Co-Opting Childhood and Obscuring Ideology in Mosaik von Hannes Hegen, 1959-1974

Published by

Comics of the New Europe: Reflections and Intersections.
Leuven University Press, 2023.
Project MUSE. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.111923.

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The implementation of socialist realism, an accessible rendering of proletarian experience, as the state-sanctioned artistic style at the writer's conference in the East German industrial town of Bitterfeld (1959) and the construction of the Berlin Wall two years later (1961) transformed comic books published in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Following these events, editors, educators, and the Free German Youth (FDJ) demanded the overhaul of *Mosaik von Hannes Hegen* (Mosaic by Hannes Hegen, henceforth *Mosaik*) and *Atze* to foreground educational and ideological components and fend off the imperialist influence of the Walt Disney comics popular in West Germany. As such, children's publications combined with state ideology to enable the politicization of the supposed ideology free-zone of the domestic, private sphere. In 1966, the FDJ wrote that, although a fundamentally new direction for *Mosaik* was impossible due to the peculiarities of its content, the comic required substantial improvement as the motivations of the main characters must be firmly demonstrated, in word and deed, to aid the poor and exploited against the ruling class and their lackeys (BArch DY 24-1585 60).[1] Of course, this does not suggest that ideological and propagandistic content was absent from East German comics prior to this. Rather, the Berlin Wall put children's development in the hands of educators, superficially at least, and aspired to create the desired "socialist personality:" respect for the collective way of life, social engagement, and a belief in the Marxist worldview of historical and economic developments (Wierling 157). Adopted and adapted from Soviet pedagogy, this approach to children's development in the GDR was emblematic of socialist education in the early 1960s and dominated the FDJ's youth policy (Saunders 11-12).

In mid-1955, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) issued the *Verordnung zum Schutz der Jugend* [Regulations for the Protection of Youth], banning the possession, sale, and distribution of western comics. Tightening of the inner-German border in the late

1950s and the Berlin Wall in 1961 created a seemingly impermeable barrier between children and western comics and culture. However, neither this apparent lack of access to western comics, nor the FDJ's focus on ideological education, discouraged children's desire for comics. Only three months after the regulations were issued, *Mosaik* launched with an initial print run of 150,000. By the third issue, this number increased to 250,000 copies and by 1962-63 print runs surpassed 300,000 copies per month (Lettkemann and Scholz 26, 35). Despite this, authorities thought the comic resembled the *Schundliteratur* [trashy literature] characteristic of western comic publications, too closely echoing the Disney comics from which their creator(s) drew inspiration. (Jo)Hannes Hegen(barth) and his staff at the *Mosaikkollektiv* [*Mosaik* collective], established in 1957 to assist Hegen as the comic transitioned from a quarterly to monthly publication schedule (BArch DY 26-114), were accused of having bourgeois backgrounds, potentially posing a threat to East German socialism. *Mosaik* was thus threatened with cancellation over its perceived lack of socialist ideological content (BStU, MfS, HA II Abt. 3, AP, Nr. 10321/64).[2] The debut of the *Amerika-Serie* in 1969, however, saw the state-run publisher expand *Mosaik*'s production with renewed educational focus appropriate to the construction of socialism and the representation of working-class experience. The conflation of the FDJ's educational, ideological control and readers' continued desire for comics provided the regime an opportunity to include state-sanctioned propaganda in the otherwise compartmentalized niche of the domestic space.

While the primary objective of East German comic publications was to entertain, the regime increasingly understood the importance and capacity of comics to develop the socialist personalities necessary for the perpetuation of the East German state. This essay looks to stories published in *Mosaik* with an eye toward the ways in which the FDJ and the editorial regime harnessed the interests of children, and East German society broadly, to promote the state's ideological agenda. In its own way, *Mosaik* was every bit as ideological as its counterpart, *Atze*. However, *Mosaik* concealed its ideological content in the palatable form of the fantastic adventures of its protagonists. *Mosaik* thus gave the impression of the absence of socialist ideology, allowing for the penetration of the domestic niche. Though this perceived lack of overt ideological content drew the ire of the publisher and editors, that same perception afforded *Mosaik* a degree of popularity with a readership more interested in entertainment than education, unmatched by *Atze*'s undisguised ideological machinations.

