Children of the Cultural Revolution "Gone Astray":

The Forlorn 1970s Generation of German Writers from Socialist Romania

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Abstract

In this thesis I analyze the discursive legitimation strategies, literary practice and political understandings of the 1970s generation of German writers from the Banat during the 1970s and 1980s Socialist Romania. Reconstructing the context of the German cultural establishment towards the end of the so-called "liberalization period" of the 1960s, I examine the emergence of a generational mode of argumentation through cultural policies driven regionally and from the center. I argue that the crystallization of Aktionsgruppe Banat at the beginning of the 1970s was a process of co-creation responding to the revolutionary appeal of the "July Theses." In the aftermath of the "mini-cultural revolution" and with the disbandment of Aktionsgruppe Banat, I analyze how the members of the 1970s generation negotiated the experience of violence against their socialist convictions, regrouped around the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle, and appropriated it as a semi-official institution of the German cultural establishment. I take the patterns of interaction of the 1970s generation with the Romanian literary elites, the breakthrough in the German Federal Republic, as well as the prolonged negotiations of voice and exit throughout the 1980s to be formative for their self-identification strategies after emigration. Analyzing how the collective mode of argumentation did not translate successfully into either patriotic anti-communist or minority representativeness, I explore the authors' formulation of individual self-narratives after emigration, and propose that these put forward alternative chronologies of the 1970s and 1980s Socialist Romania.

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My second reader, Professor Marsha Siefert, introduced me to the field of oral history, of which I wish I could have done more for this thesis. She helped me make sense of the most intimidating primary sources that I worked with and offered invaluable advice about how to be less of a literary scholar and more of a historian.

I am grateful to the colleagues and friends who read, listened to and shared their thoughts about parts of this thesis showing, as it were, infinite patience.

I dedicate this thesis to my father, for his love and unconditional support throughout the years and to my mother, hoping that she would have liked it.

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Introduction: What Are They to Us?
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> "I don't want to be a writer, this isn't the reason I write. I just have no choice and it was not me who chose this. I did not choose the life I had in Romania, nor did I wish for it. Every second I tell myself I would rather have never written a word. I would have liked to have a different profession, to do something else in life, and not have all those things happen to me. That is it. And if one day I no longer need to pull myself together, then I will stop writing. I hope that moment will come, it would be great." (Herta Müller in dialogue with Gabriel Liiceanu, Bucharest, October 2010)

Herta Müller's discussion with Gabriel Liiceanu at the Romanian Athenaeum in October 2010 was something of a cultural sensation. A German writer from the Banat who had emigrated to West Germany in 1987, Müller received the 2009 Nobel Prize in Literature for her depiction of the "landscape of the dispossessed" – that of the German minority in Communist Romania, and that of exile. Her vocal anti-communist stance, her direct indictment of former "collaborators" and indirect denunciation of the intellectuals' political passivity during communism had occasionally stirred the waters of post-socialist Romania. The public discussion with Gabriel Liiceanu, himself an outspoken anti-communist following the regime change, forcefully redrew the lines between "those who left" and "those who stayed", between the few who directly confronted the regime and the many "fellow travelers", between political dissent and apolitical resistance in Socialist Romania.

Much of the debate over the intellectuals' relationship with the political establishment during communism has been pursued on a similar note, based on the assumption that cultural actors were in the position to articulate themselves independently of the political regime by means of their privileged relationship with language. Liiceanu's "not prostituting one's words" and Müller's "pulling oneself together" share the same understanding of writing as a medium of

self-creation. However, Herta Müller has consistently framed her career as a writer as the default existential choice under a repressive regime, not a personal decision in as much as it appeared to have been the only honest option of engaging with one's surrounding reality. Ultimately, the argument goes, not being able to be a professional writer under the very conditions which put one in that existential position in the first place left emigration as the only choice.

The purpose of this thesis is to enquire into the complex configuration of the German cultural establishment in Socialist Romania from the end of the 1960s up to the second half of the 1980s, in order to trace the emergence of this paradoxical understanding of the writer profession other than in contradistinction to the "resistance through culture". Rather than arguing that the atomization of society, the loss of individual agency, the distinction between state and society are improper categories of analysis, it asks how these came to be appropriated as categories of practice by a number of German intellectuals engaged in negotiating their position within what they increasingly perceived to be a "totalitarian regime".

Broadly, it follows the emergence of the 1970s generation of German writers from the Banat, with a particular focus on the members of the German literary group Aktionsgruppe Banat and their extended cultural network. To my knowledge, they have not yet been the subject of systematic historical inquiry, although in recent years a number of well documented studies approached their literary works from various topical perspectives, with the tools of literary criticism and cultural studies. Thomas Krause's study *"Die Fremde rast durchs Gehirn, das Nichts…": Deutschlandbilder in the Texten den Banater Autorengruppe (1969 – 1991)*, published in 1998, attempts to recover the German literature from the Banat for the broader field of comparative imagology of the German-language literature. To this end, Krause traces the changing images of Germany as configured in the texts of the Banat group of German authors

roughly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with particular emphasis on the interplay between the authors' situation in Socialist Romania and their necessary refashioning of self-images as either members of a minority or members of the broader trans-national German community. Although attentively contextualized, Krause's study relies almost exclusively on German sources, many testimonies by the authors themselves, and therefore reads as a relatively contained case of literary self-thematization. To what degree this was itself a tactic of negotiation on the broader cultural scene of Socialist Romania is one of the key issues to be tackled in this thesis.

Having identified that a systematic analysis of the self-representation and critical reception of the so-called "Banater Autorengruppe" is missing from the relatively large corpus of research on the German literature in Banat, in her study from 2004 - *Die Banater Autorengruppe: Selbstdarstellung und Rezeption in Rumänien und Deutschland* Diana Schuster set out to offer a comprehensive overview of the source base pertaining to the topic. The study evenly covers the German authors' literary activity in Romania prior to and in Germany following their emigration, in each case the material being divided between "self-representation" and "reception". The choice of structure prioritizes clarity in the presentation of the impressively broad (possibly exhaustive) source base over explicit interpretation of the dynamics between the authors' tactics of self-identification and their reception in Socialist Romania and abroad. This very tension, I argue, was essential in shaping the authors' understanding of their professional status and their personal existential situation and therefore this thesis directly addresses the inconsistencies, contradictions and uncertainties expounded in the various meta-narratives constructed by and about the 1970s generation.

Raluca Cernahoschi-Condurateanu's PhD dissertation *The Political, the Urban, and the Cosmopolitan: The 1970s Generation in Romanian-German Poetry*, defended in 2010, is one of

the rare examples of thoroughly contextualized literary studies of a broad corpus of works by the 1970s generation, the systematic analysis of which would have exceeded the scope of this thesis. The dissertation follows the evolution of three themes – social and political engagement, the German minority, and the urban environment in the poetry of the German writers from the Banat - up to authors' emigration from Romania. The study aims to illuminate the generation's development from identification with Romanian socialism and rejection of the German minority to criticism of the country's policies and a renewed interest in the fate of the German community. I rely on the author's insights as a literary critic in support of my socio-historically minded analysis of the creation, recreation and dissolution of the 1970s generation, although I theorize differently the relationship between the writers' literature and the discursive practices in which they attempt to inscribe themselves.

In the first chapter, I clarify the theoretical and methodological considerations which inform my subsequent analysis. In writing a history of interpretative failures, arrested projects and political misunderstandings, I draw particularly on the theoretical insights of the historiographical tradition of post-revisionism in the Soviet studies. An integrative approach to state and society allows me to discuss interactions without assuming either a top-down or "from below" perspective. Moreover, the theoretical propositions of the studies on Soviet subjectivity frame my analysis of how the German writers of the 1970s generation experienced the period up to the mid-1970s as one of ideological co-creation, as well as how they integrated ideologically the subsequent experience of violence. In attempting to give an account of both conflict and integration, I rely on structuralist approaches to the topic of intellectuals in Socialist Romania, but also make a case for socialization and subjectivity as complementary perspectives. Framing the possibilities for their integration, I discuss the feasibility and soundness of the ethnographic

and textual approaches to the Secret Police and its files, attempting to strike a methodological middle ground between the two.

Most of the actors of this research are introduced in the second chapter, which discusses the early patterns of socialization that encouraged taking on a literary career and a critical stance towards the social and cultural make-up of the German community in the Banat. I examine several initiatives for the discovery, promotion and encouragement of German literary production among the young generations of high school and university students in the Banat at the end of the 1960s/beginning of the 1970s, driven both locally and from the center. I argue here that whereas the coagulation of Aktionsgruppe Banat was made possible by the seemingly lenient cultural policies of the Socialist regime during the so-called "liberalization period," the writers subsequently performed their ideological commitment and "avant-garde" cultural aspirations in the spirit of the "mini-cultural revolution". By this, the chapter reveals the built-in tensions of the period when the production of ideology was being encouraged and had the potential to impose a new logic of privilege in the cultural field, but the lack of a clear metadiscourse stimulated both bolder criticism from the part of the writers and overzealous surveillance and repression from that of the Secret Police.

How the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat negotiated ideologically and existentially the group's disbandment by the Secret Police is the focus of the third chapter. I trace the changes in the writers' political understandings, but at the same time explore the circumstances of their continued ideological investment in the generational mode of argumentation. Analyzing the German writers' reception on the Romanian cultural scene and their breakthrough in West Germany, I reconstruct the conditions of the miscommunication whose afterlife the title to this introduction invokes, as well as how their literature was first construed in the West.

The period prior to the German writers' emigration to West Germany was in many ways formative for their subsequent negotiation of the possibilities of collective discourse. The dynamics of voice and exit in the years following the authors' decision to emigrate reveal the contradiction between two equally reductive modes of constructing dissent. One of the two, the patriotic anti-communist discourse mobilized by the Romanian Unit of Radio Free Europe proved an unviable option for collective discourse, for reasons that also illuminate the post-socialist persistence of mutual distrust between Romanian intellectuals and the German writers. With the cultural politics of "rumäniendeutsche Literatur" equally failing to translate the German writers' previous generational rhetoric in the context of post-emigration, the authors took up individual paths of self-realization. Devising personal narratives of their shared past they also proposed what I call alternative chronologies of the 1970s and 1980s Socialist Romania. In reconstructing and comparing William Totok, Richard Wagner, and Herta Müller's meta-narratives about the Romanian communism, I argue that the case of the German writers from the Banat makes for a very interesting twist in the study of the intellectuals' relationship with politics under socialism.

Finally, a note about the title of this thesis: the Romanian Secret Police showed at times a peculiar flair for choosing conspirative names. In a textbook for current and aspiring secret police officers of 1979, the German writers of Aktionsgruppe Banat were collectively named "Rătăciţii" [those who have lost their way, who have gone astray]. While I am convinced that the 1970s generation of German writers from the Banat was in more ways than one forlorn, and while this thesis is an argument for how the members of the generation had been "the children of the cultural revolution", I believe that "gone astray" should remain a dangling modifier. As such,

it accommodates both the writers' understanding of the cultural revolution as "betrayed" and the self-understanding of the Secret Police as essential in keeping the socialist man on the right path.

Chapter 1 - The Theory behind a Considerate History of Interpretative Failures, Arrested Projects and Political Misunderstandings

"ventriloquism is a professional illness many historians succumb to"[1]

"theoretization becomes a productive response to the nausea created by the infinity process"[2]

The following theoretical and methodological considerations are palliative. They respond both to more general concerns related to "professional illnesses" and to "symptoms" peculiar to my research topic of choice. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the young generation of German writers from the Banat addressed what it perceived as the interpretative failures, the abandoned projects and the political misunderstandings of the Romanian Communist regime. In its turn, it was the subject of misinterpretation, a project arrested, and an ideologically misconstrued group. Approaching the history of the forlorn 1970s generation, I turn especially to historiographical debates and theoretical propositions sensitive to the contradictions inherent in the negotiation of socialism as a project and process.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the sore point of language in historical research, and in the study of socialism in particular, reflecting on the ways in which problematizing (and theorizing) one's relationship to historical actors and sources has a bearing on the formulation of research questions. To this end, I trace the historiographical debates in Soviet studies, from Sheila Fitzpatrick's discussion of revisionism to the studies on "Soviet subjectivity," with a special emphasis on the issue of sources in conceptualizing "the identity" of socialist subjects.

[1] Carlo Ginzburg, "Our Words, and Theirs. A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today", in Susanna Fellman, Marjatta Rahikainen (eds.), *Historical Knowledge*: *In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 110.

[2] Andreas Glaeser, "An Ontology for the Ethnographic Analysis of Social Processes: Extending the Extended-Case Method", *Social Analysis* 49.3 (2005): 32.

Taking the queue from Katherine Verdery's reference in the preface to *National Ideology Under Communism* to the "transmutation" of the Romanian researchers' "national identity and ideas concerning it" from being "their topic" to something that "by its contact with American social science […] may no longer be wholly recognizable to them"[3], the second part of the chapter addresses the stakes and limitations of the sociology of culture and the macro-sociology of literary fields as applied in the case of Socialist Romania. The necessary distinction between "categories of practice" and "categories of analysis"[4] notwithstanding, it argues that macro-sociological approaches are poorly equipped to account for non-discursive and non-institutionalized instances of sociability otherwise crucial for the actors' trajectories and self-identification. The final section discusses two pioneering approaches to the Secret Police and its files: Andreas Glaeser's theory of the "contingencies and dynamics of understanding" in the case of Stasi officers and dissidents of the GDR and Cristina Vatulescu's intertextual analysis of secret police files, literature and film from Communist Romania and the Soviet Union. The section argues for a middle ground between an ethnographical and a textual approach to secret police files and for their integration as historical sources not by "solving" them, rendering them unproblematic, but by maintaining a sense of the tensions inherent in all "evidence".

1.1. Empathy, Ventriloquism, and Soviet Studies

How historians conceive of the actors of their research, Carlo Ginzburg writes in a self-reflexive essay on "our words, and theirs", influences both the kind of questions they ask when approaching the evidence, and the kind of answers they arrive at. The two pitfalls of assuming

[3] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Communism*. *Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xii.
[4] Rogers Brubaker, Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'identity'", *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 4-6.

the transparency of the actors – empathy and ventriloquism, arise not necessarily just out of illusions of positivistic, scientific objectivity, but especially in cases of emotional identification or intellectual contiguity. Both pitfalls can be avoided, in Ginzburg's view, by carefully maintaining "the tension between our questions and the answers we get from the evidence […], although the evidence may well modify our initial questions"[5]. This already suggests that the distinction between the researcher's questions (formulated in terms which are "inevitably anachronistic") and the answers articulated in the actors' language is not nearly as clear-cut as the "etic – emic" distinction which Ginzburg translates from Kenneth Lee Pike's linguistics. In what follows I trace the dynamics of this dichotomy in the field of Soviet historiography, which functions as the "etic" starting point of my own research.

Reflecting on her historiographical practice as a revisionist in the field of Soviet studies[6], Sheila Fitzpatrick attempted to frame the shift from political science to social history happening in the 1970s as "a Kuhnian paradigm change". Her understanding of the main points of contention between the two camps is particularly instructive: the criticism leveled against revisionists revolved exactly around research questions and around the words used to articulate them. On the one hand, early inquiries into the issue of "social support" and "upward mobility" were thought to violate a highly politicized etic – emic divide: "my use of terms that came from, and were implicitly supposed to be restricted to, American (democratic) society caused a lot of distress"[7]. On the other hand, the mirror attempt to understand the terms in which the world was understood by the Soviet citizens as subjects of research was considered to be an intrinsically exculpatory project. Whereas the revisionists thought the totalitarian theorists to be guilty of

[5] Carlo Ginzburg, "Our Words, and Theirs", 109.
[6] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 77-91.
[7] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Retrospect: A Personal View," *Slavic Review* 61.3 (2002): 694.

ventriloquism, in their turn they stood accusations of empathy. In Fitzpatrick's view, the issue had been subsequently solved, *without* using the terminology of social support, by "Kotkin and those who followed him, [who] saw the Stalinist ideology and values ('Stalinist civilization') as a collective social construction, not something imposed by the regime"[8]. Kotkin's integrative view is particularly useful in approaching the attempts of the 1970s generation of German writers at co-producing a genuinely socialist culture.

The shift from social to cultural history also entailed a new approach to sources. Revisionism relied heavily on archival sources for arguments against the ideologically driven practice of the totalitarian school of historians. Beginning with the 1980s, however, and with the advent of a new generation of researchers informed by cultural theory, the insistence on the primacy of archival sources began to be questioned. Amidst the enthusiasm building around the opening of the Soviet secret archives, Stephen Kotkin, arguably the most influential post-revisionist, argued that there are still countless untapped sources on the local level, and moreover, that not everything had been preserved and not everything had been written down. The stake for him was twofold: to "write historians into history (larger structures), and to reaffirm sources as the necessary objects, rather than merely the means, of inquiry"[9]. Writing historians into history, it followed, meant acknowledging that Fitzpatrick's "unabashed positivism", in the words of Jochen Hellbeck of the "Soviet subjectivity" school, made sense historically as a response to the totalitarian theory's lack of concern for documents which were thought to be ideologically compromised. Reaffirming sources as objects of inquiry meant acknowledging the fact that archives produce knowledge constituting objects of experience, that "they are created in conversation with the constructivist agenda of Soviet power, and in many

[8] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History", 88.
[9] Stephen Kotkin, "The State – Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists", *Russian Review* 61.1 (2002): 40.

cases the intellectual categories of the Soviet state become the organizing categories of the archives themselves"[10].

The case of the Secret Police archives is particularly illustrative, in as much as they tend to privilege resistance to rather than acceptance of Soviet values. The following short discussion of the issues they pose is meant to frame my own encounter with the "evidence" compiled by the Romanian Securitate. Sarah Davis' study of *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, based extensively on OGPU/NKVD reports on the mood of the population between 1934-1942, largely reads the archival material as an unmediated source for "the thoughts and values, hopes and beliefs of 'ordinary people'"[11] otherwise silenced by the repressive Soviet regime. Although Davis acknowledges the "unreliability" of statistics on the prosecution of cases of anti-Soviet agitation due to the changing understanding of what fell into this category of dissent, she nevertheless argues, with Ian Kershaw who researched similar reports on the mood of the population compiled in Nazi Germany, that whatever was recorded and reported by state authorities was "but the tip of the iceberg," and that dissenting opinions where most probably overwhelmingly shared in private. This uncritical reading of sources, Jochen Hellbeck argued, misses the point by not recognizing that the categories used by state institutions "are in the first instance self-referential, reflective of the ideological commitment of the Soviet regime, not, however, of people's genuine mood"[12]. The logical consequence of this kind of reasoning had been voiced even more forcefully in the field of post-colonial studies, from the point of view of cultural anthropology: "scholars need to move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, […]

[10]Jochen Hellbeck, "Of Archives and Frogs: Iconoclasm in Historiographical Perspective", *Slavic Review* 67.3 (2008): 722.
[11] Sarah Davis, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia. Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.
[12] Jochen Hellbeck, "Speaking Out. Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.1 (2000), 79.

should view archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval, but of knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography"[13].

Turning the "socialist archive", broadly understood as the product of specific state practices of information gathering, processing and archiving proper, into a subject of research in its own right can be seen as a counterpart to both the still problematic attempts to recover the features of collective popular opinion and the very insightful accounts of more or less exemplary individual trajectories (intellectual, professional, existential) under socialism. Integrating state and society on equal terms in the study of the Soviet Union has arguably been one the most far-reaching theoretical and methodological post-revisionist projects, although it was not an entirely new attempt[14]. It consequently led to a reconceptualization of notions such as dissent, resistance, support, and collaboration, the vulgarized meaning of which rested on the assumption that in communist regimes state and society are discrete entities interacting in relatively simple action-reaction chains, the state imposing itself on society, society caving under the pressure. What Stephen Kotkin argued in the *Magnetic Mountain* is that Stalinism was not merely a project of state-building by means of the destruction of society, but rather a "civilization" in the sense that it created, "along with […] a state, […] a new society – manifest in property relations, social structure, the organization of the economy, political practice, and language"[15]. His approach rests on the Foucauldian understanding of power as operating through "discourse", which is appropriated, contested, and worked upon by a plurality of agents. In this sense ideology is not

[13] Ann Laura Stolner, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87.
[14] Mark Edele convincingly argues that for the researchers engaged in the "Harvard Interview Project" of the 1950s "the state […] was neither everywhere nor hovering above 'society' as the collection of those social ties that are not the state. The state was an important part of society; it was not something apart from it". See "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life. Major Frameworks Reconsidered", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8.2 (2007): 361.
[15] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1995), 2.

merely a dogma derived from canonical texts and imposed on society, but rather the product of co-creation by multiple actors. Where Kotkin seems to fall back upon the state-society dichotomy is in his conceptualization of the Soviet *subject* as reactive to the rules devised by the state rather than as "an ideological agent in its own right"[16], consciously taking on the socialist project as a means of self-expression. The liberal reluctance to take people's very personal involvement with the socialist revolutionary project seriously, as well as the post-communist embarrassment with, or reinterpretation of personal beliefs subsequently cast as illiberal obscure the powerful appeal of socialism as a collective, integrative endeavor. This insight is particularly valuable in trying to recover the pre-history of staunch anti-communism in enthusiastic socialist aspirations subsequently dismissed as "youthful" and "naive".

1.2. Conflict and Integration: Intellectuals in Socialist Romania

Discussing the types of social history of the Soviet Union which could emerge with the realization of the "irreducibility of socio-cultural complexity and [of] the interdependence and interaction among different aspects of the social whole"[17], Mark Edele suggested two different forms such a history could take. The first option would be "a history of conflict" between different social groups and institutions within the Soviet society, while the second would be a "history of social integration". Additionally, the two approaches combined would yield "a dynamic social history that looks both at the processes that pulled Soviet society together and those that tore it apart"[18]. Not least because they are configured as value-free, I take Edele's categories to be useful in reviewing the two socio-cultural studies of intellectuals (and more

[16] Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin's 'Magnetic Mountain' and the State of Soviet Historical Studies", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44 (1996): 457.
[17] Mark Edele, "Soviet Society…", 368.
[18] Ibid.

specifically writers) under Romanian socialism from which I draw theoretical and methodological inspiration – Katherine Verdey's *National Ideology Under Communism* and Ioana Macrea-Toma's *Privilighenția. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* [*Priviligentsia. Literary Institutions under the Romanian Communism*]. In so doing, I pursue a number of inter-related issues – conflict/integration (the configuration of the model of analysis), social structure/human agency (the locus of the individual in this overarching model), categories of practice/ categories of analysis (the issue of language).

