Transgressing the Borders of Gallery Space: Subversive Practices of Alternative Art Galleries in East Germany and Poland of the 1970s

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>BStU</td>
<td>Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWA</td>
<td>Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych (Art Exhibitions’ Bureau)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPN</td>
<td>Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (National Institute of Remembrance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (Unofficial collaborator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MfS</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry of State Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OV</td>
<td>Operativer Vorgang (Operative procedure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (People’s Republic of Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych (Fine Arts Studios)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZPR</td>
<td>Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Socialist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Służba Bezpieczeństwa (Security Service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stasi</td>
<td>Staatssicherheit (State Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZSP</td>
<td>Socjalistyczny Związek Studentów Polskich (Polish Socialist Students’ Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW</td>
<td>Tajny współpracownik (Secret collaborator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVP</td>
<td>Telewizja Polska (Polish Television)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBK</td>
<td>Verband bildender Künstler (Fine Artists’ Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPAP</td>
<td>Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków (Polish Fine Artists’ Union)</td>
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List of Illustrations

Fig 1. The connection diagram 1 (*Verbindungskizze*) attached to MfS 7030/82 Band 1, OV “Arkade”, p. 134

Source: BStU Berlin

Fig. 2. The connection diagram 2 (*Verbindungskizze*) attached to MfS 7030/82 Band 1, OV “Arkade”, p. 138

Source: BStU Berlin

Fig. 3. Map of Arkade’s pleinairs within the GDR territory, p. 181

Source: Aneta Jarzębska
Abstract

This thesis constitutes the first comparative study of the phenomenon of alternative art galleries functioning during the 1970s in two neighbouring state socialist regimes, namely, the German Democratic Republic and the People’s Republic of Poland. Firmly contextualised in the cultural-political climate of Honecker’s and Gierek’s quasi-liberalisation, it examines the socio-cultural function of non-conformist exhibition spaces and focuses, specifically, on two case studies: Galerie Arkade in East Berlin and Galeria/Repassage in Warsaw.

By looking at a wide variety of practices produced in those spaces, this thesis investigates the commonalities and differences in how the galleries operated and how they related to the divergent post-Stalinist conditions. For instance, due to more repressive cultural-politics in the GDR, it proved more difficult to accommodate experimental practices in Arkade, since even exhibiting abstract art was problematic for the East German officials. Conversely, in Poland Gierek’s liberalisation resulted in the state’s limited acceptance of radical artistic practices such as performance and conceptual art but only in the marginal spaces of artist-run galleries. Despite their alternative status, the galleries were, to a certain degree, dependent administratively and financially on these socialist institutions and were at the same time exposed to surveillance by the state security services. These aspects of galleries’ activities are often neglected and so to remedy this lack this thesis offers new perspectives on and insights into various aspects of the functioning of alternative culture in this region.

The originality of this research lies also in its references to new archival material which has not been published, nor interpreted before. The interpretation of these rich primary sources makes use of a new theoretical framework that combines Michel Foucault’s theory of heterotopia in a macro-level analysis and Henri Lefebvre’s ideas on the social production of space in a micro-level analysis.

In particular, the galleries’ histories are seen in this thesis as intertwined with the advancing process of disintegration of state socialism in the Eastern Bloc as this was perceptible to varying degree in different socialist states. Accordingly, it argues that the galleries were symptomatic of and, simultaneously, contributed through various practices to the ‘post-socialist condition’.
Declaration and Copyright Statement

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have materialised without the support of many people that I would like to give my special thanks to here.

I shall begin with my main supervisor Prof Matthew Philpotts who has inspired me to study the cultural politics in totalitarian and post-totalitarian contexts during my undergraduate degree at the University of Manchester. I would like to thank him immensely for invaluable comments and support throughout the project. I am also very thankful to my co-supervisor Dr Ewa Ochman and my advisor Prof Helen Rees Leahy for their additional comments and support.

I am indebted to all artists who agreed to help me in reconstructing the histories of both galleries, but also, to members of staff at the archives, museums, galleries and other institutions which I have frequented over the years in Berlin and Warsaw.

This project would not be possible without the financial support of DAAD, CEELBAS and, of course, the University of Manchester which helped with the costs of my numerous fieldtrips in Poland and Germany.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, whose love and understanding have kept me going.
Introduction

In February 1972 in the centre of Warsaw, the capital of the People’s Republic of Poland, on one of the busiest street leading up to the Old Town a group of young artists and art students founded a small exhibition space initially called Galeria. Paweł Freisler who led the initiative had managed to get a permission from the University of Warsaw Students’ Union to use a room on the ground floor of their building on 24 Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. When in March 1973 Freisler resigned from directing the gallery’s activities, for a short period the artists Włodzimierz Borowski and Elżbieta Cieślar were responsible for organisational aspects, but eventually the artist couple Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar ran the gallery until their emigration in 1978. Between 1973 and 1978 the gallery was called Repassage which playfully referred to the word ‘repasaczka’- the old-fashioned profession of repairing tights. When the Cieślars left Poland after experiencing a series of harassments from the socialist regime, the gallery was run by other artists and changed its name to Repassage 2 and then to ReRepassage.¹ In 1981 it ceased to exist as many other such initiatives in a wave of political repressions introduced during the martial law period in Poland.

Around the same time as the beginning of Galeria, 550 km westwards from Warsaw, in East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic, the art historian Klaus Werner opened a small art gallery on the Strausberger Square situated on the city’s main street Karl-Marx-Allee. The gallery was founded after a small art shop space belonging to the Berlin Fine Artists’ Association, where Werner worked as a manager, became empty and he used the opportunity to start a small exhibition venue there. It was named Arkade after the architectural feature of the building’s facade. When in 1975 the gallery was taken over by a new institution the Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR, Klaus Werner was officially made its director. He ran Arkade until 1981, when he was dismissed on political grounds and, consequently, the gallery was closed down by the socialist authorities.

¹ Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar mention the repressions in an interview by Aneta Jarzębska, April 2012, Die, France.
Today, over 40 years later, the spaces at these addresses are occupied by a university bookshop and a small art gallery, while their socio-political context is defined by democratic capitalism. What remains of the previous galleries today are memories of important artistic and social events, of artists and other people involved in producing those exhibition spaces, folders of documents, photos, very scarce film and video recordings and, of course, a reputation of artistic and political non-conformism pursued by the galleries’ actors. Indeed, both galleries have been recognised by art historians and art critics as, for instance, ‘one of the most important places of non-ideological art production in the GDR’ and ‘today seen as legendary’, ‘progressive’ gallery that showed ‘unconventional’ and ‘independent programme’ (Arkade), or as an ‘alternative artistic-countercultural community’ and representing an ‘anarchist position in its old utopian-socialist line’ (Galeria and Repassage).²

Thus, both galleries have been long celebrated as alternative exhibition spaces within repressive state socialist regimes. Despite this recognition, however, Arkade and Galeria/Repassage have not been researched extensively, or effectively, as yet. My choice in comparing these two exhibition spaces was dictated then, partly, by the gaps in the existing literature, but also by a number of commonalities in the way the galleries functioned. Firstly, as mentioned above, both Arkade and Galeria/Repassage were situated in central locations in the capital cities, and, in this way, close to the centre of socialist power. This aspect would have contributed to their influence in that it expanded the possibilities for public exposure and dissemination of their activities. Secondly, the galleries had a very similar life span, opening in the early 1970s on a wave of change of leadership in the GDR and the PRL to the less repressive Honecker and Gierek, respectively, and of the quasi-liberalisation of culture proclaimed by the new teams; and closing at the point of socio-political crisis in the Eastern Bloc, mainly linked to the emergence of Solidarity mass

movement in Poland. They functioned then in a similar, at least on the surface, cultural-political climate in which the socialist regimes allowed for some concessions to artists and writers, as well as making access to Western art and culture a bit easier, and in this way, lessened the countries’ cultural isolation. Nevertheless, the centralised and unreformed art and exhibition system in East Germany and Poland still favoured artists who demonstrated loyalty to the Party’s cultural politics and conformed to the official aesthetic prescriptions. Those, who did not conform or were critical of the system, were marginalised, or even excluded, professionally and placed under the close surveillance of state security services.

Accordingly, in response to such repressive conditions both galleries provided exhibition and social space for artists who were denied access to, or did not want to participate in the official exhibition system and, instead, looked for spaces where they could express their ideas and produce experimental and non-conformist art without so many constraints. As such Arkade’s and Galeria/Repassage’s artistic programmes differed considerably from those of the state venues, primarily, by regularly accommodating artistic practices which otherwise would have been rejected by the state exhibition system for being too radical, experimental, or not ‘socialist’ enough. Their activities did not, however, constitute isolated examples of alternative exhibition practices within their respective contexts. They were part of a phenomenon that emerged in many Eastern Bloc countries in the 1970s and resulted in formation of large numbers of small semi-official and unofficial art spaces. The latter aided the foundation of an alternative artistic culture that sought to distance itself from the official framework for artistic production and its repressive structures.

A closer examination of both galleries’ activities against their socio-political contexts reveals, however, significant differences in their functioning and, consequently, in the cultural-political functions that they fulfilled within their contexts. In a broader perspective, the state socialist systems in Poland and East Germany had evolved by the 1970s away from the totalitarian model of rule, characteristic of the Stalinist period in the Eastern Bloc and, instead, demonstrated more affinities with what has been termed by scholars as post-totalitarian or post-Stalinist regimes. What is more, in both contexts a gradual disintegration and dissolution of the systems and state structures was already
underway in the 1970s. This was also perceptible in the cultural spheres and, for instance, the 1970s cultural politics of quasi-liberalisation in Poland and East Germany can be seen as part of the changes. Yet, these processes progressed with different strength and speed, took different forms in both contexts and, ultimately, were much more visible in Poland. In cultural terms, the quasi-liberalisation differed considerably in the degree of freedoms that were granted to artists and of state’s leniency towards cultural dissidence. Consequently, the activities of Arkade and Galeria/Repassage responded to those different conditions and co-produced distinct versions of post-Stalinist artistic culture.

In general, the GDR’s cultural context was more restrictive and dogmatic and, for instance, socialist realism still persisted there as the official artistic style throughout the 1970s, while modern art tendencies such as abstractionism were demonised as an expression of Western ‘enemy’ culture up until the late 1970s. In East Berlin of the early 1970s it was possible to accommodate postmodern art practices such as conceptual art, happenings or performance art only in private ateliers or in the illegal flat gallery run in Prenzlauer Berg by Jürgen Schweinebraden. In contrast, Polish socialist authorities tolerated modern and post-modern artistic practices but the latter remained confined to the marginal spaces of small artist-run galleries. This less restrictive attitude towards experimental art resulted also in the foundation of a larger number of alternative art spaces which in most cases functioned as artist-run projects attached to the Students’ Unions. In the GDR, apart from the Clara Mosch gallery, these types of exhibition spaces followed a less horizontal and more traditional structural model with a single director/gallerist on top responsible for the gallery’s programme and organisation.

Hence, what at a first glance seems like a parallel development demonstrates deep-running complexities and the following chapters will analyse systematically the similarities.

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and differences in functioning between Arkade and Galeria/Repassage under the late socialist conditions. There has long been a need for such a comparative study as to date there has been no single publication or equivalent study that focuses on analysing the phenomenon of alternative art galleries in different state socialist contexts. So far, we have only seen sporadic and tentative interest in comparing different alternative exhibition spaces in a single socialist context and this absence needs to be addressed and corrected.

In terms of Polish alternative art galleries, the only comprehensive overview of artist-run initiatives functioning in the PRL constitutes Bożena Stokłosa’s unpublished thesis written as long ago as in 1981. Two Polish art historians Marcin Lachowski and Luiza Nader have compared examples of 1960s and 1970s alternative art galleries, while Łukasz Guzek’s and Agnieszka Pindera’s short analyses provide merely general interpretations. The East German part of the phenomenon has not found much academic attention either, apart from monographic publications about Arkade and the Leonhardi Museum, an in-depth sociological overview but exclusively of private, unofficial spaces and brief one- or two-page descriptions within more general publications.

Most of these publications approach the galleries only from one dimension of their activities, mainly through the prism of artistic practices produced and exhibited within the...
galleries or in terms of their sociological function alone.\textsuperscript{9} None of the analyses contextualise the galleries systematically in their cultural-political context of the 1970s, nor do they analyse in detail their entanglements with socialist power or their surveillance by state security service. When one narrows down to recent research on the individual galleries, each has been granted a monographic publication consisting mainly of primary sources in the form of excerpts from catalogue texts, photographic records or some state documentations with short introductory texts.\textsuperscript{10} Since the publication of these invaluable archival records, however, there has not been much academic interest in interpreting them, for only Lachowski and Łukasz Ronduda referred to the published primary materials about \textit{Galeria} and \textit{Repassage}, while there has been no scholarly response to Gabriele Muschter’s book on Klaus Werner yet.\textsuperscript{11}

Furthermore, a few scholars have compared experimental and subversive art practices produced in the 1970s in various Eastern Bloc states.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, only Piotrowski’s seminal book on avant-garde art practices in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, East Germany, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria includes short sections describing examples of alternative art galleries in each context. However, the book still does not compare their functioning or their cultural-political function in any systematic way. In terms of a comparative study of cultural politics and artistic production in East Germany and Poland, specifically, only one academic publication analyses the histories of socialist realism in both contexts but, here again, primarily in relation to the official literary canon.\textsuperscript{13}

Since in the 1970s alternative art galleries often promoted conceptual art practices, any analysis of their function needs to be situated within the long-running academic debate over the subversive character of conceptual art produced in this decade in the PRL and the GDR. Namely, in the Polish context the discussion has been polarised between the view

\textsuperscript{9} See Nader; Lachowski; Guzek; Mesch; Stoklosa, ‘Artystyczno-społeczna problematyka’; Petra Jacoby, \textit{Kollektivierung der Phantasie? Künstlergruppen in der DDR zwischen Vereinnahmung und Erfindungsgabe}, (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007).
\textsuperscript{10} For instance, Sitkowska; Muschter and Werner.
\textsuperscript{11} See Lachowski; Ronduda, \textit{Sztuka Polska}; Muschter and Werner.
\textsuperscript{13} Katarzyna Śliwińska, \textit{Socrealizm w PRL i NRD} (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006).
that by avoiding direct political reiterations and by maintaining an apolitical stance Polish conceptualists were conformist and reinforced the system. On the other side, some Polish scholars have seen their practices as a form of resistance against the dominant discourse and an attempt to free themselves from the socialist ideology.

In relation to the GDR, in the 1990s some German scholars criticised East German alternative culture for significant collaboration with the state security, its moral ambivalence, as well as superficiality and derivative character of its artistic production. In a similar vein, Piotr Piotrowski argued in his comparative study that East German alternative culture and unofficial art did not play any significant role in transition from state socialism to market capitalism. Conversely, the art historian Karl-Siegbert Rehberg argues that under conditions of repression and restriction of freedom, to pursue performance and artistic actions was an act of courage, while Claudia Mesch sees performances realised during outdoor pleinairs as having liberatory character and as allowing for alternative collective identities to be formulated. Given different cultural-political circumstances and, consequently, different attitudes in the 1970s towards modernist and post-modernist art in various state socialist contexts, Eugen Blume has argued that ‘in the political system such as the GDR a proper introduction of performance art meant to establish a second culture which inevitably had to be in conflict with the first official culture and thus, in opposition to the whole system’. Amy Bryzgel, in the most recent comparative study of performance art in the Eastern Bloc, argues, however, that performance in most cases offered artists in this region freedom to experiment rather than a vehicle for dissident political activity.

15 Andrzej Kostołowski, ‘P.C.I. Polish Conceptual Inventions’, in Refleksja konceptualna w sztuce polskiej, ed. by Paweł Polit and Piotr Woźniakiewicz (Warsawa: CSW Zamek Ujazdowski, 2001); Nader; Kemp-Welch;
16 Christoph Tannert, ‘After a Realistic Assessment of the Situation’, in Stillstand: Studies in German Art, ed. by Matthias Flügge and others (Oslo: For Art, 1995), p.44; Blume, p.735.
17 Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta, pp. 415-416.
19 Blume, p. 735.
20 Bryzgel, p. 3.
Consequently, the aim of this research is, firstly, to fill the gaps in the existing literature and, secondly, to contribute to the current academic debates in both German and Polish contexts and, hopefully, to open up a new discussion thread on the function of alternative art spaces in the former Eastern Bloc. As such, this thesis represents the first attempt to conduct a comparative study of alternative art galleries functioning within different state socialist regimes. The originality of this research lies also in the detailed contextualisation of both galleries’ activities in the socio-political processes at work in the 1970s, which also initiates a comparison of cultural politics in the GDR and the PRL, notabe, never accomplished before. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, previous publications on Arkade and Galeria/Repassage have devoted very little or no attention at all to the galleries’ entanglements with socialist power structures and the state security services and my aim is also to publish new details and new interpretations of this aspect of their functioning.

Through a discussion of various types of subversive practices produced in the galleries, as well as their ambiguous position due to administrative and financial dependencies, this thesis seeks to contribute to the current academic debate over the subversive character of conceptual and performance art practised by East German and Polish artists in the 1970s. The following chapters respond to the argumentations on both sides of the discussion and attempt to answer my main research questions: 1. In what ways did the galleries’ practices undermine the socialist system, or, if so, conform to it? 2. Considering more repressive cultural-political context in the GDR, was the production of performance or conceptual art effectively more subversive there? 3. In broader perspective, what function did the galleries fulfil within their socio-political contexts and how do these functions in two distinct post-Stalinist systems then compare?

To answer these questions, this thesis makes use of various types of primary sources (f.e. photographic, textual, film) which either have been already published but never interpreted before, or not interpreted in any great detail. Most importantly, I shall bring to light new archival material collected during my extensive fieldwork research over two years in Poland, Germany and France. My interpretation of these primary sources is pursued using a combined theoretical framework which has never been applied before in academic research on alternative art spaces under state socialism, and therefore, offers new insights
into and illuminations of hitherto concealed spaces and connections. Specifically, Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia informs my macro-scale analysis of the galleries’ function, while the micro-scale analysis refers to Henri Lefebvre’s theory of production of space which allows to interpret the galleries’ activities in their multidimensionality and multifaceted nature.

