (1995), being is life in a complementarily, that is, harmoniously organized society. Thought is for him collective consciousness structured by the categories of mind, such as space, time, class, etc. Unfortunately, Durkheim has never endeavored to think through the relationship between them beyond the mere statement of formal homologies. For Mannheim, finally, being is a particular existential problematic tied to a specific, enduring situation in social life stimulating particular kinds of thought—in the political case, ideologies or utopias. People sharing this problematic attempt to contribute to its solution. For all three authors, the institutional character of thought is not developed beyond the conditions of being, which is supposedly give rise to it. In other words, the

development of our capabilities to act requires the institutionalization of understanding.[41] The differentiations and integrations inherent in any sequence of behavior need to be abstracted into a handier, memorable, and hence mobile form that can be deployed across contexts. Alfred Schütz (1981; 1984) and his students Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger (1966) were following Simmel (1992) in describing such a process as typification. Psychoanalysts (e.g. Freud 2000c; Chodorow 1999) have described similar processes for emotive understandings in a number of different ways (e.g., neurosis, transferences, etc.). And in the very same vein, the abstracted transportability of kinesthetic understandings has been described variously as skill or more technically, for example, as "hexis" (Bourdieu 1977) or "arts of doing" (Certeau 1984). The three forms of validation accomplish this work by selecting and lifting off a bounded set of differentiations and integrations from an endless flow of doing and happening. Validations convert the processes of understand*ing* into thinglike understanding*s*; their repetition converts a processual flow into a more context-independent form. And it is thus that fixated understandings can contribute to steadying action-reaction sequences across time to reproduce institutions in a seemingly identical manner.[42]

These institutionalized understandings provide, on the one hand, enormous versatility to human existence. They enable learning and cultivation from situation to situation and from person to person, which adds a quantum leap to human beings' ability to act. On the other hand, however, lifting off differentiations and integrations from the flow of life, abstracting them into schematic, memorable form, sets in motion an inevitable process of reification. The more consistently and regularly validated understandings become, that is, the more they are formed into institutions, the more certain and thus actionable they are, but also the more thing- and eventually fetishlike they become. Thus the constitution of agency in the process of increasing validation can be thought of as framed by two boundary zones. The first demarcates the transition from possible to actual understandings. There, understandings gain or loose actionability (see figure 4.3 on p. 213). Where this boundary lies is very context sensitive, as even the simplest examples demonstrate. What kind of validation would one need before one would accuse a particular person of a specific immoral or criminal behavior? How is that different depending on whether one airs it in front of intimate friends, a reporter's microphone, or a court of law? The other boundary zone, equally determined by meta-understandings, sets off a degree and kind of certainty that no longer admits any doubts. Beyond it, the play of validating forces is so continuous, so decisive that understandings become naturalized and essentialized. This is the domain of unquestioned background assumptions; it is the territory of the phenomenologists' "natural perspective" (*natürliche Einstellung*) and Wittgenstein's "background." The uncontested nature of these understandings begins to remove them first from critical reflection and then from consciousness altogether. Behavior flowing from these understandings is quasi-automatic.

The more actions are based on background understandings, the more efficient they are: things can get done fast, without much deliberation; actions and understandings are for all practical purposes fused; the coordination with others who share in the same background can proceed with a minimal degree of communication. In extension of Durkheim (1997) one could say the *conscience collective* is at the same time *action collective*. This seems desirable for situations in which fast, coordinated reaction is necessary. It is the ideal to which military commando units and secret service organizations aspire. Whether background understandings remain effective (as opposed to efficient) in practice, however, in the sense that they are good guides of the world and for action, depends entirely on the degree to which the domains of activity validating these understandings are actually integrated with the domains of activity in which these understandings are deployed. If they begin to drift apart, for example in situations of fast social change, there looms the danger that understandings that feel entirely certain and justified become

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stability of social conditions is theorized to give rise to the stability of thought patterns. For several reasons this is problematic. First, the social constellations and existential problematics that prompt the emergence of a particular understanding are not necessarily the ones that maintain it as an institution throughout its existence. In other words, the action-reaction chains underpinning the institutional maintenance of a particular understanding may change in the course of time. This points to the second, more significant problem in all three classical accounts of the institutionalization of knowledge. Brilliant insights notwithstanding, their analyses of the processes by which people come to inhabit or move out of understandings in everyday life remain rudimentary. In fact, more often than not the attestation of homologies substitutes for the analysis of process. We are left with dazzling claims that there is a link between the commodity form and enlightenment thought (Marx 1958a; Lukács 1968; Sohn-Rethel 1970) or between the physical layout of a village and the category of space (Durkheim 1995) without as much as even the means to think through *how* the two are connected in practice. This is precisely where I hope to improve matters by attending to processes of validation. For it is my claim that understandings become actualized and thus institutionalized in particular ways through the interplay of historically specific processes of recognition, corroboration, and resonance.

41. In general, the argument developed in this section is strongly influenced by the philosophical anthropology of the 1930s and 1940s (Gehlen 1997; Cassirer 1997), which in their turn build on the hermeneutic tradition.