Notably under discussion here are the *Weltraum–* [outer-space] and *Amerika–Serie* beginning in 1958 and 1969, respectively. American literary scholar Catrin Gersdorf argues that the FDJ considered the stories and settings in *Mosaik*, prior to the *Amerika-Serie*, incapable of adequately depicting socialist class struggle (36). The *Amerika-Serie* drew on long-standing ideas about the frontier and the American West in the (East)

German imaginary, particularly the inversion of the cowboy/Indian dynamic present in the novels of nineteenth century German author, Karl May, and *Indianerfilme* ["Red Western films"] popular throughout the Soviet Bloc. Similarly, the *Weltraum-Serie* demonstrated a previously unseen level of ideology compared to early issues written by Hegen himself. Published a few months after the successful launch of the Soviet *Sputnik* 1 satellite in October 1957, the *Weltraum-Serie* exploited recent interest in space exploration and East Germany's fascination with science fiction, modernity, and technology in service of the state. Nor were these preoccupations limited to the GDR. Benita Blessing suggests that the Soviets believed children were better served by entertainment reflecting school subjects, like outer space and atomic energy as indicators of Soviet superiority, as opposed to the fantasies dominating children's media (253). Significantly, the FDJ encouraged linkages between comics and the classroom (BArch DY 24-23769) and, like their western European and American counterparts, these comics formed part of the supposed "free" time arguably left unorganized and unmonitored by the state. This provided comics the ability to act and educate on the FDJ's behalf in the perceived regime-free space of the private sphere, though this was only partially accepted by the readership.

The Space Race, Technology, and the Cold War

Mosaik's first stories saw the *Digedags*, collectively referring to *Mosaik*'s goblin-like trio of Dig, Dag, and Digedag, in the South Seas, aboard pirate ships, visiting Imperial Rome, and finally bringing them to a rocket ship landed in the middle of the desert. Created by Hegen in 1955 and written and illustrated by him until the formation of the *Mosaikkollektiv* two years later, these characters provided *Verlag Neues Leben* [New Life Publishing] with an alternative to the Disney comics popular in both halves of divided Germany (Pfeiffer 128). Reflecting an art style combining that of Disney (Pfeiffer 127 and Gersdorf 36) with elements of the Belgian Marcinelle School, notable for *Asterix* later in the decade, the *Digedags* were physically similar, though differentiated by their respective heights, hair color, and the shape of their bulbous noses (BArch DY 26-173). Together, they were emblematic of the (East) German tricolor: Dig, the shortest and most rotund, had black hair; Dag, of middle height, was blonde; while Digedag, the tallest of the three, was a redhead. The *Digedags* remained the primary characters in *Mosaik* until Hegen left the publication in 1974, taking those characters with him, following the *Amerika-Serie* (BArch DC 26-114).

The *Weltraum-Serie* began in December 1958 as Dig, Dag, and their travelling companion, Sinus Tangentus, a scrawny, bald Roman wearing philosopher's robes and whose name refers to trigonometric functions indicative of his knowledge of math and science, are whisked off into space. Whereas the *Digedags* hobnobbed with royalty

and hunted treasure in earlier stories, not entirely unlike Disney's Uncle Scrooge and his nephews after whose adventures the *Digedags* were modelled (BArch DY 26-173), the *Weltraum-Serie* was a concerted effort by the *Mosaikkollektiv* to incorporate state ideology before the *Bitterfelder Weg* [Bitterfeld Way], the policy emerging from the Bitterfeld conference to develop a new national socialist culture emblematic of worker experience, made it mandate.

In this first issue of the *Weltraum-Serie*, there is a celebration of engineering and science consistent with the perceived technology cult and the pride of place enjoyed by modernity in East Germany and throughout the Soviet Bloc, suggested by historian Eli Rubin (32). Dolores Augustine similarly argues that *Mosaik* presented technological development as the higher purpose of socialism, performed with the comic's central idealism (244). Importantly, the comic makes obvious to the *Digedags*, and thus the child-readership, the operation and possibilities of space and interstellar travel with, as Augustine describes, "textbook-like explanations" (232). This explanation begins almost as soon as the *Digedags* board the spaceship [*Raumschiff*]. Prior to brief introductions to the captain and Bhur Yham, a head-scientist aboard the craft described later as "Unserer bester Mann" [our best man], from the planet Neos, an accident leads Dig, Dag, and Sinus to explanations of a fire extinguisher's rocket-like effects in zero gravity. Compared to Yham, himself appearing of possible Asian descent, the ship's captain is more noticeably of Middle-Eastern ancestry while background characters are predominantly Caucasian, suggesting the internationality of Neos', and thus communist, society. The readers are given a tour of the ship via a splash page featuring a cutaway drawing of crew quarters and activities within. Meanwhile, the protagonists are told of their pending journey to the moon to replace atmospheric samples accidently destroyed by the fire extinguisher when the *Digedags* first boarded (Hegen, "Die Entführung ins All" [The Abduction into Space] 9, 10).

