

**“Range and Diversity” in the GDR?
Television drama in the early 1970s.**

“Range and Diversity” – this was the formula for the new cultural policy during this time period, known as the early Honecker era. Previous research has assumed that there was truly more freedom for those working in media behind this slogan. The following text will investigate the organization and content development of the field of GDR television drama in the turbulent years between 1968 to 1975. We will show, on the one hand, that the liberalization of the medium television can largely be interpreted as a calculated control maneuver by the new government. On the other hand, it will also become clear that some of what appears to be the centralized implementation of political policies (and which was communicated as such) was actually the result of a complex *interaction* between the political arena and media institutions.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the developments in GDR television policy between 1968 and 1975, we first must go back in time a bit. After the closing of the borders in 1961, which supposedly ended the threat poised by the “class enemy“, many artists had believed in a separate, emancipatory direction for art in the GDR. However, in 1965, the 11th Plenum of the central committee (*Zentralkomitee*, hereafter ZK) of the GDR government’s state party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, hereafter SED) reduced creative freedom for authors and directors considerably, speaking out against the aesthetic Modern as a whole, and proving the progressive artists false in their belief. In the plenum, the cultural officials took up a well-known strategy¹: Through the renewed pointed criticism against the “nihilistic, schematic, anti-populist works“ of a “late bourgeois“ formalism² within all media, that which was not considered “socialist realism” was barred completely.

¹ Reference must be made to the previous campaigns against „Formalism in the Fine Arts and Literatur“ and against „Decadence, Clericalism, Superstition and Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism“; see Simone Barck, *Das Dekadenz-Verdikt: Zur Konjunktur eines kulturpolitischen ‚Kampfkonzpts‘ Ende der 1950er bis Mitte der 1960er Jahre*, in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Historische DDR-Forschung. Aufsätze und Studien* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 327-344.

² Attachment No. 3 to Protocol 7 from March 19, 1963, quoted in Jürgen Kocka, *Historische DDR-*

It has been shown, therefore, that the government had already begun to condemn the trends in the international modern art scene as “subjectivism“, as “idealistic“, “voluntaristic“, and “revisionist“ before the period under investigation. In order to systematically stop this supposedly dangerous type of art, all organizational and artistic levels of television broadcasting were put under the control of the state television broadcasting committee (*Staatliches Fernsehkomitee*)³ in September 1968, and the influence of the party was intensified through the founding of a film and television organization in January 1967.

The organization of GDR television drama

The outward process of ideological monopolization that had occurred within the era of Head of State Walter Ulbricht had its internal equivalent in the massive instrumentalization of German Television Broadcasting (*Deutscher Fernsehfunk*, hereafter DFF). In strict accordance with the “New System of Planning and Management of the National Economy“ (*NÖSPL*) practiced at that time, a complex model of control was developed for which the scientific work group in the DFF and in particular the Deputy Head of the Television Committee, Dieter Glatzer, were responsible. The plan-system was not only conceptualized for the institutional control of the mass media, but was more importantly thought to be one of the “main elements of control“ in the “designing of the entire societal system of socialism“: “A conception of steering that goes beyond the mere organization of a ‘social communication process’, which works actively towards the realization of the party playing the leading role (in society)“⁴.

The objective was to test the systematic control of society through one of its aspects, whose importance cultural advisors had begun to realize: All mass media has “a remarkably strong influence on the social thinking, feeling, and actions of the people [...], whether we try to strongly direct this influence towards the formation of

Forschung, p. 2.

³ Until the mid-1960s, the “largest culture-spreading institution of our republic“ was often underestimated. Compare Walter Baumert et al., Fernsehen erobert Neuland in der Kunst. Gedanken zur dramatischen Produktion des Deutschen Fernsehfunks, *Neues Deutschland* (April 18, 1964), p. 4.

⁴ Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunke. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Praxis der längerfristigen Planung der sozialistischen Massenmedien in der DDR*. (Berlin/DDR, 1969), p. 128.

socialistic opinions and awareness or not“. Since television, “this constant current of living portrayals of societal reality [...] develops a power through the combination of graphicness, scale, intensity and its true-to-life quality“⁵ like no other mass medium, it was necessary that all categories, genres and plays be handled as part of a larger context from then on: “The single production always has an effect as part of the entire program“, “using a specific combination of its individual elements, every paramount system is capable of creating new laws of effect“. A literary drama, or even “the broadcasting of a symphony concert on the screen comes across differently within the framework of a program that is directed towards the intellectual and cultural manipulation of its viewers than it does within a program that sees itself as being at the service of the development of well-rounded personalities.“⁶

The claim formulated here by Glatzer is worth noting, because it goes beyond media control. The concept understands the entire culture to be a system of interdependent elements, which in themselves are all connected to society as a whole. Lutz Danneberg has labeled such a construction of continuity out of discontinuity the *monoparadigmatic society*.⁷ Here, all aspects of society become variables of an ideology, which has become immune by calling itself scientific: “The development and realization of such profile-determining program directives is nothing less than structural politics put into practice in a ideological-cultural mass medium“ – for Glatzer the requisite for effective media work. Previously, television had stood out due to its lack of systemic planning: According to Glatzer, until the implementation of “administrative methods” and “scientific leadership abilities”, “no improvement of content nor the organization of a complete program – both necessary for achieving the mass effect of public awareness” were possible, which could lead “to the infiltration of a way of living foreign to socialism into the broadcasts, especially into the areas of television art and television entertainment.”⁸

⁵ Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 127,141.

⁶ Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 141-142.

⁷ Compare Lutz Danneberg, Wilhelm Schernus et al., *Die Rezeption der Rezeptionsästhetik in der DDR: Wissenschaftswandel unter den Bedingungen des sozialistischen Systems*, in Gerhard P. Knapp et al.(eds.), *1945-1995. Fünfzig Jahre deutschsprachige Literatur in Aspekten*, (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 643 – 702.