42. It should be noted here that the movement from understanding to an understanding, that is, the institutionalization of a more stable form of understanding, does not pose itself to a rational choice or related "heuristics and biases" theorist. The reason is simply that the optimizing calculus is, in these traditions, assumed to be hard-wired into our brain. Accordingly, they analyze the stability of institutions in terms of incentive structures and their transformation.

increasingly misleading. As we will see, such disintegration happens easily in contexts that privilege recognition at the expense of direct corroboration either because this mode of validation is preferred according to the meta-understandings in question, or because direct corroboration is very complex or simply unpractical. Just consider for a moment how ordinary citizens would want to directly corroborate their government's claims about another government's intentions. In such disjunctures between the space of validation on the one hand and the field of action on the other lies one of the roots of catastrophic failures of understandings. The fate of socialism is a case in point.

The stability of institutional arrangements

From what I have said so far it should be clear that although the actualization of understanding is necessary for the stabilization of action-reaction effect flows, and thus of all institutions, understandings are *not* the ultimate ground on which other institutions rest. In matters social there is no such thing as an ultimate ground. This is so because understandings rest in turn on validations, which rest on meta-understandings and institutionally conditioned possibilities to occur. This may at first look like a game of infinite deferment, and in a sense it is. A better way to think of the relationship of these processes is to see them as dialectically co-constituting each other, which also means that they stabilize and/or destabilize each other. However, they do so at different rates creating the appearance of "structures" in front of a faster changing background. What is or is not in this sense "structural" can not be assumed but must be adjudicated empirically (Sewell 2005, 151; Silverstein 2004, 622; Abbott 2001b, 259). And as before, textile metaphors suggest themselves to capture the particular kind of stability institutional arrangements display. Institutionalized processes may be seen as various kinds of threads interwoven into a fabric. Even though certain threads may be more important than others, there is typically no single thread that literally weaves everything together. Rather, the stability of the whole is provided by the mutual support of a number of these threads supporting one another. This metaphor can help to grasp a peculiar characteristic of institutional dynamics. On the one hand, they are rather resilient. While some threads may run out in the course of time, they can be replaced by others. Organizations, for example, can accommodate fluctuations of members and changes in rules. On the other hand, the weakening of a number of parallel threads can lead quickly to catastrophic failure. What is needed, then, is an analysis of how the mutual buttressing of processes works. Because as I just argued, understandings give action reaction effect dynamics their qualitative shape, the dialectics of validation will shed a particularly interesting light on processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. Yet this has to wait until chapter 4.

THE POLITICAL

An analytical definition of politics immediately follows from consequent processualism, that is, the imagination of the social world as a complex of interconnected processes of people-entangling flows of actions and reactions that—where regularized—form institutions. The political is best grasped as a particular take on social life; it is a way of looking at actions in view of their role in forming institutions, no matter whether only judging or planning them. In this sense we commonly speak of a "political person" as someone who cannot but look at actions from the perspective of their consequences for institutional arrangements. Conversely and equally commonly, someone may reproach others for being apolitical because they fail to regard the effects of what they do for institutional arrangements. "Politicization" is accordingly a process that reflexively tries to bring into view the fact that particular kinds of actions do form institutions that may or may not be deemed desirable. It is hated by some precisely because it involves a certain loss of innocence. Politics is more than a point of view, however. It is the deliberate *effort* to effect, maintain, or alter particular institutions. Politics is therefore a metapractice, a practice about practices.[43] Although a large number of actions have consequences for the existence of particular institutions, which may justify an analyst to call them political in their objective effects, only a small number of them qualify as politics from the subjective perspective of the actor, because most institution-forming action effects materialize only as unintended consequences. Simply conflating the political and the social is tantamount to conflating intentions with consequences, planning with the unpredictable concatenation of action-reaction-effect flows. As socialism has shown, as a peculiar form of (mis-)understanding society, this conflation can lead to the fantastical attribution of intentions (more on this in chapter 9). And as I will show in chapter 1, a politics failing to understand its own limits, that is the limits of intentionality within a particular institutional matrix, is in danger of drifting into idealism (in the philosophical sense).[44]

43. The formulation I am using here is indebted to one of Foucault's definitions of governmentality as "conduct of conduct" (1991; Gordon 1991). And the beginning of the discursive understanding of action as political in this sense comes about precisely in the historical context Foucault describes with the other meaning of the term *governmentality*, the emergence of the state/ruler's self understanding as actively shaping the conditions of its own self-reproduction in managing territory and population development. For historically illuminating case studies see Scott 1998 and Carroll 2006.

44. The distinction between the political and the social, which follows from consequent processualism, is very much in line with the historical development of first the philosophical and then the social scientific imaginaries of what it means for humans to live together with other humans. As evinced by the great contract theoretical tradition from Hobbes to Rousseau, during the

This said, the definition of politics as *deliberate effort to shape institutions* leaves its domain consciously wide. In the sense of the definition, there are, for example, family politics dividing labor between husband and wife (e.g., Hochschild 1989); there are politics of language establishing the predominance of particular codes for creating patterns of inclusion or exclusion in use (e.g., Gal 1979, 1993; Gal and Irvine 2000); there are politics of religion establishing the boundary between different creeds and rituals (Riesebrodt 2007); there are politics of economic behavior aiming to make people into consumers (e.g., de Grazia 2005); and there are intensifying politics of scientific knowledge (Collins and Pinch, 1993, 1999; Stehr 2003; Rose 2007). There is even a politics of nature, because to an ever-increasing extent, the natural environment in which we live has become an institution that can only be maintained in a particular form through widely scoped interconnected flows of actions and reactions (Diamond 2005).