Drawing on the "indigenist" theories of socialism of the 1980s (especially those of Pavel Câmpeanu, János Kornai, György Konrád and Iván Szelényi), Katherine Verdery argues that "socialism's central imperative is to increase the bureaucracy's *capacity* to allocate [resources]"[19]. In assessing how the drive to accumulate allocative power (by accumulating means of production) translates in the sphere of culture, Verdery signals out language and discourse as the most basic means of cultural production, the control of which is disputed between the party and the intellectuals. However, given the regime's logic of centralization, competition in the field of cultural production/ production of ideology does not occur merely, or primarily, vertically within the hierarchy: "The contest is, rather, between fractions of the cultural elite, differentially empowered within a system of domination that requires and supports the production of culture while allowing influence to only some of its producers"[20]. Cultural producers compete over the meaning of value, competence and authority in what Verdery calls "the space of legitimation" and do so more or less successfully on the basis of acquired political status and cultural authority. The dynamics between the two coordinates are crucially determined by the "mechanisms of bureaucratic allocation", that is by the same drive recognizable at all

[19] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Communism*, 76.
[20] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Communism*, 91.

levels of bureaucracy to increase the amount of resources and the allocative capacity of social actors.

Overall, I take Verdery's model of interaction between intellectuals under socialism to fall under the category of the "history of conflict". This might seem to a certain extent reductive, and it could be reasonably argued that her understanding of "national ideology" as the only ideology that had potential hegemonic force also carves out a "space of integration". Her main interest nonetheless remains in the dynamics of conflict, much more so than in the dynamics of conflict *and* integration. This is partly because of the seemingly trivial matter that for the Romanian intellectuals whose arguments Verdery so compellingly rehearses there was no real conflict in producing *national* ideology to being with. While I am not prepared to argue wholesale against the hypothesis that Marxism Leninism was easily "domesticated" in the Romanian context because it was perceived as a foreign ideology imposed by force (and this despite of the easy argument that such a legitimation of national ideology is tautological), I would nevertheless contend that at least for the generation born under communism there is little reason not to pursue the implications of the constructivist agenda of the socialist regime. This, however, requires enquiry into at least two dimensions of social action which are not entirely coterminous with the production of discourse – collective socialization (creating and maintaining networks of friends and acquaintances who identify with each other based on shared or similar experiences) and fashioning of the self (which need not, and rarely is a merely private, personal and subjective enterprise).

The problem with coherently integrating these dimensions alongside the specific activities which make a social actor an intellectual is inherent in what John Torpey terms, specifically referring to Verdey's theoretical approach, "the structural definition of

intellectuals"[21]. In line with Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Zygmunt Bauman, Verdery contends that "to 'be' an intellectual means to make knowledge/value claims, to gain some degree of social recognition for them, and to participate in social relations on the basis of this exchange of claims and recognition"[22]. Essential to this definition is the centrality of the "structural or relational space" in which social actors make their knowledge claims and legitimate their social position – it is by (sometimes) occupying this site that they become intellectuals and participate at "reproducing the system of domination". Differently from Torpey, who argues that the contradiction in Verdery's structural definition is that it cannot completely avoid a functional designation of intellectuals as a social group[23], I would rather argue that what is problematic about this definition is that it privileges structure over agency, that is – that it specifically attempts to do away with "subjective" traits (which functional, behavioral, or self-ascriptive definitions of the intellectuals maintain). In terms of "epistemological positions", Verdery's theoretical model tends to privilege objectivism (the examination of the social world by means of establishing objective regularities independent of individual consciousness and will) over subjectivism (attending to the unreflexive individual experience of self, others and the environment), a criticism also leveled against Pierre Bourdieu[24]. Perhaps the best illustration of this position is the very defense of the conceptualization of the space of legitimation as a site of conflict: "Although the participants perhaps do not *experience* their activity as one of 'struggle'

[21] The structural definition, Torpey argues, "has the virtue of focusing on intellectual *activity* over the social attributes of the persons who carry it out". See John Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), 3.
[22] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Communism*, 16.
[23] Torpey infers this from Verdery's use of the passive voice in describing the space of legitimation as "a site that *is privileged* in forming and transforming discourses, in constituting thereby the means through which society is 'thought' by its members, and in forming human subjectivities". "By *whom* is this special activity 'privileged'?", asks Torpey. His answer is by intellectuals who regard the activities of the mind with enthusiasm (hence the role-specific definition). I would rather argue that the use of the passive voice is not as much the back door for a functionalist definition, but the guarding gate of the structural one (the site is privileged by *no one in particular*).
[24] See Richard Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu: from the model of reality to the reality of the model", in Peter J. Martin and Alex Dennis (eds.), *Human Agents and Social Structures* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 86-99. The definitions of objectivism and subjectivism are his.

or 'competition'," writes Verdery, "this is no proof that their activities are not bringing alternative values into competitive relation. The investigator's task is to specify the circumstances under which this competition will occur and the forms it might take"[25]. Although in my analysis I do not assume that individual experience functions as "proof", I nevertheless take subjective representations of the social world to be constitutive of the reality under "investigation". I agree, as at times the subjects of this research do so themselves, that "culture and intellectual activity are *inherently* political (not *underlain* by politics, but *interwoven* with it)"[26], but I move from an analysis of "cultural politics" to an account of the social actors' changing understandings of the political, as outlined in the next section. On the one hand, this implies that I am working with a flexible definition of the intellectuals which, as does Torpey, attempts to strike a middle ground between functional (articulated in terms of occupation and training) and structural (relative to the "space of legitimation") approaches[27]. On the other hand, by expanding the field of social action to encompass the processes of self-understanding and the practices of socialization in addition to the "production of discourse", I attempt to recover the dynamics of conflict and integration in the making and unmaking of the German literary community from the Banat.

To this end, I rely on Ioana Macrea-Toma's study of literary institutions under the Romanian communism (The Writers' Union, the publishing industry, the censorship apparatus), which is largely a "history of integration". Providing a Bourdieusian macro-sociological analysis of the literary field, Macrea-Toma describes the paradoxical mechanisms of the writers' institutionalization under communism, showing how "creative work was organizationally

[25] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Communism*, 19.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "In my approach, then, both the untutored party hack and the well-pedigreed artist working as a clerk should be regarded as intellectuals, even if their *politics* may be very different for a variety of reasons", writes Torpey. See *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent*, 4.

conditioned through a legal and economic framework that gradually come to support that which it was meant to repress, the increasing autonomy of the literary field"[28]. Although I do not share Macrea-Toma's conceptual apparatus, I draw on her insights regarding the integrative force of the literary institutional framework which created a designated space for both competition and solidarity among writers. Given that the institutional position of the German writers who are the focus of this thesis was always precarious, I examine how the low degree of professional integration encouraged the pursuit of alternative integrative projects or dissent.

1.3. Political Epistemics and Police Aesthetics

Engaging with the demise of socialism in the GDR, Andreas Glaeser argues that the customary political and economic explanations which have been brought forward to explain it have overlooked a crucial dimension, namely the epistemic one – "the generation and certification of knowledge about social life orienting the making and remaking of socialist institutions"[29]. Placing himself in the tradition of hermeneutic social thought, Glaeser proposes a theory of political epistemology which is thematically closest to Mannheim and Foucault with their interest in political knowledge, and "methodologically closest to the sociology of science with its focus on the ethnography and historical reconstruction of everyday interaction in specific kinds of contexts"[30]. His theory of the dynamics of understanding is closely weaved with the empirical investigation of former agents of the Stasi on the one hand, and the dissidents which made the Stasi's object of surveillance on the other. As such, it has the quality of providing an

[28] Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenția. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* [*Priviligentsia. Literary Institutions under the Romanian Communism*] (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009), 330.
[29] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics. The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), XV.
[30] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics,* XXV.

analytical toolbox with which to approach all historical actors, indiscriminately. It is this analytical repertoire which I employ in making sense of how socialization and subjectivity – the two areas of research which I signaled out as complementary to the production of discourse – configure the changing worldviews of social actors. In what follows I will briefly introduce the terms which will appear in my subsequent analysis.

Understanding is, in Glaeser's theoretical framework, "a process of orientation from within a particular pursuit in a specific context, which orders relevant aspects of the world by simultaneously differentiating and integrating it, thus stipulating a practical ontology"[31]. That is to say that understandings provide orientation, coordination, explanation and legitimation for actions. Glaeser identifies three modes of understanding – discursive, emotive and kinesthetic. To illuminate how these modes are different, although closely interconnected, he gives the example of the theory of history as succession of epochs defining class conflicts. This discursive understanding, he explains, can be emotionally corroborated by hatred towards the members of a different class, or solidarity for the members of one's own. Moreover, a corresponding kinesthetic understanding would be, for instance, the physical avoidance in a cityscape of particular spaces which are identified as "enemy territory"[32]. Finally, discussing how understandings are being constituted, Glaeser proposes a dynamic model of formation through validation, in interaction with other persons (through recognition), in complex configurations of other understandings (through resonances), and in relation to the experience of understandings in use (through corroborations)[33].

[31] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 10.
[32] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 11
[33] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 163-4.

Neither the nature of my sources (Glaser's analysis is based extensively on ethnographical interviews), nor the research questions which articulate this thesis allow me to systematically pursue the theoretical model laid out in *Political Epistemics*. However, I find it particularly helpful for articulating in compatible analytical categories the complex dimensions of individual social action and as such I will rely upon it in analyzing specific practices and actions – such as public reading and debate in literary circles, collective publishing, and emigration.

The privileged form of social action for the actors of my research, as well as the most extensive textual formulation of political understandings, is literature. When possible, rather than trying to recover the "true" meanings of literary texts, I read them in conversation with the hermeneutical attempts of the Secret Police or of the censors. In so doing, I tend to the underlying presupposition of both the writers and the secret police officers that writing literature was by itself a political act. In this sense, the authors' encoding strategies and the Secret Police practice of compiling as many different versions of single texts as possible (different both because of the fact that they required translation from German into Romanian, and because of the various interpretations that they elicited) are not entirely incompatible. Apart from the few instances when such readings of the texts are possible based on existing sources, I nevertheless find an exclusively textual approach to the interaction between the writers and the Secret Police problematical. In what follows, I review Cristina Vatulescu's arguments for "police aesthetics," making a case for the extra-textual analysis on which I ground my own approach to the secret police files as historical sources.

Drawing on Secret Police archives from the Soviet Union and Romania, Vatulescu proposes a reading of personal files with a focus on the rhetoric of these sources. This allows her

to rethink simultaneously and in a compatible language both individual cultural production and bureaucratic document production en masse by the Secret Police: "while a personal file can mislead about the particulars of a victim's fate, its close reading can be abundantly revealing about what the Secret Police understood by evidence, record, writing, human nature, and criminality"[34]. The emphasis that Vatulescu puts on "reading" as a hermeneutical practice that has to be adapted to the specificity of the documents read is crucial for her understanding of literature and film on the one side, and the "writing" practices of the Secret Police on the other side, as mutually informative. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's engagement with Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra's distrust with privileging the archives as sources for historical research, we are not however to understand this transfer as a simple mechanical process: "literature and the archives seem complicit in that they are both a crosshatching of condensations, a traffic in telescoped symbols, that can only too easily be read as each other's repetition-with-a-displacement"[35].

It is crucial for the way Vatulescu frames the intersections between culture and policing that the term "police aesthetics" (coined by Mandel'shtam to describe the police practices of self-presentation, but the meaning of which is extended by Vatulescu to also encompass the representation practices of the subjects of policing) does not belong to either of the two camps, but retains a critical and historical distance from both. As the argument goes, this allows Vatulescu to overcome the dichotomy between the totalitarian state and subversive/ submissive cultural actors, while at the same time avoiding to lump together police agents with writers and film-makers. The instances of appropriation, adaptation, parody, exorcism, or exposure are

[34] Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics. Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 15.
[35] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24.3 (1985): 250.

therefore to be approached dynamically: where specific tropes and practices are thought to make a person's professional or personal identity as either an artist or a police officer, Vatulescu works with the assumption that knowledge in Soviet times was fought for as common property regardless of whomever happened to be its rightful owner. In this line, Vatulescu's study goes a long way in illuminating the dialogic nature of the literature produced under communism, postulating that it was not just the passive object of interpretation, but that it was also consciously engaging with and instrumentalizing "lay" hermeneutic practices. The dialogue between the secret police officers and the writers under surveillance was never, however, a dialogue between equal partners. If I were only to give a textual argument, it would be the striking dissimilarity not just in terms of interpretative strategies, but also in terms of language and form between the several reports compiled for the secret police by two of the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat and the rest of the surveillance files' contents.

The problem with conceptualizing the relationship between literature and the secret police files based on a constructivist approach such as that of Cristina Vatulescu is that it unavoidably blurs the line between symbolic violence (purposeful violations of linguistic and discursive codes and their counterpart – purposeful misinterpretations) and real violence (surveillance, interrogations, house raids, official warnings, arrests), in which agency is anything but shared. While I agree that having a sense of the secret police officers' understanding of "tendentious" literature is important for contextualizing repressive measures, I am not convinced that their "sampling methods" or hermeneutical practices are as immediately transparent from the files as Vatulescu will have it. In the case of the German writers of the 1970s generation, the secret police officers never interpreted the texts – first because not knowing German they did not have access to them and second because they had a simplistic, but clear understanding of the

professionalization of literature. Consequently, they elicited translations and interpretations from "specialists" – either fellow writers or university professors and mobilized their professional standing as a supporting argument. While it is clear that both the secret police informers and the occasional "experts" were instructed what to look for in their analyses ("interpretative content," "tendentious ideas") the actual resulting texts recorded in the files are the result of mixed agencies, the relations between which are not accessible based solely on the texts themselves. Also, a recurring practice of the Secret Police was to coerce the authors themselves to interpret their own texts, or the texts of their friends. This goes to prove the extent to which the hermeneutics of the Secret Police were not just a textual practice of symbolic violence, but more often a violent practice tout court. What the dialogical approach further obscures is the great asymmetry between the actors' access to information. I partly agree with Vatulescu that the Secret Police constructed and ritualistically exposed its "secrecy". However, even if the German writers had been (forcefully) acquainted with the secret police officers, the so-called "conspirativity" of the informers and collaborators was greatly treasured and maintained at all costs, at times leading the secret police officers to devise absurdly complex "plots" [legende] to prevent them from being discovered. Apartments were bugged, phones tapped, personal correspondence read, manuscripts confiscated, informers successfully "infiltrated" into the writers' close group of friends. While it is true that the dialogical textual analysis of literature and secret police files does skillfully recover agency for the writers, it is rather deceiving in attempting to resolve the macro-dichotomy between the totalitarian state and submissive/subversive authors at the micro-level of individual encounters.

In conclusion, in the following chapters I analyze the history of the 1970s generation of German writers from the Banat by interpreting their collective projects (and group failures)

within a theoretical framework inspired by the post-revisionist Soviet studies' integrative understanding of state and society, and their individual interpretative options (and misinterpretations) in line with the theoretical grounds laid down by the authors of the so-called "Soviet subjectivity". In attempting to give an account of both conflict and integration, I rely on the structuralist approaches to the topic of intellectuals in Socialist Romania of Katherine Verdery and Ioana Macrea-Toma, all the while looking at socialization and subjectivity as possible complementary perspectives. Methodologically, I seek to strike a balance between an ethnographic and a textual approach to the social practices and political (mis)understandings of the members of the 1970s generation in their interaction with the Secret Police.

Chapter 2 - Making and Unmaking an "Avant-Garde": The Beginnings of the 1970s Generation

Spanning from 1972 to 1975, the short history of the German literary group Aktionsgruppe Banat would largely be incomprehensible divorced from the context of the German literary press at the end of the 1960s and during the first half of the 1970s Socialist Romania. In the period of their early socialization, the authors benefited from cultural campaigns driven regionally and from the center, as well as from the substantial investment, both in terms of resources (publication opportunities) and in terms of discourse into a generational mode of argumentation.

"It is by no means impossible," wrote the *Neue Literatur* editor Paul Schuster in 1970, "that one or the other of the *Neue Banater Zeitung* student pages will in years have bibliophile value, having published the first poem of a prominent poet"[1]. That time has proved him right is deceiving – the purpose of this chapter is to show to what extent the press did more than "discover" and make visible the young German writers in Banat. It argues that between 1972 and 1975, Aktionsgruppe was as much the project of nine newly high-school graduates and university students whose original works were published extensively in the press as it was the product and symptom of a shift in the logic of the cultural field, the ambiguities of which were being played out and tested by various actors interested in maintaining or furthering their institutional authority.

[1] Paul Schuster, "Nichtprovinzielles aus der Provinz II," *Neue Literatur* 21.10 (1970), 105.

As the formation, activity and dissolution of Aktionsgruppe Banat will show, editors and writers were equally engaged in defining themselves not just as a qualitatively new type of intellectuals, but also as producers of progressive ideology suited to the seemingly new party-line in cultural matters inaugurated by the so-called "July Theses" of 1971. By that it reveals the built-in tensions of the so-called "mini-cultural revolution" period, when the production of ideology was being encouraged and had the potential to impose a new logic of privilege in the cultural field, when accessibility and utility were being glorified as the new measure of literary value, but the lack of a clear meta-discourse stimulated both a bolder public discourse and overzealous surveillance and repression.

2.1. Patterns of Early Socialization

The background against which a generational mode of argumentation emerged in literary debates in the 1960s Socialist Romania was the so-called period of controlled liberalization[2]. Restructuring the literary canon, refashioning the role of the writer and promoting a new understanding of literature against the previous decade of socialist realism were some of the discursive means by which privilege, authority and power were being negotiated among different factions of writers. Simultaneously, these arguments potentially carried strong political implications. The youngest generation of Romanian writers (most notably The Onirists [Oniriștii]) seized the opportunity to advocate for the democratization of literary life, for freedom of thought and creation, and the abolition of censorship. In the context of 1968, with Nicolae Ceaușescu's refusal to intervene in Czechoslovakia, previously apolitical or dissident

[2] I follow the periodization and designation of Anneli Ute Gabanyi, who draws particular attention to the limits of the liberalization policies of both Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu. See *Literatura şi politica în România după 1945* [*Literature and Politics in Romania after 1945*] (Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei Române, 2001).

intellectuals joined the Communist Party in unprecedented numbers and pushed for a reformation of the Romanian cultural life from within the establishment. The fairly democratic elections at the 1968 Writers' Union Conference, followed by the much awaited for decentralization of the Writers' Union and publishing houses in 1969[3] were received with enthusiasm and taken as signs of liberalization, despite them subsequently proving to have been a double edged sword. Although associations were established in some of the main cultural centers in the country, their new members had to be validated by the Writers' Union, they had to obtain approval from the center for all publications and cultural manifestations, but more importantly – they were financially dependent on the Union, which had the right to control their expenses. Also, the decentralization of the publishing houses turned out to have been motivated by the central authorities' will to "increase ideological exigencies, reduce auxiliary personnel, and diffuse the financial responsibility for unprofitable works"[4].

On the short term, however, on the German cultural scene a change of elites seemed possible – decentralization increased the number of jobs in the cultural field and the channels for upward movement were temporarily de-clogged – especially for the liberal-minded intellectuals who had entered the cultural scene in the 1960s, who were now holding positions of medium authority and consequently could act as spokesmen of the younger generation, investing discursively in their promotion. Eduard Schneider, cultural editor of the *Neue Banater Zeitung* as of 1969, Gerhardt Csejka, editor of the Bucharest daily *Neuer Weg* between 1969-1970 and afterwards editor of the main German cultural magazine in Romania, *Neue Literatur*, Peter

[3] Cultural actors from the provinces, in particular, spoke out against the accumulation of privileges at the center, and looked forward to being granted financial and administrative autonomy in local associations of the Writers' Union. In addition, the break down and specialization of the central publishing houses was thought to put an end to excessive bureaucracy, unjust and discriminatory retribution, and unprofessional editorial practices.

[4] Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia. Instituţii literare în comunismul românesc* [*Privilligentsia. Literary Institutions under Romanian Communism*] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2010), 170.

Motzan, assistant at the German department of the Cluj University since 1970, and Stefan Sienerth, assistant at the Pedagogical Institute in Târgu Mureș and later lecturer at the University in Sibiu, were all born around the mid-1940s, finishing their studies and taking up jobs in the cultural field at the perceived height of the liberalization period.

Nikolaus Berwanger, the new chief editor of the regional daily *Die Wahrheit* from Timișoara, renamed *Neue Banater Zeitung* in 1968, was particularly instrumental in the restructuring of the cultural press in Banat. Berwanger had a spotless political background - born in 1935 in a family of workers and social-democrats, he had become in 1940 the youngest member of the German Antifascist Committee in Romania [Comitetul Antifascist German]. Since 1952 he worked for the newspaper *Neuer Weg* and in 1957 he joined the Romanian Workers' Party - as of 1965, the Romanian Communist Party. In 1968 he participated at the establishing of the Council for the Workers of German Nationality in Romania [Consiliul muncitorilor de naţionalitate germană din România]. He was also a member of the newly established Writers' Union association in Timișoara and from this position co-founded, in 1968, the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle. As chief editor of *Neue Banater Zeitung* beginning with 1969, he largely refashioned the profile of the newspaper to address the Banat Schwabians specifically. The supplement "Pipatsch", written entirely in dialect is the best example of how the seemingly generous cultural policy of the socialist regime towards ethnic minorities was being implemented both as a means of propaganda and as a reinforcement of the German minority's own conservatism. Starting from November 1969, *Neue Banater Zeitung* also published the literary supplements "Wir über uns" and "Universitas", written by high-school and

university students respectively[5]. Tens of students had their literary debut in these newspaper supplements up until they were discontinued in 1972 and 1974, including many of the future members of the literary group Aktionsgruppe Banat. "Universitas," in particular, functioned for the young generation as a platform for self-fashioning and promotion, in as much as it delegated editorial responsibilities to the writers themselves. As for Nikolaus Berwanger, he was among the first to frame the popularity of the student pages as a sign of "the rejuvenation of German literature, [since] there were never so many young people in Banat giving voice through poetry to their need to communicate."[6] In terms of cultural politics, Berwanger had struck a fragile balance between the communist enlightenment ethos and glorification of productivism and the minority interest in fostering its specificity.