⁸ Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 34-35, 149, 36 and 35.

The attempt to centrally control all aspects of society through an "objective Weltanschauung", led by a set of basic ideological assumptions, without limiting their ability to function effectively, never fully functioned in television either, as we will show below. However, the concepts behind this attempt nonetheless had a long-term influence on work in the institutions, especially within the area of television drama at the end of the 1960s.

Contrary to the "previous formal compilation of separate plans developed in isolation from one another", the new concept was no longer a "mere model of thought", but a "binding norm and strategy". Suggestions from the separate editorial staffs were now synchronized with the focal themes from the entire program and it was decided "which performances were necessary in which broadcasting genre from which areas in order to design an evening program that would have the desired mass influence."⁹

At the end of the 1960s, Dramatic Fine Arts were considered an especially important line within the program, dedicated to live studio films and made-for-television movies, television series and a „row of humorous-entertaining plays" which were to be dedicated to "problems relating to the building of socialism", "the development of a socialist national culture", and in general "the creation of a socialist consciousness". Considerable financial support was given to the department – monies which were then cut from other program slots. This concentration was initially justified with reference to the ratings: broadcasts which had low viewer ratings due to a lack in quality were to be cancelled, whereas others "will be raised to a level, based on a principal of performance, which is appropriate to the importance they have for the profile of the program." The new demands placed the producers in the difficult position of maintaining a balance between the "highlights" and the daily selection, while needing to fill the ever-expanding broadcast time – increasingly, following the introduction of a second channel in 1969 – with new as well as interesting programs.¹⁰

⁹ This and previous quotes from Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 178, 169, 41 and 38.

¹⁰ All quotes from Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 148, 150, 158, 159-160.

Although energetic attempts at centralized control were made, the responsibility for the actual program development remained in the hands of the individual editorial staffs and the departments. They were therefore under observation all the more. First they were required to work out “plan drafts”, the results of which were to be explained in the “plan defenses”, and then checked for quality and funding. Only after an agreement was reached through this complicated process could the actual production begin, whose financial, technical, and timely realization was then assessed in a interim “performance plan”, its course coordinated and, in the case of deviation from the plan, corrected when necessary.

Despite their faith in the ability to organize and control all aspects relevant to production, even true believers in the system were forced to recognize that unforeseen difficulties often occur in daily production, which automatically lead to postponements, and loss of time and money: Independent factors such as the dependency on cooperative partners and the capacities at the DEFA film studios, dependency on the schedules of the theaters and the availability of the actors and actresses there, as well as the dependency on the varying offers of the international market and their program exchanges. Television drama was especially incapable of undergoing complete pre-planning, since even for large productions with a tight schedule, “a time period of between a little over a year for the study and research, and 13 months for filming and end-production”¹¹ was calculated, in addition to the prior writing phase. The perfect controllability of man and machine is seen here to be a falsehood and the typical GDR contradiction between theory and practice, demand and reality is demonstrated here once more – proof for sociologist Ralph Jessen’s hypotheses that it was not the establishment of a totalitarian rule that singles the GDR out, but its claim to one:

“What is special about the 40-year history of the GDR society is not that the SED was *capable* of constructing a society based on a Marxist-Leninist plan. What is remarkable is that this was *attempted* with a determination for which there is no historical forerunner. [...] No amount of planning or

¹¹ Ottomar Lang, Redebeitrag auf der Theoretischen Konferenz, in Rudolf Hoffmann (Ed.), *Fernsehndramatik im Gespräch. Theoretische Konferenz des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen beim Ministerrat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 4. Februar 1969*. (Berlin/DDR, 1969), p. 193.

control, however perfectionist it may be, can predict or determine the actions of individuals and their interaction.”¹²

This forced the officials in charge, who constantly felt provoked or threatened, to set up an ever-growing catalogue of measures, which allowed them greater influence over the work of the media at any time and everywhere: Due to their need for political power, paranoid and irrational practices of intervention were established, which proved to be dysfunctional and contra-productive, as they neither strengthened trust in the leadership and an acceptable “total goal”, nor did they stimulate “pacemaker performance”.¹³ Moreover, Glatzer assesses the success of the control mechanisms based on the energy involved: They were able to teach “everyone involved disciplined cooperation”.

Instead of relative independence and personal responsibility, forced compliance and extreme fulfillment of duties dominate from this point on – an intolerant climate in which there is no willingness to take risks but instead a latent fear of flexibility. We suspect that on this interface between duty and free style performance, between party bias and autonomy there is enough potential for conflict, which allow ruling discourses to be understandable, the self-image of those involved to be legible, and the possibilities and limitations for artistic work inducible.

With the use of the above described control apparatus¹⁴, the party felt itself able to prescribe its doctrine within “main topics”, as established in the general plan in 1967, declaring it a “major priority” and a binding “social duty” within all areas of television. Glatzer writes:

„Contrary to conventional topic planning, we have not restricted ourselves to prescribing the content, object, and character of individual journalistic-artistic activities, but are aiming ever more consequently for the final goal of ideological-cultural work – an increase in socialist, public consciousness“.

¹² Ralph Jessen, Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus. Probleme einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR. *Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 21 (1995), pp. 96-110, here pp. 99-100.

¹³ Rudolf Hoffmann (Ed.), *Fernseh dramatik im Gespräch*, p. 150. See also the chapter “Die Entwicklung der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunke”, Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunke*, pp. 33-102.

¹⁴ The plan system described here was policy until the end of the 1960s. See for example Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, *Arbeitsplan des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen für das 2. Halbjahr 1972 und die ersten Monate 1973*, (Berlin/DDR, 9/5/1972), DY 30/ VORL. SED/ 11532/ 1, pp. 3-5.

