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Documentary Photography from the German Democratic Republic as a Substitute Public

Anne Pfautsch

Kingston School of Art, Kingston University, London KT1 2QJ, UK; anne.pfautsch@gmail.com

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Abstract: This paper discusses artistic documentary photography from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from the mid-1970s until the fall of the Berlin Wall, and suggests that it functioned as a substitute public–*Ersatzöffentlichkeit*–in society. This concept of a substitute public sphere sometimes termed a counter-public sphere, relates to GDR literature that, in retrospect, has been allocated this role. On the whole, in critical discourse certain texts have been recognised as being distinct from GDR propaganda which sought to deliver alternative readings in their coded texts. I propose that photography, despite having had a different status to literature in the GDR, adopted similar traits and also functioned as part of a substitute public sphere. These photographers aimed to expose the existing gap between the propagandised and actual life under socialism. They embedded a moral and critical position in their photographs to comment on society and to incite debate. However, it was necessary for these debates to occur in the private sphere, so that artists and their audience would avoid state persecution. In this paper, I review Harald Hauswald's series *Everyday Life* (1976–1990) to demonstrate how photographs enabled substitute discourses in visual ways. Hauswald is a representative of artistic documentary photography and although he was never published in the official GDR media, he was the first East German photographer to publish in renowned West German and European media outlets, such as *GEO magazine* and *ZEITmagazin*, before the reunification. In 1990, he founded the 'Ostkreuz–Agency of Photographers' with six other East German documentary photographers.

Keywords: documentary photography; German Democratic Republic; GDR daily life; photography as a substitute public; 'Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen'; literature as a substitute public; Harald Hauswald

1. Introduction

In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) photography was a contested medium struggling between art and politics and was primarily used either to serve ideology or to object it. Associated with humanism, because of photography's 'objective' character, by both party officials and the people, documentary style photography played a crucial role in this ambivalence (James 2013, p.104; Hoffmann and Knapp 1987). The Socialist Unity Party (SED), made use of photography's claim to veracity and manipulated images to present a world in which socialism had already been achieved. Walter Ulbricht, the SED's first secretary who stayed in power until 1971, sought to use the medium as a conveyor of "harmony, passion, and the appreciation for socialist life" (Betts 2010, p.197), if need be, by means of image manipulation. Berthold Beiler, the GDR's most significant photography theorist, stated that by "interfering with a gentle hand" one could "turn possibility into reality".[1] Influenced by a Soviet photographic culture, the official photographs in the GDR aimed to fulfil the stipulations of socialist realism (James 2013, p. 104). The medium was used as an educational instrument and as a

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[1] Quoted from Karl Gernot Kuehn (Kuehn 1997, p. 50).

design tool to illustrate texts for which this realistic form was pivotal cf. Heft 9, 1950; Heft 7, 1954; Heft 8/9, 1960 (Zentrale Kommission Fotografie der DDR 1947–1991; Beiler 1977). According to socialist realism, photographs had to be positive, future-oriented, taken from the workers' perspective, and had to present people as a collective (cf. Rehberg et al. 2012, p. 43) (cf. Figures 1 and 2).

This approach was challenged by some artistic documentary photographers, who committed themselves to document their social environment and create an alternative image of life under socialism in the GDR. They revealed and commented on the gap between the propagandised and existing socialism in East Germany. This is the reason researchers recognise the documentary style as the most prominent strand of artistic photography (cf. Hartewig and Lüdtke 2004).[2]

Figure 1. Carla Arnold, *Dem Unkraut zu Leibe* (Bearing down the weeds), 1960. Photo Credits: Carla Arnold.

At the beginning of the 1990s, scholars introduced the concept of *Ersatzöffentlichkeit*, a substitute public, to describe art that did not follow the ideological stipulations of the Socialist Unity Party.[3] The term has been widely discussed in relation to GDR literature, where writers either did not implement socialist realist principles or encoded their works in such a way that literature facilitated discourses on social issues, which were officially untenable in the East German political public sphere.[4] The SED Party rule made it impossible to discuss socially relevant and delicate topics in public. As a result, an open dialogue shifted into the private sphere, where the "real living experiences" of East Germans were discussed.[5] Social debates were initiated through authors "writing between the lines" and readers "reading between the lines", which made the formation of a substitute public sphere dependent on an interrelation of artists and audiences. Brigitte Reimann's unfinished novel *Franziska Linkerhand* (Franziska Linkerhand) (1974) (Reimann 1998), and Ulrich Plenzdorf's novel *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (The New Sorrows of Young W.) (1973) (Plenzdorf and Fursland 2015) are two examples