Sinus explains the theory of space and the heavens advanced by Greek astronomer, Ptolemy. With the aid of an onion, Sinus tells the *Digedags*, and the reader, that space is comprised of seven shells [*Schalen*], like the layers of that onion, with the earth at its center (Hegen, "Die Entführung ins All" 12). Of course, this explanation clashes with scientific understandings of the universe held by Soviet Bloc states, East Germany included. As the spaceship employs technology strikingly similar to that possessed by the GDR (Augustine 232), the space-faring aliens from Neos are indicative of socialist modernity confronted with the backwardness of Sinus' ancient Greco-Roman thinking. Here, the *Weltraum-Serie* resembles earlier Russian science fiction such as Alexander Bogdanov's *Red Star* (1908) and the Stalinist-era "close aim" fiction favoring industrial production in the not-too-distant future. In Soviet children's literature, these tropes appear at least as early as Innokenty Zhukov's *Voyage of the Red Star Pioneer Troop to Wonderland* in 1924. Stylistically, this was maintained in the GDR into the 1980s as the *Weltraum-Serie*'s story seemingly inspired *Ein Planet wird*

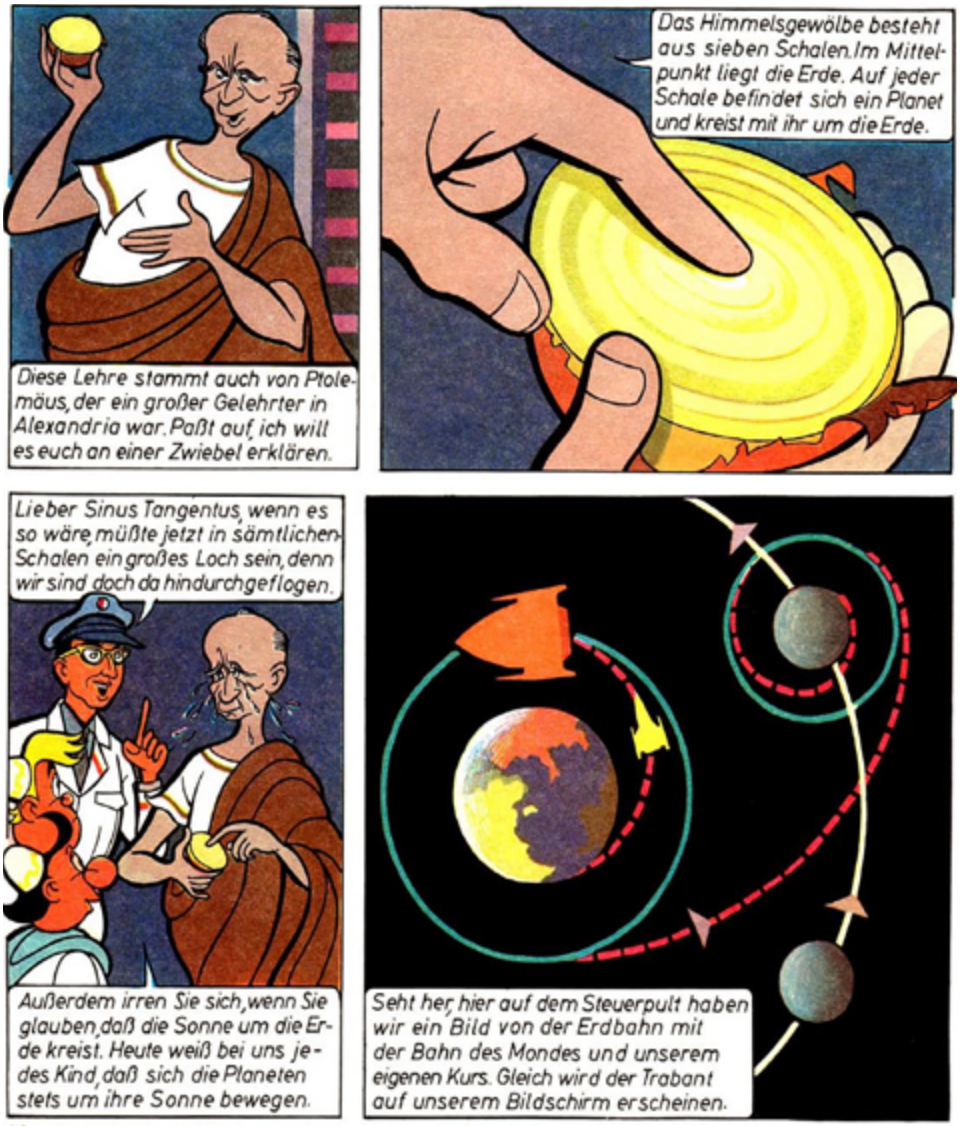

Fig. 1. Sinus and Yham discuss opposing theories of the universe, *Die Entführung ins All* [The Abduction into Space], p. 16, from *Mosaik* by Hannes Hegen, ©Tessloff Verlag, Nürnberg, Germany.

gesucht [A Sought-After Planet] by popular cartoonist Erich Schmitt, published in *Freie Welt* [Free World] magazine between March 1981and June 1982 (Pfeiffer 95). David Wittenberg argues that nineteenth century utopian fiction, from which socialist science fiction drew influence, modelled the future after a Darwinian evolution of the present, suggesting forward momentum toward societal improvement, not unlike Marxist theories of social development (30). Sinus is thus taken aback, crying from

the cut onion and deconstruction of his ideas, when Yham tells him that if Ptolemy's theory was true there should be holes in the shells through which they flew. Yham continues, condescendingly, that Sinus' belief in the Sun revolving around the Earth is mistaken, since even children know planets orbit the Sun (Hegen, "Die Entführung ins All" 12) (Fig. 1).

More than either Sinus or the *Digedags*, Yham's statement was intended for children reading *Mosaik*. Even before the requirements of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, magazines, newspapers, and comics were tasked with educating children for the progress of humanity and humanism, socialism and communism (BArch DY 26-173). Moreover, most Germans, both East and West, were convinced the Soviets could never achieve victory in the