To achieve its main objectives, this thesis is organised into two main sections. The first two chapters lay out the theoretical framework and the key areas of my enquiry and situate my investigations in the context of secondary academic literature. They are then followed by detailed analyses of four case studies of artistic, exhibition and social practices produced in the galleries Arkade and Galeria/Repassage. Accordingly, Chapter 1 introduces and discusses the foundations of my theoretical framework which informs the analysis and interpretation of four case studies in Chapters 3 to 6. The main aim of this first chapter is to explain Foucault’s ideas about space, power and heterotopias, and Lefebvre’s theory of the social production of space and the theory of social networks, as well as their complementary relationship and usefulness for my thesis. I also discuss here the theoretical issues related to my work with archival documentation. Chapter 2 discusses the different levels of my investigation referring to the subject of functioning of alternative artistic culture in the post-Stalinist systems. More specifically, I look at the cultural politics in the GDR and the PRL in the 1970s and their relationship to the advancing socio-political processes leading up to disintegration of state socialism in Eastern Europe. Subsequently, I shall discuss the similarities and differences between artistic and exhibition practices in their official vs. alternative versions in both state socialist contexts.

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I analyse examples of subversive artistic, exhibition and social practices realised inside Repassage and Arkade, respectively. For instance, the chapters demonstrate how the directors and artists challenged the official socialist discourse in their conceptual depictions of gallery space such as catalogues, manifestoes, programmes, or exhibition opening speeches. Several art installations analysed in these chapters experimented with and transgressed the physical dimensions of gallery space by incorporating its physical elements such as windows, walls, or ceilings into their art space.

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21 See Chapter 1 for the discussion of previous applications of Foucault’s and Lefebvre’s theories.
Other practices produced new forms of sociality and social structures such as unofficial artists’ networks. The chapters also discuss various types of social relations which tied both galleries to the socialist power structures outside and, at times, compromised their activities.

The subsequent Chapters 5 and Chapter 6 focus on examples of collective artistic actions that took place outside the physically defined space of gallery and, in this way, attempted to transgress the borders imposed by the state officials in institutional and art discursive sense. Chapter 5 looks closer at three group projects organised by Galeria and Repassage and planned as to intervene into the socialist public space by situating actions and installations on the streets outside the gallery and by engaging with the passers-by. The repressive reactions of the socialist authorities to these participatory practices points to the nature of the clashes between the state and the artists. In Chapter 6 I shall introduce examples of artistic pleinairs co-organised by Arkade in remote holiday villages, miles away from the gallery, which, however, still constituted an extension of its practices. In a supposedly much freer setting, mostly outside the institutional framework, the artists experimented with new artistic ideas and forms and, in this way, challenged the normative order of socialist space. However, here too, East German authorities’ interference turned out inevitable, even if pursued by a less interventionist method.

The closing chapter brings together the concluding arguments from the previous chapters in a comparative structure which re-examines, firstly, the contribution that my thesis has made to research on history of alternative art spaces in the Eastern Bloc, secondly, the similarities and differences in functioning of alternative galleries in both state socialist contexts, and thirdly, assess their subversive potential and draw on the main points of how my thesis revises our understanding of cultural-political processes of the 1970s decade in the history of Eastern Bloc. As we shall see, the practices produced in both galleries were simultaneously symptomatic of and contributed to the gradual process of disintegration of state socialism and, in that sense, they are analysed in this thesis as examples of subversive practices that transgressed the established socialist order.
Chapter 1

Space, power and artistic resistance - theoretical framework and methodology

In her 2009 publication on the genealogy of Polish conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s the Polish art historian Luiza Nader uses the examples of three alternative art galleries (*Pod Mona Lisq, Akumulatory 2, Foksal*) as concrete institutional contexts of which conceptual art emerged and examines their role in the contexture of conceptual discourse. Nader applies Foucault’s critical theory of heterotopia, amongst his other writings, to demonstrate that these spaces destroyed simplistic binary division between public and private, external and internal, engaged and autonomous.\(^2\) Nader suggests that those galleries adopted critical position versus the ideologised public sphere and, in relation to *Akumulatory 2* specifically, she sees this gallery as functioning as heterotopia of illusion and of compensation simultaneously. Although her application of Foucault’s concept is very useful and highlights the galleries’ subversive function on the level of the discursive formation of Polish conceptualism, because of the focus of her thesis, it is still rather limited and discussed briefly. In contrast with Nader’s analysis, this thesis uses Foucault’s theory in a more systematic manner as to help, primarily, in examining the galleries’ subversive function in broader cultural-political terms. Also, alternative exhibition spaces are seen here as having produced heterotopias of illusion rather than both illusion and compensation, as Nader implied.\(^3\)

Foucault’s ideas on heterotopian spaces and their ambiguous function in relation to the order outside provide rich resources on a macro-level of analysis. The use of his theory falls short, however, of detailed insights into how the gallery spaces were actually produced through everyday practices. Thus, Foucault’s theoretical approach needed to be complemented by a theory that would reflect on a micro-level on the multifaceted character of the galleries’ activities that include, for instance, artistic practices, exhibition

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\(^3\) Ibid., p. 186.
strategies, social life and organisational models. Henri Lefebvre’s analytical triad describing the production of social space as interplay of the mental, the physical and the social dimensions allows for the pursuit of this holistic approach.\textsuperscript{24} His writings seem also more fruitful where strategies of spatial appropriation and struggles against the spatial domination of political power are concerned. Hence, the case studies in the next chapters will also be subject to frequent references to Lefebvre’s ideas about the social production of space, spatial appropriation and ‘the right to the city.’

As the analyses of galleries’ practices later demonstrate, both gallery spaces were defined by alternative forms of sociality and social networks which connected them with other alternative art spaces and artists within their localities and beyond. Unofficial networks were, indeed, crucial to artists’ and directors’ experience of the gallery as a social space and in the exchange of ideas, art and knowledge. Hence, in the discussion of the social dimension of galleries’ activities, I refer to the idea of social networks as a theoretical tool to help to map out how alternative art spaces were organised and interconnected, and how they related to the official forms of social organisation.

Thus, the following three sections of this chapter explain in detail the critical theoretical approaches which inform the analyses of my case studies in Chapters 3 to 6, and my overall interpretation of the function of alternative art galleries in Poland and East Germany in the 1970s. The last section of this chapter briefly outlines the main theoretical issues related to the use of archival material in a historical inquiry and refers to writings by Jacques Derrida and Foucault, among others, on the relationship between archival sources, power and production of knowledge. More specifically, it also flags up the main problems that a researcher, writing histories of art and art galleries under state socialism, is confronted with, especially since a good proportion of the primary sources used in this thesis is comprised of state security records.

\textsuperscript{24} Lefebvre’s analytical triad has also been used by other scholars analysing various types of social spaces ranging from an art gallery, a hotel to a hospice. See, especially, Antonia Groudanidou, ‘The production of space at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham: From Art Object to Art Institution 1963-1978’ (unpublished MPhil thesis, The University of Birmingham, August 2010).
1.1. Foucault’s theory of heterotopias and their function in society

Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power – Michel Foucault.25

The above statement by Foucault subsumes, in a brief form, the nature of his interest in space with his understanding of practices of power/knowledge. He recognises here the importance of a spatial perspective for analysing social and political processes in a society. Foucault’s ideas on the relationship between power and space were elaborated upon in texts such as ‘The Mesh of Power’, ‘Panopticism’, ‘Space, Knowledge and Power’, yet, for the scope of this thesis I refer mainly to his 1967 lecture ‘Of Other Spaces’ where the concept of heterotopia is introduced. As argued by Foucault in the lecture, every culture and every society constitutes a particular type of social space, which he called a heterotopia. As he wrote, these 'absolutely other spaces' are ‘a kind of effectively enacted utopias’ that are linked with all the other spaces by a set of relations, yet, they ‘suspend, neutralise, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them’ and, consequently, can be seen as being outside and contradicting all other places.26

In general, heterotopias’ isolation, or otherness, consists also in their character and practice, for they allow rules/behaviours that are different or unacceptable to the ordinary spaces and, thus, while being inside them we feel beyond the normality. By having their own different spatial organisation, their own rules of conduct and regulations of practice, heterotopias could imply a subversive potential. We can enter them but there is often a controlled access and a code of practice/conduct which hides some exclusions inside. Foucault describes this general aspect of heterotopias as below:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable [...] Either one is constrained [...] or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications. One can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed certain number of gestures [...]

There are others, on the contrary, that look like pure and simple openings, but that, generally, conceal curious exclusions. Everybody can enter into those heterotopian emplacements, but in fact it is only an illusion: one believes to have entered and, by the very fact of entering, one is excluded.\(^{27}\)

Hence, heterotopias have an ambiguous character in terms of their accessibility as they are physically accessible and, in theory, everyone can enter them but through a practice of different rituals or rules inside, some will be excluded from these counter-sites.

Most importantly, Foucault’s lecture describes the functioning of heterotopias in society using six principles, which form heterotopias’ systematic description, the so-called 'heterotopology'. In general, the principles refer to various spatio-temporal traits of heterotopias and correspond to their different types such as heterotopias of crisis (boarding schools) and of deviance (prisons, psychiatric hospitals) or heterotopias of accumulating time (museum) and of festivity (fairgrounds). In terms of heterotopias' 'function in relation to the remaining space' (sixth principle), Foucault differentiated between the heterotopia of illusion that 'denounces all the real space, all real emplacements, as being even more illusory' (brothel), and heterotopia of compensation - 'a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganised, badly arranged, and muddled' (Jesuit colony).\(^{28}\) Thus, the sixth principle of heterotopology refers directly to heterotopias’ function in society and their relation to all other spaces. According to this principle, heterotopias can create either spaces of illusion, which denounce the supposed reality outside them to be illusionary, or they can create these perfected spaces of compensation, which are better organised and constructed than ours.

Indeed, the subversive function of heterotopias has been debated by a number of scholars from various areas of humanities. The collection of essays edited by Lieven de Cauter and Michiel Dehaene \textit{Heterotopia and the City: Public Spaces in a Postcivil Society} presents a fascinating discussion on the subject amongst urban geographers. For the purpose of this thesis, I shall outline below the main arguments put forward in the book for and against seeing heterotopias as having potential to resist and transgress the order outside them. For example, for Heidi Sohn heterotopias have an essentially subversive

\(^{27}\) Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p.21.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., pp.21-22.
function in a society, for they have the potential to overturn the established order, contrast sameness, subvert language and signification, and reflect the inverse or reverse sides of society. These spaces, which are reserved for the other, the abnormal, or the deviant, constitute, in this way, an exception to uniformity and homogeneity. For her, this function gives heterotopias a very postmodern meaning as they ‘open up pathways for the deconstruction of sameness and its subversion, becoming the antidote against the erasure of difference implicit in the progression of the cultural logic of late capitalism’. Further, Edward Soja argues against Foucault's formulations of heterotopia as a restricted system liable to permissions, exclusions and concealment. Soja’s postmodern perspective regards these spaces of ‘otherness’ as alternative urban formations characterised by their inclusiveness, ‘radical openness' and unlimited connectivity, something that renders them as sites of political and social relevance for the empowerment of minority groups and marginal subgroups through the use of space. He argues that heterotopias ‘are meant to detonate, to deconstruct, not to be poured back comfortably in the old containers’.

On the other side of the debate, David Grahame Shane points out that, although heterotopias can be seen as sites arising as an ‘inverse logic’ to industrial societies, so through the construction of ‘parallel, separate worlds for specific and segregated inhabitants’, they can also be seen as ambiguous structures, which facilitate or arrest change. He argues that the important socio-cultural role of heterotopias is based on the fact that they regulate ‘specialised exclusion’ where taboos and individuals and groups linked to the former are segregated into closed areas. This mechanism of bordering is necessary for the maintenance of order and purity. Further, in a similar vein, Marco Cenzatti points out that in modernity the process of normalisation does not translate into the elimination of difference, but in its exaltation as deviance. However, as he further argues:

the imposition of deviance (subjugation) with its rules, spaces and times, is countered by the making of self-identity (subjectification) by the ‘deviant' groups who re-code

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these other spaces with their own informal and often invisible meanings, rules and times. Modern heterotopias, then, are 'other spaces' on the one hand because they are made other by the top-down making of places of exclusion, on the other hand, they are made other by the deviant groups that live in and appropriate those places. [...] After all, power flows in all directions, and regulatory controls are not just produced by top-down interests. They also respond to movements from below.32

Thus, spaces such as, for instance, heterotopias of deviance are created so that the abnormal can be isolated from the rest. And yet, they cannot be seen purely as imposed by the state power, for the groups which create them can exercise regional forms of power upwards with their own rules and procedures and, in this way, can liberate themselves from disciplinary micro-powers.33 As Cenzatti further writes, unprivileged groups who lack access to the public sphere are forced to produce their own semi-public spheres and form ‘parallel discursive arenas’.34 They start by appropriating the opportunities and spaces where in time a group-specific public discourse can be developed like, for instance, in cases of such subaltern groups as gay, lesbian, workers, illegal immigrants.

Further, in the field of sociology Peter Johnson argues that heterotopias reflect Foucault's wider questioning of the complexities of resisting power relations. They are able to provide an escape route from power in some ways and to uncouple the grip of power relations, but, at the same time, every form of resistance becomes entangled with or sustains power, because the set of relations is never separate from dominant structures and ideology. Against reading heterotopias as having transgressive character, Johnson argues that the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation. For him, heterotopias are fundamentally disturbing places, because they ‘alter, to a different degree, what might be described as everyday existence’.35 By referring more specifically to the compensatory and illusory

32 Marco Cenzatti, ‘Heterotopias of difference’, in de Cauter and Dehaene, p. 77.
33 Following Marx, Foucault argues against the concept of a single power consisting in prohibition and exercised top-down. Instead, in addition to such a juridical type of power, there also exist local, regional forms of power, which can be relatively autonomous and have their own way of functioning, their own procedures and techniques. Thus, a society cannot be seen anymore as ‘a unitary body in which one power only exercises itself’ but as an archipelago of different powers, in which the state power is just one of the regions, see Michel Foucault, ‘The Mesh of Power’ (1976), trans. Gerald Moore, in Space, Power and Knowledge. Foucault and Geography, ed. by Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p. 156.
34 Cenzatti, p. 83.
heterotopias, the cultural historian Matthew Philpotts suggests that these two heterotopian types ‘are most readily associated with, respectively, stabilising and destabilising social functions. But both types of space can also resist these functions: compensatory heterotopia may highlight the disorder of social space as well as imposing order upon it; the illusory may act as a stabilising outlet for deviance as well as exposing otherwise hidden social order’. Their ambiguous character in relation to power makes these ‘other spaces’ both able to disturb, to some extent, the normal order of things, to create their own local forms of power and counter-act homogeneity, while, simultaneously, they still function within the radius of state’s control and possibly serve as a necessary margin for enactment of the abnormal.

When applied to the socialist context of the GDR and the PRL, Foucault’s theory of heterotopia constitutes a useful analytical tool for examining the function of alternative art spaces in relation to the official exhibition venues. Thus, alternative art galleries in the socialist context are seen in this thesis as the ‘other’ social spaces linked with the system outside by a set of relations, such as, for instance, administrative dependencies, but, at the same time, as functioning outside the state exhibition system through a different set of practices and rituals performed in there. As the following chapters demonstrate, in those heterotopian spaces the socialist ideological prescriptions could have been suspended and differently conceptualized artistic space was produced. The galleries fulfilled the function of illusionary heterotopias because what was classed by the state as artistic ‘deviance’ could have been enacted in there and, in this sense, they exposed everything outside as even more illusory. As such, alternative art spaces had a stabilizing and destabilizing function by both contesting and reinforcing the power relations outside. Consequently, the question of whether their cultural practices fundamentally resisted and transgressed the socialist order outside is then approached in this thesis from these two perspectives.

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1.2. Gallery as a socially produced space

(Social) space is a (social) product
- Henri Lefebvre.\(^{37}\)

In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre argued that space needs to be seen as a product of social practices while also as simultaneously facilitating them. According to his theory, the social production of space in a given society involves a three-dimensional process that can be described using two sets of conceptual triads. Namely, Lefebvre proposed the phenomenological account of the experience of space in form of the triad of the perceived, the conceived and the lived space; and its translation in spatial terms, referring to a semiological analysis of various ways of producing meaning, as the triad of spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation.\(^{38}\) As such, spatial practice (the perceived space) denotes the material dimension of social activity and interaction and rests upon a determinate material basis such as, for instance, built environment.\(^{39}\) Representations of space (the conceived space) emerge at the level of language and discourse and comprise of the conceptual depictions of space such as descriptions, definitions, theories of space, maps of space etc. For Lefebvre, mental space represents power and ideology, and, thus, is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production).\(^{40}\) Spaces of representations (the lived space) refer to the symbolic dimension of space and to the process of signification. This space overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects and signifies the lived, practical experience of space as ‘directly lived through its associated images and symbols.’\(^{41}\) It is the


\(^{40}\) Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp.38-39.

\(^{41}\) Lefebvre, p. 15; this dimension is also referred to as the social space in the narrow sense, as a separable field opposed to the physical-material and the mental spaces; otherwise social space is used in broad sense as encompassing the perceived, conceived and lived space, as suggests Christian Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), pp. 209-210 and Soja, p.52.
space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’ whose imagination seeks to change and appropriate.\footnote{Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}, p.17.} Thus, social space emerges as a result of interplay of these three interconnected dimensions.