Political Organizations

Politics itself is subject to institutionalization. In fact, as especially Lenin (1961h) and Weber (1980) have argued, in order to be effective in a complex mass society, politics must be organized. In the simplest case, particular individuals' politics can become institutionalized if others help them to regu-

larize their efforts to shape institutions.[45] Once the institutional character of a person's efforts is understood, it can be abstracted from any particular individual as a role, which might eventually find other incumbents. That entails that the support likewise becomes abstracted in the form of roles. Assemblies of such roles working in some coherent fashion at the realization of particular kinds of institution-forming effects are organizations; they operate as self-conscious, political institutions. The promise of organizations is that they are much better suited to overcome a number of fundamental problems involved in doing politics than individuals. In particular, they allow for the pooling and redistribution of skills, material resources, and time; they can be used as conduits to projectively articulate actions and reactions; and they can help to disseminate and stabilize understandings by forming an established network of authority. More generally speaking, they can ease the collective action problem involved in all politics by getting a significant number and/or significantly located people to maintain or alter their reactions to the actions of others.

Seen from this perspective, marketing companies aiming to sustain specific forms of consumer behavior or even consumer subjectivities, as well as churches hoping to establish a certain form of piety, can be as much understood as political organizations, as citizen initiatives, and the White House. Seen from the perspective of the sociology of understanding, politics is objectively what social organization is about. This is, however, not necessarily how organizations present themselves. Their politics may in fact be hidden, if not necessarily for political reasons, then certainly with political consequences by a language suffused with institutional fetishism. Yet, no matter whether their "goals," "objectives," or "missions" are "profits," "security," or "education," they are merely names for particular regularized interwoven action-reaction effect flows. And trying to give those a particular enduring form is an activity aiming at institution formation and thus an act of politics.

What distinguishes organizations from institutions is self-reflexivity. In other words, at least some people who participate in their formation know—not necessarily in language used here—that they are institutions that need to be actively maintained. This insight leads them to engage in self-politics on behalf of the organization. Self-reflexivity in this sense is an immense opportunity in that it allows organizations to identify and fight threats to their own institutional upkeep. Yet, especially for political organizations, this is a fateful moment as self-politics (on behalf of self-maintenance) and

Enlightenment these imaginaries were thoroughly political. Togetherness was conceived in terms of a rational construct, as the effect of joint action to create institutions, that is, politics. However, during the baroque a second tradition breaks way beginning to conceive order in togetherness no longer as the consequence of reasoned intentions, but as the unintended consequence of actions that were undertaken for reasons that have nothing to do with the emergent order, which may in fact be its polar opposite. Mandeville with his *Fable of the Bees* is among the first authors we still read today to articulate such a radical departure from contractarian thinking. His thought, prefiguring Adam Smith's "invisible hand," leads to the market-tradition in thinking through the concatenation of unintended consequences. The other is the hermeneutic tradition that can be thought of as starting with Vico. Both start in self-conscious opposition to the prevailing contractarian thought of their time. In this shift of emphasis lies the origin of the thoroughly modern notion of the "social," which as Peter Wagner shows (2000), pertained at first to that unruly sphere between the private household (which the paterfamilias could imagine as following his whim) and the state (the conception of which was still based on the fiction of a sovereign actor). The sphere in between does include the market, which as Smith most famously argued, follows in the generation of order nobody's intentions in particular. Since then we have something of a tug-of-war between the social and the political, which Dominic Boyer (2005) has so aptly described in reference to German intellectuals as a dialectic between "spirit and system." The social is the unintentional; the political is the intentional.

45. What exactly the role of others in this context is, that is, the reasons why it is often difficult for people to institutionalize their own behavior, I will discuss in chapter 3 in reference to Wittgenstein's late philosophy.

politics (on behalf of a target institution) begin to compete for attention. Because political organizations typically operate at a much smaller scale than the institutions they have targeted, self-politics is usually also much easier to do, providing extra incentives to engage in it rather than in efforts to accomplish the more elusive external political goals an organization is pursuing.

Since so much of social life is about institutionalization, a further institutional layer has emerged to regulate the political in the wider sense in which I have so far used the term. What is at issue here is the regulation of peoples' rights and duties to participate in or withdraw from any kind of processes of institution formation. This regulation of politics is constitutional politics. Since constitutional politics has to be organized if it is to be effective, it must be self-reflexive, including the regulation of peoples' rights and duties to participate in this process of regulating regulation, of participating in the politics of politics. Historically, states have emerged as sets of political organizations to engage in constitutional politics at the most general level. However, states are not the only sets of organizations engaged in it. In principle, any voluntary association does to the degree that it distributes rights and duties, encourages or discourages its members to involve themselves in some kind of institution-forming processes but not in others; and so do many "traditional" types of organizations such as churches and families. Not surprisingly, the boundaries between different domains of constitutional politics have become one of the major objects of contention between various schools of political philosophy, their embodiment in fighting ideologies, and of course day-to-day politics itself.