„whereby the ways and means of its implementation will and must be very differentiated, depending on the journalistic topic or the artistic depiction or plot.”¹⁵

For television drama, the state of its cultural policies was clearly determined at the Theoretical Conference of the State Committee (*Theoretische Konferenz des Staatlichen Komitees*) on February 4, 1969, in Berlin, Adlershof, which can be viewed as the end of the developments detailed above. The conference took place between three other relevant meetings: the 7th Party Conference in April 1967 on the one hand, and the 10th Meeting of the ZK in April 1969 as well as the 6th German Writer’s Congress in May 1969 on the other hand. At the latter, television drama was listed as a separate item on the agenda for the first time¹⁶. In the end, the Theoretical Conference was more a forum for internal communication and self-reassurance than substantial analysis.¹⁷ In its content, the discussion regarding possible tendencies of estrangement in socialism was strongly negated. Television drama was expected to become “a messenger for the revolutionary battle” and, looking proudly to the gains already made, to offer itself as “strong proof” of which system would surely come out of the international fight as the “historical winner”. “Subjectivism” must be countered with “objective forms of portrayals” and “artistic generalizations”, which have their expressions in the “great socialist folk figures”¹⁸, “whereby the level of ‘royal’ figures [...] and the ‘populist’ no longer stand in opposition to one another”¹⁹. “The fusion of the holistic societal image with the totality of the human figure”²⁰ must take place. These statements are more evidence in favor of the above described theory of a monoparadigmatic world view in the GDR, which encompassed all areas of society.

¹⁵ Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk*, pp. 125-126, 122.

¹⁶ See Deutscher Schriftstellerverband(ed.), *VI. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß vom 28. bis 30. Mai 1969 in Berlin*, (Berlin/ Weimar, 1969).

¹⁷ This was even admitted by party representatives such as Hermann Kant, who especially regretted the failure to consult the Writer’s Organisation (*Schriftstellerverband*): „Years ago (...) there was a television conference; it became a one-sided self-portrayal and was a flop“.- Speech at the 7th Writer’s Congress, November 1973, quoted in Gisela Rüß, *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, (Stuttgart, 1976), p. 879.

¹⁸ Gisela Rüß, *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Gisela Rüß, *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, p. 183.

²⁰ Social scientist Manfred Nössig in his speech. Quoted in Gisela Rüß, *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, p. 80.

They also lowered the aesthetic discussion to a qualitative level which had been thought overcome, which critics such as Ernst Bloch or Ralph Giordano called “the dictatorship of the *petit bourgeois* in the name of the proletariat” and who had been unusually open in their fury at the 4th Writer’s Congress about “the nerve with which the most horrible prudery pretends to be the moralizing governess of socialism.”²¹ As we can see, the structural entwining of all areas of television with the political apparatus corresponded with a change in the content paradigm: the conflict situation was moved from the “decisions made *in favor of socialism*” towards those made “*within socialism*”²². The “development of the hero during his great phase of endurance”, as it is foggily called, is replaced by the first generation of socialist personalities, “for whom the socialist turn within society corresponds with their own struggle for perfection within their own lives”.²³ Following the end of the 1960s, the “workers, [...] as conscious developers and rulers of society”²⁴ are the central figures in many live studio films and made-for-television movies.

Erich Selbmann, a member of the news staff at that time, has plausibly shown that, independent of the general turnover on the political level, pressure to change the program had developed within television itself, because “there was an overemphasize, a one-sided orientation” on extended television novels, which had already had a negative effect on other topics and programming forms²⁵. The plans were made without the viewers: the stations were now lacking in alternatives for the constantly increasing scheduled broadcast time, which was pushed even further by

²¹ Ralph Giordano, *Die Partei hat immer recht*, (Köln/ Berlin, 1961), p. 186-187. Quoted in Volker Gransow, *Kulturpolitik in der DDR*, (Berlin, 1975), p. 81.

²² This declaration can be found in Walter Ulbricht, Referat auf dem VII. Parteitag, *Neues Deutschland* (4/18/1967), p.20.

²³ Quoted in Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen der DDR (ed.), *Film- und Fernsehkunst der DDR. Traditionen - Beispiele - Tendenzen*, (Berlin/DDR, 1979), pp. 266-67 and 423.

²⁴ Stated literary critic Klaus Jarmatz in *Deutscher Schriftstellerverband*(ed.), *VI. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß*, p. 277.

²⁵ Erich Selbmann, *DFP Adlershof. Wege übers Fernsehland. Zur Geschichte des DDR-Fernsehens*, (Berlin, 1998), p. 164-165. With regards to the popularity of the multi-part productions in the opinion polls, see Heinz Geggel. Notiz an Joachim Herrmann vom 20.9.1979 mit Anlage zu Wiederaufführungen (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ IV 2/2.037/ 41).

the establishment of a second television channel on October 3, 1969.²⁶ The internal pressure to make changes was positively supported by a simultaneous overall turnover in power within society.

The Changeover of Power

With the naming of Erich Honecker as Head of State at the beginning of the 1970s, a political and personal change in power occurred in the GDR. This was accompanied by temporary concessions made by the administration within the arts and the media.²⁷ At the 8th SED Party Conference, Honecker made the famous demand to “overcome a certain type of tedium” and “to take the desire for good entertainment into account”²⁸ – and hereby openly proclaimed what his propaganda specialist Werner Lamberz had privately stated by criticizing “weak spots in the program composition”²⁹ since the end of the 1960s. Greater attempts are now made to live up to the audience’s wish for entertainment, even though the formal tolerance did not mean a change in the rigorous restrictions placed on content and topic. Since 1971, a number of viewer polls, viewer forums, and viewer conferences had been initiated.³⁰ Meanwhile, the station’s own viewer research presented their empirical investigations “as a support for decision-making in questions regarding the program structure”³¹ and intensified the findings to include the scope and effects of the station’s programming spectrum. The audience’s preferences were clear: the viewers stated a strong interest in “the portrayal of daily problems within the socialist present” and a

²⁶ For this reason, the network tried again and again to extend its budget. See, for example, Programmdirektion, *Entwurf des Teil II im Perspektivplan des Deutschen Fernsehfunks*, Berlin/DDR, 12/10/1968), (BArch DR 8/ 89), Kap. C, pp. 20-22.