Lefebvre also criticises the practices of architects and urban planners for their models of urbanisation and the overdetermination of urban spaces by the state. His theory sees space as inherently political and embedded in power struggles and differentiates between those who produce space for domination, to facilitate and reproduce state power and those who produce it as an appropriation to serve human needs.\footnote{Ibid., p.337.} As Lefebvre’s spatial triads demonstrate, the production of space is not reduced to planning of the bureaucrats but also takes place in everyday activities of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’.\footnote{Stanek, p. 82.} The latter are able to appropriate space by practices that modify, reshape, alter, or adopt space. Lefebvre defines the concept of appropriation of space as follows:

For an individual, for a group, to inhabit is to appropriate something. Not in the sense of possessing it, but as making it an oeuvre, making it one’s own, marking it, modelling it, shaping it. […] To inhabit is to appropriate space, in the midst of constraints, that it to say, to be in a conflict - often acute - between the constraining powers and the forces of appropriation.\footnote{Lefebvre as cited in Stanek, p. 87.}

The concept of the appropriation of space is closely linked with Lefebvre’s notion of ‘the right to the city’, introduced in 1968 in the text \textit{Le droit à la ville}. It is defined as a call for a renewed right for urban inhabitants ‘to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places, etc’.\footnote{Henri Lefebvre, ‘The Right to the City’, in Henri Lefebvre, \textit{Writing on Cities}, trans. and ed. by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996), p. 158.} Lefebvre advocates here the need for restructuring power relations inherent in the production of urban space by taking control away from the state and toward the urban dwellers. This restructuring was to be realised by giving the inhabitants the right to participate more in decision-making about urban space and to appropriate the latter in ways that met their needs.\footnote{Mark Purcell, ‘Excavating Lefebvre: the right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant’, \textit{Geojournal} 58 (Oct 2002), p.102.} The idea of ‘the right to
the city’, which since then became a slogan for many urban social movements, aimed at empowering urban residents in their use of the public space. However, it called for the inhabitants to not only be able to physically access urban spaces, occupy and use them according to own needs but also to be able to produce own spaces.48

The choice of Lefebvre’s theories for the subject of this thesis requires, however, that the question of their applicability to the context of late socialism in the GDR and the PRL of the 1970s is addressed and its implications cashed out. As Lefebvre wrote in *The Production of Space*, ‘every society produces a space, its own space’ and, accordingly, state socialism also had produced its own socialist space based on the socialist mode of production.49 In fact, he argued for the similarities between the space of state socialism and post-war capitalism describing both as bureaucratic regimes of controlled consumption oriented towards economic growth and different only in terms of the dominant model of consumption. Namely, in the Western capitalism the individualist model prevailed and in the post-Stalinist socialism the collective one.50 Yet, Lefebvre never went so far as to apply his theory of space and spatial practice to state socialist societies. In 1988, however, the Polish geographer Bohdan Jałowiecki used Lefebvre’s theory to underpin his research on the production of space in the late socialist Poland, the first occasion on which this had been done. In the book *Społeczne Wytwarzanie Przestrzeni* (The Social Production of Space) he describes space of the PRL as ‘political space’ because the decisions of the political authorities regarding economic and social development were fundamental in the social production of space in this context. Yet, as Jałowiecki also points out, in late socialism the state-owned industrial enterprises began to compete for space and increasingly gained more power at the expense of the political authorities.51 Consequently, in practice, urban space in late socialism was dominated and controlled not only by the political, but also, by the state industrial elites which suggests that the political power began to disperse, while other centres of power began to emerge.

Accordingly, if we apply Lefebvre’s ideas about social struggles between spatial domination and appropriation to the socio-political contexts of both galleries under

48 Ibid., 103.
49 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 31.
50 Stanek, p. 64.
scrutiny, we can differentiate between the socialist authorities who sought to produce
space for ideological domination and reproduction of political power, and the
directors/artists/participants who produced gallery spaces as an appropriation to serve
their need for artistic freedom. Indeed, as David Crowley and Susan Reid write, in Eastern
Bloc countries the socialist authorities sought to control the meaning and uses of space and
urban space was invested with the official ideology. Following Marx premises, the
distinction between public and private space was to be abolished as a result of socialisation
of private property. This was to culminate in the complete eradication of private space and
in the formation of all-encompassing public sphere belonging to and controlled by the
socialist state. However, in reality the relationship between the private and public sphere
was more complex and changing in the Eastern Bloc. For instance, Katerina Gerasimova
argues that since the 1950s in the Soviet Union the process of the symbolic privatisation of
domestic space intensified. Cultural and political matters were increasingly being discussed
in private spaces that led to the formation of alternative semi-public spheres. Also, informal
economies and use of public facilities and goods for private needs became increasingly
common. These arrangements were less controlled by the state and took place on private
or ‘privatised’ territories, hence, could be called ‘private publicity’. In a similar vein,
Crowley points out, by referring to the PRL context, that in state socialism not only private
space was still cultivated but it could have been transformed into a site of production
forming alternative public spaces.

Lefebvre’s conceptual triad constitutes in this thesis a theoretical tool applied to
examine the subversive character of the galleries’ practices on a micro-level of analysis.
Accordingly, they are discussed as social spaces produced as a result of three interrelated
and interconnected processes. The three dimensions of the gallery spaces comprise: firstly,
the perceived space- a network of activities which rested upon their concrete material
reality and locational relations; secondly, the conceived space in the form of the directors’
and associate artists’ conceptual constructions on the level of language and discourse; and,

52 David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, ‘Socialist Spaces: sites of everyday life in the Eastern Europe’, in Socialist
Spaces: sites of everyday life in the Eastern Europe, ed.by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford – New
187.
thirdly, the lived space - a dimension of the galleries’ social spaces as it was socially lived and experienced through its use, produced meaning and spatial symbolism. Analysing the galleries’ activities through these three spatial dimensions foregrounds various types of their practices such as exhibition and artistic practices and social strategies that appropriated space normally dominated by the political power. Yet, as Lefebvre emphasised, all these processes are interrelated and interpenetrating and should not be treated as separate entities, hence, their discussion is often more fluid and meshed together.

Since in state socialism the public space was subject to political ends, public art works were also to fit in with the social function of art and to symbolise the socialist order. Nevertheless, as the analysis of the case studies in the following chapters demonstrates, the gallery directors and artists sought to escape the officially prescribed uses of public space and appropriate them in their own ways. Thus, when discussing the galleries’ activities which were transposed outside of the material gallery spaces and which intervened in the socialist public sphere, Lefebvre’s idea of ‘the right to the city’ seems especially relevant. Accordingly, examples of artistic practices discussed in the following chapters, and especially in Chapter 5, demonstrate the ways in which the artists’ strategies, seen as attempts to reclaim ‘the right to the cities’ and participate in urban life according to own ideas and needs, could be interpreted as having undermined the socialist system.

1.3. Gallery’s social space - forms of sociality and social networks.

A mapping of the informal social connections between alternative art galleries and between individual artists is central to my analyses of social spaces produced in Arkade and Galeria/Repassage in Chapters 3 to 6. To better understand the ways in which these social spaces operated I have also introduced into my theoretical framework the concept of social networks:

The world is composed of networks, not groups
- Barry Wellman.55

networks as fundamental forms of social organisation. As Wellman’s citation above points out, modern societies are, indeed, best seen as networks rather than groups bounded in hierarchical structures. This new paradigm in thinking about the social fabric as a network emerged in the 1960s in the Western countries and was marked by advances in communication technologies.\(^{56}\) In 1977 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari contributed to the network discussion the highly influential concept of the rhizome which they use to map out a heterogenous system of multidimensional and processual character. Unlike tree-like structures, rhizomes constitute a non-hierarchical network in which one point can be linked to any other point of the system and which has no beginning nor an end.\(^{57}\)

As Manuel Castells, the father of the concept of ‘network society’, has argued, with the rapid development of information technology from late 1970s onwards, one has witnessed networks’ ‘pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure’.\(^{58}\) Yet, his seminal research, as well as that of other network scholars, focuses, predominantly, on the age of information technology in capitalist contexts. This poses questions of the applicability of those theories to late socialist contexts in which such technological developments were nowhere near as rapid as in the West. However, as Castells has also pointed out, social networks are an old form of social life and existed in other times and spaces.\(^{59}\) Therefore, one can assume that analysing social organisation as producing networking forms is also appropriate for the post-Stalinist context of Poland and East Germany in the 1970s. Especially since in the 1970s in the wake of efforts to modernise the systems, some technological advances had made their way through the Iron Curtain.

So far, the concept of social networks has been applied to the context of state socialism by very few scholars. And those who have done so have used it primarily in research on the functioning of the mail-art phenomenon. In this context, the first systematic analysis of artistic phenomenon of mail-art in the Eastern Bloc was conducted


\(^{59}\) Castells, p. 500; Also, it has been suggested that the origins of network theory go back to the 1920s when the sociologist Georg Simmel advances his theory of ‘web-affiliations, see Mary Chayko, ‘The first web theorist? George Simmel and the legacy of “The web of group-affiliations”’, *Information, Communication and Society*, 18 (2015), pp.1419-1422.
by the German art historian Kornelia Röder in 2006. In her thesis on topology and functioning of mail-art networks Röder used Deleuze’s and Guattari’s structural model of the rhizome to describe the organisational form of network. She sees mail-art networks as having produced a non-hierarchical rhizomatic system which was able to operate independently from the political centre, self-organise and provide many entry points for participants.\(^{60}\) Also, the art historians Klara Kemp-Welch and Cristina Freire have compared the mail-art phenomenon in Eastern Europe and Latin America and used the concept of the network to describe a model of collective action that sought to escape state repression and provincialism. They, however, warn against calling networking a strategy of subversion in case this constructs ‘any artificially uniform, heroic narrative’.\(^{61}\) Further, Paulina Varas Alarcón has argued in an article on artistic networks in socialist countries that the information networks which developed in Eastern Europe and South America between mail-artists provided an escape route from the censorship and repression by the regimes.\(^{62}\)

Hence, there has been some academic interest paid to the subject of alternative networking forms operating in state socialist states and connecting with international artists’ networks. However, the analyses have not included networks of alternative art galleries as yet, nor did they analyse what their relationship to the state social structures was. Although Kemp-Welch and Freira are cautious about interpreting networking forms as a subversive strategy, the informal artists’ networks produced by Arkade and *Galeria/Repassage* are analysed in this thesis as subversive practices, for, as it is demonstrated later, they challenged the official order of social life institutionalised and controlled by the political power.

Indeed, a concept of sociality based on association of human beings out of underlying interests and a need to feel connection, or a union, with the others was central to the project of state socialism in the Eastern Bloc. According to the official Marxist-Leninist ideology alienation was to be eliminated together with the division of labour and

\(^{60}\) Röder, pp. 35-37.
private property, which produced the former. Marx believed that once alienation was eliminated, relations between people would be based on mutual fulfilment and recognition rather than exploitation, conflict and subordination. In practice, the party leadership determined the models of sociality, which were to be the organising principle of social life under state socialism. By mobilising people to the centrally organised associations and unions, whether of professional or of interest-based character, the state could have exerted control over social life and indoctrinated the society through these forms of sociality. Accordingly, in reality socialist associations were often felt as a burden, endured because of the state’s ideological pressure and coercion. The state defined the principles of the associations and the formula of their sociality was imposed on society based on apparently shared common interest in building socialism. Correspondingly, the socialist authorities in the GDR and Poland designated also forms of sociality for artists which the latter were supposed to organise themselves in and work from within. For many artists and culture workers, however, those official forms of sociality were repressive and constraining to their art and exhibition practice because of their ideological basis. Hence, some sought to associate with other artists in ways that evaded the official framework and, instead, built on informal artists’ networks.

The application of the concept of network in this thesis is intended to describe and analyse forms of social organisation that bound the organisers, associate artists and intellectuals within the galleries, with other alternative art spaces and beyond their national localities. Accordingly, both galleries are analysed as Lefebvre’s social spaces that are embedded in informal artists’ networks. The latter are understood here as a set of interlocking social ties that linked members of the galleries’ social space across multiple bounded groups. Since network structures affect the flow of resources from and to individuals, networks were crucial for the gallery directors and artists to access such scarce resources as, for instance, information about Western contemporary art, art materials, money, or even emotional support. The gallery members could get hold of and transmit those scarce resources through such direct and indirect social ties. In this sense, the

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63 Craig A. Conly, ‘Alienation, Sociality and Division of Labour: Contradiction in Marx’s ideal of social man’, Ethics. An international journal of social political and legal philosophy, 89 (1978), p. 82.
64 Ibid., p. 93.
following case studies examine to what extent the galleries’ networks can be seen as having produced fairly independent forms of social organisation under state socialism.

1.4. On using archival records to write the galleries’ histories

My analysis of the activities of the galleries Arkade and Repassage is, to a great extent, founded on primary sources originating from a variety of archives. Most of these sources have not been academically assessed and interpreted before; therefore, an in-depth analysis and commentary seemed even more necessary here. The archival sources constitute a collection of manuscripts, correspondence letters, diaries, documents, exhibition catalogues, art objects, audio-visual materials and photographs. The oral history records consist of transcribed interviews of artists who participated in the phenomena, which were conducted by me, or by other researchers and published in secondary literature.⁶⁶ All of these records were selected and collected from the following types of archives: artists’ and gallery archives (Cieślars’ archive, Rolf-Rainer-Wasse archive at Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg, Repassage Archive at Muzeum ASP in Warsaw, Klaus-Werner-Archive at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin), institutions (Akademie der Künste, TVP archive), national archives (BStU and Bundesarchiv in Berlin, IPN and Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw), museum archives (CSW archive, Zachęta archive, Lindenau-Museum Altenburg archive) and national and university libraries (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw, Humboldt University and Warsaw University libraries). While working with these archival records and their interpretation I had to confront, however, many issues related to archives’ reliability, their incompleteness, or impartiality, as well as questions of objectivity of my own position as a researcher. Thus, it is important to recognise here briefly the fragmentary and, at times, subjective character of the histories of Arkade and Repassage which unfold in this thesis and draw largely on the archival documentation.

⁶⁶ Due to Klaus Werner’s death in 2010, his personal views and comments on the activities of Arkade had to be limited to already published interviews and statements. A very valuable source in that respect provides the monograph on Klaus Werner’s life work which includes texts, conversations, statements from 30 years of his professional history of working as the gallery director and an art curator; see Muschter and Werner, Klaus Werner: Für die Kunst.
Indeed, the archives are by no means neutral depositories of historical records or neutral sources of information, and consequently, neither is a researcher’s work and interpretation of them. In the field of critical theory cultural theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Foucault discussed the definition of the archive, and its role in and relationship to power structures and production of knowledge. For instance, in his 1993 text *Archive Fever* Derrida reformulated the concept of the archive and of the human drive for collecting data from the perspective of Freud’s psychoanalysis. He argued, amongst other points, that the media in which the archive is constructed inform its representation and meaning. For instance, the field of psychoanalysis would have developed differently if it did not rely merely on Freud’s files and correspondence. For Derrida, available archival technologies determine the structures and contents of the archive - ‘the very institution of the archivable event’. What is more, he recognised that control over the archives is fundamental to the operation of political power in the famous sentences: ‘[...] There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by its essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation’. Thus, through control of the archive those in power can also control how the past is remembered and how the knowledge about the past is produced. In a similar vein, Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) discusses the concept of the archive seen, in abstract terms, as a discursive formation, in his words, as ‘the general system of the formation and transformation of statements’. He describes the archive as ‘first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events’. Archives determine what can and cannot be recorded, said or thought, and consequently, they can be seen as instruments of political power and instruments of control.

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69 Ibid., p. 11 (note 1).
71 Ibid., p. 145.
Thus, archives need to be acknowledged as wielding ‘power over the shape and
direction of historical scholarship [...]’, as Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz write.72 From this
point of view it is pivotal to be aware that, for instance, the historical inquiry pursued in
this thesis, is, inevitably, limited by the technologies and the methods of transmitting
information that were available in the 1970s in Poland and East Germany and which
determined also the kind of knowledge that one can produce today. This was, of course,
shaped by the socio-political conditions and technological advances, or rather
technological underdevelopments in the case of the Eastern Bloc. For instance, a lot of
archival materials, used in this research, consist of paper documentations and
photographic reproductions and due to scarce availability of audio-visual resources there
is very small amount of sound or video recordings of the events. Artistic practices such as
performances or street actions could be documented in a much greater variety of media
today due to wide availability of video recordings, which, however, were extremely rarely
available to artists and audience in the socialist context of the 1970s. As a result, in the
analysis of performances, installations and artistic actions due to their transitory and often
site-specific character, accounts of the participants, descriptions by artists and
photographic documentation constitute often the only sources of information in my
attempts to reconstruct those artistic events.

Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that, as it is pointed out in the study on use
of photographic archives Object, Image, Enquiry: The Art Historian at Work, photographic
reproductions of art exhibitions, art works and art events are not neutral documentations
either.73 They are often documents that represent events or art objects merely from a
certain perspective and, therefore, can be subject to manipulation and provide only
fragmentary information. They certainly cannot compare with immediate contact with a
work of art or an art event and are not able to provide much information on the context of
artistic practices either. Still, in some case studies the available photographic records
originated from many different observers and, consistently, were taken from various
perspectives which offered a possibility of reconstructing some more details of exhibitions,

Study by the Getty Art History Information Program and the Institute for Research in Information and
Scholarship (Santa Monica, California: Getty Art History Information Program, 1988), pp. 7-22.
actions, or performances. In this way, despite the above-mentioned issues, photographic reproductions can still offer to a researcher substantial documentary and objective contents.

A considerable amount of the archival material used in this thesis, especially in the case of *Arkade*, has been collected in the form of the state security records, which poses a number of issues in terms of the reliability of information offered in them. So far, only a handful of publications on the 1970s artistic culture in the Eastern Bloc have incorporated state security records in their analyses. This issue was raised in 2015 by the Polish art historian Jarosław Jakimczyk who in his book on the surveillance of Polish artists by the Polish *Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, mainly in the 1970s, has argued that ‘a research on art of the communist period that consciously does not include the secret police archives, condemns itself to a kind of voluntary amnesia’.\(^{74}\) However, Jakimczyk has also warned from many traps that researchers can fall into, if not cautious, such as, for instance, the characteristic hermetic language used in the state security’s internal communication.\(^{75}\)

In a similar vein, Hungarian art historian Kata Krasznahorkai in an article on using state security records for writing the history of Hungarian underground theatre scene in the 1960s and 1970s argues that the state security tended to emphasise the power of artistic underground and ‘presented their capability and their latent danger to the political system as being far greater than it probably was’.\(^{76}\) Indeed, reports written by the informants, analyses and operational plans by the state security officers provide invaluable sources of information on details of artistic events, their participants, operational methods applied by state security services, as well as development and structures of the alternative artistic networks. However, it was important to be constantly aware of the fact that those reports and descriptions were written from the perspective of perpetrators with a clear agenda of recognising any signs of subversive behaviour in artists’ practices and their personal lives. Hence, these documents often focus only on those aspects of art events,

\(^{74}\) Jarosław Jakimczyk, *Najweselszy barak w obozie. Tajna policja komunistyczna jako krytyk sztuki* (Warszawa: Akces, 2015), p. 18, note: all original texts in Polish and German are translated in this thesis by Aneta Jarzębska.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 26.

which could have presented any ideologically subversive potential, often, in fact, exaggerating and misinterpreting the latter. What is more, the informants’ competence and knowledge of contemporary art strategies was often rather poor and, inevitably, was a reason for gaps and misinformation in the files.