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[2]   Wulf Herzogenrath for example stresses a pre-eminence of social documentary photography as it stands in solidarity with the people. (Herzogenrath 1992, p. 30) Cf. (Domröse 2012, p. 21).
[3]   Cf. (Emmerich 1994; Leeder 2015; Herminghouse 1994; Domröse and Galerie 1992; Berg 2007; Moos 2004; Mittman 1994; Hohendahl and Herminghouse 1983; Bessel and Jessen 1996).
[4]   Cf. (Liebscher 2011, p. 146; Wallenburg and Cottbus 1990, p. 15; Müller 2006, p. 12; Reifarth 2003, p. 26).
[5]   Juliana Raupp, 'Kunstöffentlichkeit in der DDR als Gegenöffentlichkeit', in (Rittersporn et al. 2003, p. 235). Cf. (Raupp 2001).

of how texts criticised social conditions in the GDR. Both authors write from the perspective of the East German youth: Reimann's protagonist, Franziska Linkerhand, is a young architect whose ideals of urban planning are clashing with the actual requirements of socialist housing, and Plenzdorf's protagonist, Edgar, is breaking free from his rigid life in a small town to live as a misfit in Berlin. Both novels deal with daily life in the GDR and the youth's disappointment and resistance; they were published in the 1970s when a feeling of protest was becoming ostensible in the younger generation. German philologists Axel Goodbody, Dennis Tate, and Ian Wallace state that "[t]he continued failure of GDR journalism and the media to investigate social grievances' resulted in literature having to 'stimulate public debate and challenge traditional attitudes on social and political issues'".[6] Writers showed solidarity with their fellow countrymen and highlighted and discussed these matters through their works, in order to create a substitute discourse. German scholar David Bathrick claims that this substitute public sphere was on the one hand able "to break into or establish dialogue with the officially dominant voices", and on the other hand, could "establish semi-autonomous terrains of publicness, either partially within or wholly outside of official institutions" (Bathrick 1995, p. 34). Literature came to function as a grassroots opposition, but it could not take on actual politics (Segert 2002, p. 214).

Figure 2. Gerhard Kiesling, LPG (Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft) Fienstedt/ Bezirk Halle (LPG (Agricultural Production Cooperative) Fienstedt/ district Halle), 1953. Photo Credits: bpk/Gerhard Kiesling.

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[6] Axel Goodbody, Dennis Tate, Ian Wallace, 'The Failed Socialist Experiment: Culture in the GDR' (Burns et al. 1995, p. 180).

I propose that documentary photography in the GDR took up similar traits and also contributed to the creation of an alternative public sphere. By the end of the 1970s, this concept had pervaded society completely. Photographers were given a greater artistic freedom from 1971 through Erich Honecker's cultural programme *Breadth and Diversity*, which stated that, as long as artists possessed a strong socialist position, there should not be any taboos in terms of content and style.[7] This liberalisation of East Germany's cultural politics allowed for more direct and critical photographs to be published and exhibited. Nonetheless, Honecker's proclamation only meant a relative artistic freedom and photographers still had to use encoding strategies to convey their critical photographic message. Still, the less East German needs and wishes were dealt with, the more photographs gained importance and assumed "informal and communicative 'substitute functions'" (Jarausch 1999, p. 225).

In general, scholars differentiate three time periods in the GDR to characterise the political and social transformations that occurred over the span of forty years. The functions and purposes of official photography altered accordingly to these developments. During the first phase, the regime needed to establish itself and photography was given a motivating and educational character to consolidate the new state and its principles—photography had an ideological role. This period came to a close with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The second phase, which ended in the mid-1970s, was a process of consolidation, in which art functioned as a means to illustrate the existing socialist state (Rehberg et al. 2012, p. 41). Official images focussed on the socialist society and its surrounding environment, coupled with the achievements of communism, such as newly constructed prefabricated housing or the triumphs of the labour force. The state utilised photography solely as a documentary means; it was not considered an artistic medium. Nonetheless, the SED regime encouraged amateurs to take up the camera by organising amateur photography exhibitions and competitions. In this second phase, artistic documentary photographers began to critically examine the regime with the idea of reforming the state (Schmid 2014, p. 180). This analytical modus operandi resulted in the third period, the 'generation of the autonomous', a term borrowed from art historian Sabine Schmid, which is characterised by the rejection and dismissal of the GDR's political system altogether. In this last phase, from the mid-1970s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, an experimental photography style that was more self-referential and conceptual came to the fore to express this attitude of denial towards the state. Schmid identifies the following three separate approaches in this third generation: firstly, the reflection through (self-) portraits; secondly, the depiction of subjective realities; and lastly, what she refers to as a paraphrasing of socialist realism often accompanied by an ironic undertone.[8] (Cf. Figure 3) Harald Hauswald's work, which I examine in this paper, can be attributed to the latter two categories; the photographer portrayed daily life in the GDR and through codes wryly mirrored the totalitarian regime.