²⁷ The thesis of greater freedom for the media is central within Western historical research. (Compare for example Günther Rüter, *Kulturbetrieb und Literatur in der DDR*, (Köln, 1987), p. 74.) We will prove below that, at least within the realm of television drama, there can hardly be talk of a distinguishable growth in creative freedom.

²⁸ *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII. Parteitag*, (Berlin, 1971), p. 101.

²⁹ Werner Lamberz “Die Aufgaben der Journalisten bei der Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des VII. Parteitages”. Referat vor dem Zentralvorstand des Journalistenverbandes 1967, quoted in Dieter Glatzer, *Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunke*, pp. 55-56.

³⁰ Live studio films, for example, were shown in companies and factories so that the producers could come into direct contact with the audience and be party to their immediate reactions. See Wolfgang Schmidt, *Das Fernsehen der DDR. Zu Struktur, Organisation und Programm 1971-1981*, *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 2 (1982), pp. 129-147, quoted from p. 135.

³¹ Paul Roth, *Massenmedien in der DDR*, *Media Perspektiven* 2 (1975), pp. 64-77, quoted from p. 72.

“broader scope in topics”. “Humorous folk plays and farces” (74.6% of those questioned), detective stories and adventure genres (80.7%) or “old movies” (e.g., the UfA productions/ 43.6%) were on the top of the viewers’ list. Less popular were the “classical plays” (28.1%) or, taking up the rear, “plays about the history of the workers’ movement” (18.4%).³²

The effect of the new cultural policies on television must not be seen as unidirectional, but instead as an interaction between two complex social institutions: For example, the discussion regarding the structural changes in GDR television had begun prior to the 8th Party Conference, namely with critical comments made by TV author Helmut Sakowski in this vein at the regional delegates conference in Neubrandenburg in June 1971. Although his speech was surely made in “behind-the-scenes” agreement with the new governmental head³³ and were not merely personal foresight, especially considering the similarity in content to later cultural policy statements, Sakowski took a vehement stand for shows “that have big results in a small format”, and demanded that “good television entertainment be extended”, turning “against the moral finger that is constantly raised on the screen to teach us all a lesson”.³⁴

And yet, even these statements had forerunners: a previous speech by Helmut Baierl must be mentioned, given at a conference of the Academy of the Arts in March 1971 on the topic of „Interaction within the Arts”, in which the author anticipates this new culture policy course.³⁵ Prior to this, internal debates within television regarding the future program structure had been going on for over a year, in which similar deficits had been discussed.³⁶ In early 1972 it is all official: The public will be

³² In general, there was an established demand for an “entertaining, colorful, variety-filled program”. See Anonymous, *Maßnahmen des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen zur Verbesserung der Qualität und Wirksamkeit des Fernsehprogramms* (Draft), (Berlin/DDR, 9/25/1971) (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ VORL. SED/ 11532/ 2).

³³ See Anonymous (Agitation Commission), *Sitzung der Agitationskommission am 4. Januar 1971* (Protocol), (Berlin/DDR, 1/7/1971) (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ IV 2/2.106/ 9), p. 1. Honecker’s entourage was able to maintain its course, which controlled the content of the meetings until the 8th Party Conference. See Anonymous, *Beratung der Agitationskommission am 1. März 1971* (Protocoll), (Berlin /DDR, 3/2/1971) (DY 30/ IV 2/2.106/ 9), p. 1.

³⁴ Quoted in Erich Selbmann, *DFP Adlershof*, p. 166.

³⁵ Helmut Baierl, Autor in drei Medien/ Fragen und Antworten, *Arbeitshefte (der AdK der DDR)* 4 (1970), pp. 66-70.

³⁶ See Anonymous (Dieter Glatzer?), *Aus meinen handschriftlichen Aufzeichnungen von der Beratung des Komitees vom 5. Juni 1970*, (Berlin /DDR, 6/15/1970) (BArch DR 8/ 97), p. 1 and 3.

presented a new program, which expressly advertises with an “increase in humorous, adventuresome and exciting material”.³⁷ In television, just as in other art forms, a development has begun which is meant to “capture the breadth and depth of the lifestyle of socialism” in its portrayals and “take position against monotony, shallowness, and the reduction in the caliber of the craft”³⁸. But by the middle of the 1970s, the liberal position had been restricted once again by the cultural policies in the GDR, which the topic of the 9th ZK Conference in 1973, „Intellectual cultural Development”, seems to have already precipitated.³⁹

Consequences for Television Drama

The effects of these political changes can only be proven by consulting the available files in the National Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) and in the German Broadcasting Archive (*Deutschen Rundfunkarchiv*). The documents show a manner of speech that displays its own bureaucratic frugidity the most at those times when creativity in being demanded of the officials: In the new formalized idioms, such as “the fight against undesired lengths of any kind” or “innovations not recipes”, spontaneity was demanded within and from a system which, with its system of plans, inspections and approvals, and reports, had consistently prevented it in the years before. Both in *what* is said and *how* it is said, language offers a peek into the complicated mechanisms of a centralized administration.

No radical changes were needed within the work of television drama following the transfer of power in December 1970 – at least not in relation to the program planning – but merely, besides the typical personnel changes, a diversification of the guiding topics. This comparatively slow process of media-political conformity is depicted in minute detail within the written files of the State Committee (*Schriftgut des Staatlichen Komitees*).

³⁷ Heinz Adameck, Welche Pläne hat unser Fernsehen? (Interview), *Neues Deutschland*, (1/23/1972).

³⁸ Verband der Film und Fernsehschaffenden/ Abt. Kultur/ Abt. Agitation, Information über den II. Kongreß des Verbandes der Film und Fernsehschaffenden der DDR. (Berlin /DDR, 5/10/1972) (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ J IV 2/2J/ 4078), p. 3.