The success formula was quickly picked up at the center. The *Neue Banater Zeitung*, wrote the *Neue Literatur* editor Paul Schuster in an enthusiastic article about the newspaper's cultural pages, was one of the very few examples in the German press proving that "cultural politics are a concrete reality"[7]. There was more to this, however, than merely the potential for a renewal of the German literature in Romania – the point Schuster made in his presentation of the high-school pages was that the coexistence of commonplaces and original, critical thought was in itself conductive of social change. By reproducing "positive" and "negative" excerpts from the newspaper on two columns (many of the negative examples being textbook illustrations of the party ideology on the role of education in a communist society, the decadence of Beat and the

[5] See Eduard Schneider, "Literatur und Literaturreflexion in der rumäniendeutschen Presse der Nachkriegszeit: Die *Neue Banater Zeitung* (Temeswar) und ihr Beitrag zur Förderung der literarischen Nachwuchsgeneration (1969 – 1975)," in Mira Miladinović Zalaznik, Peter Motzan, Stefan Sienerth (eds.), *Benachrichtigen und vermitteln: Deutschsprachige Presse und Literatur in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: IKGS Verlag, 2007): 315-45.
[6] Nikolaus Berwanger, "Verjüngtes Banater Schrifttum," *Neue Banater Zeitung* 12 (June 12, 1970): 3.
[7] Paul Schuster, "Nichtprovinzielles aus der Provinz," *Neue Literatur* 21.9 (1970): 108.

capitalist West etc), Schuster was effectively illustrating the practice of critical reading and the ability to distinguish between "dogma" and genuine engagement with one's own reality.

It was such a critical program that *Neue Literatur* was to implement in the known framework of "enlightenment" campaigns carried out from the center. In 1970 several young editors from the magazine, among whom the prose writer Paul Schuster, the poet Anemone Latzina and the literary critic Gerhardt Csejka travelled to Banat, visited the seven German high-schools in the region, met and discussed with the students, among them all the future prominent members of the 1970s generation, and published their writings in a special issue of the magazine in February 1971. As the protocols of the discussions compiled by the students show, this was itself a "concrete" and lively realization of cultural practices. One of the students recorded the initial reactions at finding out about the visit and the subsequent realization that it was not an ordinary encounter: "We were in general not particularly interested in this meeting, because we were convinced that it was one of the many visits of protocol […] These nice people who asked such open questions, who also gave as equally direct answers, could not have possibly been here 'for inspection'."[8] The visit was compared not just with the official inspections, but also with the educational lectures or the meetings of the Union of the Communist Youth, where the discussions were, wrote the students, "a pure formality". In contrast, the topics of the talks conducted by the *Neue Literatur* editors were chosen democratically, by secret ballot. Whereas in the published protocols sexuality appears to have been the most problematic theme, and love the most popular, the censorship report for the *Neue Literatur* issue records that the censors eliminated the references to discussions about the parents' participation at "the reconstruction work in U.S.S.R.", the euphemism of choice for the German populations' deportation to labor

[8] Hans Neumann, "Auszüge aus den Diskussionsprotokollen," *Neue Literatur* 22.2 (1971): 6.

camps following the Second World War, to religion, to the relationship between West and East Germany, to the "formalism and boredom" of the workings of Union of Communist Youth, as well as the comment that "taking part in patriotic work is useless"[9]. That such topics could be discussed in an official setting was striking for the students – predictably, many seem to have been reluctant to speak their minds, to which yet others protested. While it is difficult to assess the impact of the student pages and of the campaign in high-schools on the future activities of the young generation of German writers from Banat, it is nevertheless important to note that their early socialization was marked by opportunities and encouragements to express themselves freely and critically, coming from what was perceived as the official cultural establishment. *Neue Banater Zeitung* offered a platform for publishing and do-it-yourself editorial practice, while *Neue Literatur* insisted on the potential for such a platform to carry diverse and critical ideas and foster constructive debates, in the spirit of the seemingly lenient cultural policy encouraged by the party:

> When we speak of the education of our young generation, we must necessarily keep in mind to create the conditions for it to get to know what is happening in the world. We do not need to fear that an open, free confrontation of our materialist-dialectical views with idealist views can possibly hurt the formation of the youth; rather, exactly in this free confrontation […] the ideals of communism will prevail.[10]

[9] Comitetul pentru presă şi tipărituri [Committee for Press and Publishing], 13 (1971), 227.
[10] Nicolae Ceauşescu, "Talk at the 9th Congress of the Union of Communist Youth, February 19, 1971," *Neue Literatur* 22.2 (1971), 3.

2.2. The Crystallization of Aktionsgruppe Banat

"er schreibt" (Richard Wagner, *porträt eines rumäniendeutschen lyrikers*, 1972[11])

The nine members of Aktionsgruppe Banat - Albert Bohn, Rolf Bossert, Werner Kremm, Johann Lippet, Gerhard Ortinau, Anton Sterbling, William Totok, Richard Wagner and Ernest Wichner – were of the same age cohort. Many of them had been high-school colleagues, published in "Wir über uns" and participated at the meetings with the *Neue Literatur* editors. In the early 1970s, they were studying together at the Faculty of Letters in Timișoara, were members of the literary circle "Universitas" and edited the *Neue Banater Zeitung* literary supplement with the same name up until 1974. They had been following the events of 1968 on Radio Vienna and Radio Free Europe, were equally passionate about rock'n'roll music, shared and discussed the same books and their admiration for Bertolt Brecht[12]. In as much as they were "similarly located," were exposed to the same "social and intellectual symptoms" of socio-historic change and exhibited an "identity of responses" created by "mutual stimulation," they made for a "generation unit" in Karl Mannheim's terms[13]. Idiosyncratic for the context of the German literary scene at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, their coming together as a self-conscious group among ever more insistent discussions regarding the lack of modern poetry and the rise of a young generation of writers made them into the very embodiment of the hypothesized generation.

[11] "Übungen für Gleichgültige," *Neue Literatur* 23.11 (1972): 3.
[12] These are what William Totok signaled out, in an oral history interview conducted in April 2012, as the shared elements of the group members' "early socialization".
[13] Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1952), 276-320.

For all the discussions around the notions of traditional and modern literature, wrote Gerhard Csejka in 1970, there was yet for a poet to come forward and "acknowledge with full confidence, unreservedly, at the top of his voice that he is one of the modern writers"[14]. Because of their positioning at the crossroad of different cultural spheres, the German writers suffered from an "inferiority complex" ["Minderwertigkeitskomplex"], minded Csejka, and from a paralyzing fear of being either provincials or epigones. Despite taking on the formal aspects of modern poetry, their relation to both language and the human nature remained highly un-problematized. He argued however that during the 1960s there had already appeared an almost homogenous new generation of writers – "generation obviously not in the strict sense of an age cohort, perhaps not even in that of a stylistic community, but merely as a group to emerge almost simultaneously and with approximately the same basic questions"[15]. For Csejka, the writers born during the war made for a "lost generation" that had taken upon itself "the risk of inadequacy," by writing something other than the typical elegiac poetry rooted in the rural landscape. They held the promise of a changed cultural atmosphere and could stand as the basis for a truly modern literature, although definitively overcoming the inferiority complex that still plagued the post-war generation, he projected, would be the next "beginning" to the German literature in Romania.

Although Csejka's article is exemplary for the way in which literary criticism was performing a generational mode of argumentation and insisting on the necessity and opportunity for a renewal of the German literature in Romania, he was by no means alone in his attempt to build a conceptual framework that would allow for the restructuring of the cultural field.

[14] Gerhardt Csejka, "Über den Anfang. Betrachtungen die neuere deutsche Lyrik in Rumänien betreffend," *Neue Literatur* 21.5 (1970): 16.
[15] Gerhardt Csejka, "Über den Anfang..," 19.

Possibly the best illustration of the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of renewal in the German literary press is the roundtable discussion organized by *Neue Literatur* in July 1970, which brought together young writers and literary critics from Cluj (Peter Motzan, Franz Hodják), Braşov (Berndt Kolf) and Bucharest (Emmerich Reichrath, Gerhardt Csejka, Anemone Latzina, Paul Schuster) with representatives of the older generation (Emmerich Stöffel, Klaus Kessler) to discuss the post-war development and prospects of literature, with what for the external observer appeared as "a daring and openness rarely met with in Romanian publications"[16]. The most daring and open statements, such as the suggestion that there might be a resurgence of the "old ways" in the evaluation of literature and "a discrepancy between the instructions from above and their actual realization in political and social matters," as well the signaling out of "stupid and coward" censors and the requirement of praising the party "twenty times in every work" as nuisances did not pass the censorship and were left out of the print version[17]. The discussion nevertheless engaged extensively with problems of content and form in literature and their bearing on aesthetic judgment (from the "objective" structuralist position of Motzan and Kolf to the topical comments of Latzina, Schuster and Csejka on tradition and the thematization of the immediate post-war history), recurrently grounding itself in what was perceived as a period of yet untapped opportunities, when "engaged criticism" was to dialectically "reflect and direct" literary realities[18].

It is in this context that the programmatic roundtable discussion of the young German writers elicited by the newspaper *Neue Banater Zeitung* and published in the literary supplement

[16] Anneli Maier, "The Cultural Scene in Rumania II," *RFE Background Report* (December 23, 1970): 17, accessed January 12, 2013: http://fa.osaarchivum.org/background-reports?col=8&id=56786.
[17] Comitetul pentru presă şi tipărituri. Direcţia Literatură [Committee for Press and Publishing. Directorate for Literature], 19 (1970): 48.
[18] "Strukturalismus und Kerweih: NL-Rundtischgespräch über aktuelle Probleme der deutschen Literaturkritik in Rumänien," *Neue Literatur* 21.8 (1970): 46-63.

"Universitas" on April 2, 1972 marked not just the beginning of Aktionsgruppe Banat as a group, but also the self-conscious discursive appropriation of the new generation project by the group members. "Am Anfang war das Gespräch" ["At the Beginning Was the Discussion"][19] reads as a dialogue with the major themes circulating in the literary press of the time, as a bold, although somewhat vague collective positioning at the crux of the most heated topics: the paradoxical situation of the German literature in Romania in the broader context of German-language literature, the perspective on socialism and the recent history of the German community, the possibilities of experimental literature. The authors identified themselves as part of a new generation of poets, which had been brought up under socialism and expounded their "specific awareness of reality" [unser spezifisches Realitätsbewusstsein], less prejudiced and more complex than that of their parents. Avoiding direct references to National Socialism, Richard Wagner skillfully translated the generational strife in ideological terms, capitalizing especially on the educational and enlightenment ethos of communism: "our parents' education allowed for false patterns of thought to arise, which could hinder an objective perspective"[20]. The power of the argument put forward by Aktionsgruppe Banat and Wagner as its leader came from the intimate, personal intertwining of the commitment to socialism with the turn against their parents' legacy, from the emotional corroboration of a discursive political understanding. Several of the writers' family members had been members of the SS during the Second World War, and still expressed nostalgia for their national-socialist past – in this sense, the authors' socialist political understandings had also been validated through recognition. As opposed to the post-war writers who had to "unlearn" their bourgeois past, but did so uncritically, the generation born under communism could openly play out its revolt against a past that it had been unwillingly

[19] "Am Anfang war das Gespräch. Erstmalige Diskussion junger Autoren. Standpunkte and Standorte," *Neue Banater Zeitung* – "Universitas" (April 2, 1972): 4.
[20] Idem.

dealt. Although still lacking in clarity, their poetry was to make for a true Marxist literature, the argument went, exactly because it could engage critically with the social realities in which the authors were embedded, as opposed to the socialist realist literature which had created for itself a "paper reality" for reasons of circumstance and opportunism.

At the same time, this was to be poetry qualitatively different from the escapist "landscape poetry" [Landschaftlyrik], what Gerhard Csejka had plastically described as "die Heide-, Hecke- and Hochplateaulyrik". If not altogether a "poetry of thought" [Gedankenlyrik] in contradistinction to the aloof "poetry of sentiment" [Gefühlslyrik], the authors saw their writing as firmly grounded in the "concrete reality". In their programmatic discussion, they were effectively actualizing the major issues voiced by literary critics with regard to the future of the German literature in Romania, up to the point of solving the "inferiority complex" by reconciling their double relationship to reality – linguistically and by formation part of the German literature at large, they necessarily had to come to grips in their writing with the reality of their local milieu. It was to be an experimental poetry in the tradition of Brecht, at the same time taking inspiration from the East German literature of the 1960s, notably from the works of Heinz Kahlau, Sarah and Rainer Kirsch, Volker Braun and Jens Gerlach, which made for a validation of political understandings through resonance. At this point, the group program largely went ahead of the authors' actual literary practice, as it also transpired from the response to the roundtable discussion of Horst Weber, editor of the newspaper *Die Woche* from Sibiu, in which he suggested that "of these group discussions there could arise an action group [Aktionsgruppe] of the young writers."[21] Consequently, the nine friends and colleagues took on the name

[21] The critical responses were elicited and published by the newspaper *Neue Banater Zeitung*. See "Im Widerstreit der Meinungen. Stellungnahmen zur NBZ-Universitas-Diskussion 'Am Anfang war das Gespräch'," *Neue Banater Zeitung* (May 14, 1972), 4.

Aktionsgruppe Banat and went on publishing and performing collectively for the following three years.

2.3. Readjusting for the "Mini-Cultural Revolution"

By the time Aktionsgruppe configured itself as a group, intellectuals who were a part of or aspired to entering the cultural establishment were assessing the consequences of the new cultural policy announced by the Party. The real impact of the "mini-cultural revolution" inaugurated by the Theses presented and discussed by Nicolae Ceaușescu on July 6 and July 9, 1971 is a matter of debate. The document decried the lessening of the revolutionary spirit among party members and the masses alike and prescribed a number of drastic measures for the revitalization of socialist consciousness in all aspects of life. In what concerned the writers, it reiterated the idea that "through diverse forms and styles, the arts must serve the people, the nation and the socialist society," therefore cultural publications should expound "a firm political orientation in promoting the militant socialist art and literature and fight against the tendency to break with the socialist realities and the larger public"[22]. This argument was by no means novel to the humanist intelligentsia. In fact, the party line with regard to cultural matters had been surprisingly consistent throughout the end of the 1960s, with the head of the state reminding writers in countless public interventions of the Marxist-Leninist definition of creative freedom as "the understanding of historical necessity". Most notably during a speech held on the eve of the Tenth Party Congress, Ceaușescu made clear that the writers who were not in step with the demands of the time and the necessities of the people could not claim support from the state for

[22] Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Propuneri de măsuri* [*Proposals of Measures*] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971), 14.

their literature and that "freedom is a double-edged sword which gives society the right to choose to support materially, financially, and morally, those works which are of service to it"[23].

However, as long as the gap between party and state was retained, administrative measures were impractical and the perceived liberalization could be interpreted freely from the official statements issued by the highest ranking members of the Party. What the July Theses signaled was the move towards the re-politicization of state institutions, as a corrective to the increasing autonomy of the technocrats and professionals, who were acting, in Ceaușescu's words, as if "they owned those institutions". The Theses were permeated by a renewed ethos of social and institutional engineering, which had the potential to threaten the inner logic of producing and reproducing elites. Therefore, merely assessing that the July Theses did not have the desired impact on literary practice, but rather short term restrictive repercussions (censorship become more vigilant for a period, lists of banned authors began to circulate, surveillance measures were reinforced)[24] misses the point of the dispute on power being waged against the state.

The immediate institutional reform conducted in line with the July Theses was the reorganization of the State Committee for Art and Culture as the Council for Socialist Culture and Education, placed under the immediate authority of the Central Committee and conceived as "a party organ" to be led by "party activists". Moreover, following the 1972 Congress of the Writers' Union, a set of new Statues were adopted, which explicitly defined the Writers' Union as a "professional organization" having as goal "the promotion of a militant literature, inspired by the socialist ideals of the people" and which performed its activities "under the direct

[23] J. Arthur Johnson, "The Rumanian Cultural Scene on the Eve of the Party Congress," *RFE Background Report* (July 31, 1969): 12, accessed January 15, 2013, http://fa.osaarchivum.org/background-reports?col=8&id=56759.
[24] Lucia Dragomir, *L'Union des Écrivains. Une institution transnationale à l'Est: l'exemple roumain* (Paris: Belin, 2007), 179.

leadership of the Romanian Communist Party" [25]. In addition to sanctioning direct party control, the Statutes also enforced a much more restrictive admission procedure. In the short run the "mini-cultural revolution" did not significantly alter the constituency of the Union and it certainly did not succeed to displace the generation of writers who had won for themselves institutional privileges during the period of relative liberalization, but on the long run it made accession to the privileged intelligentsia increasingly more difficult, especially for the generation having its debut in the 1970s. Moreover, as suggested by Katherine Verdery, the Theses gradually imposed a new logic of upward movement in the cultural field, it dynamited the existent categories of professional evaluation, "showing writers eager for greater influence a new channel through which this might be achieved: specializing in the production of ideology"[26]. The public interventions of Aktionsgruppe Banat reveal the inbuilt tensions of the "mini-cultural revolution" period both in terms of the shifting logic of the generational mode of argumentation (between the local level and the center, the conservative and "progressive" responses to the liberalization period) and in what concerns the opportunities opened up by different strains of critical Marxism.

Drawing from the impulses of the end of the 1960s and relying both on the critical platform espoused by the young editors of *Neue Literatur* and on the resources available locally, especially the publication and exposure opportunities offered by *Neue Banater Zeitung*, the group sought to align its literary project to the most ingenious readings of modern literature as ideological production[27] and presented themselves, as a revolutionary force for the German

[25] Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia..,* 124.
[26] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 186.
[27] Anton Sterbling's essay presented at the three years anniversary of Aktionsgruppe Banat and subsequently published in *Neue Literatur* rehearses the main arguments expounded by Csejka and Motzan in their literary criticism. See Anton Sterbling, "aktionsgruppe – oder ähnlich so," *Neue Literatur* 26.7 (1975): 39-45.

literature in Romania. This mode of argumentation capitalized on the dynamics of the cultural field, in particular on the tensions between the locally and the centrally driven cultural and editorial policies. In this sense the debate around the anthology *Wortmeldungen* of 1972 is exemplary for the way in which the generational rhetoric, initially bound to the regional context of Banat, was refashioned from a means of negotiation against the center into a means of negotiation at the center. The *Neue Banater Zeitung* editor Eduard Schneider compiled the anthology from texts previously published in the newspaper's literary supplement for high-school students without the authors' consent and introduced it as "a rare flower of the wasteland," the product of the cultural campaign carried out by *Neue Banater Zeitung*, which had released the latent artistic energies of the region and put it on the map of German literature in Romania[28]. The members of Aktionsgruppe Banat protested against this regional mode of argumentation not least because they considered the selection of texts (organized thematically around issues such as childhood, love) unrepresentative of their literary program and ideological positioning. As a response, their first group of texts published by *Neue Literatur* was supposed to be punctuated by quotes from the NBZ supplement in Schwabian dialect "Pipatsch," illustrating the exaggeration of regional specificity in the cultural strategy promoted by the newspaper's chief editor Nikolaus Berwanger[29].

The "split" with *Neue Banater Zeitung* and Nikolaus Berwanger and turn towards the young editors of *Neue Literatur* for support, signaled the perceived failure of the regionally driven cultural policies' compromise between minority interests and the overarching socialist discourse in the period of the "mini-cultural revolution." Whereas at the local level actors such as

[28] Eduard Schneider (ed.), *Wortmeldungen. Eine Anthologie junger Lyrik aus dem Banat* (Timișoara: Facla, 1972), 5-11.

[29] The account is provided by Gerhad Ortinau under the informant name "Bert" and pertains to William Totok's surveillance file. Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845 - "Interpretul" [Surveillance File – William Totok], vol. II, 7.

Berwanger promoted a fairly conservative cultural policy which instrumentalized specificity in order to ensure a measure of institutional autonomy and substantiate claims for resources, the members of Aktiosgruppe Banat responded to the permeation of public discourse by a renewed interest in ideology by pushing minority interests in the foreground. They were legitimizing themselves as producers of progressive ideology which in their view lacked during the so-called period of "Sovietization," but was beginning to crystalize under the controlled liberalization of the 1960s among the first generation born under socialism. It is clear that understanding the July Theses as a drive for "re-Stalinization" was by no means a profitable interpretative strategy for the young generation of German writers in the first half of the 1970s. Instead, they negotiated with enthusiasm and naivety the affinities between their own positioning as forerunners on the German cultural scene and the Party's revolutionary ethos and renewed claims at authority in all aspects of the socialist reality.

2.4. Publishing and Performing as a Group

"our contribution in this round/ is premeditated and belongs/ to a new viewpoint" (Richard Wagner, 1973)

As of 1972, Aktionsgruppe Banat engaged in a far-reaching process of self-creation which cut across different media and forms of public performance. They participated in radio and television programs, held the regular meetings of the literary circle "Universitas" at the Students' House of Culture in Timișoara, gave public readings in Cluj, Bucharest and in several

villages from Banat[30]. The authors published extensively in German literary magazines throughout the country and as a group in three issues of *Neue Literatur*: "Übungen für Gleichgültige von jungen Banater Autoren" (1972), "Welt ins Haus. Neue Texte aus dem Banat" (1973) and "Aktionsgruppe Banat. Wire Wegbereiter" (1974), of which the latter is the only issue where the group's name passed the censorship.

Reflecting on their literary practice, the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat engaged in a purposely provocative dialogue with the literary establishment, fashioning themselves together with and against their readership. "These texts here are lessons," wrote Anton Sterbling in a programmatic introduction to "Exercises for Those Who Are Indifferent," "although this will probably not be immediately obvious to you, but rather you will believe them to be preambles."[31] The Brecht-inspired introduction further dramatizes the readerships' encounter with the texts, through a range of common "reading habits," from suspicion towards the transparency of their content, to over-interpretation – "you will look for allusions, equivoque, an inner set of issues," to the seeming discovery of the authors' intentions and method, self-identification with the texts' message, and ultimately the impossibility of engaging in a dialogue: "you will refuse the texts, you will smile over them, praise them and you will not be able to say anything about them". These formulations are symptomatic for the way in which the group conceived its role as an element of disruption and change in what they regarded as a highly conservative German (literary) community, as well as for their overarching program of "critical engagement" with the existing social realities, of which the public itself was one. Possibly the clearest formulation of the critical Marxist understanding of the relationship between the writer and his environment

[30] Anton Sterbling, "Einige subjektive Anmerkungen zur 'Aktionsgruppe Banat'," in Idem, *"Am Anfang war das Gespräch". Reflexionen und Beiträge zur "Aktionsgruppe Banat" und andere literatur- und kunstbezogene Arbeiten* (Hamburg: Krämer, 2008), 16.
[31] Anton Sterbling, "Übungen für Gleichgültige," *Neue Literatur* 23.11 (1972), 3.

came from Franz Hodjak, a fellow member of the 1970s generation: "the only function by which poetry as a form of art retains its right to existence today is to take up a dialogue with the environment, i.e. to be a counter-accomplishment, the achievements of the environment being the thesis, and those of the poem the antithesis out of which the environment has to draw a synthesis – therefore a dialectical process which is equivalent to progress"[32]. In a similar logic, Aktionsgruppe Banat introduced itself as simultaneously part of and against its environment – if there was a contradiction between publishing in the established literary press while dramatizing the public's impossibility to understand, relate and respond to the group's works, this contradiction itself was a creative factor and was thought to play into the further development of the literary establishment as a whole.