The state security archives remain in some parts incomplete, or inaccessible, which requires recognising the scope of absences and the unrecorded. Especially, in the case of the Polish SB records the resources remain general and very fragmentary due to either a lack of access or incompleteness of the archives. This creates imbalance in comparing the extent of surveillance of the galleries in the PRL and the GDR, which could only be counterbalanced by referring to different types of historical sources and participants’ memoirs, or to more general academic research on the surveillance of artistic circles. Considering, however, the complicated credibility of state security records, anyway, this did not present a major obstacle in my comparative analysis. Similarly, the access to the archives of former state art institutions was in parts very limited. For instance, the archives of the State Art Trade of the GDR (Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR), the patron institution of Arkade, have still not been made public and are in the process of being accommodated in the National Archive (Bundesarchiv). Hence, this analysis could not refer to this inaccessible documentation and acknowledges this archival information gap. For the Polish case studies, the resources at the Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw were fragmentary and mostly comprised of the ZPAP documentation and of limited materials of the Ministry of Culture and Arts. Nevertheless, the surviving amount of material documenting the galleries’ activities remains still impressive and was sufficient to undertake an in-depth analysis of their ‘lives’ and socio-cultural function.

1.5. Conclusion

The main objective of this first chapter was to introduce my theoretical framework and to demonstrate how the combination of critical theories of heterotopia, the production of space and social networks complement each other on the different levels of this research

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77 Jakimczyk has also described his unsuccessful work with the state security archives in IPN Warsaw; see Jakimczyk, p. 37 (note 63).
inquiry. As discussed in the first section, this has involved the application of Foucault’s theory of heterotopia which was dictated mainly by its usefulness in analysing the social-cultural function of alternative art galleries in relation to the remaining socialist space. Following Foucault’s sixth principle Arkade and Galeria/Repassage are seen as creating illusory heterotopias where artistic ‘deviance’ could have been marginalised but which, at the same time, highlighted the order of socialist space as even more illusory, and, in the same way, undermined it. Functioning as heterotopias of illusion, the galleries had, however, an ambiguous, both stabilising and destabilising, function within their state socialist contexts. By discussing this double-sided effect of the galleries’ activities on the maintenance of normative order, the following chapters contribute also to the debates on the subversive potential of heterotopias, outlined in the first section.

Yet, despite all its usefulness for analysing the gallery spaces on a macro-level of their cultural-political function, Foucault’s theory needs to be complemented by Lefebvre’s ideas on the social production of space. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to analyse both galleries in their multidimensionality through embracing various aspects of their practices such as conceptual representations, exhibitions, social rituals or organisational models. Lefebvre’s theory offers, indeed, such a micro-level holistic approach projecting space as an interplay of the mental, the physical and the social dimensions. It informs, therefore, the micro-level analyses of different types of subversive practices produced in the galleries discussed in Chapter 3 to 6. As the individual case studies later demonstrate, the social spaces of both galleries were strongly defined by unofficial social networks produced by their directors and associate artists. Hence, the theory of social networks understood as modern forms of social organisation constitutes here another theoretical approach which helps examine how the galleries’ actors counteracted the institutionalisation and control of social life by the socialist state.

The last section of this chapter discussed the main issues related to the use of archival records for reconstructing the history of practices produced in the galleries. As I emphasised by briefly referring to the archival theories by Derrida and Foucault, writing histories of Arkade and Galeria/Repassage requires a constant awareness of the limitations which work with primary sources entails such as their incompleteness, partiality or credibility. It is particularly important to acknowledge these issues for any researcher
working with state security archives, as the information that they offer may well be subjected, and on frequent occasions, to manipulation, falsification, or destruction.

Overall, an in-depth analysis of these galleries’ activities using such a combined theoretical framework has been undertaken here as it has not been pursued before now, therefore, this thesis offers new insights into our understanding of the socio-cultural function of alternative art spaces in late socialist systems, as well as of broader cultural-political processes in the 1970s, and beyond. Before progressing to analyses and interpretations of the individual case studies using this combined theoretical framework, the following chapter lays out the social, political and cultural circumstances prevailing in the GDR and the PRL in the 1970s and which determined the galleries’ functioning. As we shall see, the practices produced in alternative art galleries responded and contributed to these late socialist conditions.
Chapter 2

The post-socialist condition and the emergence of alternative exhibition spaces in the GDR and the PRL of the 1970s

When analysing alternative cultural production in terms of its subversive potential, it is necessary, first, to lay out what socio-political conditions and cultural structures those artistic and exhibition practices attempted to oppose and produce an alternative to. So far, very few scholars writing about alternative art production in the former Eastern Bloc states have engaged with recent historical and political research into the mechanisms of state power and cultural politics under state socialism. Although the times when all artistic production coming from the region was uniformly described as totalitarian and politically tainted are long gone, still the recent art historical research on the subject has not granted enough consideration to the changing socio-political conditions between different decades in the history of the Eastern Bloc or to different versions of socialism. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to demonstrate that compared to the previous decades the artists practising in the 1970s were subjected to different political pressures posed by the socialist authorities. Also, in this decade they were responding to a quite different form of state socialism, which has been termed as post-totalitarianism and post-Stalinism.\textsuperscript{78}

This, inevitably, has implications for how we define alternative artistic practice in such post-totalitarian, or post-Stalinist. Most importantly, I seek to point out in this chapter how the same, at least on surface, socio-political systems of the former Eastern Bloc, had in fact differed considerably, especially where cultural politics were concerned. More specifically, the differing cultural-political circumstances in the GDR and the PRL had, in turn, determined what it meant to produce alternative art and to run an alternative art gallery and how, then, the two contexts compare. The three sections that make up this chapter gradually introduce the terms post-totalitarianism and post-Stalinism, and their usefulness in describing the transformations in socio-political conditions in both regimes between the mid-1950s and end-1970s. Subsequently, the terms help me explain the changes in cultural

\textsuperscript{78} See section 2.1 for a full discussion of these terms.
politics under Gierek’s and Honecker’s leadership and how they relate to the definitions of alternative art produced under the late socialist conditions (section 2) and the advancing disintegration of state socialist systems. Next, I shall analyse and compare the phenomenon of alternative art galleries in Poland and East Germany of the 1970s, focussing on how their ‘alternativeness’ was constructed in artistic and institutional terms (section 3). Overall, the chapter seeks to address the question of the differences and similarities in cultural politics and their influence on the formation and functioning of the alternative exhibition practices in the GDR and Poland under late socialism.

2.1. The GDR and the PRL as post-Stalinist systems - a socio-political perspective

The GDR and the PRL can be broadly referred to as socialist party dictatorships. As such, a lack of rule of law, of democratic legitimisation, and of separation between executive, judiciary and legislative powers constituted the main parameters of their dictatorial nature.79 As party dictatorships in both systems power was concentrated in hands of the leadership of a single socialist party: the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in East Germany and the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in Poland. However, since the term remains far too general, more specific terms have been applied to describe various types of dictatorships in the post-1945 Eastern and Central Europe, such as totalitarianism, Stalinism and authoritarianism. What is more, system changes and transformations of the regimes’ main features over the decades were further addressed by some scholars who advanced the labels of post-totalitarianism and post-Stalinism to the period after Stalin’s death in 1953.

Thus, the phase between the imposition of state socialism in East Germany and Poland by Stalin after the Second World War and his death in 1953 have been frequently termed as showing the characteristics of totalitarianism or Stalinism.80 As examples of totalitarian regimes both the GDR and the PRL were characterized during that phase by

80 Ross, pp. 20-43.
radicalizing politics based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, administered by a single communist party that constituted the exclusive centre of power. The party mobilized the masses for a utopian vision of communism, while keeping the society under terroristic police control and exerting monopoly over media, arms and economy. Since state socialism was transferred to East Germany and Poland from the Soviet Union and, consequently, adapted most of the features of Stalinism as implemented over there, the socio-political systems in the GDR and the PRL can also be seen as examples of Stalinism. The latter term mainly implies the personality cult of Stalin, strictly centralized party, murderous purges of political enemies, class genocide and ruthless secret police.81

Yet, after Stalin’s death in 1953 and subsequent denunciation of his excesses by Khrushchev in 1956, the Eastern-bloc states underwent a process of destalinization, which aimed at overcoming some of the repressive features of Stalin’s rule. Accordingly, from mid-1950s in various Eastern-bloc countries the new party leaderships implemented certain measures in order to reform and modernize the systems. For instance, they removed the leadership cult, violence and punishment waned, bureaucratization set in, while other areas of authoritarian rule remained unchanged. Because of those socio-political changes, the political scientists Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have suggested that Eastern-bloc countries are better described in the following phase as post-totalitarian regimes with variations between ‘early’, ‘frozen’ and ‘mature’ post-totalitarianism depending on degree of departure from the totalitarian rule type.82 For the historian Hermann Weber, however, the term post-Stalinism is more specific and signals better the Soviet origins of the socialist systems in Eastern Europe, which even after destalinization still remained accountable to the Soviet directives.83

Despite similarities between the post-Stalinist regimes in Poland and East Germany, there is also a need to accentuate different chronologies of transition from Stalinism to post-Stalinism in both contexts. What is more, the degree of preservation of certain

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elements of Stalinist rule varied in both regimes at different historical moments. For instance, the period after the Stalin’s death was marked by a more radical change of leadership in the PRL than in the GDR and, consequently, the process of destalinisation, even if only temporarily, seemed to have run deeper in the former. Greater leniency towards dissidents and introduction of some degree of institutional pluralism, as, for instance, towards the Church, was, again, more characteristic of the Polish context. Deideologisation and acceptance of outward conformity describe both systems, but in the GDR the control mechanisms seemed to have stayed unchanged for longer than in Poland, as Ross points out. Although a change of attitude to and a loss of interest in competing with the West were perceptible in both contexts from the 1960s onwards, it was pursued in East Germany with much more caution, mostly due to the West-East German dynamic. Inevitably, however, those shared features and local peculiarities were echoed in cultural spheres in both countries.

Thus, the socialist systems in the GDR and the PRL had also undergone significant transformations after Stalin’s death, which classify them as post-totalitarian, or, more specifically, as post-Stalinist regimes. Prior to that, however, both Poland under Bolesław Bierut and East Germany under Walter Ulbricht bore, to varying degrees, characteristics of the Stalinist rule, such as, for instance, party purges, executions of political enemies and dissidents, strong censorship and control over culture and press, high levels of societal mobilization and indoctrination. In Poland, Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ in February 1956 coincided with the death of the First Secretary Bierut in March of the same year so the change of leadership became inevitable. Consequently, in October Władysław Gomułka, a former political prisoner who suffered repressions during the Stalinist period, was reinstated as the First Party Secretary. The initial’s signs of the system’s liberalization included change of the Party cadres, reduction of state security personnel and loosening up of censorship, as well as de-collectivisation that was enforced in the late 1940s by Stalin. However, as Martin Myart points out, although Poland became a more liberal country, ‘there was no fundamental transformation of the power structure’ and two years later a ‘retreat from October’ set in signalling a return to harsher policies.

84 Ross, p. 25.
In the GDR, the process of destalinization did not result in the change of the SED leadership and the dogmatic Ulbricht remained in the position of the First Secretary throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Here, more noticeable changes did not come about until the early 1960s, when Ulbricht put forward his plans to liberalize the over-centralised economic system. His economic reforms, named as the New Economic System, modernized GDR’s industry and helped improving living conditions. Between 1963 and 1965 he also presided over a cultural thaw, an easing of restrictions on travel to West Germany and the beginning of a dialogue between the party and the population. However, compared to the PRL the control mechanisms had been relaxed less than in Poland, and, in fact, in the coming years the Stasi apparatus expanded its structures considerably. Hence, as we can see, the processes of destalinisation in both socialist states were pursued with an emphasis on different areas and according to different chronologies.

When the new Gierek’s team came to power in Poland in December 1970 and a few months later Ulbricht was replaced by Erich Honecker in the GDR, both socialist systems underwent further changes that situated them, compared to the preceding decades, further away from the definition of totalitarian or Stalinist regimes, but also from the utopian vision of socialism. Namely, instead of Marxist-Leninist ideology goals, the main slogans propagated by new socialist leaders were those of modernization and improvement of material culture and living standards. Since the socialist states failed to achieve society’s complete commitment to communist ideology and goals, by the 1970s passive conformity and leaving politics to the party was a sufficient compromise, as Mary Fulbrook observes in relation to the GDR, and which could also be applied to Poland.

The process of deideologisation was also characterised in both socialist states by introduction of new consumerist values. As Jan Verwoert in his text on consumerism under state socialism writes:

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86 See p. 58 for more details.
88 Mary Fulbrook, Anatomy of a dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.141; the outward conformity and private authenticity was characteristic of the GDR society in the 1970s and was described by Günther Gaus as ‘niche’ society, see more on this in Fulbrook, pp.129-150.
that consumerism happened in the Eastern Bloc was difficult for the system to acknowledge. [...] It would have meant they would have to admit that people wanted something different, or that the social life on this side was not actually that different from social life on the other side of the ideological divide.\textsuperscript{89}

Similarly to Verwoert, the Czech writer and dissident Václav Havel’s observed in his 1978 essay \textit{The Power of the Powerless} which examined his experiences of living in a post-totalitarian reality that the socialist system which he then lived in was ‘simply another form of the consumer and industrial society, with all its concomitant social, intellectual, and psychological consequences’ as it prevailed in the West.\textsuperscript{90} Seen from the other side of the Iron Curtain, Henri Lefebvre also argued in the 1960s that the post-Stalinist systems were reminiscent of the capitalist states in terms of their bureaucracy, controlled consumption, emphasising economic growth and differed from the individualist Western model in the emphasis on collective consumption.\textsuperscript{91}

In Poland, the deideologisation of the system manifested itself also in Gierek’s greater openness towards the West and Western culture, a decline in anti-capitalist rhetoric and a loss of interest in competing with the West. Yet, the restrictions on travel to the West and censorship of Western mass cultural products, especially of the more controversial ones, still persisted.\textsuperscript{92} In East Germany this aspect of the process of deideologisation was pursued much more cautiously and was limited mostly to some improvements in relations with West Germany. Consequently, the comparison between the two socialist states points out to greater political and cultural isolation of the GDR. Nevertheless, the 1970s were still marked in the East German context by larger numbers of Western visitors and easier travel to the West, as well much greater exposure to Western television and other media.\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{90} Václav Havel, \textit{The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe} (New York: Armonk, 1985), p.27.

\textsuperscript{91} Stanek, p. 64.


\textsuperscript{93} Fulbrook, p.146.
In both countries, the modernisation of economy and society was pursued using Western loans which led to spiralling debts and, ultimately, caused a crisis in the second half of the 1970s as neither Gierek nor Honecker could continue providing promised consumer goods. The year 1976 constituted a turning point in the internal political situation in both contexts. In Poland, the crisis began in January when the government planned implementing constitutional changes that would further infringe on basic civil freedoms. The protests amongst intellectuals and students joined by the Catholic Church and the signing of the protest ‘Letter of 59’ by prominent cultural figures, although they did not stop the party from pursuing the changes, constituted a beginning of growing organized opposition in the country. In June the same year the state’s heavy-handed handling of workers’ strikes in Ursus led to formation of independent workers’ defence committees (KOR) that later gave birth to the Solidarity movement.

In the GDR, the mid-1970s crisis was linked mainly to the cultural sphere after the poet and ballad singer Wolf Biermann was expatriated from the GDR during his tour in West Germany. When 150 writers and artists signed a protest letter in response to the state’s decision, the SED leadership decided to apply further coercive measures to destroy the opposition. Instead of dialogue and discussion, the party apparatus encouraged dissenting intellectuals to leave the GDR and introduced in 1979 a law, which criminalised spreading ‘harmful’ information about East Germany while abroad. This return to more repressive measures in the mid-1970s has been explained by Manfred Jäger as a result of the ideologically motivated division in the SED where the more dogmatic elements of the party apparatus was responding to those more liberal with their own counter-pressures. The development can also be seen, as David Bathrick writes, as characteristic of a coercive system, which liberates itself only apparently in order to extend its domination.

As David Lane explains, however, the 1970s move of state socialist societies to more pluralistic structures and eventually to disintegration of the system resulted also from the process of modernisation. The changes in social fabric and social transformations which

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94 Friszke, p.62.
97 Lane, p.145.
came about with modernisation affected the diminishing support for the state. The comparison of the aftermaths of mid-1970s crises in both countries suggests that the Polish state socialism was undergoing further changes away from the post-Stalinist model of rule. Namely, Polish socialist authorities increasingly allowed for establishment of independent initiatives and, as Pindera argues, in the 1970s it became perceptible that ‘the state was in the process of self-contained privatisation’. Since, as Kamiński argues, Poland was always the weak link amongst the Eastern Bloc countries, thus, the shortcomings of state socialism surfaced here sooner and the first signs of disintegration of the socialist system were visible earlier.

2.2. Post-Stalinist artistic culture in the GDR and the PRL - ‘liberalisation’ under state surveillance

The socio-political processes that indicated a change to post-totalitarianism, or post-Stalinism, in Poland and East Germany from mid-1950s onwards were accompanied by transformations in cultural spheres. In general, the 1960s and 1970s saw waves of more liberal attitudes to modernist and experimental artistic practices intertwined with returns to dogmatic and repressive cultural politics of the post-Stalinist regimes. In general, however, the quasi-liberalisation of culture pursued in both contexts in the 1970s had farther-reaching consequences for Polish artists’ freedoms, however illusory, which were, in general, allowed to experiment with different art forms. In both contexts, the state’s more lenient attitude towards artistic ‘deviance’ came at a price, though, in the form of administrative dependencies, censorship and surveillance by the state security services, as the following sections demonstrate.