³⁹ Erich Selbmann, *DFP Adlershof*, pp. 193-194.

In a bill for “program work” from 1970/71, there is a general call for „party oriented, traditional, and mass effective contemporary pieces”. A discussion took place regarding how “socialist worker types could be portrayed in a traditional manner (...), the model of the party worker could be artistically captured (...), the great female figure and the young revolutionary can be placed in the spotlight of great works”.⁴⁰ In this way, artistic lines of argumentation were crystallized, which later became binding for cultural policies under the previously mentioned slogan „Range and Diversity”: The entire program was to be made “as popular as possible”, and there was a call “for differentiated depictions among the fictional figures, encompassing the range of characteristics reflecting the socialist way of life” and criticism for “false, programmatic, declamatory passages”.⁴¹

Television drama tried harder than ever to raise the number of planned programs related to the „here and now”, as well as to initiate a larger number of productions with a humorous undertone. The plan also called for changes and expansions in the program planning: Stereotypical character groupings and behavioral patterns were criticized; there was a plea to extend the literary canon to include “progressive” authors, many of whose manuscripts were actually filmed in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴² All of these changes were put into practice at the end of 1971, following a complicated, drawn-out decision-making process. The documents read like a didactic play in the functionings of the party apparatus and the political leadership of television through the head of the SED:

At the ZK meeting on June 30, 1971, the party head was presented „The State Committee for Televisions’ Initial Suggestions for Program Design Improvement”, accompanied by an „Explanation”, as supporting material for the 7th item on the agenda. These suggestions were discussed in the Secretarial Meeting and, based on the resolutions made therein, modified by Werner Lamberz (Dept. Agitation) and Heinz Adameck (State Television Committee). In the final editing, they included a

⁴⁰ Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, *Die Programmtätigkeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks 1971*, (Berlin/DDR, 1971), (SAPMO-BArch DR 8/ 107), p. B/31-32.

⁴¹ Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, *Die Programmtätigkeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks 1971*, p. B/35.

⁴² This refers to authors who had previously not been adapted, such as Balzac, Gottfried Keller, C.F. Meyer, Lion Feuchtwanger, Theodor Fontane, Theodor Storm, Jack London, Martin Andersen Nexö, Konstantin Fedin, Ernest Hemingway oder Maxim Gorki.

new 5th directive, a paragraph regarding television drama, which had been brought into the discussion by a member of the ZK, and which would later be found in all future program plans: „Television shows and television films are to draw more strongly from German classical literature, especially the literature of the revolutionary workers’ movement.” The original version with this handwritten addition in the work protocol was then replaced by a corrected, clean copy, making it possible to directly compare the two versions and their revisions.⁴³ This document, classified as „preliminary”, was then further developed internally by the television committee, and was submitted as a draft resolution, after assessment by the Agitation Commission/Department of Agitation⁴⁴, to the ZK on December 1, 1971. The Secretarial Meeting gave its blessing this time without marking changes, thereby ratifying the official regulations for television broadcasting following the change of political course.⁴⁵ According to the new regulations, the area of Television Drama was required to “conceptualize a long-term program”, which was to make “the growth of the writers’ pool, especially through the development of young writers” a priority, and, “in conjunction with the directives of the Secretary of the ZK and the viewers’ demands, focus on the interpretation of works of world literature and drama”.⁴⁶

The statistic analysis of the program *quantities* show only one aspect in which the political turnover makes itself apparent. The adaptation of modern works – especially those of the GDR’s own authors – increased significantly in comparison to the dramatizations of traditional literary works. However, there is no significant change in the ratio between live studio films/made-for-television films and drama adaptations, nor in the ratio between the productions of national literary works and international

⁴³ Protokoll Nr. 04 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 30. Juni 1971 mit TOP 7 und Anlage 4: „Erste Vorschläge des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen zur Verbesserung der Programmgestaltung” (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ J IV 2/3 A/ 2038).

⁴⁴ Compare, e.g., Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, *Weitere Maßnahmen des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen zur Verbesserung der Qualität und Massenwirksamkeit der Sendungen des Deutschen Fernsehfunks*. (Berlin/DDR, 10/1/1971) (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ IV 2/2.106/ 9).

⁴⁵ Protokoll Nr. 61/71 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK vom 1.12.1971 (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ J IV 2/3 A/ 2106)

⁴⁶ “For the security of a greater unity amongst the people, depth and diversity in the dramatic productions within GDR television”. See Abt. Agitation/ Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, *Weitere Maßnahmen (...) als Vorlage an das ZK vom 4.11.1971, a.a.O.*, pp. 6-8.

works.⁴⁷ Therefore, the further analysis will focus on possible changes in program quality.

The stagnation felt by many in television seemed to be overcome in the department of television drama, even though the new cultural policies did not have such an obvious effect on this branch as it did on non-fictional programming, where an undeniable attempt was being made to reach the standard of an international cultural production company: In the journalistic and the educational branches, a number of new or redesigned television journals and advice shows were brought forth.⁴⁸

Dramatic films, series, and the ever greater number – and often rerun – live studio films of “humorous drama” continued to be allotted program slots in or near prime time⁴⁹. In addition, more and more young writers and directors⁵⁰ took the party at its word and attempted to utilize their “entire span of creative artistic possibilities” – even if, in the same breath, carefully limited to social-realism – and took the official demand for “a greater diversity in topics, contents, forms, and designs” seriously whenever possible.⁵¹ The inclusion of psychological, social, and even gender-specific conflicts can be considered the most important reform in this time period, as they included individual decision-making situations, standpoint declarations, and reflected problems with personal development and self-fulfillment within the context of a system admittedly full of “objective”, but “non-antagonizing” inconsistencies. This was a visible shift in weight towards the “the basic material of reality” (Anna

⁴⁷ An extensive quantitative analysis of the entire collection of literary television films can be found in Thomas Beutelschmidt and Henning Wrage, „Das Buch zum Film - der Film zum Buch“. *Annäherungen an den literarischen Kanon im DDR-Fernsehen*, (Leipzig, 2003) (= MAZ 9).