The photograph *Hans-Otto-Straße, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg*, 1983 (Figure 3) depicts a closed shop entrance; the window is covered by a sheet that says "*Wir sind umgezogen! Nach gegenüber*" (We have moved! To the other side). This slogan is a pun and for GDR citizens; 'to the other side' does not refer to the other side of the road, but to West Germany. In the 1980s, the number of people applying for an emigration permit had steadily increased. Hauswald's photograph directly referred to this development. There is a tragic–ironic undertone in this image, GDR citizens knew the photographer wanted to make a connection to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), but in reality, the shop owner probably had just moved to the other side of the street, because most emigration permits were denied.

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[7]　„Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben. Das betrifft sowohl die Fragen der inhaltlichen Gestaltung als auch des Stils–kurz gesagt, die Fragen dessen, was man die künstlerische Meisterschaft nennt." Erich Honecker at the fourth meeting of the central committee of the SED, December 1971. (Schiermeyer 2015, p. 238)

[8]　Cf. (Schmid 2014, pp. 201–9).

Figure 3. Harald Hauswald, Hans-Otto-Straße, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg (Hans-Otto-Straße, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg), 1983. Photo Credits: Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen/Harald Hauswald.

This photograph belongs to the series *Everyday Life,* which offers a multi-layered portrait of life in East Berlin engaging with a range of topics from interpersonal relationships, street encounters, concerts, and football games, to the punk and protest movements in the 1980s. Hauswald's pictures were predominantly taken in the streets of East Germany. The series does not comprise a fixed number of photographs, instead he photographed everything that he came across, because to him, everything was daily life in East Germany.[9] The series was assembled retrospectively in the 1990s for the image database of the 'Ostkreuz–Agency of Photographers' that Hauswald co-founded. With his series, he illustrated the chasm between propaganda and reality in the GDR with a critical stance and 'sarcastic sensitivity'.[10] Hauswald created allegories that made this gap between propagandised and actual life tangible, and used visual codes that juxtaposed the official visual language of the SED state. Photography was a means to resist the SED state and its oppression. His images were circulating in churches, the private flats of ordinary people, artist circles, and in West German magazines. The audience decoded Hauswald's photographs and subsequently engaged in a discourse centring on life in the authoritarian state. The photographer states that GDR citizens were sensitised to what was subject to censorship and that artists tried to circumnavigate it.[11] This alternative public did not just consist of artists, oppositional groups, youth groups, and the East German intelligentsia, but in general all citizens that aimed to participate in critical debates about the Party's politics.

To demonstrate how documentary photography functioned as a substitute public, I will discuss individual photographs from Hauswald's *Everyday Life* series and juxtapose them to the different public spheres that existed in the GDR. In order to retrace the development of the distinct public spheres, I

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9   Harald Hauswald in email correspondence with the author, 9 June 2018.
10   Cf. Christoph Diekmann, *Preface*, in (Hauswald 2013).
11   Interview with Harald Hauswald, 29 December 2017.

introduce German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' concept of *Öffentlichkeit*[12] (public sphere), from which the idea of an *Ersatzöffentlichkeit* in East Germany is derived. I focus on images from the last fifteen years of the GDR, even though the notion of documentary photography as a substitute public sphere began with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, as thenceforward practitioners took on a perspective to inside (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig and Jansong 1993, p. 19).

2. *Öffentlichkeit* Versus *Ersatzöffentlichkeit* in the GDR

Scholars differentiate between three public spheres in the GDR: the first is a "state-controlled, prominent public sphere" or a "socialist public sphere", which can be defined as an arena for shaping 'proletarian consciousness' (Meyer and Schröder 1988, p. 111; Bathrick 1995, p. 47). It is juxtaposed with a "non-representative public sphere", solely concerned with the East German population, which is essentially a substitute public that German philologist Jürgen Schröder then further subdivides into a "church public sphere"[13], on the one hand, and a "private, interpersonal public sphere" on the other.[14] German scholar Marc Silberman goes one step further by subdividing the private public sphere into a "plethora of private groups, artists circles, and subcultural enclaves", and argues that this open approach is more productive when discussing the subject matter of *Öffentlichkeit* in the GDR (Silberman 1997, p. 10). This classification reflects in the exhibiting practice of Hauswald's images, which were never officially presented before the Berlin wall came down but were only shown in churches and private circles. Hauswald described the church public sphere as the only realm to verbalise oppositional ideas (Thümmler 2009). In addition, he emphasised youth clubs and private apartments as places for people to come together and incite social action. A third public sphere comprised West German television that could be received in large parts of East Germany and was condoned by the SED from the 1970s, which conveyed information that GDR citizens did not normally have access to (Meyer and Schröder 1988, p. 111).