2.2.1. Socialist Realism and reception of modern art under the post-totalitarian rule

Prior to the cultural and political thaw of the mid-1950s, both the GDR and the PRL had pursued conservative and repressive cultural politics which broadly mirrored Stalin’s

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98 Pinder, ‘Private operators’, p. 137.
dictates in the Soviet Union. As such, Socialist Realism was proclaimed the official artistic canon defined and institutionalised according to the Stalinist model functioning in the Soviet Union since the 1930s. The ultimate principles of Socialist Realism were formulated in 1934 by Zhdanov at the Writers Union Congress and demanded that art depicted socialist reality in a realist manner, which drew largely on the 19th century realism, while propagating socialist ideology through its content. Transposed to the visual arts, Socialist Realist artworks depicted an idealised version of socialist reality using figurative forms of expression, while modernist art was condemned as decadent and formalist. Artists who did not want to conform to those prescriptions were stigmatised in the public sphere and, in general, treated as political enemies. Their works were excluded from public exhibition spaces and they were refused membership of the Artists’ Union and by the same token, the right to work professionally as artists, or even persecuted in some cases.

Such an oppressive framework for artistic practice characterized both countries until mid-1950s, but the similarities ended as both followed different paths in the cultural-political matters. Thus, in the wake of destalinization process the Polish authorities stopped intervening in the stylistic matters of artists’ production, but art and literature were still to remain ‘socialist in content’. By the early 1970s Socialist Realism was to a large extent removed from the realm of official art and, in fact, in the 1960s abstractionism became the dominant style in Poland. For the art historian Jerzy Kierkuć-Bieliński two reasons lay behind such a situation: firstly, and similarly to what happened in the 1970s, the Communist Party wanted to legitimize itself as a liberal and modern state, both to Polish society and internationally, secondly, the abstract and informel art offered a politically safe option for the authorities, since the former insisted on the autonomy of art and its independence from the political context. Despite an episode of a return to more restrictive cultural politics in the late 1950s/early 1960s and the introduction of a 15% cap on the number of abstract art works in the official exhibitions, modernist art styles such as

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100 For more on Socialist Realism in visual arts see Matthew Cullerne Bown, Socialist Realist Painting (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1998); Igor Golomshток, Totalitarian Art: in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, fascist Italy and the People’s Republic of China (London: Collins-Harwill, 1991).
101 Śliwińska, p. 89.
informel art and abstractionism were allowed to be practised and exhibited in the public spaces.103

In the GDR, however, destalinisation did not result in far reaching system changes and, consistently, a dogmatic position towards art and literature, expressed in the anti-formalism campaign of the early 1950s, persisted. The official artistic production remained up until the mid-1960s under rigid restrictions of the official Socialist Realist canon. The Bitterfelder Way doctrine (*Bitterfelder Weg*), formulated during two cultural conferences in 1959 and 1964 in the industrial combine in Bitterfeld, underlined this intolerance towards formalist tendencies in art, which the officials strongly associated with the Western artistic tradition. The doctrine postulated an even deeper connection of art and literature with industry and the working classes.104 Only art that had a mass appeal and was the most educational in its socialist message could have been financially supported. However, the situation started to shift from the mid-1960s onwards, and as Goeschen writes, historical expressionism became increasingly adopted in the 1960s and its methods gradually justified as suitable for socialist art.105 Similarly, there was a gradual re-evaluation and integration of the historical Constructivism beginning in the second half of the 1960s.106

Yet, the second half of the 1960s saw also a wave of repressive reactions to attempts on the part of cultural intellectuals to emancipate literature and art that had been ossified in the dogmatism of Socialist Realism for many years. For instance, the 11th Party Plenum in December 1965 criticised many writers and artists for critical depictions of socialist reality in their works and accused them of propagating anarchism and nihilism, seen as an explicit influence of the political enemy.107 Similarly, during the 9th Plenum of Central Committee of the SED in 1968 Ulbricht made it clear that modernism in art and literature would not be allowed to replace Socialist Realism and condemned modern art as ‘capitalist unculture’ (‘kapitalistische Unkultur’).108 Officially, in visual arts, Socialist Realism was not

103 According to the official guidelines of the KC PZPR of 1960 every official exhibition was permitted to show up to 15% of abstract art works, see Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, p.70.
104 Jäger, pp. 87-8 and 102-3.
106 Ibid., p.52.
107 Jäger, p.120.
108 Ibid., p.138.
abandoned as an official aesthetic concept until the Congress of the Fine Artists’ Union (VbK) in 1988, when it was replaced by the formulation ‘Art in Socialism’ that included a wider variety of artistic modes of expression.  

2.2.2. New leadership and reorientation in cultural politics in the 1970s.

Following the change of leadership to Honecker, the East German socialists proclaimed a new direction in cultural politics, the so-called ‘breadth and diversity’ (Weite und Vielfalt) reorientation. This new strategy towards cultural production in the GDR was introduced at the 4th Meeting of the Central Committee in December 1971 and expressed in these famous, however ambiguous, Honecker’s words:

If we speak from the firm position of socialism, there should be, in my opinion, no taboos in the areas of art and literature. It applies not only to the questions of content but also of style - in brief, to the questions of what one calls an artistic mastery.  

The statement clearly pointed to the limited tolerance, which the new leadership was prepared to stretch to. Namely, there would be no taboos as long as one operated from within a ‘firm’ socialist framework. What was defined as the latter was left open, yet the sentences implied that the new liberal attitude had its boundaries. Also, as Jäger points out, Honecker’s use of a personal formulation ‘meines Erachtens’ (in my opinion) signalled a sense of uncertainty or lack of consensus in relation to the new directives.

Accordingly, the initial phase of Honecker’s rule was marked by avoiding attacks on artists and writers and by allowing a limited degree of artistic freedom, mostly in relation to forms of artistic expression and on condition of not violating rules regarding the socialist content in art. In the official aesthetics, the 1970s signalled a shift from Socialist Realism, which was rich in positive role models and naïve optimism, to a more ironic and critical depiction of ‘really existing socialism’.  

109 Goeschen, ‘From Socialist Realism’, p.47.
110 Erich Honecker as cited Jäger, p.140.
111 Jäger, p. 140.
modernist art was pursued and, consequently, expressionism, cubism and new figuration began to be tolerated in the official exhibition spaces. However, the SED still saw abstract art as a ‘system art’ of the West *par excellence* and artists using non-figurative methods were treated as politically ‘negative’ throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. Accordingly, abstractionism and contemporary experimental art such as conceptual art, or performance art were still confined to a very few unofficial art spaces and remained absent from the official art discourse. Also, the isolation of GDR culture from Western influences was much greater than in Poland and hardly any Western artists could have exhibited their works in public art galleries and museums.

The reasons behind the 1970s reorientation in cultural politics in the GDR seem to have been manifold. Namely, the new leadership aimed at removing considerable tensions between the party apparatus and cultural circles that had accumulated as a result of repressive politics of the preceding Ulbricht’s team. The SED had allowed at the time for concessions in a well-calculated act of weighing up the benefits as to improve the relationship between the party and artists. In a similar vein, Jäger has argued that the new strategy aimed at strengthening the new party’s position and achieving the so-called calming effect (*Beruhigungseffekt*) amongst the most important group of culture intellectuals. Further, the investigations into secret documentation written by the head of East German security service Mielke has revealed that the Stasi and the Central Committee of the SED did not really want to ‘liberalise’ East German culture. Instead, the 1970s reorientation was supposed to, in Mielke’s words, ‘use the opportunity to obtain far-reaching information on the political-ideological position of the circles of people who we are interested in’. In terms of foreign policy, through the cultural reorientation, East German authorities aimed at signalling a new leadership style to the international public by allowing some degree of criticism.

In Poland, similarly to the GDR, the political and economic *quasi*-liberalisation that came about with the 1970s party reshuffle had also its analogue in the cultural sphere.

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114 Jäger, p.139.
Namely, the proclaimed modernisation of various spheres of life was also to be accompanied by modern culture. Thus, by the early 1970s modernist art had been widely exhibited in public galleries and art museums and, in fact, *informel* art had become part of the official artistic culture, as Piotrowski argued. This new ‘cultural openness’ resulted in the state’s acceptance of and, in some cases, even financial support for such experimental art practice as conceptual art and performance. And yet, these practices remained marginalised into small artists’ galleries and excluded from the more publicly visible state art venues such as, for instance, *Galeria Zachęta* in Warsaw. Gierek’s tolerant attitude towards artistic experimentation, was, undoubtedly, preconditioned by the rehabilitation of modernist art that happened in Poland in the previous decades as a result of cultural destalinisation.

This increasingly tolerant reception of experimental artistic practices in Poland was also facilitated by an atmosphere of European détente and a greater openness to the West in the Soviet Union. Consequently, in Poland the socialist authorities allowed for a greater artistic exchange with the West, even if the latter was not really encouraged and still treated with suspicion. Thus, in the 1970s it became possible to invite and host Western conceptual artists, mainly from the USA, West Germany and France, in the artist-run galleries, with an openness that was extremely rare under Gomułka’s regime. In his thesis on American-Polish conceptual art exchange Kierkuć-Bieliński points out, however, that many of the visiting American artists were known for their Marxist sympathies and this would have made it easier to obtain the state’s authorisation for their visits. The situation in Poland with respect to the possibility of exhibiting contemporary Western art and engaging with international exchange in the 1970s, was in fact quite unique, especially when compared to the much more isolated East German artistic culture. As the German art historians Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzhold write, for many East German artists Poland functioned as an access point to the international art scene, as their access to Western art and publications was much more restricted in the GDR.

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117 Kierkuć-Bieliński, p.156.
The occidentalisation of Polish culture, as Piotrowski termed it, was also a result of the process of deideologisation of a post-Stalinist system, which lost its ideological character and did not legitimise itself through an anti-capitalist Marxist viewpoint any more.\footnote{Piotr Piotrowski, Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce-wybiorczo i subiektywnie (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Obserwator, 1991), p.9.} The regime’s guarded opening towards Western lifestyles, especially consumer goods and pop culture, led to the emergence of the phenomena such as ‘sots pop art’ or ‘red bourgeoisie’, argue Łukasz Ronduda and Michał Woliński. As they demonstrate, some Polish artists responded to those new late socialist conditions, and specifically to the so-called ‘socialist consumerism’, and the echoes of the issues of sexual emancipation, criticism of the society of the spectacle, and the 1968 revolt in the West are noticeable in their artworks.\footnote{Łukasz Ronduda and Michał Woliński, ‘Consumption and Corruption’, in Crowley and Verwoert, p.4.} However, it was not particular to Poland, for even in the isolated GDR some artists were influenced by Western pop art and produced art works which referred to this type of artistic practice. For instance, the art historian Sigrid Hofer demonstrates that the East German non-conformist artist Willy Wolf created in the late 1960s and 1970s a number of art works that were influenced by the ideas of pop art and incorporated mass culture imagery found in mass media and advertising.\footnote{Sigrid Hofer, ‘Pop Art in the GDR: Willy Wolff’s Dialogue with the West’, in Bazin, Glatigny and Piotrowski, pp.57-69.}

The reorientation in cultural politics in both socialist contexts was disseminated and implemented through old and unreformed institutional structures that demonstrated a lot of commonalities in their organisation and methods of ideological control. Namely, in the GDR and the PRL the Ministry of Culture constituted the highest authority in cultural matters and was to guarantee that the political directives of the Central Committee of the socialist party were translated and trickled down to all cultural institutions. In this way, the authorities believed that the uniformity of cultural politics could have been achieved in all areas of arts. The Departments for Fine Art with a head director on the top were financially and administratively responsible for all state museums, as well as art galleries, art schools and colleges. The artists were then professionally bound to the system through the Artists’ Unions - the ZPAP in Poland and the VBK-DDR in East Germany, membership to which was an official requirement if one wanted to receive any state contracts and, in practice, to be able to work professionally as an artist. Artists whose art did not fit with the officially
sanctioned paradigm could be excluded from their profession by their membership to artists’ unions being withdrawn. Also, by being able to pose restriction on access to art materials these organisations could exert considerable control over the character of art production in both socialist countries. State art museums and galleries were also obliged to follow the official outlines that regulated what kind of art was to be promoted and suitable for public shows as well as for acquisition of new art for their collections.

Still, despite the oppressive institutional structures, in practice, ‘total’ control of artistic production was unachievable. The authorities were not able to control the actions of every single worker and decision-making processes were at times subjected to individual opinions and choices that could have run against the official directives. The progressing deideologisation of the systems had, undoubtedly, an effect on decreasing compliance amongst the citizens. As Gillen writes in relation to the functioning of the VBK-DDR in the 1970s: ‘the members as well as the secretaries of the sections were not always prepared to endorse respective cultural politics, and increasingly demanded more freedom’.\(^{123}\) What is more, the exclusion of non-conformist artists by the state institutions did not hinder but rather enhanced the creation of alternative art spaces.\(^{124}\) The latter provided for non-conformist artists an escape from the ideological pressures posed by the state within the institutional framework.

It is also important to acknowledge that the entire decade of the 1970s was not monolithic in terms of the state’s cultural policies. Especially the year 1976 marked an economic and cultural crisis in both the GDR and Poland with differing effects on further developments in cultural politics. In general, both histories show that the systems were characterized by fluctuating instability in terms of their characteristic features of post-totalitarian rule. Thus, in both countries the domestic and cultural politics oscillated between short periods of part-liberalisation, as, for instance, in the early 1970s, and years of clamping down on dissenting elements and on liberties given in the previous years.

In the Polish context, the crisis began in January with the protest ‘Letter of 59’ signed by leading intellectuals and was then escalated by the authorities’ repressive handling of

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\(^{123}\) Gillen, p.137.  
\(^{124}\) Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, p. 297.
workers’ protests in June. Ultimately, all the events led to the formation of independent workers’ defence committees (KOR) and independent publication initiatives. The latter had a decisive impact on the emergence of second circuit of literature. In the visual arts, however, it is hard to speak of visible effects of the mid-1970s events on the alternative art scene as none showed their support and signed the protest ‘Letter of 59’, or hardly anyone maintained links to the political opposition. The harshest repressions of the alternative art scene were pursued by the regime in the period of martial law.

In the GDR, the mid-1970s crisis exerted a more significant effect on alternative artistic culture. The measures introduced by Honecker’s team in the early 1970s helped to stabilise the relations between the party apparatus and cultural intellectuals for some time, but this superficial relaxation did not last for long. Already in the mid-1970s the counterpressures from within the party received more and more voice and influenced the decision to expatriate Wolf Biermann in 1976, as well as to persecute other controversial writers and artists.125 When a surge of discontent materialised in the official protest letter, the state implemented further coercive measures such as exclusions from the Unions and bans on publishing/exhibiting within the GDR. In 1978 the main protagonist of the alternative art scene Ralf Winkler was exiled after years of the Stasi’s methods of degradation (Zersetzungsmaßnahmen).126 In general, dissenting elements were encouraged to leave the GDR and harsher laws introduced for those travelling abroad. In the visual arts, as Klaus Michael points out, the crisis resulted also in a systematic take-over of the self-managed galleries by the State Art Trade, which aimed at restricting their freedoms.127 Nevertheless, the Biermann episode constituted also a turning point in the struggle for civil rights in the GDR, as Gillen argues, for it demonstrated that it is impossible to work within the official framework and the fight for social change needed to be collectively organised.128

Despite some signs of the system’s liberalisation in both countries, the repressive apparatus including censorship and surveillance of artists was very much in operation in the 1970s but, as under a post-Stalinist rule, its methods changed. In terms of application

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125 Wolf Biermann was a convinced communist but his critique of ‘really existing’ socialism in the GDR was not acceptable for the authorities who forbade him to perform or publish publicly in the GDR already in 1965, see Bathrick, p.28.
126 Gillen, p.139.
127 Michael, p. 1659.
128 Gillen, p.28.
of mechanisms of control, the 1970s saw a change in the repression strategies of the state security services in both East Germany and Poland. While between 1950 and 1976 the Stasi used the harshest means and methods to deal with ideological enemies, in 1976 with the introduction of the directive 1/76, they pursued the methods of degradation that implied a hidden punishment without a trial or a prison sentence.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly, in a study of surveillance amongst Polish artists, the historian Sebastian Ligarski demonstrates, using documents of the Polish security services, that in the 1970s the SB abandoned methods based on persecuting dissenting artists and applying brutal investigation methods in favour of more systematic and consistent methods of harassment, intimidation, stalking and gathering of information.\textsuperscript{130}

The statistics show that compared to the mid-1960s, the beginning of Gierek’s regime brought about a considerable increase of agents observing artistic circles which was probably, to a large extent, linked to the December 1970 strikes. The numbers then fell only to rise again in the mid-1970s showing that the surveillance procedures must have been inconsistent at times and conditioned by internal political events. Ligarski’s investigation reveals also incompetence and errors, common to the work of informers and agents of the SB, as well as problems with recruitment of agents, which made the effectiveness ‘worse than optimal or even satisfactory’.\textsuperscript{131}

In general, in Poland the visual arts were less infiltrated compared to the literary circles. For Piotrowski, the reasons for the more tolerant attitude of Polish authorities towards visual artists in the 1970s lay in the fact that the visual arts were traditionally perceived by the authorities as more formalist, while literature had a tradition in Polish culture of being more socially and politically engaged. According to him, this in turn influenced a greater censorship of writers than of artists in the PRL and, ultimately, a lack of necessity to create the unofficial, ‘second circuit’ of art.\textsuperscript{132} And yet, Ronduda’s and Jakimczyk’s investigations of various operational cases which closely observed networks of neo-avantgarde artists in Poland concluded with a number of interesting insights into

\textsuperscript{129} Karsten Dümmel, ‘Die Überwachung’, in Dümmel and Schmitz, p.22.
\textsuperscript{131} Ligarski, p.16.
\textsuperscript{132} Piotrowski, Dekada, p.18.
invigilation of these circles. For instance, the operational cases analysed by the scholars demonstrated that the SB used to apply such measures as surveillance of postal correspondence and phone calls, and unexpected house visits, with the intention to intimidate and discipline the artists. The cases revealed also that the institutions of the ZPAP and the ASP were planted with a number of unofficial informants (TW) and operational contacts (KO) who regularly reported on ideological suspects, while sometimes, the enemy was created out of vague evidence.