Space Race without German engineering (Geyer 128). This belief propelled the popularity of space and science fiction among East German children (Lettkemann 357). Having Yham indirectly address the readership, convinced that all children are familiar with scientific fact, played to this societal popularity and the assumption of FDJ educators that children should be interested and entertained by subjects like outer space and atomic energy that demarcated socialist modernity. As such, educators established connections between material studied in the East German classroom and the entertainment consumed by children in the time left unorganized by youth groups and state sanctioned activities. Likewise, as *Mosaik* and contemporary children's publications in the GDR were aimed at children whose ages coincided with membership in the Thälmann Pioneers (BArch DY 26-42), tapping into the science fiction genre, particularly at this juncture in Soviet history and the Space Race with the United States, provided educators opportunity to promote ideological concerns in seemingly innocuous forms of entertainment.

In so doing, *Mosaik*'s *Weltraum-Serie* was demonstrative of utopian narratives typical of socialist and Soviet science fiction and required by socialist realism after the *Bitterfelder Weg*.[3] By both its nature and connection to socialist realism, utopian (science) fiction demonstrated the inhumane character of capitalist imperialism, foregrounding socialism's progressive superiority (Darnton 167-168). Maintaining the perceived educational emphasis of GDR comics, *Mosaik* introduced the *Digedags* to an interstellar Cold War between Neos and what this first issue describes as a "feindlichen Macht" [fiendish power] (Hegen, "Die Entführung ins All" 19). Indeed, while the *Digedags*, Sinus, and Yham are on the lunar surface gathering samples and an education in the effects of reduced gravity, the ship's captain reveals himself as a spy for this same fiendish power. Expressing trepidation at the prospect of discovery and punishment, the captain attempts to launch the spaceship to complete his mission, abandoning those characters in the process (Hegen, "Die Entführung ins All" 19-20). The captain's duplicity is not discovered here; instead, he is incapacitated by an apologetic crewman. His insistence to launch the spacecraft, despite crewmembers' protests, is ascribed to space fever [*Raumkoller*]. This diagnosis is not entirely inaccurate as the captain is

metaphorically sick, nervous, and irrational under the influence of western capitalism and is thus unable to act with the best intentions or in harmony with the "progressive power of revolutionary tradition" that marked utopian fiction (Darnton 168).