Since the reunification of Germany, Habermas' notion of a bourgeois public sphere as a "self-conscious collective that demanded the 'rule of reason'"[15] forms the basis for the discussion on works of art that did not follow socialist realist regulations imposed on art and/or had a critical message and so could be differentiated from official works of art in the GDR. Habermas discusses the development of the public sphere, which is tied specifically to democratic systems, in his publication *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Habermas 1989). Since its publication in 1971, Habermas' thoughts have been picked up, scrutinised, and revised (Cf. Calhoun 1992; Gripsrud 2011; Emden and Midgley 2012; Habermas et al. 2004; Gerhards and Neidhardt 1990; Peters and Wessler 2008; Laberenz 2003); he has been critiqued for his idealistic characterisation of the bourgeois public sphere, thereby disregarding other, alternative forms of public realms (Cf. Negt and Kluge 1993), and for failing to account for democracies in late-capitalist societies (Cf. Outhwaite 2009), or to address the issue of gender (Cf. Calhoun 1992, pp. 109–42). Thus, the question arises of why his model serves as a starting point for investigations into East German art if the official public sphere in the GDR juxtaposed Habermas' model in opposition? On the one hand, I argue that Habermas was first to discuss the concept of a public sphere and subsequent research is rooted in his initial analysis. Furthermore, the GDR's private public sphere took on features that are associated with his notion of a bourgeois public sphere; for example, societal issues

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[12] I follow the accruement and transformation of public sphere in Germany, as I view Jürgen Habermas' *The structural transformation of the public sphere* as the starting point of an analysis of public sphere, which does include European semantics of the word 'public', but is specifically rooted in the German language area.

[13] The church assumed the role of an alternative public sphere in the GDR. It undermined the monopoly on truth of the SED state by inviting ideologically non-conform artists and writers as well as discussing controversial topics. Cf. e.g. (Wolle 1998, pp. 247–55).

[14] Schröder, Jürgen, '*Literatur als Ersatzöffentlichkeit? Gesellschaftliche Probleme im Spiegel der Literatur*', in (Meyer and Schröder 1988, p. 111).

[15] Quoted in (Gripsrud 2011). Cf. (Forst 2001).

have been negotiated in an East German private sphere, so that it forms an antithesis to an official, ideologically driven first public sphere. On the other hand, the triumph of capitalism over socialism allows for the assumption that more emphasis has been laid on scholarly work coming from First World countries, which coincides with German literary scholar Peter Hohendahl's observation that Western researchers "tend to assume the universal validity of their own structures and institutions and thereby deny the potential value of a socialist tradition" (Hohendahl 1995). Perhaps it is more fruitful to use the Habermasian concept in an unbiased and evocative way, as East German scholars Simone Barck, Christoph Classen, and Thomas Heimann suggest, to enable a clear differentiation to the public sphere in East Germany.[16]

In that sense, GDR literary critic Robert Weimann defines the socialist public sphere as an "agent of socialism" and "a moment of organisation in socialist living and thinking processes"[17], whilst Bathrick describes it as a forum for shaping "proletarian" consciousness (Bathrick 1995). However, both scholars argue that this socialist public sphere is an ideal notion of *Öffentlichkeit*, which did not come into effect in East Germany (Cf. Silberman 1997, p. 7). Instead, it is more helpful to use Hohendahl's terminology of the "public sphere of the SED", which sought to negotiate between the Party and the state on one side, and the Party and East Germans on the other side (Hohendahl 1995, p. 45). According to Hohendahl, the SED was supposed to

> "organise the debates among its members about the policies of the state bureaucracy, but also the debates among the citizens at large about their political interests as well as their social and economic needs. This public sphere of the Party had two typical features: first, it was hierarchically structured in accordance with the hierarchy of the party organization; second, it left no room for competing public spheres. The Party was expected to lead and by extension to control the public space; by that I do not mean only the administration of the state but also the public communication among the citizens." [18]

In the GDR, public places such as the Alexanderplatz in Berlin-Mitte, were an important means for the SED to legitimise its rule, and to educate and control its citizens. Their function was to gather and to 'serve' working-class people. Public places were meant to foster the internalisation and strengthening of socialism in the public sphere, so that workers would be able to act collectively and strive for the same socialist goals, but also monitor each other and keep each other in line. Stefan Wolle states that "(t)he public discussion must not solely focus on the Stasi as it formed only part of the perfected security, disciplining and surveillance structure. [. . .] Deliberate denunciation of colleagues, neighbours and fellow students shaped everyday life as much as the drafting of extended reports."[19] Still, public areas were predominantly a means for the SED to control East Germans.