In the GDR, a closer and more specialised observation of cultural life by the state security service began in mid-1950s with creation of the special Department V for control of cultural circles. However, the Stasi properly intensified their surveillance of artistic and cultural spheres after the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. The structure of the Culture and Art Department, in 1964 changed to the Department XX and consisting of sub-departments and units planted in various cities, crystallised in the early 1960s and remained as such until 1989. According to Klaus Michael, in the late 1970s around 5-10% of the alternative scene artists cooperated with the Stasi as unofficial collaborators (IM), compared to 30-40% in the artists unions, while nearly all artists apart from the IMs were observed. Similarly to the Polish state security service, major internal or external political crises translated into intensification of surveillance. Thus, after Wolf Biermann’s expatriation the Stasi intensified their work and ‘strong operative control measures’ targeted all who signed the protest letter, or even had withdrawn their signature. Alternative circles were to be infiltrated more through an increase of IMs in central positions. This, in turn, led to significant personnel changes within cultural institutions, a wave of exclusion from artists’ unions, and ultimately, to the situation where a large number of young artists were denied access to the official institutional framework. Ultimately, this process aided the formation of an alternative culture as the young artists, excluded and disillusioned with the system, began to organize themselves in an unofficial cultural scene.

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136 Michael, p.1638.
137 Ibid, p.1640.
138 Ibid., p.1641.
2.2.3. Conceptual and performance art in the PRL and the GDR - subversive, conformist or derivative?

Some academic publications have acknowledged the necessity to relate to the theories of post-totalitarianism when discussing cultural politics and alternative artistic practices in the Eastern Bloc. However, the views on how the artists responded to these conditions in their artistic practice are rather conflicting. The debates discussed below are, in broad terms, divided between seeing conceptual and performance art practices as subversive and having introduced alternative discourse into the homogenised socialist culture, or as conformist for not taking up political issues explicitly.

Thus, Piotrowski has made references to the theory of post-totalitarian and post-Stalinist rule when comparing artistic developments in various socialist states of the region. For him, Poland was a perfect example of a post-totalitarian system, following Václav Havel’s definition, mainly for its ritualized ideology, surveillance apparatus and embracing consumer values. These system features had also an effect on the state’s limited tolerance towards political opposition and the strategies of infiltrating and watching dissident elements rather than eliminating them. As Piotrowski pointed out, those processes became also apparent in the cultural sphere and, accordingly, the socialist regime allowed a certain degree of artistic freedom on the condition of artists’ complete withdrawal from politics - a territory claimed as exclusive to the post-totalitarian power. For him, Polish neo-avantgarde artists remained apolitical and conformist in order not to violate the silent agreement with the state.\(^{139}\) Consequently, the propositions of Polish conceptual artists were form of conformist ‘hiding away’ from taking up political issues in art\(^{140}\) and, in this way, they co-created the myth of liberalism of the Polish regime and reinforced that very illusion.\(^{141}\) In a similar vein, the Polish art theoretician Andrzej Turowski has argued that the regime’s liberal attitude towards modernist and avant-garde art was a strategic manoeuvre and as such was aimed at binding dissenting elements to the system.\(^{142}\)

\(^{139}\) Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, p. 286-88.
\(^{141}\) Piotrowski, *Dekada*, p.10.
\(^{142}\) Turowski, p. 31.
Piotrowski’s and Turowski’s views reflect, in fact, the interpretation that was put forward by the Hungarian dissident writer Miklós Haraszti who argued in 1988 that the politics of quasi-liberalisation pursued in the 1970s in many Eastern Bloc states created the condition of ‘velvet prison’ so that the obedience amongst artists and intellectuals could be maintained. By introducing a system of economic rewards and by relaxing cultural controls, the state managed to win artists’ support in the preservation of the system out of self-interest.\(^{143}\)

Further, in the book *Postmodernism and The Postsocialist Condition* Aleš Erjavec writes about the emergence of politicised postmodernist art in various socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc in the 1970s and 1980s. He argues that from the early 1970s a crack in the social and political fabric began to appear there and marked the beginning of the process of disintegration of socialism.\(^{144}\) Thus, he terms the period of late socialism as ‘postsocialism’ because the proclamation of the end of socialism from within socialism was reminiscent of the condition of postmodernism, as it prevailed in the West. Accordingly, artistic production which responded critically to this historical change and, for instance, used postmodernist techniques and procedures, is seen here as ‘socialist postmodernism’. The book discusses examples of politicised postmodernist art produced in Hungary, Slovenia, or the Soviet Union, but omits both Poland and East Germany from its research scope, for, as the Erjavec explains, both contexts constituted ‘exceptions to the emergence of postmodern and postsocialist art in the socialist countries’.\(^{145}\) The GDR has been excluded on the grounds that the political repressions were so strong there that East German artists could only have produced postmodern art once they immigrated to West Germany. In Poland, due to political and economic crises of the 1980s, postmodern ideas were very vague and did not really disseminated amongst visual artists. Consequently, Polish conceptual art remained non-politicised from 1960s up until the early 1990s and as such does not fall into the book’s research focus.

In general, Erjavec uses the definition of ‘totalitarianism’ by Claude Lefort in reference to the state socialist systems, and not the theories of post-totalitarianism, except

\(^{145}\) Erjavec, p.25.
by noting that postsocialism was no longer equally totalitarian and therefore less repressive. Yet, as I demonstrated in the previous section, both Poland and East Germany had shown signs of post-totalitarian conditions and of disintegration of socialism in certain areas of socialist life from 1970s onwards. In a similar vein, in the sphere of cultural production a different artistic paradigm emerged that distance itself from socialist culture and drew instead on Western postmodernist aesthetics. Thus, to refuse both contexts the production of socialist postmodernism seems inaccurate.

For instance, contrary to Erjavec’s views, Łukasz Ronduda in his book on Polish art of the 1970s demonstrates that new radical artistic positions that began to emerge in the 1970s (mainly involving conceptual art practices, of the pragmatic strand) signalled, indeed, broader cultural processes linked to a transition from modernism to postmodernism. As Ronduda argues, artists of the pragmatist strand of Polish conceptualism did question the relationship between politics and art. The practitioners of soc-art who represented an idealist and reformist socialist position criticised the socialist state for not being socialist but authoritarian. Thus, their critique constituted an attempt of subversion from within the system. Other anti-communist artists such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, Akademia Ruchu and the Cieślars, who did not want a system reform but a radical change, used metaphorical language to communicate critical messages against the system. In the East German context, examples of post-modernist art practices such as pop art, mail-art and performance can also be found in the 1970s, even in smaller numbers and, in majority, in unofficial spaces.

The art historian Kostołowski points out that Polish conceptual art and activities of independent art galleries can be seen as examples of ‘silent’ discourse, a form of resistance against the dominant socialist discourse - and an attempt to free artistic practices from the power of ideology. In a similar vein, Luiza Nader in her book on conceptualism in the PRL argues, against Piotrowski, that some examples of conceptual practices had a critical potential as it undermined the discourse of truth functioning on the ground and in relation to power. She has demonstrated how some conceptual art practices criticised the

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fundaments on which the socialist power and its apparatus were founded, namely, truths, realities, or linguistic constructs.\textsuperscript{149}

In the most recent comparative publications on alternative art produced in Eastern Europe, Kemp-Welch in her book on dissident artistic strategies in the socialist Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary draws on Havel’s theory of post-totalitarianism in order to argue that the ideological climate of late socialism and the post-totalitarian condition made a mark on the whole attitude to life, whereas a number of Eastern European artists opposed the post-totalitarian condition through their art by maintaining an apolitical stance. For her, to withdraw from politics became in this context, in fact, a political act.\textsuperscript{150} Amy Bryzgel, however, comparing performance art practices such as actions, happenings, performances in the Eastern Bloc countries concludes that these practices in most cases offered artists freedom to experiment rather than a vehicle for oppositional activity.\textsuperscript{151}

In the GDR, ‘tolerance’ towards conceptual art practice was hard to imagine and, in fact, it was not possible to exhibit such art in state art galleries until the very late 1970s. A much more restrictive cultural politics towards this type of artistic practice, doubled up with more limited access to sources of information about contemporary international art developments, meant that in the 1970s conceptual and performance art was not practised as much as in the PRL. What is more, the East German authorities still did not approve abstract and, generally, non-figurative art up until the 1980s.\textsuperscript{152} Because of these more dogmatic state’s policies, to challenge the state’s prescriptions alternative artistic practice would have embraced both modernist and post-modernist stylistics, as both opposed the aesthetic and ideological regime of the official socialist realist canon. Consistently, artists who wanted to practice conceptual art, mail-art or performance could only be shown on the margins or outside the official exhibition system, mostly in illegal flat galleries.

In the face of the 1990s revelations about the extent of collaboration with the state security services amongst alternative artists, the German art historian Christoph Tanners discredited East German alternative culture for its moral ambivalence and political

\textsuperscript{149} Luiza Nader, p. 408; she argues against Piotrowski’s argument of ‘quiet social agreement’ between the state and conceptual artists in the 1970s.
\textsuperscript{150} Kemp-Welch, \textit{Antipolitics}, p.242.
\textsuperscript{151} Bryzgel, p.3.
\textsuperscript{152} Rehberg, ‘Die verdrängte Abstraktion’, p.63.
opportunism. Piotrowski, comparing alternative artistic cultures in various socialist states, has argued that East German alternative culture and unofficial art did not play a significant role in the transition from state socialism to a market economy and denies it any political meaning. Eugen Blume criticised the derivative character of performances and artistic actions produced in the GDR, because, for him, they merely ‘imported art forms that had no intellectual pre-conditions in the GDR society’. However, he recognises that potentially to show performance art in East Germany constituted an oppositional act against the socialist system in the words:

In a political system, such as the GDR, the genuine introduction of performance art meant to establish a second culture, which, inevitably, stood in conflict with the first official culture and, in this way, against the whole system.

Yet, he refuses to recognise experimental artistic practices such as performance and art actions realised by the GDR artists in the 1970s as subversive because of their tableau character.

Conversely, for Rehberg performance and action art under circumstances of repression and restriction of freedom, as it prevailed in the GDR, constitutes an act of courage. He writes:

In such a situation, it is clear that it is about courage- and even if it was a group-supported act (which does not mean that aesthetic fashions and contagious effects do not play any role here). It obviously destabilised the prevailing order by unpredictability of the physical presence.

Accordingly, due to the more repressive politics towards non-conformist artists in the GDR, Rehberg’s statement suggests that East German performance art could have, in fact, more subversive character than, for instance, experimental art produced in Poland in the 1970s. Interestingly, and confusingly, against his earlier statement about political insignificance of East German alternative culture, Piotrowski concludes his article on

154 Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta, p.415.
155 Blume, p.735.
156 Ibid.
157 Rehberg, p.155.
alternative artistic practices in the GDR and Poland with a statement that while in the GDR artists’ struggle for autonomy of art was an expression of opposition against ideologisation of art by the SED functionaries, in Poland it was inscribed in the pseudo-liberal strategy of the state apparatus and reinforced it. Further, because in East Germany non-conformist artists were pacified and only allowed to function in the ‘niches’, while in Poland they were tolerated by the state, he, undoubtedly, suggests also that East German alternative art had a more subversive character.  

2.3. Alternative exhibition spaces in Poland and East Germany during the 1970s

In his essay about artist-run initiatives in the 1970s, the art historian Sandy Nairne compares Western and Eastern ‘alternate’, as he names them, art galleries in terms of their subversive character and writes:

[the answers] are probably only to be found in circumstances of political oppression where a gallery run by artists is effectively expressive of their freedom to create and publish ideas and images that are not merely alternate but unacceptable. Such a gallery conveys this subversiveness in ways that are not as rhetorical and superfluous as in the West.  

Thus, Nairne argues that galleries which functioned under circumstances of political repression, as under state socialism, constitute the only examples of truly subversive ‘alternate’ spaces. He rightly points to fundamental differences between running an alternative gallery in a capitalist and a socialist context. Namely, in socialism an alternative art gallery was forced to respond to oppressive cultural policies, while in capitalism mainly to capitalist market mechanisms. Yet, as I have demonstrated earlier, the cultural-political situation in the Eastern Bloc in the 1970s was less repressive than in the preceding decades and, in fact, in Poland the socialist authorities did tolerate the activities of artist-run initiatives. Therefore, it seems necessary to define more precisely what aspects of the

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158 See Piotrowski, ‘How to write a history of Central-East Europe?’, Third Text, 23.1. (2009), pp. 5-14.
galleries’ functioning the terms used to describe those spaces such as ‘alternative’, ‘independent’, ‘autonomous’ or ‘unofficial’ refer to. Especially, since more issues arise when the same labels are applied to different cultural political contexts of Poland and East Germany. Accordingly, the following section will examine this aspect of the phenomenon in both contexts.

2.3.1. The 1970s phenomenon of galerie autorskie in Poland

The alternative art galleries in Poland in the 1970s can be generally divided between the established ‘independent’ galleries (galerie niezależne) that functioned since the 1960s and gathered Polish avant-garde and neo-avantgarde artists such as Foksal and Współczesna in Warsaw, and the new generation of exhibition spaces that emerged in the 1970s and were referred to as artist-run galleries (galerie autorskie). Their number rose significantly during the 1970s and became a characteristic feature of the decade. Amongst artist-galleries one can further distinguish between ‘semi-official’ spaces such as, for instance, Repassage, Remont, or Galeria 80x120 and private art and exhibition spaces organised in artists’ flats such as Andrzei Partum’s Poetry Bureau (Biuro Poezji), KwieKulik’s Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation (PDDiU) or Ewa Partum’s Adres.

In 1970 in an article for the official arts magazine Współczesność the art critic Wojciech Skrodzki makes a passing remark about the exclusion of young unrecognised artists from the official exhibition system in the PRL. He wrote:

Exhibitions, which are organised outside the galleries Foksal or Współczesna, are very rarely discussed in this magazine. It does not result from my lack of interest, or of the journalists writing for Współczesność, but simply from what one can see in the official salons. Zachęta offers from time to time rooms on the ground floor for young artists, but only for those, who are already well-known from another site.160

Thus, as the article points out, the phenomenon of galerie autorskie in Poland needs to be seen as resulting, amongst other factors, from a need for alternative exhibition spaces for young creative people who could not be included in the state exhibition system due to

the type of their artistic practice and, consequently, their marginal professional status. Three years after Skrodzki’s article, Anda Rottenberg reported in the official magazine of the ZPAP about 16 artist-run initiatives functioning in various cities across Poland. Her article recognised the phenomenon for the first time in the official press and defined the galleries’ marginal position versus the state exhibition system as resulting from the type of artistic practices accommodated by them and an insignificant official status because of their self-organisational character.\footnote{Anda Rottenberg, ‘Nowe galerie autorskie’, Biuletyn ZPAP, 115-116.2-3 (1974), pp.74-83.}

Janusz Bogucki, the director of Warsaw’s gallery \textit{Współczesna}, in the 1971 interview printed in \textit{Współczesność}, talks about the independent galleries that functioned ‘alongside’ a large number of state exhibition spaces belonging to the BWA, or run by the ZPAP and other socio-cultural associations.\footnote{Janusz Bogucki, ‘Funkcje galerii’, Współczesność, 1(1971), p.8; Bogucki lists the following ‘independent’ galleries: \textit{Współczesna}, \textit{Foksal}, Krzysztofory, \textit{Galeria El}, \textit{Pod Mona Lisą}.} He explained the ‘independence’ of these galleries in terms of freedom of artistic choices and of realisation of their own artistic programmes. Bogucki also juxtaposed the ways in which the decision-making functioned in both types of art spaces, which, for him, fundamentally differentiated independent galleries from the state-run venues. As he described, what was shown in state art institutions was decided by ‘the so-called associative democracy (equal rights of all members to present their works) and by the administrative order (organisational accuracy of undertaken tasks rather than discursive and immeasurable character of creative processes)’.\footnote{Bogucki, p.8.} Instead, independent galleries did not follow any rules and administrative schemes, so that ‘not impersonal administrative bodies will be setting up new forms but real people who are taking up creative initiative’.\footnote{Ibid.}

Similarly to the older independent galleries, the main characteristic of \textit{galerie autorskie} (in Warsaw represented by \textit{Repassage, Remont, Biuro Poezji Partum, Dziekanka}) was also their self-organisational and self-curating model. However, differently to them, they were always run by artists/producers. What is more, the 1970s artists’ galleries promoted experimental art practices such as performance art and conceptual art and for many artists the gallery was part of their own artistic practice. In that sense, they
constituted a challenge to the traditional conception of an art gallery, and, inevitably, introduced difference to the centralised exhibition system in the PRL and with its conservative structures, as some scholars argue.\textsuperscript{165}

The function of the galleries has been discussed in academic publications only briefly and defined differently by various scholars. In the most extensive research on the art galleries in the PRL so far, Bożena Stokłosa described and discussed over 200 small artistic initiatives of informal status and functioning between 1946 and 1976.\textsuperscript{166} As she wrote, the informal artists’ groups gathered around small galleries in the 1970s, because the artists either could not yet be accepted as members of the ZPAP or out of their opposition to this state institution, ignoring its membership criteria and questioning its politics.\textsuperscript{167} According to Stokłosa, galerie autorskie aimed at introducing new values to the art system and its ideology, as well as new forms of organisation in terms of art exhibition and artists’ associations. Artists assumed new roles as art creators, initiators and curators. For her, the galleries’ function, assigned by their leaders, was to initiate creative processes and stimulate creative attitudes and their activities resulted in gathering the artists into small informal social groups.\textsuperscript{168} Stokłosa’s research, however valuable, was still conducted during state socialism and, consequently, does not engage in political questions or interpretations.