⁴⁸ Compare Anja Kreutz et al., *Von „AHA“ bis „Visite“*. *Ein Lexikon der Magazinreihen im DDR-Fernsehen (1952-1990/91)*, (Potsdam, 1998).

⁴⁹ Compare „Übersicht über die Programmstruktur“ for 1974, which takes both the new, post 1971 profile in the GDR into account, as well as the programming scheme of the FRG’s public stations ARD and ZDF since 10/1/1973:

Information zu journalistischen Sendungen in ARD und ZDF 1974. No Year. (1973/ SAPMO-BArch DR 8/ 77 sowie DY 30/ IV 2/2.033/ 109).

⁵⁰ Graduates of the *Babelsberger Filmhochschule* began to work in television more and more, after having even been given their own slot, *DIE KLEINE PREMIERE* (Small Premieres) for “first attempts”. See Regine Sylvester, *Vielfalt von Themen und Gestaltungsweisen*, Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen der DDR (ed.), *Film- und Fernsehkunst der DDR*, p. 430.

⁵¹ Kurt Hager, *Zu Fragen der Kulturpolitik*, (Berlin /DDR, 1972), p. 33.

Seghers), and therefore to topics of profane daily life as “an inconspicuous, unemotional expression of our history”.⁵²

Instead of merely giving “politically-correct” answers, critical questions were – carefully – raised. In the place of the schematic stress on historical legitimacy came contradiction and incompleteness, which became the motive for a definition of non-deterministic progress. Lively, sometimes poetic, often comical or even ironical portrayals of ordinary characters who were less heroic than likeable⁵³, unobtrusive milieu studies⁵⁴; sensitive observations of private life and depictions of often complicated yet realistic partner relationships⁵⁵ were the result. Overall, quite a rich variety of films, even if they were “of varying relevance for society” and did “demonstrate enormous quality differences with respect to the artistic performances”, as contemporaries criticized⁵⁶.

In form, a certain documentary speech pattern can be found in many pieces⁵⁷, analogous to that in DEFA films of the time, which may have been in sync with the realism sought after, but also corresponded to the lack of sensationalism in narration – often falling into „lethargy”⁵⁸ – typical of East German fiction. Juxtaposed to the predominantly action-focussed international series and film productions, there was, according to Peter Hoff, a greater “stress on dramatic characters”, artistically drawn

⁵² Regine Sylvester, *Vielfalt von Themen und Gestaltungsweisen*, pp. 427-428, although she also points out the conspicuous “authorship by well-known writers” in contemporary live studio films.

⁵³ E.g., *Florentiner 73* (Klaus Gendries; GDR, 1972). Based on *Das Durchgangszimmer* by Renate Holland-Moritz.

⁵⁴ E.g., *Junger Mann* (Ralf Kirsten (director)/ Armin Müller (script); GDR, 1971)

⁵⁵ This often reoccurring topic was the center of both *Die sieben Affairen der Donna Juanita* (Frank Beyer; GDR, 1973) and *Die unheilige Sophia* (Manfred Wekwerth; GDR, 1974), as well as many others.

⁵⁶ Regine Sylvester, *Vielfalt von Themen und Gestaltungsweisen*, p. 428.

⁵⁷ The connection and relationship to Cinéma vérité, for example, is pointed out by Knut Hickethier, *Schwierigkeiten beim Umgang mit der Wirklichkeit. Fernsehspiel und Kinospießfilm der sechziger und siebziger Jahre*, Thomas Koebner (ed.), *Tendenzen der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 382-445; quoted here from p. 421 and Note 72.

⁵⁸ Claimed the GDR television critic Peter Hoff, *Der starke Charakter in der Krise als Leitfigur und Hoffnungsträger im DDR-Fernsehspiel*, Helmut Schanze/Helmut Kreuzer (eds.), *Bausteine IV. Beiträge zur Ästhetik, Pragmatik und Geschichte der Bildschirmmedien*, (Siegen, 1997), p. 61-66; quoted here from p. 62.

from early chamber plays, the original basis for the GDR live studio film⁵⁹, which itself was continued in its own electronic form until far into the 1980s. The conspicuous fixation on a “central figure in television drama” as the true dynamic element can be plausibly explained by the economical and technical production constraints requiring the producers to keep the takes, figures and locations to a minimum. However, the development of every fable was also determined by certain “philosophical-ideological limitations”, which reduced “action-taking” to those protagonists „whose ‘role in history’ (Plechanow) is controversial and who can therefore be more openly dramatized.”⁶⁰

With regards to the classical literary productions, which were often costly and broadcast over a series of days, no grave changes are visible in the topic plans, even if similar “accent shifts – away from general portraits of society towards the psychologically rooted destinies of individuals”⁶¹ were undertaken. Even the number of internal and cooperative productions with the DEFA between 1970-1975 – between five and eight films annually, and up to three live studio films based on literary works – remained relatively constant.⁶² The adaptation of epic material from the canon of world literature was continued in the 1970s with less extensive productions in the program “Exquisite” (*ERLESENES*)⁶³, and the relevance of canonical classical literature, as well manners of creative expression within the traditional canon⁶⁴, for contemporary art was confirmed. “The aesthetics of socialist society take up the progressive inheritance of bourgeois tradition, for example that of the 18th century, and develop it further on the basis of the new historical-societal foundation.”⁶⁵ According to the understanding of those in power, “further

⁵⁹ Peter Hoff, *Der starke Charakter in der Krise*, p. 62-64.

⁶⁰ Peter Hoff, *Der starke Charakter in der Krise*, p. 62.

⁶¹ Erich Selbmann, *DFP Adlershof*, p. 169.