The concept of literary engagement as referred to by members of the 1970s generation such as Anemone Latzina and Franz Hodjak and as it was made into a literary credo by Aktionsgruppe Banat had reached the German literary scene in Romania by way of contemporary German criticism and poetry. *Neue Literatur* in particular published along with contemporary literature interviews with East German poets such as Volker Braun, Rainer Kunze, Wulf Kirsten, Rainer and Sarah Kirsch[33]. In the GDR, lyrical poetry had asserted itself in the 1960s as what David Bathrick calls "a danger zone of transcendence," a medium in which challenges to the official cultural policy were articulated "by a collective group that experienced itself as such – a group ready to assert publicly its sense of shared 'provocation' and critical impatience to the status quo"[34]. In their most daring interventions, the poets of the 1960s had taken issue with the orthodoxies of Marxist-Leninism (productivism, the glorification of

[32] Franz Hodjak, "Interview mit mir selbst," *Neue Literatur* 22.9 (1971): 13.
[33] Raluca Cernahoschi-Condurateanu, "The Political, the Urban, and the Cosmopolitan: The 1970s Generation in Romanian-German Poetry", Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2010, 44.
[34] David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 70-1.

technological progress) and have sought to subvert the instrumentalization of Marxism by insisting on the legitimacy of the lyric persona's subjective take on reality. Inspired by these developments, the point for the authors of Aktionsgruppe Banat was to re-appropriate "engagement" – a concept which had been, in Richard Wagner's words, discredited by excessive conventional use, turned into a formal declaration of allegiance to the regime. At the roundtable discussion organized around the topic in 1973, "Engagement as Opportunity and Change" ["Engagement als Chance und Veränderung"], Wagner defined engagement as "the attempt to find answers to the questions of public life,"[35] an essentially social practice which entailed a critical concern for the realities of the German community in Romania under communism. At the same time, literary engagement meant fashioning a new aesthetic through linguistic and stylistic experimentation. Finally, in as much as it stemmed from the authors' identification with the socialist project, their literary program was inherently, though not always overtly political. Thus configured, Wagner could align the literary practice of Aktionsgruppe Banat with that of the avant-garde (Majakowski and Brecht). Not without irony, the same positioning vis-à-vis the literary establishment is suggested by the motto to the third group montage published in *Neue Literatur*, the poem "wire wegbereiter" ["us (or scattered) forerunners"] by the avant-garde literary group Wiener Gruppe[36].

Aktionsgruppe Banat maintained that the renewal of the German literature in Romania depended on the overcoming of provincialism and argued from the position of "forerunners" for an uncompromising experimentation with form and language. As early as 1972 and with direct reference to the members of the group, Gerhard Csejka qualified his previous evaluation of the

[35] "Engagement als Chance und Veränderung. Rundtischgespräch mit jungen Autoren in Temesvar," in *Ein Pronomen ist verhaftet worden. Die frühen Jahre in Rumänien – Texte der Aktionsgruppe Banat*, edited by Ernest Wichner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 61.
[36] "Aktionsgruppe Banat. Wire Wegbereiter," *Neue Literatur* 25.4 (1974): 4.

young generation of German writers and proceeded to present it as a stylistically distinguishable group rather than an age community: "distinct and outstanding are at the moment those features which they have in common and which characterize them as a generation," [37] particularly their mastery of language, their conciseness, directness and clarity. The preeminence of form and structure rather than content in the evaluation of literature was predictably an argument against subjective, circumstantial criticism, but it was rarely being practiced in a strong form (one exception is Bernd Kolf). Critics like Gerhard Csejka and Peter Motzan rather sought to maintain proportions and interpreted formal innovations as part of a broader program of social change, a strategy by which the authors attempted to create an active, receptive public, making it into a co-partner. In this line of reasoning, frustrating the readership's expectations in terms of genre, form and language had the potential to develop new habits of thought, which was "the tendency of every true socialist literature"[38]. This type of argument had the added value that it interpreted modern literature as a sophisticated mode of ideological production and therefore played into the ongoing negotiation of the status of professional writer (and literary critic) in the aftermath of the so-called "July Theses".

2.5. Repression and Dissolution

The eventual dissolution of the group rested on the extent to which their program was comprehensible outside the discursive field disputed in the press of the time and on how their literary practice fared with the official party line in cultural matters on the one hand, and with the

[37] Gerhard Csejka, "Als ob es mit 'als ob' zu Ende ginge: Neues in der rumäniendeutschen Lyrik 1972," *Neue Literatur* 23.12 (1972): 66.
[38] Peter Motzan, "Nachwort," in Peter Motzan (ed.), *vorläufige protokolle. Anthologie junger rumäniendeutscher lyrik* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1976), 101.

available tropes, narratives and stock figures employed by the Secret Police on the other. Having been approached by Secret Police officers, both William Totok and Gerhard Ortinau strategically agreed to collaborate[39] and wrote several reports on the activity of the group. The point for both authors was to reiterate that the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat were writing a Marxist literature which reflected the realities of the German nationality from the Romanian Socialist Republic. That this was indeed so, suggested Ortinau, was proven by the very fact that they were being published – "the fact that a work is published serves the members of the literary circle as both artistic and ideological criteria [of evaluation]. They start from the idea that the editor who publishes it is by nature of his profession highly qualified in literary and political-ideological matters so as to assess both dimensions of the work of art"[40]. To this comment, a marginal note by the officer referred to a report by another informant in which Ortinau was quoted to have questioned exactly the editors' "capabilities". "Pay attention," the officer warned, "he [Ortinau] is therefore liable of lizards!!". There is a sense in which this is paradigmatic for the relationship between the writers of Aktionsgruppe Banat, the informants recruited by the Secret Police, and the various officers in charge of their cases. The arguments put forward by the group members, as well as the generational rhetoric itself were embedded in the logic of the (public) cultural scene and therefore legitimate. Translating them was a work of interpretation elicited from variously qualified informants, from which the Secret Police officers sought confirmation that the texts had "an interpretative content" [conţinut interpretativ]. Much like the authors

[39] See William Totok, *Constrângerea memoriei* [*The Constraint of Memory*] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 20: "We elaborated a defense strategy meant to annihilate the plans of the Secret Police. According to the understanding among ourselves, the group members that the *Securitate* tried to recruit were to show cooperation, but at the same time inform the whole group about the intentions of the political police." Note, however, that Totok's interpretation is part of an account of the Secret Police's repressive actions against himself and the group members throughout the 1970s and 1980s. There is a sense in which their reports to the Secret Police, given in the early 1970s, reproduce the same strategies of legitimation employed by the authors in the literary debates, which suggests that the collaboration was both preemptive and creative.

[40] Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845, vol. II, 4.

themselves, the Secret Police produced a body of "texts" which were self-referential, acquired meaning and legitimacy within the very system that produced them. This does not imply that the writers and police officers did not share assumptions, or that the informants were mere mediators between languages otherwise incomprehensible to each other[41]. It does however assume the existence of a gap maintained on the one hand by the absence of a clear meta-discourse regarding the official party line on issues of cultural production and on the other hand by the inability of the Secret Police to adapt to the changes brought about by the period of liberalization.

Aktionsgruppe Banat was disbanded following the arrest of Gerhard Csejka, Gerhard Ortinau, Richard Wagner and William Totok in October 1975 with the charge of attempting to cross the border illegally. As it became clear during interrogations, the Secret Police officers were trying to make a case against William Totok on the basis of confiscated unpublished texts, which both Ortinau and Wagner were asked to interpret. With an added literary expertise conducted by three professors from the University of Letters in Timișoara, he was arrested in November 1975 and trialed for propaganda against the socialist order[42]. The Secret Police handling of Totok's case followed a logic similar to that identified by Andreas Glaeser in his analysis of the Stasi's response to the Berlin peace and civil rights movements of the 1980s. As long as the suspects responded to educational measures, "temporal lapses of allegiance were not only pardonable, but they added a distinct flavor of realism to what the party called 'the struggle for the minds and hearts of the people'."[43] Such an educational measure had been taken against

[41] For instance, in a report about the anthology *Wortmeldungen*, in which the informant exemplified "the obvious interpretative potential" of the young German writers' poetry by quoting in Romanian translation the ending of the poem "Paradoxon" by Gerhard Ortinau: "stating that you don't do politics/ is an act/ by which you do politics", the Secret Police officer commented in a marginal note to the poem: "it's exactly like this!". See Dosar de urmărire informativă I184945 - "Ziaristul" [Surveillance File – Richard Wagner], 5.
[42] See William Totok, *Constrângerea memoriei*, 24-84 and Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845, vol. II, 67-9.
[43] Andreas Glaeser, "Power/Knowledge Failure: Epistemic Practices and Ideologies of the Secret Police in Former East Germany," *Social Analysis* 47.1 (2003): 12.

Totok in 1971, when he was identified as the author of two anonymous letters send to Radio Free Europe in which "the author commented inimically on the situation of the youth, on the study conditions in schools and slandered the party leadership and the state institutions."[44] Totok was publicly "unmasked," made into an example and expelled from the Union of Communist Youth. However, the Secret Police failed to adapt to resistance prompted by the educational measures which were meant to bring the socialist subject back on the collective path. In this sense, William Totok's surveillance file documents exactly the kind of vicious circle produced by the inability of the Secret Police to "react constructively to interpretive failures in response to a fast changing environment". Not only did the Secret Police fail to recognize the socialist reformist project of Aktionsgruppe Banat as a legitimate product of the liberalization period, but it was also confronted with the failure of traditional measures of coercion in the transnational context created by the relative opening of the ways of communications with the West in the 1960s.

In June 1976, immediately after an article about his arrest appeared in *Le Monde* and was taken up by several radio stations in the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, USA, and Israel[45], Totok was released from prison. Several weeks later, the poet and literary critic Dieter Schlesak, former editor of *Neue Literatur* who had left the country in 1973 published an extensive account of the repression of Aktionsgruppe Banat in the newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, presenting it in connection with the failure of similar critical Marxist projects, such as that of the Praxis group in Yugoslavia, those of Wolf Biermann and Robert Havemann in the GDR, and of Lukács in Hungary. "It is yet again being proven," argued Schlesak, "that there can be no common ground between socialists and those who build a state on dogma, so as it [the dogma] to amount to

[44] Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845 – "Muzicologul" [Surveillance File – William Totok], vol. I, 4.
[45] Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845, vol. II, 82-3.

nothing in terms of power play"[46]. Inscribing the case of Aktionsgruppe into the logic of Western criticism against state socialism, Schlesak effectively opened up a new line of argumentation for the group members. Following the failure of the generational rhetoric in the early 1980s, the authors were to take up individual paths of self-realization, of which one option gradually became to engage in a transnational dialogue by accessing the German media and publishing possibilities abroad. Having tested the limitations of engaged literature and critical Marxism in the changing dynamics of the increasingly nationalist Romanian public discourse, they were to turn towards the thematization of the German minority as a means of negotiation both peculiar to the Romanian cultural scene and mediated by a new conceptualization of the minority status against the background of the transnational German community.

[46] Dieter Schlesak, "Kulturpolitik mit Polizeieinsatz. Marxistische Rumäniendeutsche stören die revolutionäre Ruhe ihres 'sozialistischen' Staates," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 149 (July 10, 1976).

Chapter 3 - Try Again, Fail Again, Fail Better: Arguing for the Generation after Aktionsgruppe Banat

To what extent did the violent intervention of the Secret Police for the disbandment of Aktionsgruppe Banat mark a change in political understandings for the members of the 1970s generation? In subsequent accounts, Richard Wagner cast the moment of the arrest and especially William Totok's eight months imprisonment as a period of helplessness and confusion, but also one of readjustment: "while he stood in prison, we were outside thinking how we could bring our socialist thought in line with the changed realities; we were stupid"[1]. The first part of this chapter explores in detail a case of validation of political understandings through corroboration, which illuminates exactly the kind of ideological realignment which made possible, for several of the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat, to regroup and continue arguing as a generation following Aktionsgruppe's disbandment by the Secret Police. The complex negotiation of continuity and change towards the end of the 1970s resulted in a new ideological and literary offer by the 1970s generation, but it also reinforced its isolation both on the German literary scene in Banat and from the contemporary Romanian literary groups. However, there is a sense in which the generational project had "failed better" the second time around. On the one hand, the group of young German writers managed to establish themselves temporarily as an alternative literary institution, while on the other hand their self-managed literary activity recommended them in West Germany as the most interesting representatives of contemporary German literature from Socialist Romania.

[1] Richard Wagner, "Die Aktionsgruppe Banat. Versuch einer Selbstdarstellung," in *Nachruf auf die rumäniendeutsche Literatur*, edited by Wilhelm Solms (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1990), 126.

3.1. Regrouping after Aktionsgruppe

"There were questions to be asked, decisions would have to be taken, a decision was due, and there was the decision. Finally, almost too late, he had made it. Then his life began, right before the abyss, to gradually change, and he was changing too, without becoming another. In this way the movement won a new man." (Gerhard Ortinau, typescript of *Erscheinung am Rande*, circa 1976[2])

Two of the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat – Anton Sterbling and Ernest Wichner immigrated to West Germany in 1975. Following the dissolution of the group, the writers had difficulties publishing under their names (although it is unclear to what extent there had been an "official" *Publikationsverbot*). All of them eventually made appearances again in the German cultural press, from January 1976, when a review by Rolf Bossert appeared in *Neue Literatur*[3] until July 1977, when two poems by William Totok, one of them about the tiles' factory where he was working at the time, were published in *Karpaten Rundschau*[4]. As several of the group members graduated and got teaching positions in different cities (Richard Wagner in Hunedoara, Rolf Bossert in Bușteni, Johann Lippet in Timișoara), the initial friendship circle also loosened. Most of them, however, did not opt for emigration for almost another decade. On the one hand, this was partly due to the fact that in the second half of the 1970s the former members of Aktionsgruppe Banat gradually re-integrated institutionally into the German cultural establishment, discursively and ideologically re-negotiating their position as writers within the German community and the socialist state. On the other hand, emigration was neither existentially, nor practically an easy option.

[2] Dosar de urmărire informativă I233471 "Titan" [Surveillance file - Gerhard Ortinau], vol. II, 30.
[3] Rolf Bossert, "Weniger ist manchmal mehr," *Neue Literatur* 26.1 (1976): 100-1. Poems by Rolf Bossert and Richard Wagner were also published shortly thereafter, in *Neue Literatur* 26.3 (1976): 28-44.
[4] William Totok, "die obsessionen des kanonenofens," "arbeiter in der ziegelei," *Karpatend Rundschau* 29 (July 22, 1977).

The case of Gerhard Ortinau is possibly the most dramatic illustration of the immediate conflicting responses to the dissolution of Aktionsgruppe Banat, and of the complexities and contradictions behind the decision to emigrate. It reflects the painful sense of personal indeterminacy which came with the violation of the deep intellectual and existential commitment to communism that he had openly performed, and the dramatic consequences of the measures taken against him and the group by the state authorities. In April 1976, Gerhard Ortinau was expelled from the Romanian Communist Party because of his poor academic situation and "for having violated the communist moral code."[5] Later that year he was also expelled from the Faculty of Letters at the University in Timișoara. In September 1976, following a nervous breakdown and hospitalization, Ortinau gave an official written declaration to a major of the Secret Police in which he expressed his resolution to file for emigration if he would not be allowed to finish his studies. Another reason invoked was the inability to profess as a writer because of the violation of the right to free expression, otherwise guaranteed by the Romanian constitution[6]. This explicitly referred to his first published volume, *verteidigung des kugelblitzes*, which appeared in 1976, after long negotiations between the publishing house Dacia and the Romanian censorship institution, The Committee for Press and Print [Comitetul pentru presă și tipărituri]. As one of the rare cases in which archival records of the correspondence between the institutions regarding a volume of one of the young German writers have been preserved, it gives a sense of how the disbanding of Aktionsgruppe Banat impacted the treatment of their works by state authorities. Ortinau's volume had been returned to the publishing house for revision in 1975, after a typical review by the Committee for Press and Publishing, which had signaled out two short stories deemed inadequate. One of them was to be removed presumably for its

[5] Dosar de urmărire informativă I233471, vol. I, 64-5.
[6] Idem, 81.

pornographic content, while the other - *party auf dem lande*, because it tackled, in the censor's laconic description-cum-interpretation "the conflict between generations":

> during a party the youngsters reproach their parents for having done nothing else than 'march, fire arms, and take the wrong stance'; one of them asks why everyone wants to live in the city when 'life in the countryside is so beautiful'; 'long live the peasants,' answers another one, 'there are contradictions in socialism too.'[7]

In the absence of any other commentary (censorship reports are never explanations of the act of censorship, but the act of censorship itself), one can only assume that the reference to the Nazi past of the parents' generation, as well as the ambiguous reference to the so-called "peasant problem" were the reasons for the story's removal. Several years before, however, the text had been published in its entirety in *Neue Literatur*[8], and this was one of the core arguments in Ortinau's complaint against censorship, as was also to become the central argument for writers looking to publish their works abroad.

The censorship report also signaled out for removal a passage in Gerhard Csejka's introduction to the volume, in which the critic, discussing the relationship between the public and the writers in the past noted that after a period of uncertainty regarding the role of literature, followed by the "false expectations of socialist realism" and then by the institutionalization of "a seeming autonomy, a false expectation of literature towards itself," Aktionsgruppe Banat "reestablished the relationship between writers and public on real, sincere grounds"[9]. The references to Aktionsgruppe Banat were also removed from Ortinau's short story *die letzte banater story*[10], together with an insinuation that letters can fall into the wrong hands, but otherwise (contrary to what Ortinau somewhat exaggeratedly stated in the declaration mentioned

[7] Comitetul pentru presă și tipărituri [Committee for Press and Print] 22/1976, 24.
[8] Gerhard Ortinau, "Party auf dem Lande," *Neue Literatur* 23.7 (1972): 11-2.
[9] Comitetul pentru presă și tipărituri [Committee for Press and Print] 22/1976, 24.
[10] Compare Gerhard Ortinau, "die letzte banater story," *Neue Literatur* 26.4 (1975): 15-21 and Gerhard Ortinau, *verteidigung des kugelblitzes* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1976), 78-87.

above) the texts which had been published previously remained intact. After the publishing house made the required changes, the volume was approved for print, but as the correspondence between the publishing house and the Committee for Press and Print shows, the process was interrupted in its final stages by the intervention of the Department for Literature, Cultural Issues, and Film Scripts [Direcţia literaturii, problemelor culturale și scenariilor de film] of the Council for Culture and Socialist Education [Consiliul culturii și educaţiei socialiste]. The Council for Culture and Socialist Education, to which the Committee (as part of the General Directorate for Press and Publishing) was subordinated, had been established in 1971, immediately after the July Theses, as a party-state institution - which meant that cultural production was to be directly controlled by the party (and the Secret Police)[11]. The publishing house director and Dacia's German editor had a meeting at the Council, during which it was decided to remove a "more ambiguous" short story entirely, as well as "some formulations, short paragraphs, also ambiguous [neclare]."[12] After modifications, the process was again interrupted, with the directive "to wait until after the Congress for Political Education and Socialist Culture". Inquiring after the Congress, the publishing house was instructed to request another 2-3 "clearer, engaged"[13] short stories from the author. Finally, the volume was sent back to the Committee for Press and Print for approval. None of the decisions taken in the personal meetings with the members of the Council left a paper trail other than the confused correspondence between the publishing house and the Committee, which was to formally approve the *fait accompli*. Other

[11]Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia. Instituţii literare în comunismul românesc* [*Privilligentsia. Literary Institutions under Romanian Communism*] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2010), 213. In the case of the German writers' volumes published in the 1980s, the authors' surveillance files record requests made by the Secret Police to thoroughly review their content before publication, for instance for William Totok's volume *freundliche fremdheit* (Timișoara: Facla, 1984) which was reduced to less than half of its initial content and for Richard Wagner's volume *Hotel California* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980) which was initially published only partially. One year later the remaining poems were published as *Hotel California II* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1981), but the volume's logic had been compromised.

[12] Comitetul pentru presă și tipărituri [Committee for Press and Print] 22/1976, 22.

[13] Idem, 23-4.

than Ortinau's own complaints that his volume "had been mutilated" there are no written records of how "short" and "ambiguous" the removed paragraphs actually were. After 1977, when the official institution of censorship was disbanded and the Council remained the single deciding authority in cultural matters, this became the norm, which goes to prove the importance of informal relationships with the publishing house editors, as well as with party members in charge of cultural issues at the regional or central level. Ortinau's case also gives weight to the anecdotic accounts that editors knew "when the time was right" to propose a volume for publication.

Ortinau officially filed an emigration request in 1977, which was approved by the county authorities, given that he had close relatives in the Federal Republic. At this point, Ortinau's surveillance file records the intervention of the head of the Secret Police for the county Timiș, who demanded that Ortinau's situation "be reanalyzed". His emigration request was subsequently rejected, and based on reports from various informants according to whom Ortinau was writing on a presumably "hostile" novel, a house raid was ordered to confiscate the manuscript[14]. *Erscheinung am Rande*, the confiscated typescript, opened with a motto by Miklós Haraszti[15] and a haunting account of the authors' undoubtedly personal experience of political disillusionment and confusion following his imprisonment by the Secret Police. In its rough form, the manuscript is a rare document of an ongoing ideological realignment – it records the moment when one's communist beliefs, challenged by the realities of the existing socialist order, are reformulated with renewed conviction exactly because of the perceived antagonism between ideology and real-existing socialism. It was not the image of the "capitalist other" which

[14] Idem, 108, 111.
[15] Haraszti's book about a Hungarian tractor factory, for which he was trialed in 1974, had been translated in German in 1975. Its core argument, eloquently picked up by Heinrich Böll in the book's preface, was that industrial work is equally alienating under socialist conditions. See : Miklós Haraszti, *Stücklohn* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1975).

mediated the change in political understandings, but rather the experience of real-existing socialism functioned as the other against which genuine communist ideals could be measured. "The movement won a new man," Ortinau concludes – a declaration of ideological commitment arrived at via a profound crisis rather than because of the contingency of having been born and socialized under communism. It is around this time that Ortinau (and surely his other writer friends) got news of Wolf Biermann being stripped of his East German citizenship. To the extent that immigrating to the GDR had ever even been a serious alternative for the young German writers[16], this was also the moment when the Federal Republic became the sole acceptable option. In 1978, Ortinau briefly participated along with former members of Aktionsgruppe Banat at the literary circle "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn", through which the writers were being gradually reintegrated into the German cultural establishment. In 1980, however, he left Romania for West Germany.