In the more recent publications on the 1970s phenomenon, alternative art galleries are often distinguished from the official venues for promoting alternative art practices. For instance, the art historians Marcin Lachowski and Łukasz Guzek have defined the independent character of those marginal art spaces as mainly based on supporting and producing non-conformist art that challenged the official art paradigm.\textsuperscript{169} These galleries’ programmes differed considerably from those of the state art galleries and museums, for in the latter exhibited art had to adhere to the official directives issued by the Ministry of

\textsuperscript{166} Stokłosa explains the ‘informal’ status as informal artists’ groups that did not have to follow the statutory regulations of state associations; see Stokłosa, ‘Artystyczno-społeczna problematyka’, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.2.
\textsuperscript{169} See Guzek, p.13; Lachowski, pp.16-18.
Culture and Art. Lachowski, in his published thesis about the Polish anti-institutional movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s, analyses four case studies of alternative art galleries (Repassage, Foksal, Pod Mona Lizq and Akumulatory 2) in order to show that those art spaces practised anti-institutional subversion through promoting new art forms. In a similar vein, Guzek in an article on the ‘gallery movement’ in Poland distinguishes between the 1960s modernist galleries and the 1970s conceptual galleries and argues that this development reflects the ontological change in Polish art that happened in the 1970s.

Further, Nader in her book on the emergence of conceptualism in the PRL analyses exhibitions, texts and artistic events produced in three examples of independent art galleries, namely, in Pod Mona Lizq (Wroclaw), Akumulatory 2 (Poznań) and Foksal (Warsaw). Her research concludes with an argument that the alternative character of Polish independent galleries lay in the production of ‘privacy’ through an artistic discourse that was ‘other’ than the socialist one. The artists involved created different artistic, and by the same token, mental spaces, in which they had an opportunity to renegotiate confiscated privacy. The galleries provided a possibility of getting rid of the ideological context of the PRL through, for instance, privacy, an ahistorical position and individualism, which artists practiced in those art spaces.¹⁷⁰

In 2011 Agnieszka Pindera advanced an interesting theory about the 1970s alternative art spaces which corresponds to the theories of disintegration of socialism and the post-socialist condition in the late 1970s, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Namely, she has argued that in the 1970s it became perceptible that the PRL was in the process of self-contained privatization and the bottom-line initiatives of artists, who established self-curated and self-organised art spaces, were, indeed, linked to this development.¹⁷¹ As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, this theory seems to best describe the social practices produced by Repassage.

In the most recent collection of texts on the phenomenon of artists’ initiatives in Poland edited by Polish art historians Pindera, Ptak and Szczupacka, the text by Zofia Cielątkowska focuses on Ewa Parum’s flat gallery Adres in Łódź (1971-1977) and the

¹⁷⁰ Nader, p.182.
¹⁷¹ Pindera, p. 155.
definition of *galeria autorska* in the historical and contemporary Polish context. In relation to the 1970s artists’ galleries, she argues that they constituted extension to artists’ practice and their function was that of meeting, exchange of thoughts and making meaning.\(^{172}\) Those artists’ initiatives were born out of ‘illusory’ artistic freedom, which was perceptible in the 1970s, since artistic experimentation was allowed, as long as it did not confront the official politics of the system.\(^{173}\)

However, apart from completely private initiatives organised in flats, the galleries were attached to official cultural organisations or Students’ Union which offered them spaces and some subsidies, often on condition of following certain administrative procedures. In the 1970s the links with state structures were established, for instance, by the very fact that a great proportion of them functioned under patronage of the Students’ Union, which was given more opportunities to organise cultural enterprises in the early 1970s in the wake of Gierek’s part-liberalisation.\(^{174}\) This meant that very often the physical space in which galleries functioned belonged to the SZSP, financial support was provided by the latter and, consistently, administrative duties and responsibilities tied the galleries to this official institution, as well as, for instance, to the Ministry of Art and Culture which subsidized cultural activities of the Students’ Union. In this sense, the galleries reflected the socio-political relations which were dominant at the time and could be seen as products of the *quasi*-liberalisation of Gierek’s regime. The patronage of student associations constituted a new development which came about in the early 1970s. The very few critics-run galleries which functioned in Warsaw in the late 1960s, namely *Foksal* and *Wspólczesna*, belonged to, respectively, the Fine Arts Studios (PSP) and the ZPAP, state art institutions which officially bound professional art practitioners.

For Piotrowski, the situation where the state subsidised alternative galleries cause the conformist attitudes amongst the artists who were prepared to stay apolitical as long as their practices remain financially supported by the state. He wrote:

> The state’s permissive attitude towards politically uncritical or pseudo-critical statements formulated in the language of the neo-avant-garde, postmodernism, or


\(^{173}\) Ibid, p.33.

\(^{174}\) Piotrowski, *Dekada*, p.11.
any other art trend, its financial support for art galleries and venues, conferences and exhibitions, something that could not be taken for granted in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, was commonplace in Poland. The regime needed the artists, but the artists also needed the regime. The possibility of working in the public sphere and having access to state subsidies was simply too significant a privilege to be jeopardized by production of ‘undesirable’ art. This type of accommodation entrenched conformist attitudes.\footnote{Piotrowski, \textit{In the Shadow of Yalta}, p.290.}

However true is the scope for artistic compromise that the support of state would have entailed, Nader rightly argues, that in the case of \textit{galerie autorskie} in Poland the patronage of student organisations, instead of an art institution, had influence on a lesser extent of control over the artistic output, which the galleries had to adapt to.\footnote{Nader, p. 408.} I would also argue that the mediation of the student organisation had a significant effect on the decision-making and permission-granting processes in which the galleries were regularly involved and which then could become based on local powers running sometimes against the grain of official prescriptions.

\subsection*{2.3.2. Official vs. unofficial art galleries in the GDR of the 1970s}

The functioning of alternative art spaces in East Germany in the 1970s seems, at least on the surface, more polarised. In broad terms, art galleries which are considered as having an alternative profile could be divided into the official and unofficial spaces. The former were attached to the state institutions and organisations, while the latter set up illegally in private flats, artists’ ateliers, or work premises.\footnote{Fiedler, \textit{Kunst im Korridor}, p. 60.} The majority of official galleries belonged to the VBK, the Cultural Association of the GDR (\textit{Kulturbund der DDR}) and, later with the foundation of the State Art Trade in 1974, many art galleries were taken over by its institutional framework.\footnote{The \textit{Kulturbund der DDR} was a cultural mass organisation consisting of regional associations and commissions, the \textit{Staatlicher Kunsthandel} was founded in 1976 and was designed as a state commercial cultural enterprise.} Small galleries were also set up in culture houses, theatres or run by communal district councils. As Jörg Heiko Bruns writes about the GDR gallery system in a short contribution in \textit{Kunst in der DDR} there was a considerable increase in the number
of the *Kulturbund*-galleries in the first half of the 1970s, so that by 1975 121 galleries functioned under the auspices of this single institution.\textsuperscript{179} Except a few examples, though, the official galleries constituted platforms only for artists who worked in a Socialist Realist aesthetic, met with state’s acceptance and held membership of the Artists’ Union.

Yet, a closer examination of the official venues reveals examples of exhibition spaces, which, despite their institutional associations, managed to promote non-conformist art and ‘smuggle in’ controversial artists within their premises. For instance, *Galerie Arkade* in Berlin, the galleries *Clara Mosch* and *Galerie oben* in Karl-Marx-Stadt constituted such exhibition spaces where artists marginalised by the official exhibition system could display their works, even if in a limited scope. Also, Angelika Weißbach’s doctoral thesis, published in 2008, on the Leonhardi-Museum in Dresden reveals another instance of alternative exhibition practice within an official art institution. As she writes, the Leonhardi-Museum despite its affiliation with the Artists’ Union managed to ‘(mis-) use official structure in order to create in productive autonomy a free space for visual arts’.\textsuperscript{180} The activities of the Leonhardi-Museum along with those of *Arkade, Clara Mosch* or *Galerie oben* have broadened our perspective on alternative artistic practice within the official institutional framework in the GDR. Thus, as Kaiser and Petzhold rightly observe, and the case studies also demonstrate later, the simplified categorisations into official and unofficial art cannot be easily applied to the GDR context of the 1970s.\textsuperscript{181}

Outside the official exhibition spaces, in the early and late 1970s there was a rise in the number of private illegal galleries, which functioned without involvement in the state cultural structures. These spaces were very often set up and run by artists themselves, hence, they have been referred to as *Produzentengalerien* (producers’ galleries), or *Selbsthilfegalerien* (self-help galleries), since they were also self-funded. The temporary illegal exhibition space founded in 1971 by the *Lücke* artists in Dresden and the private *EP Galerie* founded in Schwinebraden’s flat in Prenzlauer Berg in 1974 belong to the early 1970s examples of such practices. Thanks to the extensive socio-historical research into this phenomenon accomplished in 2012 by Fiedler, we have a better and more detailed

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\textsuperscript{180} Weißbach, p.15.
\textsuperscript{181} Kaiser and Petzhold, p.38.
picture of how the unofficial galleries functioned in East Germany between 1949 and 1990. According to the statistics gathered in her book, the number of unofficial art venues founded in private flats, ateliers, or occupied building rose in 1971 to eight galleries, then fell around the cultural-political turning point in 1976 and from the late 1970s were on a sharp constant rise.\(^\text{182}\) This shows almost direct correlation with the cultural-political chronologies of the 1970s - the initial liberalisation and a return to more repressive politics from 1976 onwards. In general, private galleries offered in most cases the only exhibition spaces for artists who were not members of the VBK, hence, their works would not have been allowed to be displayed in the officially sanctioned galleries. This also meant that the private galleries became a platform for contemporary art forms such as performance art and happenings, which could not find a place within the state art institutions.\(^\text{183}\)

The activities of East German alternative galleries, whether with official or unofficial status, have been rarely discussed in terms of their function and subversive character vis-à-vis the socialist order. So far, Lindner has argued that although the semi-official galleries such as Arkade or Galerie oben contributed to broadening of art scope in the GDR, at the same time their histories exposed the limits against which displaying of modern, non-conformist art was set. He wrote:

> in the long run in state galleries there was no place for an autonomous art industry, for painting and music actions, for creations that were breaking with a panel painting, not to mention politically awkward art works.\(^\text{184}\)

In a similar vein, Fiedler argues that only private, illegal galleries in the GDR could be termed as ‘autonomous’ for they functioned without involvement of the party, state, social and Artists’ Union structures. However, she also argues that the unofficial venues in the 1970s and 1980s were not intentionally set up with an aim to overcome the socialist system

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\(^{182}\) See the graph in Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, p.55.


or did not have an ‘explicitly oppositional character’. They were primarily set up out of their actors’ love of art and longing for self-realisation and participation, and, in this way, could be interpreted as counteracting homogenisation of the GDR society intended by the authorities. These alternative art spaces were created to provide opportunities for exchange between young unknown artists who wanted to relate their work to each other. Thus, Fiedler sees the GDR’s alternative artistic culture as less of an ‘anti-’ but rather a parallel movement for which private galleries became the central platforms.

2.4. Conclusion

In its contribution to the debates outlined above, this chapter has argued that in the 1970s both the GDR and the PRL had shown, to varying degrees, signs of an advancing process of disintegration of socialism which was also perceptible in the cultural spheres. In the case of East Germany those processes were, however, arrested for longer than in Poland, but they were still perceptible in the late 1970s in less visible and less public spaces. The differing post-Stalinist conditions prevalent in the 1970s in both contexts influenced how the alternative artistic culture functioned. Thus, Polish artists had more freedom to experiment and the socialist authorities tolerated and partly funded their practices which was the reason for criticism for apparent ideological conformism in the later academic publications. Conceptual and performance art was often accommodated here in semi-official artist-run galleries which rose to large numbers in the 1970s. In East Germany, the situation was more restrictive and to experiment with different art forms artists had to relocate to the unofficial spaces of flat galleries and ateliers. However, there functioned also a few examples of small art galleries which managed to ‘smuggle in’ non-conformist artists within the official framework. In general, it is rather hard to find explicitly political statements in Polish and German art of the 1970s, however, to deny the artists’ any critical credits overlooks levels of subversive meanings and subversive social relations which alternative artistic and exhibition practices produced in the 1970s in both systems. Accordingly, the following study cases demonstrate that the critique of the systems could have been conveyed in veiled and subtler ways than explicit political statement, but also,

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185 Fiedler, Kunst im Korridor, p.297.
that the gradual process of disintegration of state socialist systems was also reflected in various dimensions of practices produced by the alternative art galleries.
Chapter 3

‘Privately in a public space’ - appropriation of space on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 as a subversive practice

Artistic practices and strategies produced in the gallery space on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 have been interpreted by many scholars as subversive, or even oppositional. For instance, Stokłosa writes about Galeria and Repassage as having a countercultural character based on artists’ aims to form a spontaneous artistic and social micro-community, on their anti-institutional critique and on their conception of art as a spontaneous creativity. Similarly, Sitkowska emphasised that Repassage (she only refers to this gallery) became a centre for thought, intuitions and activities that led to a change in consciousness. Artistic practices produced in the gallery have been categorised by her as representing either a contesting, oppositional, or counter-cultural position towards the socio-political reality. Lachowski situated Repassage as part of anti-institutional movement of the 1960s and 1970s but, for him, due to the financial and administrative dependencies their anti-institutionalism was constructed by discrediting the official framework and creating, instead, a private scale of reference in the gallery space. Their activities transgressed the official discourse in the PRL by, for instance, overcoming the cultural construction of the individual and privileging subjective experience over the common system of reference. Finally, Ronduda argues that Galeria was a permanent institutional and conceptual experiment of Paweł Freisler, while Repassage’s activities were based on a countercultural and antisystemic protest against ideologised socio-political sphere in Poland and a critique of avant-garde art language that was dominant in the 1970s. Yet, Piotrowski also argued that Repassage along with other artist-run

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186 Elżbieta and absent Emil, ‘Galeria Repassage’, Linia, IV-V, 1977, Elżbieta uses the phrase ‘privately in public space’ to describe the method that defines their programme.
189 Lachowski, p.171.
190 Ronduda, Sztuka polska, p.198.
galleries in the 1970s were, in fact, conformist due to their dependencies on the state financial support and apolitical character of their art.191

Thus, this chapter seeks to contribute to this debate by revisiting the gallery’s practices, analysing them from a different theoretical perspective and, consequently, proposing alternative interpretations. It looks at examples of artistic, exhibition and social practices which were produced inside the gallery space on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street 24 in Warsaw between 1972 and 1981 and which strongly engaged with the concept of space understood in both the artistic and socio-political senses. This first case study focuses on a selection of programmatic statements, exhibitions, social practices and organisational strategies that were only briefly discussed in previous publications on Galeria’s and Repassage’s activities. These examples seem, however, especially worthy of an in-depth academic consideration, as they demonstrate how the artists and organisers used and appropriated, using Lefebvre’s terminology here, the space belonging to and given to their disposal by the Polish authorities in ways that were subversive towards the prevalent socialist order. More generally, this chapter will also discuss how the strategies used by the Polish artists relate to the socio-cultural context of the 1970s in Poland with its post-Stalinist features and the signs of advancing disintegration of state socialism. As such I have identified a number of questions which this chapter seeks to answer: 1. How was the gallery’s ‘alternativeness’ constructed and what aspects of their activities did it refer to? 2. Can their artistic and exhibition practices be seen as subversive and political, and in what ways? 3. How did the socio-political circumstances and cultural politics of the Gierek’s era influenced the emergence and functioning of Galeria and Repassage? 4. What function did Galeria and Repassage fulfill in relation to artistic and exhibition culture under state socialism in Poland in the 1970s?

Accordingly, this chapter analyses the production of gallery space on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 as a complex process encompassing various spatial strategies that sought to reclaim and appropriate a small part of the public space normally colonised by the socialist authorities. All different types of artistic, exhibition and social practices produced in there are analysed using Lefebvre’s theory of production of space as a three-dimensional

191 Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta, pp.286-88.
process encompassing the conceived, the perceived and the lived dimensions. The first section focuses on textual representations such as manifestoes and programmatic statements which were printed in art magazines and the gallery’s catalogues and discursively produced a concept of collective art space that was differently constructed than the official model promoted by the state. As I will demonstrate further, this linguistically defined and demarcated space sought to undermine the dominant discourse on art, the official art institutions and social structures. The second section looks closely at specific examples of artistic practices, such as art installations and performances, which took place inside the gallery and attempted to transgress the borders of gallery space and its definitions. I have chosen here three artistic events, in fact never discussed in detail before, that appropriated the physical realm of the gallery, its material environment, and overlaid it, ‘making symbolic use of its objects’ in subversive ways. The third section analyses examples of ‘everyday’ social practices and rituals that were produced by the organisers and artists in the gallery and sought to resist the top-down organisation and social programming imposed by the political power. This section will also expose the gallery’s entanglement in the socio-political context and its official structures and how the latter influenced and compromised the artists’ practices, which, inevitably, will add an element of ambiguity in relation to their subversive claims. In the concluding part I shall look at the function of the gallery space versus the remaining socialist space outside by referring back to Foucault’s theory of heterotopia. This will help in explaining the ambiguous socio-cultural function of Galeria/Repassage within the Polish socialist context and how it operated as a stabilising and a destabilising art space within the post-Stalinist system.