⁶² Compare Manfred Hempel et al, *Die Entwicklung des Fernsehens der DDR. Folge 4: Fotochronik*, (Berlin/DDR, 1978)

⁶³ The row of short live studio scenes had begun on 10/30/1966. Through 1975, over 40 productions took place. Translators comment: The word *Erlesenes* is a play on *exquisite* and *read aloud*.

⁶⁴ The seriousness with which the integration of literary tradition was taken is mirrored in various scientific conferences, among others the Colloquium of the Central Institute for Literary History (Academy of the Sciences) on the topic of “World Literary Heritag and the Socialist Society” in May 1972.

⁶⁵ See Erich Kühne in Rudolf Hoffmann (Ed.), *Fernseh dramatik im Gespräch*, p. 180.

development” meant not only “continuation”, but also “a search for new approaches”.⁶⁶

The changes in television in 1971 were more strongly related to dramatical house productions and commissioned theater productions. The department responsible for these presented an extensive “play series” in collaboration with the appropriate areas within Entertaining Drama, with the goal of “bringing classical and socialist culture to the working class” and of satisfying “the desire for entertainment within the broad mass of viewers”. Among the selections were works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Gerhardt Hauptmann, Franz Wedekind, in addition to the GDR representative authors Bertolt Brecht, Peter Hacks, Johannes R. Becher, Hermann Kant, as well as international authors such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Arthur Miller, Alfred de Musset or Sean O’Casey.⁶⁷ This program selection was supplemented by more live theater broadcasts and studio guest theater productions from the department of Entertaining Drama, which were to “be representative of GDR theater productions on the path to a socialist people’s theater”. This type of drama can be summed up by national authors as well as foreign greats such as Carlo Goldoni, Molière, Maxim Gorki and Federico García Lorca.⁶⁸ With regards to the adaptation of GDR prose and its historical or contemporary material, this ranged considerably from Anna Seghers and Franz Fühmann to Otto Gotschem, Eberhard Panitz, and Jurek Becker until the mid-1970s.

Although the increase in creative and – though limited – political sovereignty must not be over-interpreted, based on what we know today, the obvious differences in the positions prior to and following the change of power must not be underestimated either. In comparison to 1969, when only “a unambiguous party-conform position” was deemed acceptable “that did not make concessions to the taste of the bourgeoisie or to trends calling themselves modern”, and which unmistakably showed that “socialist art must always include a bit of, a very large bit of, clear

⁶⁶ As it was officially called, quoted in Erich Selbmann, *DFF Adlershof*, p. 245.

⁶⁷ Bereich Dramatische Kunst, *Dramatikerreihe 1972*. (Berlin/DDR, 5/28/1971), (BArch DR 8/111), p. 1-2.

⁶⁸ Compare Deutscher Fernsehfunk/ Bereich Unterhaltende Dramatik, *Programmorschläge für 1972*, (Berlin/DDR, 5/27/1971), p. 1-2. The focal point was even justified theoretically in 2. Entwurf einer Konzeption für die Theaterabteilung, (Berlin/DDR, 5/5/1971), (both in BArch DR 8/111).

agitation”⁶⁹, the summary of television drama in the mid-1970s sounds considerably more moderate:

It is “clear to see that the viewer is being called to use his active influence more often than before, as he is being utilized more and more as a partner – it is left up to him to, and even suggested that he, draw his own conclusions from the program. Pat recipes have become more seldom.”⁷⁰

However, the thematic and creative growth of the station’s program policies was soon to be criticized. The focus on current problems in the GDR had supported “a differentiated understanding for the historical process of becoming” and thereby helped to bring out “developmentally related, socialism internal contradictions”. However, this had simultaneously led to deficits in dealing with the past and international topics.⁷¹ Although visible concessions had been made in favor of emotionally richer dramatizations and attempts at innovative arrangements (in the jargon of the television producers: the attempt to overcome “confinement and overt intellectualism”), the dramatic television productions had not done their part to aesthetically emancipate the viewers: “It is hard to lose the impression that television is more reserved than open to artistic experiments.”⁷²

Even the head of television had to admit that they had “shied from risks and sought instead the tried and tested”⁷³. Despite the praise for “well-rounded and developed” stories and characters at the beginning of the 1970s, there was more and more pressure for a “unity of individual and societal demands and tasks”, as well as for

⁶⁹ Stated Helmut Sakowski on the one hand and Hermann Kant on the other in his speech at the Forum on Contemporary Socialist Art in Literature, Film and Television (*Forum zur sozialistischen Gegenwartskunst in Literatur, Film und Fernsehen*). Hermann Kant, *Die Kunst hilft unser Leben meistern*, Stenografisches Protokoll, (Berlin /DDR, 5/8/1969, p. 24 and p. 28 (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ J IV 2/2J/ 2565).

⁷⁰ Therese Hörnigk, *Einige Tendenzen unserer Fernseh dramatik*, *Filmwissenschaftliche Beiträge* 2 (1976), pp. 48-70, quoted here from p. 51.

⁷¹ Therese Hörnigk, *Einige Tendenzen unserer Fernseh dramatik*, pp. 51-52 and 69. In 1974, the critic Hans-Dieter Tok attested to the fact that television drama was “obviously limping behind the demands of both the times and the audience” and criticized that many productions “remain cemented in the episodic, in impressions, choose the strange eccentric over the strong character and leave out dramatic conflict in order to (...) include odd anecdotes”. See Hans-Dieter Tok, *F Fernseh dramatik im Zwielficht? Anmerkungen zu einem fernseh dramatischen Jahrgang, als gesunde Provokation gedacht*, *Film und Fernsehen* 2 (1975), pp. 10-14, quoted here on p. 12, 14.

⁷² Therese Hörnigk, *Einige Tendenzen unserer Fernseh dramatik*, pp. 50-51.

⁷³ *Fernsehen der DDR/ Programm direktion, Stand und Tendenzen auf dem Gebiet der Fernseh dramatik*, (Berlin/DDR, 6/10/1974), (BArch DR 8/ 139), p. 12.