Falling in line with the need of organizations to engage in self-politics, states are at least as much concerned with the participation of their citizens and that of foreign states in their own reproduction as they are in external political projects or constitutional politics. In fact, their very position has allowed them to become the most powerful institution building, maintaining, and destroying set of organizations around, challenged in capabilities only by very large private corporations. Needless to say, the state has used these very capabilities for purposes of self-politics. That in turn has given constitutional politics a different flavor: the rights and duties to participate in or withdraw from processes of institution formation have become increasingly focused on the institutions of the state. Small surprise, then, that the state as a set of political organizations has become a thoroughly ambiguous phenomenon. For good reasons, it is the object of as much hope as of fear. This is why politics in a narrow sense has emerged as state-centered politics; it is the state's effort to shape institutions, and other peoples' and institutions' efforts to shape the state.

Main Forms of Politics

Consequent processualism also provides a simple analytical framework to study the means of doing politics. This will be useful when I discuss the politics of the party state to institutionalize socialism in the following two chapters, as well as in chapter 8 when I will discuss the ways in which dissidents empowered themselves to engage in politics, and in chapter 9 when I provide an overview of how the Stasi in particular tried to disempower them. Following the logic of consequent processualism, politics can intervene at the level of general enablement as well as at the four principal moments of process, that is, understanding, action, projective articulation, and reaction. This yields an ideal-typical schema. With the exception of the last type, each can come in more or less dialogic or monologic varieties, depending on how politicians address others to become involved in the setting and execution of politics.

There is first a *politics of general enablement or disablement*, which is the very basis of any form of constitutional politics. Instead of aiming at the foundation, maintenance, or change of particular institutions, one may want to enable or disable a person, a group, or whole categories of persons from participating in processes of institution formation more generally. Enablement means to provide people with material resources, time, and perhaps some secondary, enabling set of institutions that allow for the development of understandings and social networks. Disablement can analogously proceed by attempting to prevent people from developing or maintaining more stable understandings—for example, by means of terror, psychological and social destabilization, or by the creation of some kind of information overload. Moreover, it can work by depriving people of material resources in form of income, shelter, or health, thus creating a cobweb of time-consuming and thus freedom-extinguishing "necessities." Finally, it can work at least selectively by absorbing people into the reproduction of particular institutions (e.g., through overwork and through completely organized leisure time), thus preventing people from participating in other kinds of activities.

Intervening at the moment of action, there is, second, a *politics as policy* whereby actors spell out and often communicate to others the conditions for their own participation in forming particular kinds of institutions.[46] Policies are explicit understandings, not necessarily put in practice but certainly credibly realizable in performance about what kinds of actions one does or does not want to engage in under what specific circumstances. Of course, ef-

46. Policies are relatively simple devices because to some degree it is easier to self-regulate than to influence others in a persistent way. However, in chapter 1, I will have more to say about the limits of self-regulation.

fective policies presuppose adequate understandings about how processes of institutionalization actually proceed. One has to know something about how the mere communication or actual performance of one's own actions, either directly or as signs, influences the formation of the targeted institution.

Then, there is a *politics of (projective) articulation/disarticulation* that aims to intervene at the moment of effect flows in action-reaction chains. Most simply speaking, one can either try to stimulate or prevent certain kinds of face-to-face interactions. Since more broadly scoped institutions all depend on projective articulations across time and space one may wish to block such flows by disarticulating, that is, isolating, actions from potential reactions. Managing or preventing the circulation and storage/maintenance/residence of all forms of understandings, goods, and people in the form of secrecy, censorship, customs, permits, licenses, passports, and such are all political means in this sense. Conversely, one may want to create articulations where there were none before. Any form of publication may do this (be it by a public relations agent or a whistle-blower trying to trigger a scandal). Put more generally, the politics of articulation rests on easing, managing, or preventing the access to communication, transportation, or storage/maintenance/residence.

Next, one can try to induce others to undertake (or refrain from undertaking) targeted actions that according to one's own understandings about action-reaction effect flows are constitutive of institutions. Short of violent force, all ways to do so have to take into account targeted actor's understandings, which the politician has to come to know and engage with. There are two principle approaches to this *politics of induction*. On the one hand, one can take the basic understandings of others as fixed—either because one believes that they are part of human nature that is by definition unalterable (as rational choice theorists do), or because one believes one does not have the institutional means to influence them. In this case one has to work with the existing understandings, for example, by providing positive or negative *incentives*. This style of politics typically aims to utilize existing understandings about desirable goods or undesirable states by rewarding target actions or by punishing deviations from them. This is the politics of sin taxes, tax holidays, performance bonuses, but also of medals, prizes and other honors. Much political rhetoric also works with existing understandings by making appeals to identities, moral, aesthetic, or logical norms. On the other hand, one might want to pursue an *educational approach*, which aims at reshaping the understandings of target actors. This can be done by either teaching them directly and/or by helping to actualize those of their understandings, which promise to increase the likelihood that the target performance will in fact occur. In other words, educational politicians must try to become authorities. They do their work by selectively recognizing certain under

standings; they try to make visible how certain events indirectly corroborate desired understanding; and they try to make sure that target understandings will resonate with people.