Nikolaus Berwanger, chief editor of *Neue Banater Zeitung* and president of "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn", the Writers' Union literary circle in Timișoara played an important role in the re-socialization of the Aktionsgruppe members. Berwanger had a spotless background[17] and had grown to prominence throughout the 1960s and 1970s to become one of the most influential cultural and political figures in the Banat region. He welcomed and invited young German writers to the literary circle, not "to support a literature intended to fight and abolish socialism," but with the understanding that "socialism had hit a dead end […] but with the help of education,

[16] Ortinau's personal correspondence, Dosar de urmărire informativă I233471, vol. I, 87-93, 97-8.

[17] Born in 1935 in a family of workers, he had become in 1940 the youngest member of the German Antifascist Committee in Romania [Comitetul Antifascist German]. In 1957 he joined the Romanian Workers' Party - as of 1965, the Romanian Communist Party. Since 1952 he worked for the newspaper *Neuer Weg*, and became chief editor of *Neue Banater Zeitung* in 1969. In 1968, he participated at the establishing of the Council for the Workers of German Nationality in Romania [Consiliul muncitorilor de naţionalitate germană din România]. He was member of the Writers' Union and co-founded, in 1968, the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle.

culture, and literature one could bring about substantial changes"[18]. By late 1977 former Aktionsgruppe members Johann Lippet, Richard Wagner, and William Totok were attending the literary circle's meetings regularly, as were Herta Müller, Horst Samson, Balthazar Waitz, and Helmuth Frauendorfer. Membership facilitated the authors' access to resources – in the form of publications opportunities, participation in radio recordings and literature readings organized by the literary circle[19]. At the same time, it functioned as a form of institutional legitimation and a platform for the promotion of the young German writers back on the literary scene. Already in 1979, William Totok published an article about the workings of the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle in 1977/1978, in which he brought into the forefront the works of Richard Wagner, himself, Johann Lippet and Horst Samson, while neutrally (or critically) reviewing the more traditional poetry of the older generation of writers (the so-called *Dialektgedicht*, poetry written in the Schwabian dialect)[20]. Richard Wagner was to take a roughly similar stance in his account of the season 1978/1979[21]. By 1981, when Nikolaus Berwanger stepped down from his position as president of the literary circle and proposed Richard Wagner to be his successor, the young German writers already had enough votes to ensure his election and the group successfully reestablished itself.

[18] Volker Kaukoreit, "Zwischen den Stühlen. Interview mit Nikolaus Berwanger," *Düsseldorfer Debatte* 2 (1988): 22.
[19] Thomas Krause, *"Die Fremde rast durchs Gehirn, das Nichts…": Deutschlandbilder in the Texten den Banater Autorengruppe (1969 – 1991)* (Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang, 1998), 118.
[20] William Totok, "Auftakt mit Adam-Müller-Guttenbrunn," *Neue Literatur* 29.9 (1978): 113-5.
[21] Richard Wagner, "Vom der Praxis der Literatur. Der Adam-Müller-Guttenbrunn-Kreis in der Saison 1978/79," *Karpaten Rundschau* (June 6, 1979): 1, 4-5.

3.2. Continuity and Change

"we grasped the situation/ we resolved to change it // we changed it // then others came along/ who grasped the changed/ situation and resolved/ to change it // then others came along/ who grasped the changed changed/ situation and resolved/ to change it // they changed the changed/ changed situation // then others came along" (Richard Wagner, *dialektik*, republished in 1977[22])

The gradual institutional integration to "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" and into the cultural establishment (by taking jobs in publishing houses, cultural institutes, or editor positions at various German newspapers) played into and was in its turn made possible by the literary and discursive realignment of the young German writers after 1975. In March 1978, *Neue Literatur* published a group of poems by former Aktionsgruppe Banat member Rolf Bossert, under the title "Die Macht der Poesie" [The Power of Poetry], which were to also appear one year later in his first published volume, *siebensachen*. After graduating from the University of Bucharest in 1975, Bossert had been teaching German as a foreign language in the small city Bușteni and was now writing "about his life" [aus meinem leben] as a married man with two children, living in the two smaller rooms of a three-rooms apartment shared with various other people: "I have written to the housing authorities to the peoples' council to/ the newspaper I have called on quite a number of comrades// now I am writing a poem/ I have infinite confidence in the power of poetry". The poem reads as a parody of an official complaint/request letter dated September 24th, 1977, only to end with a coda of December 21st: "this text was not published until now yesterday/ […] we received the key/ to the third room which goes to prove that unpublished poems too/ can change the reality from which they draw their inspiration/ I will write more poems" [23]. It is such an (self) ironic stance, and the free play with the unstable possibilities of different forms and genres (what

[22] Richard Wagner, *die invasion der uhren* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1977), 20.
[23] Rolf Bossert, "aus meinem leben," *Neue Literatur* 28.3 (1978): 26-7.

is really the "power" of official documents, of published literature, of unpublished but otherwise known of poems) that had characterized, at its best, the poetry of the young German writers in the early 1970s.

Much of the literature written following the dissolution of Aktionsgruppe Banat, both by former members and by new writers associated with the group (such as Herta Müller, Balthasar Waitz, Helmuth Frauendorfer) retained something of the paradoxical faith in "the power of poetry" and referenced the enthusiastic first debates around the relationship between literature and reality under socialism – granted, with increasing skepticism. Rolf Bossert asks in one of the opening poems published in the aforementioned volume "wer aber ist die realität?" [who is reality anyway?] : "she is not moral, as we can see./ can one then even ask, if she is going in the right direction? // we are going with her. […] // are we going along with a whore?"[24] Here is one of the defining themes of Aktionsgruppe Banat – representing novel ways in which the socialist subject can genuinely engage with his/her surrounding reality – taken to its logical consequences, and with a sharpened critical edge, self-reflexively turned upon itself. The generational mode of argumentation with its minimal group manifesto had proved to be unviable and also potentially dangerous, but it had opened up a space of negotiation for the young German writers, and provided the tools with which they were to gradually relinquish it. In a double movement, they could rhetorically distance themselves from the Aktionsgruppe Banat period, all the while pursuing its critical writing program further, by phrasing it in terms of individual experiences.

The break with the previous, "youthful" artistic period was somewhat artificially reinforced by the reception of the works they published towards the end of the 1970s. Reviewing *siebensachen*, Helmut Britz, editor of the German section of the university literary magazine

[24] Rolf Bossert, *siebensachen* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1979), 6.

Echinox from Cluj-Napoca awkwardly attempted to salvage what was clearly a self-ironic Ars poetica[25] from the "frugal genre" of concrete poetry. This had been practiced by the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat in their most experimental and daring literary attempts, had been traced back to the influence of the Austrian avant-garde group Wiener Gruppe, and despite the Brechtian ethos of participatory enlightenment with which it was introduced, easily stood accusations of art for art's sake. Half a decade after Aktionsgruppe Banat, the several concrete poems still making their way into Bossert's volume, Britz warned, "are not to his advantage"[26].

The case of Richard Wagner is emblematic for this successful double move which brought the former members of Aktionsgruppe back to prominence at the end of the 1970s. In interviews following the publishing of his second volume of poetry, *die invasion der uhren* (1977), Wagner seemingly distanced himself from his earlier literary practice, at the same time cautiously reworking his militant artistic program for a socialist literature genuinely representative of the relations established with(in) the surrounding reality:

> The poetry model [Gedichtmodell] from *klartext* was no longer useful […]. I am seeking to establish a direct relation to reality; that means that in contrast to my first volume, in which the issues were represented in the post-Brechtian "reduced poetry" [Reduktionsgedicht][27] as a totality, another perspective is now brought into the foreground – one which rather grasps the relations out of the details of daily life. As a result I arrived from the aphoristic formulations of short poetry to the long poetry formula, which enabled me to posit phenomena in their contrariness.[28]

The underlying assumptions behind this otherwise obscure mode of argumentation were eloquently picked up by Peter Motzan, one of the literary critics who had been consistently

[25] Rolf Bossert, "argument," *siebensachen*, 15: "ich/ schrei/ be/ weil/ ich/ a/ gesagt/ habe". Because of the spatial arrangement of the poem, it reads: "I write [scheibe] (scream 'B' [schrei be]), because I have said 'A'."
[26] Helmut Britz, "…dem brotmesser sei gedankt," *Neue Literatur* 31.4 (1980): 97.
[27] The genre of Reduktionsgedicht (experimental poetry with a limited linguistic inventory, which turns elisions, breaks, "letting away" [Fortlassung] into artistic means of expression) was practiced, for instance, by the Austrian writer Ernst Jandl.
[28] Emmerich Reichrath, "'Direktes Verhältnis zur Realität.' Gespräch mit dem Schriftsteller Richard Wagner," *Neuer Weg* 8715 (May 24, 1977).

sympathetic to the members of the young generation. In an article written in 1978, he traces Wagner's artistic development from *klartext* (1973) to *die invasion der uhren* (1977). For the most part, the review of *klartext* is meant to reconstruct the image of a highly self-conscious and dedicated *socialist* writer – by noting Wagner's self-identification as a product of the socialist order, his self-ascribed role in the "emancipation process of his countrymen," his Brechtian-inspired program for "an engaged literature," and his rejection of narrow-minded nationalism. This last point, in particular, reflects the rising awareness that "the talk of the nation" was re-emerging as an idiom of negotiation and debate – Wagner's writings, Motzan clarifies, are inspired by his status of a Romanian citizen, rather than strictly representing the perspective of the German "cohabiting nationality"[29] or the community of German-speaking settlers[30]. In this sense, Motzan's argument goes, there is significant continuity between Wagner's volumes, whereas what changes is that the problematization of the relationship between language and reality takes on new discursive, rather than formal dimensions, without ever becoming a "metaphysical doctrine of the muteness of language". The experimentation with language and form of his earlier poetry now gives way to subjective reflections on the writer's craft and on the immediate environment of his daily life.

The turn towards subjectivity was to be gradually formalized by literary critics at the end of the 1970s into a potent legitimatory language which effectively rehabilitated the former members of Aktionsgruppe Banat as individual writers having now "found their voice." The literary critics who identified as part of their generation, such as Annemarie Schuller or Walter Fromm were especially quick to explain away the Aktionsgruppe period as one of "naive

[29] "Naţionalităţi colocuitoare" [mitwohnenden Nationalitäten] was the official status of national minorities in Socialist Romania.
[30] Peter Motzan, "…und hier wird schon noch geredet warden," *Neue Literatur* 29.2 (1978): 113.

engagement": "to what extent were these young writers determined to cultivate their talent within convenient limits, to what extent did the success go to their heads, to what extent did their literary strategies focus on use value [Gebrauchswert], and to what extent on selling value [Verkaufswert]?"[31] These were all bold questions but perhaps even bolder was the theoretical offer that the young critics put forward – with rather minimal qualifications, the terms "new subjectivity" [neue Subjektivität], "new inwardness" [neue Innerlichkeit], or "new sensibility" [neue Sensibilität] were imported from contemporary (West) German literary criticism to designate the writers' turn towards a private, "sensual" register and thematically towards the subjective experience of everyday life.

"Neue Subjektivität" had quickly become a catchword meant to describe one of strongest (but by no means homogenous) literary movements in the German poetry of the 1970s. One of the main protagonists of the movement, Jürgen Theobaldy, had traced its source back to the political poetry of the 1960s, which in his view signaled a marked break with the major post-war traditions of nature poetry, hermetic poetry, and concrete poetry. "Neue Subjektivität" was largely the movement of poets who were born around the Second World War, who engaged intensively in the student protests at the end of the 1960s, and following their failure rethought political poetry as "personally sensitized: the *Ich* was reinstated."[32] In the midst of leftist disillusionment, this argument for continuity was not entirely convincing. Far from the enthusiasm of the agitprop poetry of the 1960s, the poets of the "neue Subjektivität" turned their criticism towards the complacency of bourgeois life, in "an ironic attempt to define an entire social class: the remnants of middle-class attitudes that still determined in large measure the

[31] Annemarie Schuller, "Vom Gebrauchwert zur Sinnlichkeit," *Die Woche* 577 (January 5, 1979): 5.
[32] David A. Scrase, "Dimensions of Reality: West German Poetry of the Seventies," *World Literature Today* 55.4 (1981): 568.

lifestyles of the former student revolutionaries"[33]. In theory, "neue Subjektivität" maintained from the previous political poetry an understanding of the subject as socially embedded. In practice, the critical edge of former social and political engagement gave way to subtle irony and self-reflexivity only in the best of the works. Moreover, with aggressive marketing by publishers and booksellers and systematic debates among literary critics, "neue Subjektivität" had become, by the end of the 1970s, a buzzword and a trend.

Even if it were not a literary trend of the "capitalist West," employing it to describe the new poetry of the young generation of German writers in Banat had very problematic implications. On the one hand, the theoretical arguments for social and political engagement in this new formula lacked in sophistication and reverted to gratuitous dogmatism and occasional name-dropping of the classics of socialism for legitimation – they were, that is, much less convincing. On the other hand, the performative use of "hypernormalized language"[34] in literary criticism easily got ahead of the authors' own skepticism towards the socialist discourse:

> Whereas the basic experience of the European and American "new subjectivism" is the experience of a chaotic, individualistic world, we experience our socialist reality with all its claims and challenges, tasks and laws. The more urgent the claim to all-encompassing social participation, the more urgent is also the drive to individual reflection on this participation. […] The enthusiastic social use of literature is followed by reflection on the condition of the socialized individual.[35]

For the critics of the immediate older generation, who had also invested in the promotion of the young writers in the Aktionsgruppe period, the insistence on a radical shift in focus (as well as, one assumes, the transparency of the argument for a less-politicized literature, with its

[33] Judith Ryan, "'Your Life Jacket is under Your Skin.' Reflections on German Poetry of the Seventies," *The German Quarterly* 55.3 (1982): 299.

[34] I follow here Alexei Yurchak, who contends that in the absence of a metadiscourse on ideology, authoritative language in late socialism became increasingly self-referential and therefore the importance of the performative dimension of discourse grew all the while its constative dimension took on new meanings. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*. *The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[35] Annemarie Schuller, "Vom Gebrauchwert zur Sinnlichkeit," 5.

underlying criticism of the collectivist socialist project) did not go unnoticed[36]. Peter Motzan argued against the perceived break with the literature of the early 1970s and for a nuanced understanding of continuity *and* change. Also, severely criticizing the use of the catchwords "neue Subjektivität" etc (which had been used at times by the authors themselves, and otherwise quite accurately described their literary influences), Motzan opted for the "indigenous" (and ingenious) term coined by Walter Fromm[37] – "engaged subjectivity" [engagierte Subjektivität]. He defined it as "the personal involvement of the socialized individual," as subjective processing of the social[38], thus achieving the double feat of safeguarding the authors against accusations of escapism and ideological profanity. Granted, maintaining the sense of a literary tradition in the making was closely related to the attempt to also preserve the continuity of literary criticism[39], but what interventions like Motzan's show is that there was still significant interest in producing flexible ideological alternatives that would accommodate and legitimize the young German writers' comeback on the cultural scene.

Previous scholars who reflected on the development of the German poetry in Romania at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s tended to take at face value the most radical accounts of the literary criticism of the time. In this reading that tries to recover *was sie eigentlich gedacht*, "engaged subjectivity" appears as merely a "surrogate concept" [Ersatzbegriff][40] meant to signal to the "initiated reader […] that the real change had occurred

[36] See Emmerich Reichrath , "Vorwort," *Reflexe II* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1984), 11: "Annemarie Schuller's attempt to mark a shift in the still young literature of the second half of the 1970s […] came undoubtedly too early. She did not have a consolidated understanding of literature and was somewhat out of her depth".
[37] Walter Fromm, "Vom Gebrauchswert zur Besinnlichkeit," *Die Woche* (January 26, 1979): 3.
[38] Peter Motzan, "Kontinuität und Wandlung," *Neue Literatur* 30.11 (1979): 100.
[39] In 1980, Peter Motzan published his *Die rumäniendeutsche Lyrik nach 1944. Problemaufriss und historicher Überblick* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1980), which remains to this date one of the most authoritative accounts of the post-war German poetry in Romania.
[40] Thomas Krause, *"Die Fremde rast durchs Gehirn, das Nichts…",* 156-8.

not in the poets' attitudes, but in Romania's increasingly restrictive political climate"[41]. The assumption here is that there is a liberal political subtext to the formulations of the literary critics which can be uncovered, and that in rare cases – such as Annemarie Schuller's article, or Walter Fromm's introduction to an anthology of post-war Romanian-German poetry published in West Germany in 1983, these hidden intentions are immediately accessible. Shortly after having immigrated to West Germany, for instance, Fromm described the development of the German poetry in Romania at the beginning of the 1980s as "the discovery of the *I*" with the loss of "hope and utopia." Consequently, poetry became "a corrective and questioning gesture, which uncovered ideology were it degenerated into mystification (as with history) and into the oftentimes absurd twisting of facts (especially those of daily life)."[42]

In light of the German writers' conflicts with the state around the second half of the 1980s, as well as according to their own post-immigration accounts, the turn from a critique of social structures towards that of the political system is a plausible interpretation[43]. However, at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the writers and the literary critics who had discovered and promoted them during the Aktionsgruppe Banat period were investing in producing a sophisticated legitimatory language, having learned from both the success and the failures of the early 1970s. Interviewed in 1980 by Walter Fromm, and asked to what extent the program of 1973 – engagement as the optimistic attempt to offer answers to the questions of by public life – was still in place, Richard Wagner gave a much more conservative answer than the question he had been asked: "I stand behind what I have said in 1973, the same goals are still

[41] Raluca Cernahoschi-Condurateanu,, "The Political, the Urban, and the Cosmopolitan: The 1970s Generation in Romanian-German Poetry" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2010), 46-7.
[42] Walter Fromm, "Die Entdeckung des Ichs: Rumäniendeutsche Gegenwartslyrik zwichen Engagement und Subjektivität," *Kürbiskern. Literatur, Kritik, Klassenkampf* 3 (1983): 144.
[43] Totok cu manuscrisul ala

valid, but there is also the understanding, that a question well put has the value of an answer."[44] Despite obvious skepticism towards the enthusiastic early years of literary production and the initial cautious reassessment of the strategies that had brought the group in the spotlight but simultaneously sealed its faith, former members of Aktionsgruppe Banat (Rolf Bossert, Richard Wagner, William Totok, Johann Lippet), some of the slightly younger writers (Herta Müller, Helmuth Frauendorfer, Balthazar Waitz), and certainly the slightly older literary critics (Peter Motzan, Gerhard Csejka) still maintained the sense of a mission and the confidence that "as long as there are people, that is points of view, for whom literature is uncomfortable, there is no danger of becoming superfluous."[45]

3.3. Establishing Contact - Breakthroughs in Romania and in West Germany

By the early 1980s, the "progressive" writers had successfully re-established themselves as a group. This time around well-connected institutionally (Richard Wagner became correspondent for *Karpaten Rundschau*, William Totok and Horst Samson were brought by Berwanger at *Neue Banater Zeitung*, Johann Lippet worked at the German National Theatre in Timișoara, Rolf Bossert was lector at the Kriterion publishing house in Bucharest), the authors' self-understanding of their role on the German cultural scene in Romania was strikingly similar to that of the late Aktionsgruppe period. "We are not a closed group," argued Richard Wagner as president of the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle, much as he had done as leader of Aktionsgruppe Banat, "what connects us is a minimal program – our goal […] is to encourage a critical literature in German that overcomes the self-reproduction tendencies of a minority

[44] Walter Fromm, "Interview mit Richard Wagner," *Neue Literatur* 30.2 (1979): 53.
[45] Idem.

literature, [to encourage] a literature that discusses the social"[46]. Because of the sustained support of literary critics, the group had been given if not a proper name than certainly a distinctive literary identity, as the writers of "engaged subjectivity". Like before, *Neue Literatur* played an important role in promoting the young generation "at the center," by publishing two numbers entirely dedicated to the writers of the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle[47]. After gradually taking the circle's lead, the group also had access to sources of symbolic capital. With the support of Nikolaus Berwanger, the members set up a literary prize based on voluntary contributions, which was awarded yearly within the literary circle, as of 1980. The prizes for prose and poetry were awarded to Johann Lippet (1980, 1983), Franz Thomas Schleich (1980), Herta Müller (1981), Eduard Schneider (1981), Horst Samson (1982), Helmuth Frauendorfer (1982), Rolf Bossert (1983), Joachim Wittstock (1984), and Hellmut Seiler (1984). Except for Schneider and Wittstock, these were all members of the young generation and close friends. This does not necessarily mean that the prizes were awarded solely based on proximity[48], as Lippet, Wagner, Samson and Bossert were variously awarded debut and poetry prizes by the Writers' Union and the Union of Communist Youth. It does, however, accurately reflect the group's so-called *Werthierarchie* for the contemporary German literature in Banat. Undoubtedly due to Berwanger's privileged position within the political and cultural establishment (his network within the party, the Writers' Union, him being the chief editor of the biggest regional newspaper), the young generation did not just integrate institutionally, but by doing so effectively turned the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" into an alternative cultural institution, that complexly connected with the official establishment, but did not formally depend upon it. As

[46] Emmerich Reichrath, "Wir sind fürs Lebendige. Interview mit Richard Wagner," *Neuer Weg* (July 24, 1982).
[47] *Neue Literatur* 31.12 (1980) and 32.12 (1981).
[48] Although Franz Thomas Schleich was a rather mediocre writer and was later discovered to have been one of the most prolific Secret Police informants in many of the group members' surveillance files.

such, it reproduced the practices of cultural institutions such as the Writers' Union, the access to which had been increasingly restricted towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Award winning ceremonies were organized every year, and the *Laudatio* for the literary prize winners, their responses and works were published by Berwanger in *Neue Banater Zeitung*. In this way, the literary circle maintained visibility and the semblance of semi-formal endorsement.