Under the GDR regime, public meetings would revolve around the Party's ideology. Social events in public spaces were obligatory mass activities, where the Party could reinforce its rule and people could recognise each other as part of a collective 'working class' entity. Historian Esther von Richthofen speaks about the effort of the SED to turn citizens into "socialist personalities" through cultural events (cf. Von Richthofen 2009). However, the citizens were not a determinant in society, even though workers were the proclaimed ruling class. This is one explanation for the increasing discontent of East Germans, as the growing gap between proclaimed and existing living conditions in the GDR became more apparent with time, and eventually led to mass protests that contributed to the collapse of the

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16 Simone Barck, Christoph Classen and Thomas Heimann, 'The Fettered Media. Controlling Public Debate', in (Jarausch 1999, p. 224).
17 Robert Weimann, 'Kunst und Öffentlichkeit in der Sozialistischen Gesellschaft. Zum Stand der Vergesellschaftung künstlerischer Verkehrsformen', in (Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin 1979, p. 221).
18 (Hohendahl 1995, p. 45)
19 „Die Konzentration der öffentlichen Debatte auf die Stasi darf nicht den Blick dafür verstellen, daß sie lediglich einen Teil der perfektionierten Sicherheits-, Disziplinierungs- und Überwachungsstruktur bildete. [. . .] Die gezielte Denunziation von Kollegen, Nachbarn, Mitschülern und Kommilitonen prägte ebenso den Alltag wie das ständige Verfassen breit angelegter Berichte." (Wolle 1998, p. 153)

dictatorship in 1989 (cf. Rudolph et al. 2015; Bahrmann 2017). Public events functioned as part of a surveillance system in which the Stasi[20] could control participants, and the citizens could monitor each other. Hauswald had up to 35 unofficial collaborators of the Ministry for State Security assigned to him who documented every move and conducted random house searches. The photographer felt impotent and helpless in the face of this power exercise. I suggest that the loss of control and the invasion of his personal space is also partly why Hauswald took up a camera; 'Ostkreuz-Agency' colleague Werner Mahler asserts that he used the photographs to set something against the state.[21] Hauswald claims that because there was only one officially stipulated way to portray socialist life in the GDR, he used photography to document the actually existing living conditions.[22] Moreover, as a means to resist state oppression, he never labelled or categorised his photo negatives.

Hauswald's photograph titled *Fahnenflucht* ('Desertion') (Figure 4) documents a GDR mass event, namely the May Day Parade, which was mandatory for all citizens. Hauswald portrays a group of young men holding GDR flags in the pouring rain as part of a May Day celebration. Indirectly, it can be understood as an illustration of the slow downfall of the socialist state: Hauswald depicts young men who do not march proudly with the East German flag but run for shelter from the rain. He creates an image that contrasts the official SED ideology and by naming the photograph 'Desertion', he cynically comments on the future of the GDR, as the citizens dissolve away from Alexanderplatz instead of defying the rain, which can be interpreted as external conditions that threatened communist rule. Karin Hartewig states that socialist genre images served political agitation and were evidence of the state's achievements (Hartewig and Lüdtke 2004, p. 11). The first of May was the International Struggle Day of the Proletariat and for that official images depicted either group photographs of enthusiastic workers or portrait photographs of heroic (and predominantly) young workers. The agitative function of the photograph was meant to be mirrored in its composition so that East German citizens could identify with the state's ideology; Beiler speaks about partisanship as an aesthetic quality (cf. Beiler 1959). The composition of Hauswald's May Day image challenges this interpretation; the illustration of an important socialist subject matter in a style that defies socialist realist principles suggests the reading of this image as a means to resist state ideology.

Another important parameter in the analysis of the GDR's public sphere is the distinction between public and private interests, more specifically the differentiation between individual and collective concerns or activities. In order to avoid state surveillance, citizens had to retreat into the private sphere. Political scientist James Scott differentiates between a hidden and public transcript as follows: suppressed groups produce a distinctive set of communication tools with which criticism is voiced in private (Scott 1990, pp. xi–xii). Hidden transcripts challenge the public transcript, whose function it is to verify the rule of the dominating group (Scott 1990, p. 18). In accordance with Scott, the first Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Günter Gaus, coined the term 'niche society' with regards to the East German people, which describes a retreat into small private areas (Gaus 1983, p. 156ff). Interestingly, the GDR encyclopaedia defines public sphere as "the human population outside of their personal, private sphere".[23] Hence, under the stipulations of the SED, individuals form a collective as soon as they set foot into the public. The Party did not view its citizens as political protagonists, rather it constituted itself as the sole enunciator and representative of working class' interests. Therefore, the needs of the citizenry were not discussed publicly but were predefined by the political system to ensure its preservation, and as such were forced upon the people. The same accounts for socialist realism which was not based on the perceptions of needs of the citizens but was

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[20] The Stasi, short for *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry for State Security) was the GDR's secret police founded in the 1950s. Its main objective was the Socialist Unity Party's preservation of power by means of spying and intimidation of GDR citizens. Cf. http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/stasi/218372/definition (7 June 2018).
[21] Interview with Werner Mahler, 11 October 2017.
[22] Interview with Harald Hauswald, 29 December 2017.
[23] Öffentlichkeit, die; 1. Die Bevölkerung außerhalb ihrer persönlichen, privaten Sphäre […]. (Kempcke 1984, p. 839). Cf. (Müller-Römer 1968).

nonetheless articulated in their name (Groys 2014, 9).[24] Personal fulfilment and contentment of the country's population was supposed to occur in the public sphere through work, and cultural and sport mass events. All of this adds up to the formation of a substitute public sphere that eventually impacted on the official public sphere of the GDR and aimed to affect the politics of the regime (cf. Rühle 2003, p. 16). As German scholar Mary Fulbrook rightfully claims, criticism of the SED's politics was to some extent possible if not desired as part of the construction of the socialist state in the early years, but the last decade of the GDR was characterised by an unwillingness of the regime to acknowledge, let alone debate the societal, environmental, and economic issues that were intensifying (Fulbrook 2005, p. 268).