Finally, there is *politics by brute force*. Unfortunately, as the global success of large-scale theft, murder, and genocide shows, force is an inefficient means of politics only where the ongoing willing and knowing cooperation of the subdued is needed. Where it is, however, brute force typically gives way to other forms of politics. Yet, even they usually face a dilemma. Wanting changes in institutions, all politics has to change how targeted people act and react to one another in a sustained way. To achieve this, politicians have to relate to people. Since dialogic relating implies the openness of politicians to change their goal, it is the great temptation of politics to relate to people in an objectifying way, both to honor the goal's presumed dignity as well as in the interest of efficiency. Where politics' goals are not universally shared by the targeted people, objectification may trigger resistance, however small, that can ultimately thwart goal attainment. The degree to which politics is monologic or dialogic may therefore have consequences for its success. How much this matters and in what way reactions to politicians' initiatives will form depends entirely on the way that people understand these initiatives in the first place, as Nina Eliasoph has shown (1998).

Power

This has consequences for the concept of *power*. It should no longer be seen as what politics is primarily about (Weber 1980, 822), but much more its precondition, that is, the ability to engage successfully in politics. Central to power is the ability to make reactions follow actions in a predictable way, which necessarily includes means of projective articulation, or what Michael Mann (1984) has called "infrastructural power." More, however, since we cannot build, maintain, or transform institutions on our own, power is the ability to maneuver not only within, but most notably with the help of existing institutional arrangements and thus always with the assistance of others, to achieve a political goal. This is where what often is called "soft power" comes in (Lukes 1974). Seen in this way, power is the ability to play given sets of institutions for the sake of influencing some of them. Needless to say, depending on the institution targeted for creation, maintenance, or change, and the situation in which this is supposed to be done, power requires rather different kinds of understandings, theories, emotive dispositions, and skills that can be more or less suitable for a particular situation.

Every form of politics, every effort at politicization, is contingent on understandings orienting, directing, coordinating, explaining, and legitimating actions. From the perspective of consequent processualism they *should*

pertain to understandings about the processes forming the target institu-
tion. This should include ideas about the understandings of the various
participants located in the fabrics of action-reaction effect flows that consti-
tute the institution targeted by politics. The social imaginary of people who
want to shape the fabric of institutions in and through which they live need
not follow this ideal-typical sociological construct. To analyze the success
and failure of politics, it is indispensable to study *how* politicians imagine
the social world, how they understand its operations, and how they there-
fore understand their possibilities for intervention. Of course, and contrary
to simplistic understandings of Foucauldian power/knowledge dynamics,
these understandings can be misleading. They can actually undermine
power rather than further it. Consequent processualism provides at least a
critical framework to begin with an analysis of the suitability of particular
understandings for politics.

It is not uncommon that human beings understand their world in such
a way that they see, at least for themselves, no possibilities for effective in-
tervention. This is the case, for example, wherever people believe that the
social world is determined by transcendental powers, no matter whether
they be called by the name of some personal god or some abstract principle
such as history. Dominic Boyer (2005, 10–13) calls this "negative dialectical
knowledge."[47] If it prevails, politics in the sense presented here (in extreme
cases even the political as a way to think) ceases to exist. The very condi-
tion for the possibility of politics is the defetishization of institutions by
comprehending them as susceptible to human influence. What this enables
is what Boyer terms "positive dialectical knowledge." I call understandings
orienting politics *political understandings*. They enable institutional creation
or transformation. The process of their imagination, negotiation, testing,
certification, their formation into institutions, can then properly be called a
political epistemics. In spite of its lofty name it takes its home in the humble
quarters of poor families and street gangs as much as in the hallowed halls of
governments, universities, think tanks, and corporate headquarters.

Political understandings may carry the promise of a social world more
to the liking of the politician. Historically speaking, the appeal of political
philosophy and later also of ideology and the social sciences lay precisely in

their potential to defetishize institutional orders and thus to enable politics.
This does not mean that they were right. Political understandings as ideolo-
gies can become fetishized themselves—and socialism is the prime example.
This has led to the paradoxical phenomenon of an ultimately enslaving poli-
tics of liberation. To develop a few useful tools to think through this problem
more generally by way of an intensive engagement with GDR socialism as
an exemplar is the hope of this book.

At the end of this section an important reminder is in place. Many in-
stitutions are not the consequence of politics, and most, if not all, are not
the consequence of politics alone. This has important consequences for the
possibilities and limits of political knowledge. Being capable of developing
appropriate political knowledge is no guarantee for the ability to engage
in successful politics and self-politics. Institutions with a larger base may
always exceed the very possibility of politics. Nevertheless, for politics to be
as effective as it can be, adequate political knowledge is a precondition (the
possibility of lucky ignorance notwithstanding).