“life-like” portrayals of “today’s revolutionaries”, who have both “the welfare and pain of the class in mind” and the “future of world socialism [...] in daily life, in marriage, in the family, in the collective”.⁷⁴ It is therefore not surprising that, as early as 1972, the Agitation Commission demanded a first revision of the programming schedule.

In the beginning, it was only this circle that found most of the current programs lacking in political drive. They felt that the selection of literary films should concentrate more strongly on “what certain works of this type have to tell us about our modern times and our current struggle, and which important contemporary ideological questions are touched upon”.⁷⁵ In the end, the commissions’ convictions led to a rollback strategy: They commissioned the conception of a long-term program, which not only held the writers and directors responsible, but also bound all possibly relevant “social partners” and party committees to act as advisors.⁷⁶

The paper became the basis for a complete change in program policy, in which the television programmatic of “range and diversity” was exchanged for one more strict, which was, as it stated, oriented towards “binding perspectives” and the general “efficacy of socialism”.⁷⁷ With this, television was made to backtrack, once again required to devote itself to “making the ‘role of the socialist world system’ visible and depicting the working class”, to “GDR reality within the changing socialist society”, and to “the direct confrontation with the imperialist adversary”⁷⁸.

If nothing else, this change qualifies the previous research depictions of the liberal cultural and media policies in the GDR at the beginning of the 1970s. Although there

⁷⁴ Anonymous (Heinz Adameck), Referat des Vorsitzenden in der Komitee-Beratung (on 3/26/1974), (Berlin/DDR, n.d.). (1974/ BArch DR 8/ 145), pp. 34-36.

⁷⁵ Abteilung Agitation: Information über einige Probleme der Fernseharbeit auf dem Gebiet der Kunst. Berlin (DDR) 1.11.1972 (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ VORL. SED/ 11532/ 1), pp. 2-3.

⁷⁶ See Eberhard Fensch, Schreiben an Hans Modrow vom 7.2.1972 mit Anlage „Maßnahmeplan zur Erarbeitung einer langfristigen Spielplankonzeption im Bereich Dramatische Kunst“, (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ VORL. SED/ 11532/ 2).

⁷⁷ Bereich Kunst- und Kulturpolitik, Erste Überlegungen zur Vorgabe 1975/76 für die Gebiete Kulturpolitik und Dramatische Kunst, (Berlin/DDR, 6/6/1974) (Vorlage Nr. 50/74-39/ SAPMO-BArch DR 8/ 139), p. 2.

⁷⁸ Fernsehen der DDR/ Bereich Dramatische Kunst, Langfristige Spielplankonzeption, (Berlin/DDR, 11/10/1972) (BArch DR 8/ 125), p. 7.

are an undeniable diversity of and even unexpected signatures discernible within the production spectrum of television drama, at no time did the party apparatus tolerate content-independent and creatively self-determined work. The apparent freedom in the short interim must instead be viewed as a means to an end, in order to win over both producers and viewers for the new course and to motivate them to willing cooperation. The chief ideologists feared even the smallest freedoms as a danger to their positions of power and insisted on a definition of art that merely “has effect in terms of the socialist type of morality and lifestyle.”⁷⁹

The rigidly demanded, while simultaneously vaguely formulated regulations required all involved to develop a good nose for the right interpretation at the right time. Whether or not certain topics and depictions were adequate was highly dependent on the art of a careful “exegesis of more or less ambiguous, in part foggy party documents, on the basis of the awareness of individual winks and nudges, from which the preferences of the important party functionaries were to be interpolated.”⁸⁰ Since such decisions were highly risky, both for the implementation of a project and even one’s own career, most steered away from extreme positions and wagered instead on the inconspicuous mediocre. From the mid-1970s on, with the exception of a few exceptional extravagances⁸¹ and large, export-effective projects⁸², this brought more and more rote and less-than-inspired productions of average quality to the screens: contemporary television films, humorous plays,

⁷⁹ Eberhard Fensch, Notiz an Hans Modrow vom 6.4.1973 mit Anlage „Konzeptionelle Gedanken zur Fernsehkunst“, (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ VORL. SED/ 14359/ 1), p. 1.

⁸⁰ Konrad Dussel and Edgar Lersch, *Quellensammlung zur Programmggeschichte des deutschen Hörfunks und Fernsehens*, (Göttingen/ Zürich, 1999), p. 336.

⁸¹ The selection ranges from *Hölderlin* (based on the book by Peter Weiss/ Director: Henry Riedel; GDR, 1974) or *NO-Theater* (Hisao Kanze; GDR, 1976) to *Befragung Anna O.* (Script: Gerhard Stuchlik, Klaus Poche/ Director: Thomas Langhoff; GDR, 1977) or *Ursula* (based on the book by Gottfried Keller/ Director: Egon Günther; GDR, 1978) to *Der Mittelstürmer verweigert das Paradies* (based on the book by Augustin Cuzzani/ Director: Peter Wekwerth; GDR, 1986).

⁸² E.g., *Scharnhorst* (Script: Hans Pfeiffer/ Director: Wolf-Dieter Panse, 5 parts; GDR, 1978), *Martin Luther* (Script: Hans Kohlus based on the book *Die Rebellen von Wittenberg* by Hans Lorbeer/ Director: Kurt Veth, 5 parts; GDR, 1983) or *Sachsens Glanz und Preussens Gloria* (Script: Albrecht Bömer based on the book by Jozef I. Kraszewski/ Director: Hans-Joachim Kasprzik, 6 parts; GDR, 1985).

entertaining series, historical biographies, and classical literary adaptations, in none of which a productive desire for change is expressed. Instead, they are merely proof of the laming societal stagnation which continued – not only for the media – until the end of 1989.

The question remains: did they come to a realization within the GDR, following a short phase of partial artistic exploration, that the medium of television only functions as either a profane entertainment machine or as an operative information apparatus, and is therefore only partially fits the role of a noble cultural mediator?

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