The introduction of threats of this kind, particularly espionage, was not unique to *Mosaik* and, like the tropes of utopian fiction, was common to GDR comics well after their appearance in the *Weltraum-Serie*. The September 1979 issue of *Atze* featured the political story, "Vom Hackenpflug zur E-Lok" [From Plows to Streetcars] by Günther Hain, in which a West German agent was caught stealing equipment from East German factories rebuilt following World War II (7). This celebrated socialist achievement, but also made children aware of the perceived need for vigilance against western saboteurs, spies, and thieves seeking to dismantle East German socialism that citizens and the SED built. This is but one example of the threat posed by imperialists in East German comics. Elsewhere in this volume, Michael Scholz provides an insightful analysis of episodes of this very subject in the children's magazines *Atze* and *Frösi*.

America in the (East) German Imaginary

Just as science fiction was popular among youth and the driving force behind the *Weltraum-Serie* (Darnton 167), so too were stories of the American West. The notion of the "Wild West" was not only popular among children and East German *Indianistik* role-play groups but proved ideologically acceptable to the SED as there was ample evidence to cast indigenous Americans as "victims of American capitalism and colonialism" (Reagin 567) in these narratives. Drawing inspiration from the writings of Mark Twain, Jack London, and Karl May, the ideological-propagandistic thrust of the *Amerika-Serie* displayed the evils associated with "die Entwicklung eines typischen kapitalistichen Landes" [the development of a typical capitalist country] and the heroism of workers clearing the land and building the railroads eventually uniting the country (BArch DC 9-1628).

The *Weltraum-Serie* a decade earlier was, to that point, the most ideological story in *Mosaik*. That story was, however, insufficient despite Cold War allegories and the triumph of East German modernity for the technological future (Augustine 232) as the trappings of utopian fiction prevented Cold War metaphors from becoming more than that, without open and direct comparison between socialism and capitalism. Before the mid-1960s, Hegen was unwilling to include "patronizing" and heavy-handed ideological discussions in *Mosaik* (Lettkemann and Scholz 40). This garnered complaints from the FDJ's Central Committee over the supposedly bourgeois associations kept by the *Digedags* (BArch DY 24-1585) and changed only as Hegen's authority within the *Mosaikkollektiv* diminished under Wolfgang Altenburger's editorial guidance (Lettkemann and Scholz 40). By 1966, the FDJ made it clear that

Fig. 2. Colonel Springfield attacks the editor of New Orleans Magazine as "illustrated" by *Die digedags in Amerika*, p. 12, from *Mosaik* by Hannes Hegen, ©Tessloff Verlag, Nürnberg, Germany.

the locale for the *Digedags*' future adventures needed to be transposed to the towns and villages among the laboring proletariat (BArch DY 24-1585) they were intended to represent and defend. Whereas the *Weltraum-Serie* thrust the *Digedags* into an analogue for the Earth-bound Cold War, the dichotomy between non-unionized workers and managers, slaves and owners, American Indigenes and an imperialistic government during the pre-Civil War development of the United States made America seem the best location for this ideological battle. Although the original conceptualization for the *Amerika-Serie* envisioned placing it in the years following the Civil War to demonstrate problems facing African-Americans despite the abolition of slavery and celebrate the workers' completion of the transcontinental railway (BArch DC 9-1628), they ultimately decided to set the story in the year before the war (Hegen "Karneval in New Orleans" 2), establishing conflict as the ultimate outcome of capitalism.

As the *Amerika-Serie* opens, the *Digedags* work as reporters for *New Orleans Magazine*. The opening narration offers a brief background on recent American history, including the impact of the 1848 gold rush and American expansionism on

the indigenous peoples while also drawing comparisons between southern slavery and the North's exploitation of European immigrant laborers in the factories. Casting the *Digedags* as reporters put them in the center of the story's action, not unlike the Belgian character Tintin by Hergé or Ivan Semenov's Soviet world traveler Petia Ryzhik (Alaniz 65), providing reason to explore and comment on the state of American society (Hegen, "Karneval in New Orleans" 2). This works well in terms of the requirements made clear by the FDJ and Altenburger, affording the *Digedags* a straightforward motivation and purpose to act in service to the poor and exploited, immigrant laborers, slaves, and the indigenous people they encountered. This setting removed the *Digedags* from the royal courts, dropping them squarely in America's development as a modern state evidenced by the railroads guiding the *Digedags* across the country and the heroization of the (American) workers that coincided with developing industrial production. Further, the *Digedags*' journey gave children a sense of technology's role in a modern state, which the GDR most certainly was (BArch DY 24-1585). The combination of ideological and story elements in the *Amerika-Serie* provided readers a depiction of class struggle that was largely indirect or indiscernible in early issues under Hegen's direction (BArch DY 26-173) (Fig. 2).