CONCLUSIONS

Stated in the shortest and most general possible way, my argument so far
has been that the particular dynamic of institutions needs to be analyzed
in reference to understandings and the ways in which they are stabilized or
destabilized. A fortiori this is true for political institutions and organiza-
tions. The rationale behind this argument follows a genetic account of the
formation of institutions. I argued that they are formed in action-reaction
effect flows that are, although generally enabled by material resources and
time, moved in a particular direction only by understandings that orient,
direct, coordinate, and explain or legitimize particular actions, thereby link-
ing them as reactions to past or expected future actions. Understandings
contribute significantly to the stabilization of institutions to the degree that
they themselves become institutionalized. For this to happen, understand-
ings need to be continuously validated. Validation takes place in encoun-
ters with other people deemed authorities (i.e., through recognition), as the
result of an evaluation of the merits of understandings in orienting action
(i.e., in corroboration), or by agreement with already existing understand-
ings (i.e., by resonance). These validations, too, can at least partially become
institutionalized. Just imagine the ways in which our understanding that we
are in fact the bearer of a particular name is continuously validated through
deeply institutionalized forms of address, administrative documentation,
and so on. In part, the very institutions that are stabilized by particular un-
derstandings increase or decrease the likelihood that a particular validation
will occur. What we obtain, then, is an image of society as a thicket of social

47. With his notion "dialectical knowledge," Dominic Boyer (2005, 10) uses a concept related to
what I call *political understanding* albeit with the more specific sense of "knowledges of social
dynamics, relations and forms that center on perceived ontological tensions between the tem-
porality of potentiality and actuality and between the spatiality of interiority and exteriority."
He traces the oscillation between a positive, agency-affirming form of such knowledges and
a negative agency-denying one through the contexts of their emergence in over two hundred
years of German history.

processes that wherever they are stable, that is, institutionalized, buttress each other; wherever some are changing, others will be affected, possibly even creating cascading change effects. We have therefore a unique way of making sense of both, apparent stability and catastrophic failure, which followed in the case of GDR socialism on each other's heels.

Methodologically this means we should focus our investigation on processes of co-constitution between formed understandings and other kinds of institutions. These processes of co-constitution take the form of a dialectic where they remain open. They do so where processes of validation remain open ended, where they are allowed some degree of play, which is to say, where they are not fully institutionalized. Such openness is important in situations of social change necessitating an adjustment of understandings and institutions to changing circumstances. However, processes of co-constitution can also be short-circuited, that is, closed onto each other. We will see in the course of the investigation that institutionalizing validations is not simple, especially in the case of resonances (because of their long-term temporal horizon and their inertia) and in the case of corroborations, which can only become institutionalized to the degree that they are effectively remade in the image of recognitions. We shall see that some meta-understandings, epistemic feeling patterns, ideologies, and practices make short-circuiting much easier. In the case of GDR socialism, short-circuiting was prevalent, because its self-politics was driven by understandings emphasizing mobilization at the expense of critique. How this came about historically is the topic of the next chapter.

THE EMPIRICAL AND THE THEORETICAL—
A NOTE ON METHOD

Consequent Processualism and Ethnography

Adopting the meta-theoretical framework of consequent processualism has profound consequences for the study of institutions. They need to be understood in terms of the interconnected flows of actions and reactions that form them. However, much of social-scientific analysis has taken to reifying institutions. This is done, even where lip service is paid to the ontology of institutional formation, most notably in Durkheim's highly influential *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1982) and the various kinds of sociological structuralisms that have systematically built on it. There are several reasons for this. First, as Durkheim's text makes clear, there is a particular normative understanding of what proper science is about that is inspired by the phenomenal success of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century. It proposes that legitimate scientific objects are things that are independent

of the human imagination. Accordingly, the condition for the possibility of a true science of the social is taken to rest in strictly limiting analysis to the causal relations among different kinds of social things. Thus Durkheim analyzes how one particular form of institutions, most importantly forms of social organization, "cause" other kinds of institutions, most notably particular forms of solidarity (1997) or categories of the mind (1995). With a few (albeit notable) exceptions, he is not interested in the distributed action-reaction flows that alone can transport an effect and thus "cause" one institution to have an impact on another. The whole Durkheimian tradition has in consequence developed a penchant for fetishizing institutional arrangements.

The second reason for reification is its promise of parsimony in explanation. Talking about "classes" or "states" or "organizations" as collective actors reduces the complex, distributed flow of effects in a myriad of actions and reactions into a much more simple analysis. Under certain circumstances, treating institutions as if they were things is a justifiable analytical shorthand, just as it is a necessary, and by no means necessarily problematic, shorthand in everyday life. But even then it is important to develop an ethnographic imagination (Glaeser 2005) that allows us to retranslate institutions into the processes that form them. Where we cannot do this, we have no way of validating our analysis, because institutions appear to us only in the actions and reactions of people in real time and space. Without their retranslation into interconnected action-reaction flows we can also neither say what institutions (and our analysis) mean for the life of people nor can we propose courses of action that could either help to maintain or change institutions should we desire to do so. Thus, without an ethnographic imagination, we end up with a meaningless sociology of shadows, a theater of "collective actors," of "forces" or "variables," or worse, still, a mere exhibition of "structures" set up not as a means to the end of a better comprehension of social *life*, which also offers hope and suggestions for how to change it, but very much for its own sake.