The young writers' rise to prominence within the literary circle "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" and on the German cultural scene did not remain unchallenged. In 1979, Richard Wagner's article about the literary circle's meetings in the previous year sparked a rough exchange in *Neue Banater Zeitung.* In his article, Wagner noted that the theater play *Viehwaggon 21* read by Hans Kehrer had missed the opportunity, because of its literary shortcomings, to properly address the highly controversial subject of the deportations of Germans to the Soviet Union after the Second World War[49]. In his turn, Kehrer accused Wagner of using the literary circle as a platform for promoting his subjective critical opinions, biased in favor of his close circle[50], to which Wagner responded with a harsh evaluation of Kehrer's literary qualities and a reminder of the "corrective" role of literary criticism[51]. An even harsher debate followed the publication of Herta Müller's short story *Das schwäbische Bad* in *Neue Banater Zeitung*, shortly before the newspaper announced that the author had received the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" prize for prose in 1981. In his *Laudatio* to Herta Müller, Richard Wagner criticized the old generation for refusing to reflect upon its Nazi past and the conservative Banat Schwabians for disguising their ethnocentrism, built around "imaginary values – order, diligence, cleanliness"

[49] Richard Wagner, "Vom der Praxis der Literatur,", 4.
[50] Hans Kehrer, "Von der manipulierten Praxis der Literatur. Eine Stellunsnahme zur Beurteilung von Lesungen im Literaturkreis 'Adam-Müller-Guttenbrunn'," *Neue Banater Zeitung* (November 15, 1979): 2-3.
[51] Richard Wagner, "Von der Lauterkeit. Zu Hans Kehrers 'Von Manipulierten Praxis der Literatur'," *Neue Banater Zeitung* (December 13, 1979): 3.

under perceived fears of assimilation[52]. Müller's satirical short stories, taking up the theme of traditional village life, were thought to be a needed corrective to provincialism and conservatism. For months, *Neue Banater Zeitung* published letters and polemical articles from readers on Müller's satire, which ranged from mildly positive to highly accusatory in tone and attitude[53].

Apart from being an illustration of the generational divide within the literary circle and of the highly conservative milieu in Banat, the very publication of these exchanges in *Neue Banater Zeitung* is indicative of Nikolaus Berwanger's mediator role, true to his agenda of encouraging constructive debate on the public cultural scene in the region. He had also been the one to encourage discussion about the politically sensitive topic of the Germans' post-war faith. Arguing that the taboo on the Ion Antonescu regime had been lifted in 1975 with the publication of Marin Preda's novel *Delirium* [Delirul], in 1977 Berwanger announced his intention to write about the deportations to Soviet Union labor camps in an autobiographical work from which he read at a meeting of the literary circle, information which was promptly brought to the attention of the county chief-secretary of the Romanian Communist Party by the Secret Police[54].

Of the young German writers, the theme was taken up by Horst Samson, and by Johann Lippet in his poem *biographie. ein muster*. Lippet's autobiographical epic poem begins by paraphrasing the first stanza of Bertolt Brecht's *Vom armen B. B.* - "i, johann lippet, come only indirectly from banat./ my mother brought me into the world in austria,/ where she had come from the soviet union, and the question/ why and how i often ask myself"[55] – and goes on to

[52] Richard Wagner, "Laudatio Herta Müller," *Neue Banater Zeitung* (June 7, 1981): 2.
[53] See Diana Schuster, *Die Banater Autorengruppe: Selbstdarstellung und Rezeption in Rumänien und Deutschland* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 2004), 79-82.
[54] Dosar de urmarire informativă I210847 [Surveillance File – Nikolaus Berwanger], vol. II, 50.
[55] Johann Lippet, *biographie. ein muster* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980), 5. The Romanian translation of the volume, published in 1983, mentions the fact that Lippet had been a member of Aktionsgruppe Banat. See *biografie. un model* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983).

describe the suffering of the poet's mother in a Soviet labor camp. The poem also touches upon the deportations of the Banat Schwabians to Bărăgan during the 1950s, upon collectivization, and upon food shortages and housing problems, but the overall tone is descriptive and evocative rather than evaluative or critical[56]. Reviewing the published volume in *Neue Literatur*, William Totok was to reproach Lippet for having avoided the risk of a radical representation of the realities of the 1950s "because of the typical constraints of the Romanian Germans' situation, but also because of internalized pragmatism"[57]. His is one of the very rare interventions which refer to the context of Romanian literature for legitimation. Invoking the novels on the so-called "obsessing decade" [obsedantul deceniu] by Marin Preda – who coined the term, Augustin Buzura, D. R. Popescu, and Constantin Ţoiu, in which the "dogmatic" period of the 1950s had been thematized, Totok points out that no similar attempt was made in the German literature, and that although pioneering, Lippet's own was much less radical than the reference to the Romanian context would have allowed.

The young German writers had rarely sought arguments for their literary practice outside of a predominantly German cultural context, partly because, such in the case of the "literature of the obsessive decade," the anti-Stalinist rhetoric couched increasingly nationalistic overtones. The reference for the literature of the 1970s generation, which they designated as "progressive" in opposition to the traditionalism and provincialism of the older generation of German writers in Banat and Transylvania had consistently been post-war Austrian and (West) German literature, at times the literature of the Beat Generation, but seldom explicitly Romanian literature, with the exception – in the early 1970s, of Marin Sorescu. This went as far as Richard Wagner distancing

[56] Even so, Johann Lippet reminisces about the extraordinary interest that the public showed for a poetry reading held in his home-village, exactly because of the taboo topics such as the deportations following the Second World War: "Die 178 Häuser von Wiseschdia: Johann Lippet antwortet, Dieter Scherr fragt," *Bawülon* 4 (2011): 31.
[57] William Totok, "Schwierig, die Wahrheit. Randbemerkungen zu Johann Lippets 'biographie. ein muster'," *Neue Literatur* 32.10 (1981): 100.

himself rhetorically even from the one German author from Romania from whom the young generation had enthusiastically drew inspiration at the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s – Anemone Latzina. Whereas they were undoubtedly knowledgeable of the works of their Romanian contemporaries, at the very least through the translations published in the German cultural press, some of which they signed themselves, in terms of public discourse the cross-fertilization was minimal.

In the early 1980s, however, there were some attempts at bridging the gap between the Romanian and German writers, critics, and publics. Already in 1980, William Totok published an article in Romanian about Aktionsgruppe Banat, in which he nevertheless presented the group exclusively in the context of the German poetry in Romania, as a double counter-reaction: "on the one hand against the remnants of proletcultism and its neo-dogmatic followers, on the other hand against the hermetic tendency, whose representatives reached the peak of their glory at the end of the 1960s"[58]. There is a sense in which this had become the standard account of the literature of the young generation, so as when *Neue Literatur* published a special issue dedicated to the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle in 1982, Richard Wagner could describe the circle as representative for Banat and its cultural context, position from which the authors "extended their interest outside their linguistic island, as the translation of texts by their Romanian colleagues documents"[59]. For this issue, William Totok, Eduard Schneider, Horst Samson, Helmuth Frauendorfer and Richard Wagner translated texts by young Romanian authors such as Mircea Cărtărescu, Nichita Danilov, Mircea Nedelciu, Matei Vișniec and Traian T. Coșovei. It was not until the publication of Peter Motzan's anthology *Vînt potrivit până la tare. Zece tineri poeţi germani din România* [Mild to Strong Winds. Ten Young German Poets from

[58] William Totok, "Textele Grupului de Acțiune" [The texts of Aktionsgruppe], *Echinox* 3-4-5 (1980): 18.
[59] Richard Wagner, "Von Temeswar aus," *Neue Literatur* 32.12 (1982): 8.

Romania] in 1982 that the works of former Aktionsgruppe Banat members Johann Lippet, William Totok, Richard Wagner and Rolf Bossert, along with those of Anemone Latzina, Franz Hodjak, Horst Samson and Helmut Britz reached a broader Romanian public. Although quick to welcome the appearance of the volume as "an exceptional and extremely useful cultural event"[60] and to point out that "the young German writers were perfectly synchronized with the big changes happening in the Romanian poetry around the mid-1960s and afterwards,"[61] the discussion of the volume and of the German literature in Romania did not go much past these welcoming notes. This was partly due to the configuration of the Romanian literary scene that had encouraged the volume's appearance in the first place. 1982 had been the year of *Aer cu diamante* [Air with Diamonds], followed in 1983 by *Cinci* [Five], anthologies of poetry by the members of the literary circle *Cenaclul de luni* [The Monday Literary Circle] from the Bucharest University. The literary circle, prized over by one of the most influential Romanian literary critics at the time, Nicolae Manolescu, gathered the members of the "new generation" of Romanian poets, the so-called '80s generation [generaţia '80] and met regularly between 1977 and 1983. It sought to foster something akin to the "autonomy of literature," a literature heavily influenced by the Beat Generation, which programmatically distanced itself from the Romanian literature of the past with regard to its reliance on French and German reference points.

At the initiative of *Neue Literatur*, several of the writers of the '80s generation expressed their view on the commonalities and differences between their literature and that of the young German poets. Despite the obvious sympathy towards the appearance of *Vînt potrivit până la tare* as "a cultural event", the Romanian writers were much more inclined to point out the

[60] Cornel Moraru, "Tineri poeţi germani din România" [Young German Poets from Romania], *Vatra* 11 (1983): 5.
[61] Mircea Iorgulescu, "Cuvânt înainte" [Preface], in *Vînt potrivit până la tare. Zece tineri poeţi germani din România* [Mild to Strong Winds. Ten Young German Poets from Romania] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1982), 5.

differences between their literary practice and that of the German writers. "From my point of view," wrote Mircea Cărtărescu, one of the leading poets of the '80s generation, "there are many more differences than commonalities; if we let our phantasy wander for a bit, we could speak about a proper archetypical opposition between the two structures"[62]. In addition to differences in poetic language, discussed at length by all the other respondents, Cărtărescu noted that while the poetry of the German writers was programmatically moralizing in its ironic depiction of reality, that of the Romanian poets was rather theory-indifferent. This is a recurring observation, formulated in its most radical form as the opposition between "ethical" and "aesthetical ideals"[63] and effectively reveals the extent to which the legitimation discourses of the '80s generation and of the young German writers were ultimately incompatible. The Romanian writers maintained that "engaged literature," both as practice and as a category of discourse was "more than compromised"[64], construing their preoccupation with "aesthetics," following the fall of the Communist regime, as a political act in itself. Behind intricate expositions of the structural, thematic and emotive resorts of the German poetry as compared to the one of the young Romanian poets and despite of the occasional, undoubtedly honest welcoming gestures, the responses published in *Neue Literatur* betray some condescendence regarding the German author's literary practice, barely veiled suspicion towards the political tone of their poetry and a diffuse, cautious sense of solidarity. Except for Ioan Mușlea's excellent translation of the poems in *Vînt potrivit până la tare*, the poetry of the 1970s generation of German writers did not translate well into the legitimatory language of the '80s generation. If anything, there was a sense in which it could have easily been construed as a counter-model. So, for instance, a review of the volume published in the Party daily *Scînteia Tineretului* read: "The book completes with

[62] Mircea Cărtărescu, "NL-Umfrage. Unterschiede und Ähnlichkeiten," *Neue Literatur* 34.5 (1983): 27.
[63] Ioan Buduca, "NL-Umfrage," 31.
[64] Liviu Antonesei, "NL-Umfrage. Unterschiede und Ähnlichkeiten (2. Folge)," Neue *Literatur* 34.6 (1983): 32.

intelligence and seriousness the landscape of our youngest generation of poets. The so-called irony which, so it's been said, characterizes the tone of the new poetry, finally becomes with them [the German writers] correctly processed, openly and correctly delivered observation"[65].

Throughout the 1970s, the literature of the young German writers in Romania was also sporadically published in West Germany, notably by the former Aktionsgruppe Banat member Ernst Wichner, who wrote the introduction to a group of texts that appeared in the literary magazine *Akzente* in 1976, mentioning that in Romania the authors' works "are oftentimes rejected for publication and the writers are under close surveillance by the Securitate". This did not lead, however, to a systematic coverage of the writers in the Federal Republic, partly because in accordance with the authors' own stance in Romania, Wichner was quick to note that "the poets who are spied on and ostracized by the state were not even hostile towards it, quite the contrary"[66]. The real breakthrough in West Germany came with the publication of Herta Müller's volume of short stories *Niederungen* by the publishing house Rotbuch in 1984[67]. The enthusiastic reception in West Germany was due to a complex of circumstances – the subject matter was appropriately "exotic" and allowed most of the reviewers to bring to the public's attention the situation of the German community in Banat; at the same time, there was a more or less

[65] Ana-Maria Ivan, "Zece poeți germani din România" [Ten German Poets from Romania], *Scînteia tineretului* (December 8, 1982).

[66] William Totok, *Constrângerea memoriei* [The Constraint of Memory] (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 86. Discussing the article published in *Akzente*, Gerhard Ortinau writes to Ernst Wichner in a personal letter that what he found missing was "a clear indication of the writers' position within the literary establishment, the state and the world – we wanted to be called communists". See Dosar de urmărire informativă I233471, 140.

[67] The volume was first published in Romania in 1982 - *Niederungen* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1982). It was awarded by the Central Committee of the Union of Communist Youth and by the Writers' Union, which was undoubtedly an argument for its publication in the West. The German edition - *Niederungen* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1984) also contains several short stories published in the volume *Drückender Tango* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1984). There are differences between the two editions throughout, some certainly attributable to the volume's censorship in Romania. For instance, a passage for the short story *Niederungen* deemed "pornographic" by Kriterion's chief editor and the volume's lector appears in the German edition (See Dosar de urmărire informativă I233477 - "Cristina" [Surveillance File – Herta Müller], 23). However, it is unclear to what extent some of the differences are due to the negotiations with the Rotbuch publishing house, or to the author's rewriting of some of the stories for the German edition.

recognizable tradition of literary criticism engaging with the de-idealization of village life – Müller's volume was compared, most notably, with the works of the Austrian prose writer Josef Winkler; in addition, there was the unmistakable potential for political controversy, especially regarding the attitude of the Federal Republic towards the German minorities outside of its borders. In spite of the lengthy accounts of Herta Müller's literary style, motives and themes, it is in this sense deceiving to conclude that the immediate "literary reviews lack deviations towards the political sphere, so that the debate takes place exclusively on the terrain of aesthetics"[68]. The most visible and sophisticated of these initial reviews was published in 1984 in *Der Spiegel* by the writer and former member of Gruppe 47 Friedrich Christian Delius, following a visit to Romania in 1983. Delius, also a founding member of the publishing house Rotbuch[69], commented at length on the situation of the German community in Banat and set the tone for an uncomfortable political debate: "they are a minority under the protectorate of a repressive state which allows them restricted free space (language, media, theatre), but isolates them as much as possible"[70]. He further denounced the silence regarding their faith outside of the right-wing press and their treatment by the Romanian and West German politicians as equal to the bargaining over "import quotas for salami and furniture". In this context, Delius noted, the German writers from Romania were the rare reliable sources to turn to. It is significant that at this point the political agenda behind Müller's enthusiastic reception was not anti-communist: "Herta Müller does not show solutions, she does not write a 'critique', she has no dissident-allure"[71]. Rather,

[68] Cosmin Dragoste, *Herta Müller. Metamorfozele terorii* (Craiova: Aius, 2007), 90.
[69] Rotbuch was co-founded in 1973 by Friedrich Christian Delius, Anna Duden and Ingrid Karsunke. The publishing house had a unique structure in West Germany – it was managed collectively, decisions over organization, finances, program and the choice of authors being taken by all its members. Rotbuch was the first to publish in West Germany GDR authors such as Thomas Brasch, Sascha Anderson and Kurt Bartsch, as well as authors from Eastern and Central Europe (Libuše Moníková, György Dalos, Agota Kristof). Up to 1990, it also published the cultural magazine *Kursbuch*, edited by Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Karl Markus Michel.
[70] Friedrich Christian Delius, "Jeden Monat einen neuen Besen," *Der Spiegel* 43 (July 30, 1984)" 119.
[71] Idem, 121.

Delius denounced the hypocritical political instrumentalization of the anti-communist discourse (either in its human rights formula or in its reliance on economic arguments) at the expense of the German minority. His main target, the government financed extreme right-wing association of German expats in West Germany responded furiously in its newspapers *Der Donauschwabe* and *Banater Post* denouncing Herta Müller as either "Nestbeschmutzerin" or "member of the [Romanian Communist Party] Central Committee's propaganda department"[72].

Following the widespread discussion of her books in the cultural press, Herta Müller was awarded a number of prizes in West Germany and received numerous invitations to book fairs, public lectures, and cultural events. During the four approved visits she made in West Germany, Austria and France in 1984 and 1985, Müller gave interviews in which she discussed the German authors' situation in Romania, notably the issue of censorship, the interdiction to leave the country, and the limited access to the Writers' Union[73]. With the growing interest in the literature of the German writers in Romania, the only other member of the group who was allowed to give course to an invitation to read in the Federal Republic was Richard Wagner in 1985. It was around the time when West Germany became a real alternative for follow through their profession as writers and because of renewed repression measures that most of the remaining young German writers in Romania decided to emigrate.

[72] J. Hammer, "Ketzerei oder totale Verantwortungslosigkeit?", *Der Donauschwabe* 34. 38 (September 16, 1984): 1-2 and H. Schneider, "Eine Apotheose des Häßlichen und Abstoßenden. Anmerkungen zu Herta Müllers 'Niederungen'," *Banater Post* (December 24, 1984): 19-21.

[73] Gebhard Henke, "Mir erscheint jede Umgebung lebensfeindlich. Ein Gespräch mit der rumäniendeutschen Schriftstellerin Herta Müller," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (November 16, 1984).

Chapter 4 - Obituary for the 1970s Generation of German Writers from Socialist Romania

The period prior to the emigration of the German authors of the 1970s generation was in many ways formative for their subsequent discursive and emotional political understandings. If, as Richard Wagner would have it, the Romanian Communist regime turned the German writers into dissidents, it did so in close collaboration with the West, through prolonged negotiations of voice and exit, which I explore in the first part of this chapter. Following the German authors' exit, what began in the early 1970s Romania as a generational rhetoric, refashioned into an alternative, "pressure" group discourse towards the end of the 1970s, was then either reproduced or misinterpreted in West Germany at the end of the 1980s as minority representativeness, anti-communist opposition, or some combination of both. Maintaining that the public identity of the German writers from Banat emerged through a process of co-creation driven by the authors' ethical testimonial impulses, the rhetorical strength of anti-communism (complexly intertwined with the issue of the German minorities abroad), and the editorial interest in both, the second part of this chapter explores the significance ascribed to collective discourse immediately after the emigration from Romania. To this end, it follows on the one hand the articulation of a common thematic repertoire in the authors' early public interventions in West Germany – intellectual repression and opposition, minority cultural politics, social and political critique of the "Ceaușescu regime," as recorded and interpreted by the Romanian Unit of Radio Free Europe. On the other hand, it explores the negotiation of the authors' literary personae under the pressure of a literary market ready to ascribe them a common identity for reasons of publicity and easy recognition.

After the fall of communism and the early "transition period," collective discourse gave way to individual paths of self-realization and personal self-narratives. In the last part of the chapter, I explore how Richard Wagner and William Totok, two of the most visible public intellectuals of the 1970s generation of German writers from Banat devised specific patterns for approaching their personal past, that of their generation, and ultimately the history of Romanian communism. These configure what I call the alternative chronologies of the 1970s and 1980s Socialist Romania, loosely defined by the dominant tropes that organize the authors' narratives. As representations of the past, they are part of the very "reality" that they seek to represent.

4.1. Voice and Exit

"Since Windisch made the decision to emigrate, he sees the end everywhere in the village." (Herta Müller, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, 1986[1])

"Literary dissidence in the GDR," argues David Bathrick, "often began *not* as a philosophical or political challenge to the ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism but as a sometimes unintended fall into 'polysemic' modes of address that […] were perforce understood and evaluated […] as subversive of the official, 'monosemic' mode of discourse"[2]. In this sense, it was not the Eastern *Kulturpolitik* alone which produced dissidence "from within," but also the West German *Kulturindustrie* betting on the inherently polysemic potential of literature, especially after 1960. With the German writers in Romania becoming known, talked of, and published in the West, the question arises to what extent a certain pattern of interaction comparable to that of the writers in the GDR can be discerned.

[1] Translation from Herta Müller, *The Passport* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009), 7. First published in West Germany as *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1986).
[2] David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 16.

The dynamics between West and East Germany had been constitutive of the making and unmaking of "dissidence", as well as crucial for the negotiation of what have been discussed as the voice and exit options in the GDR. The notions have been first put forward by Albert O. Hirschman in his study of 1970, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*[3], which was translated in German in 1974 and widely picked up in the aftermath of the opening of the Berlin Wall to explain the dynamics of the sudden fall of communism in the GDR. Hirschman offered a simple model of how consumers express disapproval towards the deterioration in quality of goods or services – either by demanding a better product (the voice option), or by turning to a competing firm (the exit option). In addition, he posited that voice being more costly in terms of time and effort, exit usually tends to undermine it, in what he called a "basic seesaw pattern" – in cases of discontent with the deterioration of goods and services, the more pressure is released through exit, the less is available for voice[4]. Predictably, this model was applied with qualifications to explain the East German *Sonderweg* with regard to the configuration of oppositional movements under communism – in this analysis, the real or imagined availability of exit in the GDR had systematically undermined voice in the form of resistance and oppositional movements like those in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary[5]. This explanation has been variously formulated, either by pointing out that exit reduced the pressure put on the regime to change and demoralized those who chose to remain in the GDR[6], or by suggesting that the exit option in the GDR was the equivalent to the quest for democracy in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, and therefore it

[3] Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
[4] Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit and Voice: An Expanding Sphere of Influence," in *Rival Views of Market Society and Other Recent Essays* (New York: Viking, 1986), 91.
[5] Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History," *World Politics* 45.2 (1993): 173-202.
[6] John Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), 9.

"neutralized the appearance of antipolitical dissidence as a political claim"[7]. Arguments against the oversimplifying tendencies of the exit-voice model were brought up especially with regard to the events surrounding fall of the Berlin Wall – which allowed for more sophisticated re-workings of the model in light of the complex dynamics between the peace and human rights movements and the citizens demanding the right to emigrate, and afterwards between the supporters' of East Germany's reformation as a socialist state and those in favor of the unification[8].