Figure 4. Harald Hauswald, 'Fahnenflucht', 1. Mai Demonstration auf dem Alexanderplatz ('Desertion', May Day March at Alexanderplatz), 1987. Photo Credits: Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen/ Harald Hauswald.

3. GDR Documentary Photography as a Substitute Public Sphere

Öffentlichkeit was a crucial factor in the production, dissemination, and mediation of East German art works that could, in retrospect, be attributed to a substitute public sphere. Bathrick states that "the area of culture and in particular literature came to provide an invaluable forum for articulating the needs for pluralism and for actively organising the groundwork for a more democratic public sphere" (Bathrick 1995, p. 30). Scholars denote artistic documentary photographs particularly from the 1970s and 1980s, as a "visual counter-public" (cf. Schiermeyer 2015, p. 28; Hartewig and Lüdtke 2004, p. 9). They were generally perceived as authentic by the public and the documentary style bestowed them with authenticity which can also be attributed to the role of the photographer as "one of them". The artistic documentary photographer shows solidarity with the GDR citizens by visually emphasising the discrepancies between propagandised and actual life circumstances in East Germany in a personal manner. This notion draws reference to the concept of '*Autorenfotografie*' (author photography) which brings attention to the subjective viewpoint of the photographer.[25] East

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[24] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and beyond/by Boris Groys; Translated by Charles Rougle.*, [New] ed. (Groys 2014), 9. Cf. (Groys 2008).

[25] The term was originally coined by art historian Klaus Honnef but is a widely known concept in German photo theory. (Honnef et al. 1979, pp. 8–32)//Cf. (Barron et al. 2009, p. 198; Domröse 2012, p. 174).

German photographer Evelyn Richter emphasises that, in order to take authentic photographs, an ethos of the independent practitioner is essential (cf. Barron et al. 2009, p. 198). In so doing, author photographers questioned the authority of the state (Martin 2001, p. 19); unsurprisingly, Hauswald identifies as an *Autorenfotograf*. East German photographer Ursula Arnold writes that "[t]he authorities wanted propaganda and enthusiasm–which no one except the party functionaries believed in–so I (...) made a commitment to tell the truth as I saw it (Betts 2010, p. 199)." This is why art historian Gabriele Muschter defines this documentary approach not as a photographic style, but as an artistic method that highlights the status of the photographer as an author.[26] Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that there was no clear demarcation between official and freelance photographers. Most GDR photographers were members of the *Verband Bildender Künstler* (VBK) (the GDR's artist association), so that they could receive funding for projects, and permission to travel and work on assignment. This allowed them to earn a living and to pursue their freelance projects which would later be allocated to a substitute public sphere. Richter's phrase "*für die Kiste produzieren*" (producing for the box) is indicative that freelance projects were usually not part of official exhibitions, but rather shown in private circles. Hauswald applied to become a member in the VBK numerous times to be able to travel, and he was finally accepted in 1989.

In order to unveil the existing contradictions between propagandised and real existing socialism, artistic documentary photographers employed codes that facilitated the above mentioned 'reading between the lines' of the audience. Thus, sensitive subjects could still be portrayed and discussed. East Germans were attuned to censorship and, according to Hauswald, trained each other to detect and decipher codes.[27] Accordingly, East German art historian and curator Ulrich Domröse claims that the people were sensitised to read images and detect the messages that implied "hidden political statements or referred to controversial topics" (Domröse 2012, p. 21). Literary scholar Gert Reifarth outlines two distinctive encoding strategies, namely metaphor and ambiguity, to create complex images that levelled criticism against the totalitarian state and to (critically) comment on it (Reifarth 2003, p. 40). The method of coding had different objectives: it was crucial if works were to be published official state media, or if the artist aimed to reach a wider audience that went beyond their personal niche, and also to avoid the SED's persecution.

Metaphors were easy to recognise and to understand by a social group that shared the same values, history, and culture. The pictorial representation of social issues was implicit and beyond suspicion. Harald Hauswald uses metaphors as a stylistic element in his series *Everyday Life*. His photograph *Governmental convoy, Wilhem-Pieck-Straße, Berlin-Mitte* (Figure 5), for example, illustrates the saying "not practicing what one preaches". The aphorism's translation into German is "preaching water whilst drinking wine" (*Wasser predigen und Wein trinken*), which underlines the metaphoric character of the photograph. Figure 5 depicts three cars driving on a street in front of a wall, which has a sign on that reads "ES LEBE DER MARXISMUS-LENINISMUS" (Long live Marxism-Leninism). The luxury limousines are a governmental convoy and are from the Swedish automotive manufacturer Volvo. They were exclusively intended for Party officials and not available for purchase for the rest of the population. East German citizens were well aware of the existing discrepancy between what GDR officials and politicians preached and practiced, and they talked about it behind closed doors. The photograph therefore addresses the chasm between state-proclaimed and real-existing socialism.