Against these various structuralisms, against the fetishization of institutions in the social sciences (as opposed to the everyday), the processual formation of institutions has been recovered repeatedly in the history of the social sciences as a *critical* device.[48]

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48. A genealogy of authors who have contributed major pieces to the recovery and/or reformulation of the interactive formation of institutions could be constructed. It would include at least (here with the original publication dates): Marx (e.g., 1867), Simmel (e.g., 1908), M. Weber (e.g., 1922), Schutz 1932, Vygotsky 1934, Elias 1939, Mead 1934, Wittgenstein 1949, Goffman 1959, Austin 1962, Berger and Luckmann 1966, Garfinkel 1967, Burke 1969, Bourdieu 1972, Silverstein 1979, Giddens 1984, Latour 1999, Abbott 2001b, Brubaker 2004, and Sewell 2005.

While the institutional fetishisms of the everyday effectively undercut the very possibility of politics, academic forms make it more difficult to comprehend institutional change while serving at the same time as political ideologies. Ethnography promises a way out of this predicament because it urges the study of process (Gluckman 1967; Moore 1978). However, more traditional ethnographic conventions, above all the fixation on the immediate spatial, temporal, and social context, render the study of institution formation difficult. Luckily, in the last quarter century ethnography has come a long way in overcoming at least some of these problems by having become historical (e.g., Sahlins 1981; Moore 1986; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). And yet, the theoretization of processes has, in my opinion, lagged behind description. This has something to do with the ways in which social scientists think about the relationship between theoretical and empirical work. One way to produce a tighter link between theoretization and description is what I have called *analytical ethnography* (Glaeser 2000; 2005). The standard lore of common procedure in social research is to begin with an interest in a particular social arena, which is then dramatized into a pointed empirical puzzle. This supposedly gets solved by mobilizing the right kind of theory, which may get adjusted, amended, or transcended in the course of solving the puzzle. Without even beginning to get into the question of whether this is in fact what social scientists do, one conclusion about this account is obvious: the empirical puzzle comes first, and theory development is relegated to the status of a side-product of the research process. It is neither explicitly given a role in the choice of the empirical arena of interest, nor is it acknowledged how much of (mostly implicit) theory goes into the formulation of the puzzle. The point of analytical ethnography is to engage questions about the social world in which we live and theoretical problems dialectically right from the start of the project. This means that the arena of investigation is chosen not just for its intrinsic interest but at least as much for the theory development potential it holds. Theory and the story, which is developed as an answer to the empirical puzzle at hand, are developed pari passu.

This confronts us with the following questions: "Why are answers to sociological puzzles stories?" and "what does theory have to do with narrative?" Driven by action-reaction effect flows social processes are contingent; their course is *principally* open.[49] This does not imply that they cannot be also highly regular and thus more predictable. However, regularity and predictability is something that needs to be accounted for by analyzing the metaprocesses that stabilize and regularize types of reactions to types of

actions.[50] I have in the previous sections of this chapter explained how I plan to go about analyzing the stabilization of particular understandings as an inroad into investigations of institutional stability and change. Narratives are the particular form in which we have learned to communicate a linked sequence of events, and thus they are the means of choice to relate them (e.g., White 1973; Ricoeur 1984). The analytical work of picking and connecting relevant types of events out of an infinitesimally complex tapestry of happenings, of proposing systematic action-reaction links at the core of these events, and of hypothesizing how these events constitute, maintain, or change institutions is the work done by a particular kind of emplotment. Stories are composed of a number of elements such as characters, locations, actions, and events. They arrange them along the linear temporality of telling that makes visible the underlying temporal order of happenings that are related through the story. Following Aristotle (1970), the work of synthesizing the sundry elements of story into a coherent-appearing whole has been called emplotment (cf., Ricoeur 1984). Helpful for the work of constructing this synthesis are cultural forms, templates of tale telling such as genres, and, even more importantly, standard forms of emplotment. Arguably the best known among these are tragedy, comedy, satire, and romance (Frye 1957). The use of these templates as synthesizing devices relies on audiences to fill in commonplace associations between the elements of story (e.g., that jealousy can turn human beings into murderers, that fathers try to replicate themselves in their sons, etc.). The social sciences cannot satisfy themselves with telling stories in this sense. They must critically investigate the synthesizing links of story. In other words, they must explicitly reflect on the *effective emplotment* of the tales they tell, which is to say that they need to develop theories explicating the dynamics of process. The theoretization of process is possible because the chain of links from actions to reactions and institutions comes about in fairly regular ways, a fact that opens the dynamics of process to careful generalizations. These, however, must take into account that the production of links in process is contingent on local circumstances, for example, the understandings of events by participants or the wider institutional field in which action-reaction sequences are embedded.[51]

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49. For two collections of essays zeroing in on the matter of contingent development of processes from a variety of angles (e.g., ambiguity, polysemy, ingenuity, chance) see Abbott 2001b and Sewell 2005.

50. An illustration for the radical contingency of processes and institutions that look so stable that even the very word *prediction* feels ill applied may be in place. On the end of May Day 1989 nearly everybody in the GDR would have "predicted" that there would be a May Day 1990 resembling the one that had just taken place. Of course it was not to be. Most of us would "predict" that the next Independence Day celebrations would resemble the last. What could we imagine to happen that this would not be the case?