For the young German writers in Romania the voice *and* exit options became available roughly at the same time and reinforced each other. This is in a sense comparable to the situation of the GDR authors following Wolf Biermann expatriation from East Germany in 1976. Prominent writers such as Sarah Kirsch, Christa Wolf, Volker Braun, Stefan Heym and Heiner Müller wrote a declaration of protest which was later signed by almost 100 other intellectuals. "Wolf Biermann was and is an uncomfortable poet," read the declaration, "bearing in mind Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, according to which the proletarian revolution is constantly self-critical, our socialist state should […] be able to tolerate such discomfort in a calm contemplative way"[9]. Further on, the writers dissociated themselves from the attempts to misuse the Biermann case against the GDR, and asked for the expatriation to be reconsidered. Not allowed for

[7] Christian Joppke , *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* (London: MacMillan, 1995), 29.
[8] Rogers Brubaker in "Frontier Theses: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in East Germany," *Migration World* 18.3/4 (1990): 12-17, builds on Hirschman's model to explain the GDR citizens' overwhelming support for reunification and to point out "the deep irony in this use of voice to demand collective exit". Steven Pfaff argues in *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) that the availability of exit can stimulate voice, by exposing the regime's vulnerability and lowering the costs of protest. In his view, the tightly controlled expulsion of protesters from 1961 onward helped create a passive, "niche" society. That is because people usually left quietly and only in the later 1980s did a growing number noisily demand the right to leave – for instance in Leipzig 1988-9 where dissidents of the human rights movement came to realize that the would-be emigrants were not a threat to the opposition, but its ally – the right to emigrate being itself a "human right".
[9] "Gegen die Ausbürgerung von Wolf Biermann," in Michael Krüger, Susanne Schüssler et al. (eds.), *Vaterland, Muttersprache. Deutsche Schriftsteller und ihr Staat seit 1945* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2004), 303.

publishing in the GDR, the declaration appeared in West Germany, which illustrates the contradictions in the Federal Republic becoming an "*ersatz* public sphere" – on the one hand, the signatories could not control the political uses of their statements in the West and on the other, they stood severe criticism and reprimands from the Communist Party for serving the anti-Communist slander. As much as notoriety in the West might have prevented radical repressive measures, it also largely discredited the dissidents in the GDR. The contradictory situation of performing "criticism from within" outside of the GDR led to many of the writers' expulsion from the Writers' Union, disillusionment and emigration in the aftermath of the Biermann case: voice was closely followed by exit.

Much in the same way, Herta Müller's breakthrough in West Germany and consequently the increased interest showed towards the German writers' situation facilitated and encouraged the voice option (both in Romania and abroad), which led to increased surveillance and repressive measures in Romania, followed by most of the remaining young German authors filing for emigration. Already in 1984, Helmuth Frauendorfer received an official warning for having "slipped in [to his literary works] ideas with tendentious and interpretative-hostile content towards our [social/political] order"[10]. Herta Müller, Richard Wagner, Johann Lippet, Horst Samson, Balthazar Waitz and Helmuth Frauendorfer wrote a letter to the chief-secretary of the County Party Committee and to the president of the Writers' Union in which they were protesting against Frauendorfer's treatment by the Secret Police and against "the flagrant violation of the status of nationalities in our homeland [patria noastră]" by "the tendentious distortion" of their writings, the interdiction to travel abroad, the house raids, arrests and the

[10] Dosar de urmărire informativă I211348 – "Florin" [Surveillance File – Helmuth Frauendorfer], 58.

refusal to admit writers who fulfill the necessary conditions to the Writers' Union[11]. It is significant that at this point the writers were formulating their complaints as members of the German minority, also decrying, as recorded in a Secret Police report compiled following a meeting with the writers in which their letter was discussed, that the history of the German minority in Romania was not recorded in school books, that the German section of the Institute of Theatre Art in Bucharest was closed down, and that the university professors at the Letters Faculty in Timișoara were under-qualified[12]. This was consistent with the initial interest showed in West Germany towards the situation of the German community as a whole under the Ceaușescu regime.

Towards the second half of the 1980s, the writers' prospects in Romania were further limited – Richard Wagner had lost his job at *Karpaten Rundschau* in 1983 and was not hired subsequently, William Totok was fired from *Neue Banater Zeitung* in 1985, the writers had lost Nikolaus Berwanger's support following his emigration in 1984, and the "Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn" literary circle was disbanded the same year. Their situation was covered in West Germany through the accounts of those who had already emigrated, as did Rolf Bossert in 1985. In an interview conducted just several days before he took his life, Bossert described in great detail the German cultural scene in Romania, the overlapping, increasingly overzealous workings of censorship following the dissolution of the official institution, as well as the dramatic situation of the German authors after filling for emigration, because of the ensuing interdiction to profess and publish. He especially signaled out the situation of Richard Wagner, Herta Müller, William Totok, Franz Hodjak and Helmuth Frauendorfer, whose treatment by the authorities Bossert

[11] Dosar de urmărire informativă I184945 - "Ziaristul" [Surveillance File – Richard Wagner], 192-7.
[12] Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845 - "Interpretul" [Surveillance File – William Totok], vol. II, 338-40.

described as "psychological terror."[13] There is a sense in which Rolf Bossert's suicide rang an alarm signal regarding the situation of the remaining young German writers from Romania. Numerous articles deploring his sudden death and covering the writers' grim prospects after filling for emigration proceeded to raise awareness about this issue in the West German press. A letter addressed by the German Writers' Union to the Romanian Writers' Union in 1985 mentioned Bossert's clarification that after filing for emigration writers are prevented from taking jobs. The letter referred specifically to Herta Müller and Richard Wagner, protested against their interdiction to leave the country, expressed the signatories' solidarity with the writers and concluded with the warning: "if necessary, we will also manifest our solidarity publicly"[14]. The German Writers Union did not merely instrumentalize voice for exit, but also made Herta Müller, Richard Wagner, Johann Lippet and William Totok members of the Union in their absence, thus symbolically performing a gesture of transmutation.

The period prior to the authors' emigration, with the prolonged negotiation of the voice and exit options, also illustrates the tension between hardly compatible understandings of opposition. Already in 1985, a Radio Free Europe situation report discussing an article published in West Germany by Franz Thomas Schleich who described the German authors' grim prospects in Romania[15] commented that "one must assume that these Schwabian writers agreed to have their

[13] "Der Exitus der deutschsprachigen Literatur Rumäniens. Ein Gespräch mit Rolf Bossert, geführt von Gisela Lerch am 11. Februar in Berlin," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 43 (February 20, 1986), 7. The interview was picked up by Radio Free Europe and aired in March 1986 in Romanian translation during the show "Oameni, idei, atitudini" [People, Ideas, Attitudes] hosted by Emil Hurezeanu. The part in which Bossert explained that in terms of publication opportunities the German authors' situation "is not as tragic as it is sometimes presented here [in the German Federal Republic]" and his indication that the number of volumes published was relatively large compared to the German population, were omitted. See transcript in HU OSA 300-60-1, box 152.

[14] Dosar de urmărire informativă I233477, 186-8.

[15] Franz Thomas Schleich, "Endzeit im Banat," *Mannheimer Morgen* 198 (August 28, 1985). Schleich had immigrated to West Germany in 1983, but briefly returned to Romania on several occasions between 1984 and 1986. As of 1975, he had been collaborating with the Secret Police by providing translations and interpretations of the German writers' works, as well as information gathered in private conversations with the authors. The Secret Police was aware of (and confused by) Schleich's article in which, a report noted, "he referred to the so-called

names published in the West, because they no longer want to play the regime's game; they must feel they have nothing more to lose"[16]. Back in Romania, based on information provided by Schleich during one of his visits in 1986, the Secret Police reported that the German writers from Banat with whom Schleich had been in contact were attempting "to make themselves known for taking a stance against the Romanian state, to create a 'platform' so as when they arrive abroad they will be known and recognized for their activity in Romania"[17]. The two accounts are equally simplistic in their understanding of the dynamics of anti-communism across the West-East divide. The first assumes that voicing opposition in the West is the last resort of individuals otherwise neatly contained within a system presumably opaque, of which nothing is known with certainty unless it is revealed in moments of crisis, rupture or desperation. Conversely, the second interpretation is based on the assumption that dissent cannot arise from within the socialist system (as a system of truth), but can only come about under the influence or with the support of the West and therefore it is a process of deliberate manipulation rather than a single, eruptive event.

In between these interpretative options, what was being negotiated in the second half of the 1980s by the German authors who decided to opt out of Socialist Romania, the Secret Police with its obsession to contain the voicing of real or perceived opposition towards the regime, and the observers in West Germany was the temporal dimension of opposition. The dynamics of

persecution [of the German-speaking writers], especially of those about whom he provided information regarding their hostility towards our state." See ACNSAS I 251877, 100-3.

[16] Carmen Pompei-Cojocaru, "The Harassment of Ethnic German Writers," *Radio Free Europe Research. Situation Report* (October 29, 1985), 29.

[17] Dosar de urmărire informativă I210845, vol. III, 43. During his visit in 1986, Schleich contacted the Secret Police officer to whom he reported before leaving Romania and at his request met with William Totok, Horst Samson and Johann Lippet, providing an account of the discussion he had with them, presumably so as to secure the emigration of his parents in law. In conversation with the Secret Police officer, Schleich explained that he wrote the critical article for *Stern* at the insistence of the newspaper's chief editor, who reasoned that he would be the most credible source and could by this secure a job at the newspaper. In this logic, Schleich's gesture mirrored his collaboration with the Secret Police in Romania and was therefore credible regardless of his "true" motivations.

voice and exit were complicated to such extent by the uneven and discontinued participation and interaction of these groups of actors, that for some of the German writers it took little over two years before they could leave the country. Towards the beginning of 1986, when it had become clear that allowing exit was the only solution to contain voice[18], the Secret Police proposed that Müller and Wagner's emigration requests be approved[19]. In 1987 they left the country, as did later that year William Totok, Johann Lippet and Helmuth Frauendorfer. By the time they finally reached West Germany, a new round of equally confused negotiations regarding their political, cultural and existential options had already began.

4.2. Common Grounds?: Anti-Communism and Minority Literature

"My generation is dead", wrote Richard Wagner in a poem published in West Germany shortly before leaving Romania[20]. For almost two decades, arguing for the existence and in the name of a distinct generational consciousness had been, professionally and existentially, a core mode of self-identification. Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a sense of solidarity and cohesion still permeated the public interventions of the German authors who had recently immigrated to the German Federal Republic. This was partly maintained through published anthologies that promoted the German literature from Romania or explored the nature of the Romanian communist regime, as well as through group lectures, conferences or collective political activism. In interviews and articles from this period, Herta Müller, Richard Wagner,

[18] Although the Secret Police had also suggested that the Romanian Writers' Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could preemptively publish a declaration that would present "the real situation of the writers, the rights and liberties that they enjoy together with the rest of the German cohabitating nationality in our country". In this sense, Rolf Bossert's tragic suicide in West Germany at the beginning of 1986 was to be "used as a recent example," presumably to illustrate these claims. Dosar de urmărire informativă I184945, 318.
[19] Dosar de urmărire informativă I233477, 208.
[20] Richard Wagner, "Notiz an einem Herbsttag," *Rostregen* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986), 60.

William Totok, and Helmuth Frauendorfer developed a similar language of self-thematization and anti-communism, which resonated well with the demand for personal, yet knowledgeable accounts "from within" the communist regime. There is a sense in which the build-up to their public interventions in the West, especially the accounts of repression meant to maintain visibility and expedite their leave from Romania set the tone for the subsequent interest in their position of dignified victims, first-hand observers and outspoken opponents of the regime. The generational mode of argumentation, however, translated imperfectly in the new political and cultural configuration. To the extent that the 1970s generation was Wagner's not merely because he thought of himself as part of it, but also because he systematically invested discursively in maintaining it as an operational mode of argumentation, upon arrival in West Germany Wagner indeed lost agency over what used to be "his generation".

"The only thing that helps those who must still live in Ceaușima is if everything that happens there receives the most possible publicity in the West,"[21] explained William Totok in an interview given just five days after he had arrived in the German Federal Republic. Back in Romania, this had not been immediately obvious to all the members of the 1970s generation – the consequences of maintaining visibility in the West were not as straightforward as Totok, surely because of the circumstances of his imprisonment and release in 1976, portrayed them[22]. The role of Radio Free Europe's Romanian Unit was particularly problematic, both in its strategies of reflecting and constructing dissent[23] and in its selective repertoire of anti-communist

[21] Urs Allemann, "Böse nachrichten aus Ceaușima. Ein Gespräch über Rumänien mit dem in die Bundesrepublik ausgereisen Lyriker William Totok," *Baster Zeitung* 73 (March 26, 1987).
[22] Richard Wagner was deeply distrustful of treating the West, and especially Radio Free Europe as an ersatz public sphere, in as much as this meant that agency and the control over information were renounced. He especially questioned the simple causal relationship between one being talked about in the West and one's situation improving in Romania. See Dosar de urmărire informativă I233477, vol. III, 136.
[23] See Ioana Macrea-Toma, "Radio Free Europe in Paris: the Paradoxes of an Ethereal Opposition," M.A. dissertation, Central European University, 2008.

tropes. The reports about the situation of the German population in Romania largely reproduced majority stereotypes, resorting to an idealized portrayal of the historical role of the German minority and of the pre-war inter-ethnic relations to articulate a patriotic anti-communism:

> Through its mistaken policies, the Communist government will completely eliminate the Germans and German culture from Romania. […] I believe that for every Romanian with a mind and with love for the country, such a phenomenon must be considered negative. In this respect it is yet again clear that the party's politics are anti-national, anti-Romanian, and harmful to the fundamental interests of the Romanian people. […] Is it in our interest to destroy a centuries-old presence, creator of civilization and culture, a bridge towards the Occident?[24]

By following the reports published in the West German press regarding the German writers' repression by the communist regime, as well as the reactions to Rolf Bossert's suicide, Radio Free Europe was effectively recovering the German authors for the Romanian "nation" [patrie] via the indecisive attempts in the West to recover them for "the German culture". Culturally isolated while in Romania because of their literature's programmatically "ethical" stance, the paradox of the German writers' situation following emigration was that they had been post-factum ascribed the role of highly publicized oppositional figures of an imagined country. That the German authors did not ultimately make it into the Romanian post-communist canon of dissident and oppositional intellectuals is partly due to the opportunistic and unproblematized manner in which their experiences had been integrated to a patriotic anti-communist discourse, only superficially concerned with the issue of ethnic minorities. Emil Hurezeanu, one of Radio Free Europe's most sympathetic, consistent and sophisticated commentators of the German writers' situation, would still contend that "if the Germans, and even the Hungarians live with the hope of immigrating to the Federal Republic or to Hungary (a debatable and desperate solution, but nevertheless a solution), Romanians have nothing except the certainty of an

[24] Transcript of Romanian Domestic Bloc radio program "Editorial no. 166 – Romania's German Minority", hosted by Vlad Georgescu, aired March 15, 1986. HU OSA 300-60-1, box 152.

unbearable life at home," going as far as to note that "the discrimination [of Romanians by the communist regime] is obvious"[25]. Despite the rhetorical over-statement, one of the basic arguments for the later marginalization of the minority oppositional intellectuals - the availability of the exit-option – was already there. The counterpart argument – the availability of the voice-option – later mobilized against the Romanian intellectuals who described their position towards the communist regime as "resistance through culture" [rezistenţa prin cultură] was also formulated around the same time. In an interview given shortly before leaving Romania, Herta Müller explained that one of the reasons which convinced her to emigrate was people's cowardice and lack of solidarity:

> The majority of the population, intellectuals included, has never yet opened its mouth, will never open it either. One could point the finger at the people who openly express their loyalty to this state. But the many others who keep silent and do not do that only because nobody asked them to - they are, I believe, equally guilty.[26]

The ultimate incompatibility between the German writers' minority experience in Socialist Romania and its rather simplistic portrayal by the editors of Radio Free Europe meant that despite the shared vehement criticism of "Ceaușescu's regime", the writers could not identify themselves with the anti-communism platform to which their arguments were being subsumed. Except for William Totok, who became a regular collaborator of Radio Free Europe, initially delivering either monographic or auto-biographic accounts, anti-communism fashioned for a Romanian audience never became a serious option of collective political activism for the members of the 1970s generation abroad.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Radio Free Europe's Romanian Unit continued to regularly air excerpts from the interviews and articles published in the West German press by

[25] Transcript of Romanian Domestic Bloc radio program hosted by Emil Hurezeanu, aired January 4, 1985.
[26] "Warum Herta Müller Rumänien verlieβ. Ein Gespräch mit Autorin der 'Niederungen'," *Bayern Kurier* (March 21, 1987).

Richard Wagner, Herta Müller, Helmuth Frauendorfer and William Totok, picking up on their critical comments regarding Ceaușescu's personality cult, the country's disastrous economic situation, the state's demographic policies, as well as on the vivid accounts of repression. While their interviews about Socialist Romania weighted towards Radio Free Europe's patriotic anti-communist propaganda, and while they were presented at parting as Romanians, countrymen "of which we can only be proud"[27], the same interviews positioned them in West Germany as representatives of a peculiar German minority from an "exotic" communist regime. A lengthily interview conducted by *Der Spiegel* with Herta Müller and Richard Wagner was illustrated with pictures of German village celebrations ("musty provinciality", read the caption), the Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu and the late Rolf Bossert. The authors were asked how they adapted to the consumerist society and if they feared that under the new circumstances their creativity might have to suffer. "The circumstances are obviously different," answered Wagner, "but here too […] one must exchange opinions, one must brawl and fight against something", to which the reporter quickly added, "now no longer against the personality cult."[28] Many of the German authors from Romania did actually take part at the collective protests organized in November 1988 and appropriately named "Aktionstag Rumänien," voicing against the communist regime's announcement of a new systematization plan. Also, following the fall of the regime in 1989, they reported extensively about the situation in Romania and in 1990 Richard Wagner and Helmuth Frauendorfer edited a critical anthology about Romanian communism, in which Herta Müller and William Totok also published their contributions[29]. Despite having emerged in West

[27] Transcript of Romanian Domestic Bloc radio program hosted by Emil Hurezeanu, aired May 6, 1987. HU OSA 300-60-1, box 153.
[28] "'Jetzt hoffen die Rumänen auf Gorbatschow.' Die Schriftsteller Herta Müller und Richard Wagner über die deutsche Minderheit im Ceausescu-Staat," *Der Spiegel* 19 (1987), 163.
[29] Richard Wagner, Helmuth Frauendorfer (eds.), *Der Sturz des Tyrannen. Rumänien und das Ende einer Diktatur* (Hamburg: Rowohl, 1990).

Germany as specialists on the Romanian social and political context, and although espousing a similarly critical stance towards what all of them regarded as a dictatorship built around Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality cult, the former members of the 1970s generation did not coagulate ideologically to the extent of arguing as a group. Their critical public interventions nevertheless maintained the interest in their literature, and prompted a reconsideration of their common literary identity.

As proven in the case of Herta Müller's prose and Rolf Bossert's poetry, the interest of the West German press in the contemporary German literature from Romania was closely intertwined with the interest in the faith of the German minority under the Romanian communist regime. With the extensive coverage of the German authors from Banat in the second half of the 1980s, this was the high time for literary anthologies, which could effectively write the canon of the German literature from Romania for a Western audience. Former Aktionsgruppe Banat member Ernest Wichner edited in 1987 an issue of the cultural magazine *die horen* dedicated to the German literature from Romania and to the memory of Rolf Bossert. His choice of authors largely reproduced the *Werthierarchie* that had been established in the 1970s and 1980s around the members of the post-war generation[30] and was also biased towards authors which had been victims of the communist regime. Reviewing the publication for Radio Free Europe's Romanian Unit, William Totok deemed the choice illustrative for what had been rather unfortunately designated as "the fifth German literature" and concluded that "there is almost no text in this

[30] The anthology contains texts by Joachim Wittstock, Oskar Pastior, Paul Schuster (the 1950s generation), Anemone Latzina, Franz Hodjak (the 1960s generation), Richard Wagner, Johann Lippet, Anton Sterbling, Gerhard Ortinau, William Totok, Herta Müller, Rolf Bossert, Horst Samson, Werner Söllner (the 1970s generation). See Ernest Wichner (ed.), *die horen. Das Wohnen ist kein Ort. Texte & Zeichen aus Siebenbürgen, dem Banat – und den Gegenden versuchter Ankunft. In memoriam Rolf Bossert* 147 (1987).

massive anthology that does not mirror, in one way or another, the obsessions generated by a delirious reality"[31].

The traumatic history of the German minority in Romania was made into the common denominator for what was known in West Germany as the "rumäniendeutsche Literatur," but this designation was in itself, as Ernest Wichner pointed out in the introduction to the anthology, an illustration of the minority's dramatic situation. On the one hand, the sustained interest in the German literature from Romania largely coincided with its dying out. Rolf Bossert had already reported about "the exit" of the German-speaking literature – both because of the gradual loss of its audience and because of the emigration of the writers themselves. On the other hand, minded Wichner, "the Romanian-German land [Rumäniendeutschland] is no more, but even while it existed, it was a nebulous-imaginary landscape of the mind that marked the place of a specific literature; [the word] had the task to ironically bind Romanian citizenship with the consciousness, that one produces German literature"[32]. There is a sense in which the paradox of the West German reception and construction of "groupness" in the case of the German writers from Romania closely parallels that of the authors' superficial recovery for the collective anti-communist discourse. "Rumäniendeutschland" was an imagined community as ghostly as the "patria." Its inadequacy was debated at length with the occasion of a conference organized by the Merburger Literaturforum in 1989, provocatively called "Nachruf auf die rumäniendeutsche Literatur" [Obituary for the Romanian-German Literature][33].

[31] William Totok, *"Die Horen" No. 147/1987*. HU OSA 300-60-1, box 152.
[32] Ernest Wichner, "Als hätte es sie alle nicht gegeben. Zu diesem Band," *die horen* 3(1987): 5.
[33] At the conference took part members of the 1970s generation - Richard Wagner, Herta Müller, Helmuth Frauendorfer, William Totok, Johann Lippet, Werner Söllner, Dieter Schlesak, the literary critic Gerhard Csejka, while the invited authors who were still living in Romania - Peter Motzan, Franz Hodjak and Anemone Latzina, did not receive permission to travel out of the country.

"Rumäniendeutsche Literatur," explained Werner Söllner, "is a conceptual crutch that one must maybe use when organizing conferences such as this, meant for a broader public; […] otherwise I do not consider us to be a group now, and I no longer define myself as a member of this group"[34]. Although very precise in his observation regarding the instrumentalization of an otherwise "empty" concept, Söllner's radical stance should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt. On the one hand, for years following emigration, the German writers from Romania largely continued to write for an audience presumably knowledgeable of the context of the German cultural establishment in Romania – by making references to their peers and to regional traditions, by employing words from the Schwabian dialect, or Romanian expressions[35]. On the other hand, opting out of the "rumäniendeutsche Literatur" was also instrumental as a self-defining strategy. This was not new to the members of the 1970s generation – as pointed out by Richard Wagner, it had been the initial strategy of Aktionsgruppe Banat: "we did not consider ourselves a part of the rumäniendeutschen Literatur, but as a type of anti-rumäniendeutsche Literatur"[36]. In Romania the authors had experienced the concept as an inherently political designation, an attempt by the communist regime to override regional specificities (of the Banat Schwabians, Transylvanian Saxons, Bukovina Germans, Dobruja Germans etc) and bind the German minority to the Romanian state – "naturally, an ascribed concept,"[37] in as much as the German minority was not a uniform ethnic group. Conversely, in the Federal Republic it functioned as an instrument of cultural politics, at the same time serving "branding" purposes

[34] Werner Söllner, "Rumäniendeutsche Autoren in der Diskussion," in *Nachruf auf die rumäniendeutsche Literatur*, edited by Wilhelm Solms (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1990), 268.
[35] See Claire de Oliviera, *La poésie allemande de Roumanie: Entre hétéronomie et dissidence (1944-1990)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), 313-318. Except for the examples from the poetry of the German writers offered by Claire de Oliviera, Herta Müller's case is also illustrative. Her second volume of prose published in West Germany, the title of which is a Romanian expression translated in German literally (*Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*) is a case in point. Over the years, incorporating Romanian words and expression in her prose has become a trademark of Herta Müller's literary style.
[36] Richard Wagner, "Rumäniendeutsche Autoren in der Diskussion," 270.
[37] Gerhard Csejka, "Rumäniendeutsche Autoren in der Diskussion," 270.

and ensuring publicity. Arguing against the label did not mean, however, arguing against the principles of the cultural market. The members of the 1970s generation formulated their claims within the logic of the cultural field – by pointing out that their literature written in Romania was programmatically in dialogue with the Austrian and West German literary trends, rather than with the "rumäniendeutsche Literatur" they were effectively attempting to integrate to the new cultural establishment and recover their literary works on equal terms.