Similarly, Figure 6 depicts a dilapidated house with a neon sign reading '*Wohnkultur*' (Housing Culture) in the foreground. The image is oxymoronic and can be linked to the GDR's housing programme that was initiated by the SED's central committee in 1973. Under the slogan "*Jedem seine Wohnung*" (To each their own home), the programme was concerned with solving the housing shortage until 1990, which failed to be achieved. The SED promoted prefabricated housing schemes

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26   Muschter quoted in (Schmid 2014, p. 241).
27   Interview with Harald Hauswald, 29 December 2017.

(predominantly on the outskirts of the city centre) whilst letting *Gründerzeit* houses (in the city centre) decay. This photograph is a metaphor for living standards in real existing socialism, where a future-oriented domestic culture is promoted that is radically divergent from the housing situation captured in the image. The rhetoric of this photograph highlights the living circumstances in the GDR. The text in the image and its caption point to a cultural, political, and social background specific to the SED state. The reading of the photographs does therefore depend on the knowledge of the viewer but also on the knowledge of the photographer to use signs detectable by the intended audience. Hauswald creates photographic messages, to deploy literary critic Roland Barthes' notion[28], that allow the audience to incite critical discourses on the matter of East German daily life. In this case, he creates a debate on living circumstances in the GDR and how the Party's politics neither solved the housing shortage nor redeveloped inner cities. Instead, Hauswald raises the question of what housing culture actually means, for East Germany's officials as well as for citizens. In addition, the photograph *Dimitroffstraße, Schönhauser Allee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg* challenges the SED regime and can thus be interpreted as a means to resist.

Figure 5. Harald Hauswald, *Regierungskonvoi, Wilhem-Pieck-Straße, Berlin-Mitte* (Governmental convoy, Wilhem-Pieck-Straße, Berlin-Mitte), from the series *Everyday Life*, 1980. Photo Credits: Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen/Harald Hauswald.

Moreover, ambiguity and allusion were important stylistic devices used for coding the underlying message in photographs. Philosopher Sebastian Kleinschmidt talks about an "aesthetics of innuendo"—texts (and I argue photographs as well) possess a 'self-aesthetic', defined as an elaborate ciphering of thought through "indirect reflections, shift of location and time, borrowed garment and tongue, encrypted language and the art to talk between the lines" (Rüther 1997, p. 50). Furthermore, the art work always draws reference to its creator and to its audience at the same time, which Kleinschmidt designates as a 'reception aesthetic' (Ibid.). The concept of allusion relies on the relationship of photographer and audience. Both entities have to communicate within a system of innuendos to avoid

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28 Literary critic Roland Barthes coined the term photographic message, which is composed of a denoted and a connoted message. The former is described as "pure and simple denotation of reality" whilst the latter refers to social and cultural manners. Cf. (Barthes 1984, p. 28).

state persecution and repression. The photographer hints at and the viewer is sensitised to detect and understand the signs; a prerequisite for this kind of communication is the shared social and cultural background. This relates to cultural theorist Stuart Hall's method of encoding and decoding[29], where shared cultural references form the framework for the photographer to encode and the viewer to decode the images. The audience knew what the artist was aiming at as both shared the same culture and set of values. Allusions were enough to suggest the artist's underlying critique.

Figure 6. Harald Hauswald, *Dimitroffstraße, Schönhauser Allee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg*, (Dimitroffstraße, Schönhauser Allee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg), 1985. Photo Credits: Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen/ Harald Hauswald.

Innuendos were relatively subtle but became more apparent in the last decade of the GDR, firstly, because of the greater artistic freedom that resulted from the SED's cultural policy, and secondly, because of the dismissal of the totalitarian state through the "generation of the autonomous". Hauswald's photograph of a sewing machine billboard (Figure 7) is an example of how ambiguity became increasingly explicit. It presents the advertising panel of a closed shop which reads "*Reparaturen sämtl. Systeme*"[30] (Mending all systems). By photographing the advertising when the shop is closed and so removing it from its original context, Hauswald referred to the political system of the GDR. Citizens understood that "Mending all systems" was alluding to the totalitarian state they were living in. The photographer enabled a discourse on the political system of the totalitarian state and gave the audience food for thought that might incite action which is why this photograph can also be understood as a means to oppose the regime.