But *Mosaik*'s primary obligation, despite FDJ requirements to the comic's educational, informative aspects, was to produce entertaining stories for children (BArch DY 26-42), satiating their hunger for comics that the FDJ recognized and harnessed (BArch DY 26-173). As a result, the first issue of the *Amerika-Serie* introduced the *Digedags* to Colonel Springfield, a visual mixture of the American symbolic figure Uncle Sam and the gunfighter "Wild Bill" Hickok, as a former military man reveling in past glory. However, Springfield is quickly revealed to be a buffoon as he bullies the magazine editor, Mr. Potter, because of an unflattering story printed in a recent issue (Hegen, "Karneval in New Orleans" 5-8). For readers, Springfield provided physical humor the *Digedags* themselves could not given their roles as the comic's protagonists and socialist emissaries. That said, though the character does not appear in every issue, Springfield immediately foregrounds the ideological underpinnings of the *Amerika-Serie* even if those objectives escaped the average reader. The character is oafish, clumsy, a bully, easily offended, and quick to draw pistols. Given Springfield's visual similarities to Uncle Sam, popularized by the 1917 "I Want You" US Army recruiting poster, the character was broadly indicative of East German and socialist views of America (Gersdorf 42). Indeed, in the conceptualization of the series, the FDJ suggests that "Spekulation, Betrug, Erpressung und Gewalt, Landraub, Rassenhetze und journalistische Sensationsmache, das sind einige der Mittel, denen sich die nordamerikanischen Ausbeuter bedienen, um noch reicher und mächtiger zu werden" [speculation, fraud, extortion and violence, land grabs, race-baiting and journalistic sensationalism…are some of the means by which North American exploiters become richer and more powerful] (BArch DC 9-1628) over the workers

and farmers as evidenced through Springfield's character. Embodying many of these principles, Colonel Springfield placed American imperialism in stark relief with the lived experience of "real existing socialism" in the GDR and throughout the Soviet Bloc, addressing some of East German educators' earliest criticisms against the comic. And yet, the *Amerika-Serie* still provided fantasy adorned with the cultural touchstones understood by children and, as such, had more in common with Karl May's Winnetou western novels, originally published between 1875 and 1910, and the western European and American comics on which it was modelled than other children's literary styles preferred by the regime (Prager 364).

Observed through the first-person narration of his German blood-brother, Old Shatterhand, Winnetou was an Apache chief in May's novels. May flipped traditional western narratives by depicting indigenous Americans as romantic figures and "freedom loving heroes" (Penny 4) struggling against American expansionism represented by the presence of settlers, gunslingers, and the military. Not only did these novels inspire *Indianistik* hobbyists in East Germany (Reagin 567), but the inversion of the cowboy/Indian dynamic perhaps explained SED Secretary Erich Honecker's (1971-1989) own interest in May's writings (Darnton 168). Moreover, the socialist subtext of the *Indianerfilme* popular in the GDR themselves were often influenced by May's work, and further upended the cowboy/Indian dynamic that arguably defined the genre. *Mosaik* likewise characterized indigenous populations as victims of American westward imperialism, cheated of their land by railroad companies, prospectors, and gunslingers (BArch DC 9-1628), stoic defenders against the encroaching threat posed by the United States. The *Digedags* befriended these victimized people, to say nothing of the slaves and farmers equally beleaguered, in the FDJ's estimation, by capitalist exploiters (BArch DC 9-1628). In doing so, *Mosaik* made the comic book version of America and its people palatable to the SED regime, despite the fact that these narratives sometimes ran contrary to socialist ideology.