In 1992, Ernest Wichner edited an anthology of texts by Aktionsgruppe Banat, which gathered literary works and programmatic articles published by the group members in the cultural press between 1972-1975. Compared to the later works of the members of the 1970s generation, which had been publicized in West Germany along with an extensive coverage of the authors' repression by the state, the early works were undoubtedly more difficult to recover. As such, they appear in the volume as a rather uniform mass, framed by Ernest Wichner's preface and a concluding essay written by Gerhard Csejka, both stressing the degree to which "groupness" was thought of and perceived as an oppositional endeavor, ultimately leading to the disbandment of Aktionsgruppe. The crux of the matter, however, was framing the group's political stance. It is in this sense significant that Csejka carefully avoids referring to the East German poetry of the 1960s, which had otherwise been both an influence and a means of legitimation for the authors' ideological positioning in the early 1970s.

"With Marx," writes Csejka, "the real, not the official Marx, one could go against both the old fascists and the old Stalinists [and] this explains the fondness with which Aktionsgruppe described its position as Marxist"[38]. This type of critical Marxism that the GDR writers of the 1960s had put forward both turned them into dissidents and later elicited the condemnation of the

[38] Gerhard Csejka, "Die Aktionsgruppe Story," in *Ein Pronomen ist verhaftet worden*, 232

1980s generation, the so-called Prenzlauer Berg poets, who portrayed it as a type of political compromise ultimately reinforcing the official ideology. With the raging debates over the complex intertwining between politics and aesthetics in the former GDR, especially following the East German intellectuals' advocacy for a reformed socialist state rather than for reunification, Csejka seems to have sought a balance between portraying Aktionsgruppe as the public mouthpiece of a naively appropriated critical Marxism and the semi-private performers of a hybrid youth culture, which mimicked with biting sarcasm the practices of the communist regime: "anarchic jugglery and political cabaret – in the land of the notorious omnipresent one and of the best extended web of police informers"[39]. Recovering the "Aktionsgruppe story" was both a means to reconstruct the logic of the authors' present ideological standpoint and an attempt at writing their early works into the history of German literature writ large.

By the time Ernest Wichner re-edited the 1987 anthology from *die horen* for the publishing house Reclam in 1993, the tone of the volume had changed. He added texts especially by the members of the 1970s generation, which at the request of the publishing house were meant to update the collection following the fall of communism, and reorganized the whole volume so as to convey a sense of the synchronized development of the German literature from Romania with that of the German literature abroad[40]. This time around, the anthology was thus proposing ways of integrating the works of the 1970s generation via the references shared with the German literary tradition, rather than betting on the rhetoric force of the authors' complex positioning as a "minority within a minority" in Socialist Romania. As in the case of the anti-communist discourse, "groupness" as understood by the members of the 1970s generation up until their emigration did not translate into the West German context. While it functioned as the

[39] Idem, 241-2.
[40] See Diana Schuster, *Die Banater Autorengruppe*, 114-5.

basis for writing the canon of the German literature from Romania in the West, it sought to subvert, rather than give weight to the ascribed common platform of a minority literature. By the mid-1990s and having had an unsustainable afterlife, Richard Wagner's "generation" was dead.

4.3. Self-Narratives and Alternative Chronologies

The peculiar context in which Richard Wagner, William Totok and Herta Müller found themselves upon emigration was constitutive of their subsequent narratives in two interrelated ways. On the one hand, the inadequacy of both options for collective discourse – patriotic anti-communism and minority literature prompted individual reflection upon the significance of their past reliance on self-identification as members of a specific generation and of a relatively closed group of friends, similarly positioned ideologically and existentially. Relinquishing their collective past for themselves against the outside attempts at re-signifying it simultaneously marked its abandonment. On the other hand, the fact that they were received in West Germany as inside observers of the workings of the communist regime in Romania, coupled with their own existential attempt to make sense of their place in the "democratic West" closely merged their personal narratives with the ones they told about Communist Romania. Approaching these hybrid self-narratives from a "tropological" perspective is not meant to obscure either the fact that the three writers did espouse a consistent critical stance towards the totalitarian regime, or the similar dilemmas regarding their literary practice in a new cultural context. It is rather meant to illuminate the idiosyncratic representations of a shared past, with the understanding that "troping is both a movement *from* one notion of the way things are related *to* another notion, and

a connection between things so that they can be expressed in language that takes account of the possibility of their being expressed otherwise"[41].

In what follows, I will describe the self-narratives of Richard Wagner, William Totok and Herta Müller as "metonymical," "synecdochical" and "metaphorical" respectively, without ascribing to Hayden White's correlation between modes of emplottment, modes of explanation and ideological outlook[42]. I consider the kind of fine tuning required to distinguish between the three tropes to be their main analytical value, rather than a hindrance – which is the chance of the futility of arguing, considering the shared backdrop of their narratives, against overlapping and commonalities. Also, it is the chance of being in the privileged position of not having to argue for the necessity of identifying the poetic elements in historiography, but rather, turning the tables on White, for the historiographical elements in "poetry". While I partly agree that in the case of historians "a certain lack of linguistic self-consciousness obscures the extent to which descriptions of events *already* constitute interpretations of their nature"[43] I am grateful to only have to explore the kinds of interpretations that linguistically hyper-conscious authors of literature offer for historical events.

Unlike William Totok and Herta Müller, Richard Wagner had been a member of the Romanian Communist Party from 1972 up to 1985. Seen in the context of the German community's conservatism in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as retrospectively from the perspective of the 1980s, persuasive arguments against a simplistic equation of his membership with a form of ideological compromise could easily be mobilized. Gerhard Csejka, for instance,

[41] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2.
[42] It is worth mentioning that Hayden White himself proposes these correlations as "ideal types" and makes a case for the value of exactly the deviations from these intuitive correlations. See Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," in *Idem*, 70.
[43] Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Idem*, 86.

explained that Wagner's trusting, rather than adverse reaction to Marxism had also been the product of a "biographical coincidence" – one of the members of his close family had joined the Communist Party during the years of illegality, having been a "genuine, convincing" communist and "an absolute exception, because in a world of mental collectivism, he had afforded for himself the luxury of having a personal conviction"[44]. Both Helmuth Frauendorfer and Johann Lippet had pointed out that joining the Communist Party in the early 1970s had a quite different significance than doing so in the 1980s[45].

However, Richard Wagner emplotted the narrative of his early "coquetry" with the Communist Party in a different causal logic, that had to do less with the significance of his gesture relative to the downfall of Romanian Communism during Ceaușescu's dictatorship than with the path of Romanian Communism relative to that of the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Wagner's theoretical proposal for interpreting the Romanian Communism is the national-communist special path [der nationalkommunistische Sonderweg], which he traces back to the "belated" modernization of the mid-19th century[46]. Moreover, although with regard to the nationalist domestication of communism he sees similarities with the whole region of "the Balkans" (Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in particular), the stronger form of his argument was that Ceaușescu's regime is comparable not with East European Communism, but with third world dictatorial regimes[47].

[44] Gerhardt Csejka, "Die Aktionsgruppe Story," 232.
[45] Helmuth Frauendorfer did so after explaining that one of the reasons for leaving Romania had been for him the growing inevitability of making compromises. He gave the example of having had to let one of the members of his theater group go, because she had joined the Party in the early 1980s. See Helmuth Frauendorfer, "Das biβchen Kompromiβ," in *Nachruf*…, 130-5. In his turn, Johann Lippet explained that he had joined the Party for professional reasons (it had been presented to him as a prerequisite for becoming an assistant professor at the University), and that opting out of the Party would have been a very provocative gesture. See Johann Lippet, *Das Leben einer Akte. Chronologie einer Bespitzelung durch die Securitate* (Heidelberg: Wunderhorn, 2009), 69-70.
[46] Richard Wagner, *Sonderweg Rumänien. Bericht aus einem Entwicklungsland* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1992).
[47] In an interview given for the radio station Österreich 1 on September 13, 1988, Richard Wagner explained that: "In Ceaușescu I see not an European, but rather a third-world phenomenon. One can give the example of individuals

His account is metonymical in that "it asserts a difference between phenomena construed in the manner of part-part relationships"[48] – that is, it operates a comparison between events by which some of them are deemed representative (either as causes or as effects). In this sense, the Ceaușescu regime stands for the Romanian Communism which in its turn stands for the Romanian Sonderweg. For Wagner, the Ceaușescu regime does not fit the logic of post-Stalinism, simply because it was an effect in a different causal series, not yet apparent at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. His choice of joining the Communist Party, construed as the very opposite of the former generation's opportunism, was therefore taken in a logic alien to that of Romanian Communism. In this sense, both the anti-communism (of the previous generation) and the anti-anti-communism of Wagner's generation were wrong. Relying on metonymy, Wagner emplots both the narrative of the Romanian Sonderweg, and his personal narrative as Tragedies, in the sense that he does not imply in the relations he sees between parts their eventual resolution in the whole. This has important consequences for his understanding of Romanian post-socialism, for instance, as yet another moment of illusory rupture, which in reality obscures the continuities with the previous period. As for his personal narrative, whereas in 1972 Wagner was decrying the fact that the parents' [national-socialist] past still has a bearing on the young generations' patterns of thought, in a strikingly similar formulation he minded in 1989 that "we were shaped by the communists' culture, our education by the communists left traces in our way of thinking even to this moment"[49].

Wagner's narrative very interestingly compares with that of William Totok, the first member of the 1970s generation to publish an account of his past. Shortly after immigrating to

such as [Ferdinand] Marcos, [François] Duvalier, or [Jean-Bédel] Bokassa". See the transcript in HU OSA 300-60-1, box 152.

[48] Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 34.

[49] Richard Wagner, "Die Aktionsgruppe Banat. Versuch einer Selbstdarstellung," in *Nachruf*.., 123.

West Germany, he wrote a volume of "notes from Romania"[50] from which he also delivered parts for Radio Free Europe, under the title "the chronicle of a repression". In 1995, his book was published in Romanian translation, enlarged upon with three interviews taken with a former military prosecutor in charge of Totok's case in 1974, a professor who had provided an ideological analysis of his texts, and a former Securitate officer. As such, it fitted well into "the rituals of post-communist life" – sacrifice, purification and confession - that negotiated the transition from socialism to capitalism drawing on the symbolic capital acquired by the dissident intellectuals of the socialist regime[51]. His volume of memoires reads as a seemingly objective account of the ideological and coercive modes of control that Totok and the members of the 1970s generation were subjected to under the Romanian communism – it is therefore a detailed and documented description of denigrations, censorship, surveillance, investigations, imprisonment, verbal and physical abuse, forceful implementation of literary, and implicitly ideological models dictated by the party and the ruler: "The Ceaușescu epoch will be recorded in history as a continuous chain of repressive actions"[52]. It is perhaps counterintuitive, but compared to Richard Wagner's account of the same events, Totok's narrative was not emplotted as a Tragedy. By the trope of synecdoche, he interpreted the 1970s and 1980s Socialist Romania as a neo-Stalinist regime, of which the accounts of repression were parts construed "in the manner of an *integration* within a whole that is *qualitatively* different from the sum of the parts and of which the parts are but *microcosmic* replications"[53].

[50] William Totok, *Die Zwänge der Erinnerung. Aufzeichnungen aus Rumänien* (Hamburg: Junius, 1988).
[51] I refer here to the description of the rituals of post-communist life offered by Gil Eyal, Iván Szelényi, and Eleanor Townsley: "This rituals were cast initially in anti-communist terms: the communist system was impure, it had to be purged to create civil individuals; this would demand sacrifices from all, and would work only if those who lived under communism confronted their collective guilt in the ritual of public confession". In *Making Capitalism without Capitalists : Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-Communist Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1998), 12.
[52] William Totok, *Constrângerea memoriei. Însemnări, documente, amintiri* [*The Constraint of Memory. Notes, Documents, Recollections*] (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 105.
[53] Hayden White, *Metahistory*.., 34.

The Aktionsgruppe Banat period best illustrates the differences between Wagner and Totok's emplottments. For Wagner, this is the period that reveals the rift between two causal orders which cannot be integrated subsequently: the setting up of the group and its activity stand as effects of the liberalization period, whereas the disbandment is a cause understandable only in the logic of Nicolae Ceaușescu's Sonderweg. Totok, however, amply describes the interventions of the Secret Police, integrating them to what he designates as "the period of re-Stalinization". Whereas Wagner's narrative is one of chronologies disrupted, Totok's is a narrative of history repeating itself.

"Am I the man who sees the glass half full, or the one who sees it half empty?" asks Totok towards the end of his volume of memoires. The synecdochical narrative lends itself to both answers, in that it assumes the correspondence between life story and history. It is in this sense significant that Totok first wrote down the chronicle of Aktionsgruppe Banat's repression by the state immediately after being released from prison. The manuscript was a radical anti-totalitarian essay, in which he denounced the "Romanian Orwellianism," the denaturation of the ideal of a proletarian democracy, the rise of the dictator's cult, the omnipotence of the Secret Police, the resurgence of nationalism, concluding that "the rebirth of true communism is extremely necessary, because the Marxist ideology became a state religion"[54]. This was the understanding of the Romanian Communist regime that he was to maintain in all subsequent accounts. The significance of his personal life-story, however, changed from being a narrative of repression, to being a narrative of self-won freedom. Having agreed to an oral history interview[55], 25 years

[54] The manuscript entitled "Project for an Intellectual Extermination" was photographed and translated for the Secret Police by Franz Thomas Schleich, and later confiscated during a so-called "percheziție legendată" [a house raid for which a pretext, "a legend" was created]. Because the Secret Police could not prove that the manuscript was meant to be distributed or read by anyone else, Totok was not convicted. See ACNSAS, D 013381, vol. XXV, 6-9.

[55] I conducted the interview in Timișoara, on April 25, 2012, with the occasion of the 40 years anniversary of the establishing of Aktionsgruppe Banat. I conceived the discussion as a semi-structured interview and sought to adapt

after immigration Totok narrated the period of Aktionsgruppe Banat by accounting for two facets of the story simultaneously – that of himself and the group activating in public, "talking freely and doing whatever we thought about doing" and that of the repressive apparatus performing after "a scenario" the purpose of which was to imprison Totok and disband the group. The Aktionsgruppe period, in which his personal history, that of the group and the one "fabricated" by the Secret Police most intertwine stands as an "anecdote"[56] for the rest of the group members' activity in Romania, deemed "more representative in terms of intellectual development and of the misdeeds we've made". Emplotting his personal story and that of the 1970s generation as a narrative of freedom, William Totok recovers both agency and an individual chronology for those previously cast as the subjects of repression in a narrative reproducing the "etatized" chronology of Romanian Communism. Like Richard Wagner, however, he does not ultimately resolve the tension between parts – whereas for Wagner the parts do not integrate to a whole, for Totok the whole is understood as qualitatively different from the parts it integrates.

In 1992, Herta Müller wrote and published a movie script about the Romanian Revolution entitled "Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter". The script addresses one of the most debated issues after the fall of the Communist regime, the issue of victims and perpetrators, which Herta Müller approached in the form of a metaphor: "The hunter put the fox on the table and stroked its fur. He said – you don't shoot foxes, foxes fall into traps. His hair and beard were red like the fox. […] Even back then, the fox was the hunter"[57]. Unlike those of Richard Wagner

the order of topics to the narrative flow set by Totok himself. I have never during the interview challenged his theoretical assumptions, but I did try to steer the discussion from a general description of the historical context towards a more personal account – asking questions about his own experience or that of the group's. (Language – Romanian. Length – 100 minutes.)

[56] "Anecdote" is a term used by Totok himself during the interview, to refer to personal stories which although might seem marginal are thought to reveal something essential about the workings of the communist regime.

[57] Herta Müller, *Încă de pe atunci vulpea era vânătorul* [Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter] (Bucharest: Univers, 1995), 124.

and William Totok, Herta Müller's self-narrative and her emplottment of the history of Romanian Communism are not construed as relations between parts, but between "objects," like the fox and the hunter, that share in qualities but do not stand one for the other, either reductively, or extensively. Metaphor as a trope reaffirms the incommensurability of the objects compared in the same movement in which they are made to appear the most similar to one another. Moments of crisis, such as the 1989 Revolution, violent repression, the deportations to the Soviet labor camps are related in Herta Müller's emplottment based on their shared quality of reaffirming the distinction between victims and perpetrators. As such, chronology is altogether overridden as an explanatory device, and Herta Müller's approach to the past is ultimately ahistorical.

Having elaborated a highly personalized language to describe the "landscape of the dispossessed," Müller's accounts of repression under the Romanian communist regime[58] stand as a salient critique of totalitarianism in all its historical "actualizations." "Every word knows something of a vicious circle", explained Herta Müller in her acceptance speech for the 2009 Nobel Prize in Literature, weaving around the question "do you have a handkerchief?" the story of her own repression by the Secret Police, that of Oskar Pastior's deportation to the Soviet labor camp, and that of her uncle's volunteering for the SS. The "metaphorical" emplottment allowed Herta Müller to speak about and "for all those whom dictatorships deprive of dignity every day, up to and including the present," thus subsuming her self-narrative to an ahistorical account of "the acute solitude of the human being"[59].

[58] See especially the collections of essays and lectures *Der König verneigt sich und tötet* (München: Carl Hanser, 2003) and *Immer derselbe Schnee und immer derselbe Onkel* (München: Carl Hanser, 2011).
[59] See Herta Müller, "Jedes Wort weiβ etwas vom Teufelskreis" ["Every Word Knows Something of a Vicious (the Devi's) Circle"] (December 7, 2009), accessed June 1, 2013: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2009/muller-lecture_en.html.

Conclusions

This thesis explored the history of the 1970s generation of German writes from the Banat from three main perspectives. In terms of discourse, it followed the formulation of a generational mode of argumentation in negotiations between regionally and centrally driven cultural campaigns which sought for the "rejuvenation" of the German literature in Romania. It then analyzed the way in which the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat appropriated the generational discourse and adjusted it to the period of the "mini-cultural revolution" by ideologically positioning themselves against both the conservative, former national-socialist generation of their parents and the Stalinist generation which they regarded as opportunistic. As the representatives of "the first generation born under socialism," the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat proposed an "avant-garde" literary and ideological program which seemingly resonated with the period of re-ideologization following the "July Thesis". The generational project was recast following the disbandment of Aktionsgruppe Banat, and the writers emerged and identified themselves as representatives of the German literature in Banat. With the coagulation of the 1980s generation on the Romanian literary scene, the German writers' politically engaged literary offer did not translate into the logic of the Romanian writers' legitimation of aesthetics over ethics. Following the German writers' emigration in the second half of the 1970s, the collective discourse was misconstrued as either patriotic anti-communism or minority representativeness, and ultimately succumbed to individual paths of self-realization and personal narratives.

In terms of the authors' literary practice and ideological outlook one of the goals of this research was to assess the extent to which the German writers of the 1970s generation drew on

models from Austria (the Wiener Gruppe), the GDR (especially the 1960s generation of poets) and the Federal Republic (Neue Subjektivität) to devise a model of experimental and critical Marxist literature against the traditional dialectal literature and against socialist realism. To the extent that this isolated them on the German cultural scene from the Banat, it had also offered after emigration a powerful argument for the authors' integration as part of the German literary tradition writ large. In anthologies, the 1970s generation emerged as a central part of the canon of the German literature in Romania. Especially in the case of Herta Müller, her critical account of village life and of the German community's provincialism and ethnocentrism responded to an increasing interest of the West German press in the "exotic" German minority and in its faith under the communist regime.

As an account of political understandings, this thesis argued for an approach integrative of state and society meant to illuminate both the process of co-creation and the authors' individual negotiations of their ideological positioning, especially when faced with repression, coercion and violence from the part of the Secret Police. The case of the former members of Aktionsgruppe Banat who reintegrated to the cultural establishment was in this sense illustrative for the complex way in which the experience of violence was individually negotiated by the authors against their socialist convictions. The options ranged from radical anti-totalitarianism to a renewed ideological alignment to communism, understood in contradistinction to real existing socialism. In the period immediately prior to emigration, the negotiations of voice and exit corroborated the formulation of a radical critique of totalitarianism, also from the previously renounced discursive position of members of an ethnic minority under a communist regime turned nationalist.

By intertwining these layers of analysis throughout my account of the 1970s generation, I meant to present a case study in minority cultural politics understood not just in relation to the majority politics, or in the particular case of Socialist Romania in relation to the resurgence of a nationalist public discourse. The context of the (real or projected) transnational German community, with its specific patterns of interaction between West and East, and between center and periphery has been equally formative for the members of the 1970s generation as has been the context of Romanian Socialism. Moreover, by following the discursive development and actual workings of a group of intellectuals identifying themselves and being identified as a generation, I attempted to detail an idiosyncratic example of a mode of argumentation extremely salient already in interwar Romania. Finally, I proposed an interpretation of the "mini-cultural revolution" that takes its revolutionary appeal seriously. The most common-held account of the "July Theses" is that they marked the end of the liberalization period and the renewed strengthening of ideological and coercive modes of control from the part of the communist regime, having been prefigured already at the end of the 1960s. I contend that this argument could potentially work the other way around – as the case of Aktionsgruppe Banat has shown, the group was socialized towards the end of the so-called liberalization period and made its boldest public interventions during the period of the mini-cultural revolution. In this sense, the revolution presented itself as the logical continuation of a seemingly reformist road and invited the participation of an artistic avant-garde. Among the various chronologies of the Romanian Communism which have been addressed in this thesis, this is the only one which can conceivably account for some degree of integration of the forlorn 1970s generation.

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