51. The making of such limited generalizations as effective emplotment devices is what I take Weber's (1988) ideal-typical approach to be about.

Theory can be developed by working forth and back between using alternative effective emplotments as data-mining tools on the one hand (if a person has reacted this way then there should have been this kind of antecedent action; if a social formation has changed this way then there should be this kind of action to alter it, etc.) and the integration of these data into stories on the other. The altercation between data and theory, stories, and effective employment can come to a (provisional) end when a locally satisfying fit between story and data is achieved. In their final versions, theory and story are therefore both results presupposing each other. The story is effectively emplotted by the theory and the theory is the reflexive abstraction of successively refined stories.[52] That does not guarantee that theory and narrative are perfectly adjusted to each other. The narrative will always outstrip the theory, and theory will take flights of fancy that are not fully reflected in narrative. This is so because both constantly overshoot each other. And at one point one has to come to a stop. Science after all is an open-ended process. It lives by unruly narratives and overshooting theories. Where else would we get the ideas from for the next round of investigating social life?

Data

The data I have collected for this study originate in a wide variety of different sources. However, the main body flows from a historical ethnography of Stasi's efforts to control the peace, civil rights, and environmental movements in East Berlin during the 1980s. This historical ethnography relies on the one hand on intensive interviews with twenty-five Stasi officers, sixteen opposition members, and three secret informants. These interviews varied greatly in length. The shortest ones lasted two hours; the typical interview was conducted over three to four sessions with a total of six to eight hours of interview time; some interviews with selected key informants stretched over a whole year, totaling forty hours of interview time. There are more interviews with Stasi officers for the simple reason that there is far more published material about the lives of opposition members, including memoirs on which I could rely in addition to the interviews. On the other hand the historical ethnography builds on archival material mostly from the Stasi, but also from the opposition collected in the Stasi archives, and especially the

Mathias Domaschk archive in the Robert Havemann Society, a private foundation. The interviews provide retrospective autobiographical accounts, reconstructions of daily routines, reflections on local ideologies and practices, and descriptions of events from several perspectives. The archival material supplies on the one hand propaganda material, contemporary action plans, reports about events, security assessments, training materials and textbooks, official rules and regulations, planning documents, case progress notes that were formulated by Stasi officers and other state and party agencies. On the other hand, the archival material furnishes official letters, petitions, position statements, and samizdat publications written by members of several opposition groups.

I paid close attention to matching officers, opposition members, and secret informants onto each other as participants in the same social arena. The choices were driven by what was interesting as much as by what documents could be made available and who was willing to talk. Although I have collected wider contextual information, I have in the end focused on an interrelated set of Berlin opposition groups, among which Women for Peace (Frauen für den Frieden), the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte or IFM), the Ecological Library (Umweltbibliothek), and the Peace Circle Friedrichsfelde (Friedenskreis Friedrichsfelde) form the core.

The advantage of pairing documentary evidence with interviews is that they form a lively commentary on each other. Documents are objectified, radically decontextualized communications. Interviews can reveal much about how these documents were made, how they were used, and hence what they mean. Oral accounts of past events are notoriously prone to constant rewriting through successive presentations. Documents can be used as effective memory props. They also provide significant clues about how the reconstruction of the past actually proceeds.

Besides these interviews and documents I have participated for a whole year in the monthly meetings of the Insiderkomitee, a group of former Stasi officers who are interested in researching and discussing the history of the Stasi and the GDR. Several members of this group have engaged in writing articles and books about the Stasi (e.g., Eichner and Dobbert 1997; Grimmer et al. 2002b). These were instructive, because here I could see former officers interact with one another: appealing to common goals, listening and commenting on each other's narratives, and so forth.

Besides the historical ethnography of the Stasi's efforts to control the peace, civil rights, and environmental movements in Berlin, I did archival research on the ways in which various other governmental and party agencies addressed the issue of dissidence. Thus, I consulted documents of the Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen (the governmental agency responsible

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52. In the end, then, one could tell the story without making the theory explicit. However, self-consciously writing stories on the basis of effective emplotments while making the theory explicit and thus available for discussion is a central component of reflexive social scientific practices. In fact, the explicit development of effective emplotment as hermata should be as much an integral part of ethnographic practices as it is typically not a part of fictional writing, where explanations or psychologizations stick out as alien to the genre.

for church state relations), the central committee, and the politburo. To learn more about how the party state made sense of itself, I studied textbooks and pamphlets on propaganda, personnel administration, organization and planning. More, since my study of Stasi revealed particular patterns of interaction, ways of thinking about information flows, of talking about work and the world at large, I began to wonder how typical they were for socialism more generally. This was a very important, even necessary, step for this investigation, because I wanted to see to which degree I could generalize from Stasi to GDR socialism. For this reason I have spent a lot of time reading a wide variety of memoirs available about work in socialist bureaucracies in East Germany, covering not only politburo members but also central committee bureaucrats and county administrators, artists, and scientists. This was made possible by the fact that after unification, many former East Germans felt the need to reflect on their time either because they saw themselves challenged by countless prejudices of West Germans about their former country, or because they themselves wanted to arrive at a better understanding of what had happened.