Gersdorf suggests that the *Amerika-Serie* by its nature, positioning East and West in such close comparison and in the fantastical style afforded by the comics medium, told a fictional story with enough historical accuracy to invert perceptions of the United States as the enemy. Although the comic makes clear its "socialist world view and morality" as the backdrop for the series, *Mosaik* demonstrated America to be a place of "adventure, fun, and ardent desires…that is counterproductive to a politically motived reduction of the U.S. to…the political, economic and military imperialism of the American state" (Gersdorf 42). In "Die Grosse Herausforderung" [The Great Challenge], for example, two black women, servants mopping the floor, cause Springfield to slip and fall. However, Springfield slides into an adjacent room where he quickly recovers to join the military men within (Hegen "Die Grosse Herausforderung" 8-10). This reversal challenges socialist notions of capitalism's inevitable end and, as Gersdorf concludes, suggests a deconstruction of "the erroneous thesis that

capitalism…is about to be discharged from world history" (42) through a combination of humor and the symbolic coding of Springfield's character. Nonetheless, this afforded *Mosaik*, especially the *Amerika-Serie*, an opportunity to appeal to children in a way unavailable to other, more overtly ideological children's publications.

While *Mosaik* was almost immediately popular with children (BArch DY 26-173), *Atze*, one of the few other comics published in the GDR, was often criticized for its inability to capture a dedicated younger audience (BArch DY 24-1581). *Atze* was indeed the more politically-minded of the two comics and suffered a decided lack of popularity until Altenburger, *Mosaik*'s editor-in-chief, was hired to correct the publication in the mid-1960s. The incorporation of new stories like *Pats Reiseabenteuer* [Pat's Adventurous Journey], written by Altenburger himself and echoing elements of *Mosaik*, helped to significantly increase readership (BStU, MfS, HA XX, Nr. 11285). Even so, *Atze* required political stories alongside the more humorous likes of *Pats Reiseabenteuer* and *Fix und Fax*, the FDJ claiming that children who desired *Fix und Fax* had to accept half an issue of propaganda ("Propaganda in '*Atze*'").[4] In this, the FDJ happily provided children with their desired *Fix und Fax* strips, but included the political content largely, though not entirely, absent from the strip to elevate *Atze* above the level of *Schundliteratur*. Placating readers' expressed interests created a base for the comic and gave the FDJ a platform for its socialist ideology. The political stories were often biographies of socialist leaders and episodes of wartime anti-fascist resistance written with a serious, reverent tone accompanied by art that typically favored realism over the cartoonish caricatures of *Mosaik* (BArch DY 24-1581).

"Schwarza-Geschichten I" [Schwarza Stories I] by Bernd Günther (*Atze* 10/1984) is one example of these types of political narratives. The comic recounts anti-fascist resistance in a concentration camp located in eastern Germany and the nearby urban district of Schwarza in Rudolstadt, Thuringia, rebuilding its industry after World War II.[5] Here, the American arrival is cast in the same light as the Nazi occupation and the town is only truly liberated by the Soviet Red Army (Günther 2-7 and 10-11). Likewise, Günther Hain's "Abschied mit Bitternis" [Bitter Farewell] (*Atze* 9/1984), describes East German friendship, education, and relief efforts in Grenada prior to the United States' 1983 invasion, ironically similar to the imperialism against which socialism claimed to fight and indicative of the Cold War spread of political ideologies (2-7). In both instances, the authors lay socialism and capitalism side by side, not unlike comparisons made in the *Amerika-Serie*. *Atze*, however, does not undercut the message in these stories with analogy and humor like *Mosaik*. Because of *Atze*'s socialist realist aesthetic in the political stories and despite the FDJ's insistence on their inclusion, these were the stories most overlooked by children. Of course, this does not suggest the child-readership avoided these stories altogether. Rather, in their letters to the editors, the political stories are often left unmentioned in favor of *Pats Reiseabenteuer* and *Fix und Fax* (BArch DY 24-23769). But given the wide distribution of *Atze* (BArch DY 26-42), it is

difficult to believe these stories were entirely ignored, which indicates the penetration of the domestic sphere by the overt state influence denied by conceptualizations of the GDR's niche society (Saunders 10).