Reading and working between the lines was the guiding principle for both artist and audience and it is still internalised today; East Germans still refer to it and acknowledge it as a common means of communication. This mirrors art historian Horst Bredekamp's concept of the image act in which the image as an actor impacts the feeling, thinking, and acting of the viewer (Bredekamp 2017,

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29　Stuart Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding', in (Simon During 1999, pp. 507–17).
30　'Sämtl.' (abbreviation for '*sämtliche*' in German, having a strong connotation of 'comprehensively' or 'each and every' does not translate well into English in this case).

p. 33ff). The photograph *Advertising board of a sewing machine shop, Pappeallee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg* communicates with the viewer, the writing on the advertisement board addresses the audience directly and almost seems like a call to action.

Figure 7. Harald Hauswald, *Werbetafel eines Nähmaschinenladens, Pappelallee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg* (Advertising board of a sewing machine shop, Pappeallee, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg), 1984. Photo Credits: Ostkreuz–Agentur der Fotografen/Harald Hauswald.

4. Summary and Outlook

Nowadays, artistic documentary photographs from the GDR have become important contemporary historical documents, and it is this photography style that, in retrospect, has been characterised as the "better photography tradition" (Hartewig and Lüdtke 2004, p. 9). Artistic documentary photographers were committed to portraying their social environment and addressing societal needs, and so aimed to reveal the chasm between ideology and real living circumstances in East Germany. Even though photography had a different status than literature, it utilised the same techniques to deal with the existing discrepancies in the authoritarian state, and thus facilitated the development of a substitute public by employing a "[f]orest of [s]igns"[31]. The concept of a substitute public has been in play predominantly to discuss literary work from the GDR, but I suggest that artistic documentary photography shall be investigated under that lens as well. It is precisely the medium's claim to veracity that made it an important means for the photographer, as well as for the audience

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[31] Quoted after Alf Lüdtke, 'Kein Entkommen? Bilder-Codes und eigen-sinniges Fotografieren; eine Nachlese.' in (Hartewig and Lüdtke 2004, p. 235).

to critically engage with the SED regime. Through signs or codes, documentary photographers commented on the state and citizens were able to discuss the depicted societal matters. In so doing, they created key documents that chronicle the multifaceted history of society and everyday life in East Germany. Artistic documentary photography took up part of the empty space left by a non-existing public sphere in a Habermasian sense, it addressed societal issues caused by social and political stagnation in the GDR. For studies on GDR photography, to examine a documentary practice as an *Ersatzöffentlichkeit* offers a new opportunity to discern the complex social structure in East Germany. The idea of art as a substitute public has been an important source for the photographic practice of various practitioners. Hauswald's selected photographs from the series *Everyday Life* serve as a representative of this type and there are numerous photographers whose œuvre would benefit a re-reading under the substitute public lens. The fact that Hauswald served in different alternative public spheres allowed him to create a visual imagery outside socialist realist principles and through the use of codes to directly communicate with the audience.

Looking at artistic documentary photographs in this manner offers the possibility to detach them from the interpretation of being illustrations of an historic totalitarian regime or merely a means to opposition. Instead, it is an opportunity to reappraise them as artistic documents, which I believe contributed to the mobilisation of citizens in in 1989 and subsequently, the downfall of the SED regime. The idea of documentary photography as a substitute public could prove vital for research on the social and cultural history of the GDR as to understand the dissenting role of documentary photography in East German society. It is valuable to investigate how criticisms of the state were mediated in artistic documentary photography, and how GDR citizens used these images to incite debates and to learn about the coded visual language utilised. Furthermore, I believe it is crucial to decode these photographs before they become illegible and to make them accessible to younger (East) German generation as well as to a non-East-German audience. Hauswald's photographs are nowadays considered historical artefacts that need to be preserved, which is why the *Federal Foundation of the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship* and *Ostkreuz* engage in a project that archives and digitises Hauswald's photo negative stock. To look at his images through the lens of the substitute public they helped facilitate, underlines the artistic character of the photographs and focusses on their aesthetic and stylistic qualities. To understand these photographs as an accumulation of codes and to be able to decipher them through this approach of a substitute public adds a new layer of meaning to these images.

With the collapse of the GDR, the question also arises of how the practice of documentary photographers driven by political circumstances changed, and whether their style and approach to photography continues. Does the artistic impulse that led to the formation of a substitute public remain? Did artistic documentary photographers develop a specific tradition whose roots can be traced back to the GDR, and if so, how can it be seen today? Is this attribute still detectable in their images or has it transformed accordingly with the change of the political system?[32] With particular regard to the 'Ostkreuz Agency', of which Hauswald is a founding member, and which assembles photographers from East and West Germany, as well as Eastern and Western Europe, the question arises whether a younger generation in the agency is influenced by this tradition, and if so, how it impacts on their photo works and creates the potential for a critique of contemporary mores.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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[32] I investigate this question in depth in my ongoing doctoral thesis 'Ostkreuz–Agency of Photographers. Tracing the Influence of GDR Social Documentary Photography in Contemporary Practice'.

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