Conclusion

In the early 1980s, the West German Permanent Representative to the GDR, Günter Gaus, observed that East German citizens sheltered themselves from the sphere of official political culture and created "stability and identity" in private, domestic space, or "private niches" as he terms them (Saunders 10). Western journalist Theo Sommer noted similar trends, though in much more nebulous forms, dating back at least as far as his visit to the East in 1964 (19). And comics had the potential to occupy the domestic niche that was supposedly free of state influence. Although these private niches afforded some independence in constructions of GDR identity, this argument fails to recognize, intentionally or otherwise, the interference of the state in daily life, including encounters with the *Staatssicherheit*, or *Stasi* [state security], and thus the notion of a space entirely free of ideological influence was largely an illusion (Saunders 4-11). Children brought comics into the home to be read in their free time, and the ideology contained therein occupied their thoughts, if only briefly, while those comics were read. Indeed, Augustine suggests that many of *Mosaik*'s readers considered the comic free of socialist ideology (230), rendering the comics' educational agenda palatable, though still present, to readers. Moreover, comics were considered a media consumed only by children to be outgrown before reaching adulthood and were thus often dismissed (Barker 240). In the GDR, this was marked by the child's transition from the Thälmann Pioneers to the FDJ, demarcating the intended age-range for these publications (BArch DY 26-173). However, comics' popularity in Germany during the immediate postwar drew the FDJ's attention and, by the mid-1950s, comics were incorporated into the East German educational regime, expanding their ideological content after the implementation of the *Bitterfelder Weg* in 1959. This was most noticeable in *Atze* with the introduction of realistic, political stories of socialist martyrs and anti-fascist heroes in the mid- to late-1960s. Although these stories entertained children, *Atze*'s editors had no qualms about its socialist content or the purpose behind these stories.

The otherwise innocuous *Weltraum-* and *Amerika-Serie*, published in the ideologically understated *Mosaik* in 1958-1962 and 1969-1974 respectively, drew on the enduring popularity of German travel stories, science fiction, and American-style westerns. While the *Weltraum-Serie* built itself around the utopian fiction popular among socialist youth throughout the Soviet Bloc, it lacked sufficient ideological content to satisfy either the FDJ or GDR educators as the Cold War analogy was not appropriately and instantly recognizable or relatable to working-

class experience. Published a decade later, the *Amerika-Serie* attempted something similar. Employing the near ubiquitous popularity of the American Old West and indigenous Americans, the *Amerika-Serie* located the *Digedags* in a setting allowing direct comparison with the perceived imperialist enemy as they befriended those very classes supposedly represented by the workers and farmers state. Nor was this the only time the FDJ and children's publications used these tropes. In 1983, the publishers of *Frösi* hosted the *Frösi-treff* [Meet up with *Frösi*] as a variety show and opportunity for children to interact with the magazine's cartoonists. Both Sigmund Jähn, the GDR's first Cosmonaut aboard the Soviet rocket *Soyuz* [Union] 31 in 1978, and Gojko Mitić, the Serbian actor in numerous *Indianerfilme* as the indigenous hero, appeared in some form, setting the show's tone. The program included singing, dancing, and the chance for children to design their own *Frösi* character, interspersed with segments testing children's knowledge of GDR history or else engaging with a more overt political bent (BArch DC 207-686).

Allusions to science fiction and the American West obfuscated the required ideological components, drawing inspiration from aspects of the popular consciousness already attractive to children and youth. In the case of indigenous Americans, there was a long tradition of interest in the American frontier that directly influenced the *Amerika-Serie*, *Indianerfilme*, and *Indianistik* role-play groups, appropriately and correctly recasting indigenous people as victims of American expansion. These points of influence captivated and capitalized on a young comics readership, providing the state access to the organization of children's "free" time. Moreover, comics, *Mosaik* in particular, were perceived to be free from the conspicuous propaganda characterizing most media in the Soviet Bloc and, in doing so, rendered these publications acceptable, if not entirely invisible, to the domestic sphere as a supposed ideological-free zone.

Notes

1 This and similar, subsequent references are from the *Bundesarchiv* (BArch) Berlin-Lichterfelde.

2 This and similar, subsequent references are from *Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatsicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (BStU) [Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic].

3 For a larger discussion of science fiction in the GDR than I can provide here, see Sonja Fritsche's monograph, *Science Fiction Literature in East Germany.*

4 *Fix und Fax* was an East German comic strip created by Jürgen Kieser in 1958 and featured in *Atze.*

5 Although the concentration camp in the story is unnamed, it is most likely *KZ-Außenlager Laura*, a subcamp of Buchenwald, local to Rudolstadt where the story is based.

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