3.1. Discursive construction of the ‘other’ gallery space

The genesis of the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street 24 can be traced back to the activities of a student theatre project called Sigma which used the lower ground space in the neighbouring building number 26. Sigma theatre functioned there since

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192 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p.39.
March 1971 within the framework of the Warsaw University Socialist Students’ Union (the SZSP UW). The SZSP, like other student organisations, was granted opportunities of patronage over small galleries and artistic events in the wake of Gierek’s quasi-liberalisation of cultural politics in the early 1970s. From this point of view the foundation of the gallery needs to be seen as resulting from the changing socio-political conditions in the Polish socialist context and, consequently, a less restrictive, although still tutelary, style of cultural politics. Indeed, this change allowed the artists to use their own initiative to start art projects that were not forced upon them through the top-down state cultural programmes. In this way, from late 1971 Sigma theatre let a group of art students and musicians associated with art student Paweł Freisler (who also took part in Sigma’s activities) use their rooms for concerts and temporary exhibitions. Soon after, in March 1972 an opportunity arose for Freisler and his artist friends to take over a renovated ground floor space in the attached building number 24, where previously the state exhibition venue Debuts’ Salon (Salon Debiutów) had been located.194

Taking over the space on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 in March 1972 was preceded by a written proposal sent by the group of artists to the authorities of the Warsaw University Students’ Union who managed the place. The letter outlined ideas for the intended use of the space and constitutes a conceptual representation of a gallery as understood by its founders. It was then published in the first issue of the art magazine Art’s Worker Notebook (Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki) in February 1972.195 The fact that the programme was printed in Notatnik is particularly noteworthy because the magazine had a special place in the history of alternative art in Poland. Namely, it was a self-printed avant-garde art magazine, which was published by Gerard Kwiatkowski, the director of Laboratorium Sztuki Galeria EL in Elbląg. Kwiatkowski was the initiator of this artistic project and used the facilities of Galeria EL to realise its publication for 2 years between January 1972 and June 1973. In fact, Ronduda has argued that Notatnik constituted ‘the most important magazine of the Polish avant-garde in the first half of the 1970s’ and had an assemblage and self-organisational formula characteristic of the 60s/70s neo-avant-

194 Anita Thierry’s diary, Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
195 Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki, Laboratorium Sztuki Galeria EL, no.1, February 1972 (not paged).
garde strategies. Its assemblage form was based on techniques of putting together separate elements created by various artists and non-artists in one project and creating a collection of artistic attitudes and strategies. This first auto-presentation of Galeria in a self-published art magazine already signalled artists’ intention to position themselves as somehow outside the official artistic framework. It also suggested their plans to operate on their own different terms through self-organisational and self-promoting practices and, in this way, create the ‘other’ heterotopian space.

The original letter to the Warsaw University Students’ Union printed in Notatnik was dated the 14th of February and signed by the art school graduates Paweł Freisler, Przemysław Kwiek, Zofia Kulik and an art student Jan Wojciechowski. The text can be seen as a manifesto, for it presented the artists’ aims and views, the proposed ways of functioning and the targeted audience of the future Galeria. As explained in the text, they were interested in this particular space because the building was located in the heart of where students and young people gathered and, in this way, their artistic activities could be fully felt by the local community. In their conception of a gallery space they wanted to break away from a conventional model where art works on display are invigilated by gallery staff and visitors do not come to contact with artists but remain merely passive recipients. Thus, they discursively contested the traditional gallery model as it was designed and organized by the socialist institutions, and proposed their own. They wrote:

- We don’t propose a dead salon and won’t employ an old lady to guard the art works.
- Nothing will have a greater effect on a human than direct contact to another living human being.
- Everyone who possesses knowledge and original personality will be able to work with us and have an opportunity to impact others.
- We won’t be just waiting for already formed individualists but we’ll try to create and reveal them. With help of all methods and means.
- There won’t be impossible things here.
- If they don’t come to us, we will go out to people.
We understand service to society in this way [...] 197

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197 Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki, Laboratorium Sztuki Galeria EL, no.1, February 1972 (not paged) - trans. AJ.
The artists emphasised the heterotopian character of the new gallery by distancing themselves from the ordinary exhibition spaces, and by operating different rules of conduct. As this programmatic statement indicates, their intention was to open their gallery space to new values such as originality and individualism. The latter signalled a challenge to the primacy of socialist values such as commonality and collectivity propagated by the official ideology. The text bore also characteristics of an avant-garde manifesto with postulates of a revolution in artists’ work and a revision of ‘all previous forms and systems in art and culture’. Just as the technological changes such as automatisation, or miniaturization, demanded implementing new working methods in the areas of administration and labour, so, for them, the way art institutions functioned had to change, too. They proposed a new type of experimental art space which they called ‘Experimental Centre for Working on Methods and Forms of Artistic Activity in Young People’s Environments’. The art centre was to have a working space character and function as an ‘office, editorial point, and workshop’, while also creating, collecting and researching art documentation.

Hence, Galeria was to, on one hand, recognise and encourage the need for expressing originality and individualism which challenged the official discourse promoting collective identity as of a higher value. On the other, however, the art centre was to function as a collective creative space, which suggests that the text supported and promoted ideas of collective work and, in this sense, overlapped with the premises of the socialist ideology. The artists’ understanding of collectivity, however, differed from the official Marxist-Leninist position, which criticised individuality and an emphasis on originality of creative practice as characteristic of the bourgeois culture, by embracing a possibility of individualism within a collective project. In general, the manifesto called also for operating on a basis of a different organizational structure that would be produced out of artists’ own ideas and initiatives rather than of the state’s top-down directives.

The programme specified also the gallery’s artistic and social links with other art spaces and groups in Poland with an intention of integrating them. The artists signalled their connections to Galeria EL in Elbląg and Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw, both of an ‘independent’ profile, with art students gathered in discussion clubs in three Warsaw art

198 Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki, no.1.
schools (ASP, PWSM, PWST), as well as with the experimental film group the Workshop of Film Form, formed at the Łódź Film School. In fact, as Gerard Kwiatkowski wrote in his manifesto for Laboratorium Sztuki, they wanted to connect various art environments across Poland with an aim to decentralize art in Poland.\(^{199}\) Thus, by determining their own networking structure, the artists, again, challenged the state’s authority as a patron of artistic life. And yet, the manifesto mentioned also the artists’ plans for engaging with working class youth through art projects organized at culture houses in Elbląg and Warsaw, which suggests that they intended to maintain, to some degree, links to the socialist cultural system and its institutions. But after all, the gallery was, as every heterotopia, separate from and, simultaneously, connected with all the remaining spaces by a set of relations.

When the gallery was taken over by Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars in 1973 in a short, written statement entitled ‘Galeria Repassage would like to present artistic conceptions’ the new directors introduced one of the key concepts which laid the ground for the gallery’s functioning. Namely, they understood a gallery space as, primarily, a ‘lived’ space of social practices which were connected to its surroundings. They wrote that a ‘gallery is a place of working contact of an artist and his operation with human environment’.\(^{200}\) The idea expressed in this first programmatic statement called for an exhibition space that would become a platform for greater artists’ involvement with their social context. Considering that the official discourse also postulated a removal of the chasm between artists and working classes and of the bourgeois idea of an isolated artist, this text shares similarity in terms of its promotion of sociality and inclusion between artists and society. However, as Ronduda points out, it was in fact the Cieślars’ artistic strategy to reject the imposition of ideology onto everyday life, which was prevalent in state socialism, and instead postulated that artistic language should develop from below through cooperation with people.\(^{201}\)

Another key operational principle which was evoked in many catalogue texts was the artists’ anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical position, whether in relation to artistic or social structures in general. Thus, the directors often emphasised their disapproving

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\(^{199}\) Ronduda, ‘Polska awangarda lat 70.’, p.45.

\(^{200}\) ‘Galeria Repassage would like to present artistic conceptions’, 1973-74 (typewritten copy stored at Dział Dokumentacji Sztuki Współczesnej IS PAN).

\(^{201}\) Ronduda, Sztuka Polska, p.198.
attitude towards programmatic statements. As they claimed, during their directorship no programme or manifesto was imposed, as this would have contradicted their strong belief that everyone had a right for unconstrained freedom of expression. They called this lack of program an anti-programme of ‘white card’ that forbids to forbid.\footnote{Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, ‘Prasować? - Przejść ponownie? - Cerować?’, Nr 7, 1993’, in Elżbieta i Emil Cieślar. Prace z lat 1960-2002, exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2003), p.30.} Both strategies of constructing their own concept of sociality and promoting an anti-authoritarian position can be seen as attempts at operating in opposition to the order imposed by the party officials outside the gallery. Again, by establishing their own rules of conduct and their ‘otherness’ from the ordinary exhibition spaces the gallery created a space of Foucauldian heterotopia.

Yet, despite the proclaimed lack of programme, a series of texts entitled ‘-To Iron?-To Pass Again?-To Darn?’ (‘-Prasować? - Przejść ponownie? - Cerować?’) printed in Repassage’s catalogues in 1975, discursively demarcated the conceptual foundations for their gallery and artistic practices, and strongly accentuated the social dimension and implications of their activities. Most importantly, however, the texts can be seen as challenging the dominant ideological framework. The latter sought to program and control social life through bureaucratic and institutional regulations informed by a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint and enforced top-down. Accordingly, in the first opening text No. 1 ‘The art of staying together’ (‘Sztuka przebywania ze sobą’) the artists questioned the nature of human relations, their role and conditions.\footnote{Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, ‘Prasować? - Przejść ponownie? - Cerować?’, Nr 1. Sztuka przebywania ze sobą’, catalogue, Galeria Repassage, 24.08.1974-3.3.1975, (not paged).} They proposed here to practice ‘the art of staying together’ which belonged to the ‘usual’ day and drew on ‘naturally established “institutions” of inter-human relations’. They underlined such concepts as ‘friendship’, ‘personal feeling’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘uniqueness of contact’ that significantly diverged from the state socialist perspective interpreting the social reality first of all in terms of class and labour relations. As Lachowski points out the artists’ contestation of rationality and progress which were identified with the official socialist culture expressed their belief in being able to overcome the ideological framework of culture. He argues that their practices constitute an example of transgressing the official humanism of the PRL through activities that led to primal and biological sense of reality. Thus, they transgressed the cultural
construction of an individual and privileged personal relations that cannot be translated into a common reference system.

In the next catalogue, in June 1975, the text No 2. ‘Self-evident views’ (‘Poglądy oczywiste’) comments, in a similar vein, on the subject of how human activities and relations are determined by the prevailing social order. The text opens, rather provocatively considering its context, with a motto, a short children’s rhyme: ‘A bricklayer builds houses/ A tailor makes clothes/ Where would he sew anything/ If he didn’t have a flat?/ And the bricklayer, too/ Would not be able to go to work/ If the tailor didn’t sew / Him trousers and a gown/ Thus for the mutual benefit/ And for the common good/ All have to work/ My little friend’. The artists argued further that relations between people who constitute Repassage’s environment and those outside on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street were regulated by the content of this rhyme. The latter promoted the Marxist idea of labour as a high civic responsibility and encouraged participation in common work for common good. It was imbued into people’s consciousness through a general model of education and adopted as a self-evident nature. The Cieślars pointed to the subject character of human existence in words ‘[…] In realization of their lives people, in a more or less ego-centrical manner, fulfil the role of cogs in the social machine’. What is more, they criticized the society’s passivity and ‘numbness’ and called for questioning of ‘self-evident views’. As in the previous text, the directors underlined here the instrumental role of human beings inside a socio-political system and called for a critical stance towards reality. Without having made direct references to socialism, the statement can still be seen as a critique of oppressive social structures imposed on an individual and society by the prevalent order.

Two subsequent texts printed in the same catalogue referred critically to the institutionalization of artistic life in Poland. The text No.3 ‘Institutionalism’ (‘Instytucjonalizm’) constitutes an anti-institutional statement which mocked institutionalism described here by Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar as a ‘commonly known disease’.

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204 Lachowski, p. 173.
206 In general, in socialist states worker’s alienation from products of their labour was to be eliminated and work was to be performed for the good of society and the service to the people.
207 Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, ‘Poglądy oczywiste’.
As they wrote, someone attacked by this illness suffered from a lack of their own personality that had been replaced by a programme of institutionalisation. The artists commented here also on their conflicts with the socialist state institutions, which were not able to understand that some artistic activities did not fulfil a servile role to utilitarian purposes but, instead, were produced out of a need for expression and for expanding one’s perception. Similarly, in the text No 4 the artists undermined the dominant order of art institutions and, by the same token, empty socialist slogans that proclaimed the prevailing democratization of arts. The text criticises the division between the artists and the recipient and the egocentric art environments that were closed in elitist circles of art experts. They called for democratisation of the right to creativity and for abandoning the ‘absurd’ division between the artist and recipient in which the latter had only right to consume art. Thus, the artists constructed a discursive gallery space that operated according to their own rules and codes defined by rejecting values prevalent in their immediate socialist reality. In this sense, the gallery constituted a heterotopian space where ‘other’ way of conduct and rules could operate.

3.2. Art exhibitions as means of alternating the conception of gallery space in state socialism

The following section discusses examples of exhibitions, installations and performances that took place in Repassage and Repassage 2 and explored the relationship between artistic practice, the context of the gallery space, as well as social relations inherent in space. These examples demonstrate how the artists used and appropriated the traditionally constructed gallery space, the ‘white cube’ using Brian O’Doherty’s term, that belonged to the hegemonic power of Polish socialist state, in ways that were challenging and subverting the order of things outside. This was realised through various artistic strategies which aimed at questioning and, consequently, breaking with the

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209 Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar ‘-Prasować?- Przejść ponownie?-Cerować?- Nr 4’, catalogue, Galeria Repassage, 1975 (not paged).

conventionality of the gallery space as it was perpetuated by the official state art institutions. Thus, the artists challenged the ideology of the ‘white cube’ gallery space in a number of exhibitions. Firstly, they used the physical dimension of the gallery as their primary material, for instance, by incorporating walls into their projects (Krasiński’s 1974 exhibition), and by appropriating windows as a communication medium (Cieślars’ *Kaleidoscope* and Buren’s white stripes installations). Secondly, they produced ephemeral and temporary artistic practices that left no material traces after the events as was the case with Jung’s performances, in particular. Lastly, they sought to break with the conventional position of audience as passive spectators and consumers of art and, instead, promoted the visitors’ participation in and contribution to creative processes.

Indeed, the material dimension of the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmiecie 24 constituted a conventional ‘white cube’ space. As such, the artists had at their disposal four 3.5 meter high white walls, 46 square meters of floor and ceiling space and three large windows on the wall that separated, and connected, the gallery with Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. In terms of the external context the location of the gallery’s building was of great importance, as it was situated in the centre of Warsaw on one of the busiest streets and bus routes leading through Nowy Świat, a shopping passage with cafes and restaurants, to the Old Town. In the direct proximity of the Warsaw University’s main campus, which could be entered through a gate just a few meters left to the Students’ Union building and with Warsaw School of Art just over the road, the gallery lay in the centre of Warsaw’s academic life. Hundreds of students, passers-by and bus passengers would pass every day the gallery’s, often wide-open, three windows and could see what was happening inside. Thus, it can be assumed that the gallery had a significant public exposure, even if, in majority, to young university students. This material dimension of the gallery space and its locational relations within Warsaw did not just constitute architectural and geographical settings but also structured and influenced artists’ practices inside as the art exhibitions and installations will demonstrate.

As O’Doherty argues, the modern gallery space is constructed according to laws that ensure that ‘the outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off, walls

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are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light [...]'. However, even the sealed off windows can at the same time ‘allow for discourse with the outside' and, consistently, have both a stabilising and destabilising function. For instance, Patterson suggests that windows need to be seen not as a place but a threshold, a medium. This mediation performed by the windows can take different forms. He argues that we can differentiate between three types of windows: window of domination - looking through windows can imply a dominating gaze since one side is visually dominated and consumed by others; window of revelation as it offers a portal to another world; and window of definition by delineating the boundary of the room and positions, the interior in relation to the exterior. Hence, windows need to be seen as products of spatial practices which divide and set the boundary between the outside and the inside but also as constituting a materialized expression of the dominant space designed by architects. They symbolize the simultaneous state of openness and restriction which, in fact, is characteristic of Foucault’s heterotopian spaces. Namely, the glass windows allow us to see others, while we are being watched at the same time. The curious gaze of passers-by has a controlling effect because, as Foucault argued, power is exercised through the dissociation ‘see/being seen dyad'. These different qualities of windows were exposed and explored in various artistic practices realized inside/outside Galeria and Repassage.

The three windows of the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 became a very important element of the material space that was incorporated into installations and used as a medium of contact and communication with the outside. Opening of windows onto the Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and engaging with passers-by were practised in the gallery from its very beginnings. Those practices transgressed the boundary between the gallery and the outside and counteracted the gallery’s isolation imposed by its material dimensions. The importance of windows for Galeria and Repassage’s activities was recognised by Sitkowska who wrote that Repassage’s three windows, opened onto the

212 O’Doherty, p. 15.
213 Ibid., p. 85.
214 Duncan P.R. Patterson, “There’s Glass between Us”: A critical examination of “the window” in art and architecture from Ancient Greece to the present day, FORUM EJournal, 10 (2011), pp.1-21, <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/forum/v10i1/1_Window.pdf>[accessed 30.02.2016]
street, absorbed life and filtered it in one or another way to, once processed, return it back to the street in a form of an artistically formulated message. Lachowski argues that windows were, in general, exposed by ‘independent’ galleries in the 1960s and 1970s and constituted a central element of social communication. Art installations in windows defined the direction of expansion of artistic activities beyond the artistically defined place and into the street and exposed the dynamic tension between the inside of the gallery and the outside on the street.

The installation *Kaleidoscope, look inside through a pipe* (*Kalejdoskop, popatrz przez rurę*) realized in May 1972 during the art festival *Revealing the Place* (*Ujawnienie Miejsca*) by Emil and Elżbieta Cieślar constitutes one of examples of ‘window’ art projects. The artist couple installed in the windows of *Galeria* large pipes, one end of which stuck out outside the gallery building while the other end pointed inside. On the side of the pipes an instruction ‘Look through the pipe’ was written in white capital letters. Because the pipes were constructed as kaleidoscopes they reflected and duplicated images of objects inside the gallery space into patterns. What is more, as in kaleidoscopes the images produced in the recipients’ eyes were fragmented and manipulated by both the optical instruments and the artists, and the viewers. As the Cieślars described it, the installation’s aim was to encourage the public to enter the realm of the gallery through their gaze and to ‘create an atmosphere of public peeping through a keyhole’. The passers-by were presented with a choice of participating in the activities of the gallery even without entering its physical space inside, but also, they could have chosen what elements of the gallery space they will look at through the kaleidoscope. The impressions and choices of objects that the viewers reported on afterwards were later analysed by the artists in terms of their psychological personality characteristics. They were to produce a reduced model of individual world views.

In the *Kaleidoscope* the gallery’s three windows and the presence of a busy city street outside formed a material basis for an interactive installation. By leaving the

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218 Lachowski, p.159.
219 Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, a typewritten description of the installation *Kalejdoskop, popatrz przez rurę* for the catalogue, Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
220 Ibid.
windows wide-open for the public and by building a bridge between the inside and outside in the form of sculptural objects, the artists extended the gallery space into the street and temporarily suspended the boundary between the inside and outside delineated by the windows and walls. The windows had been, in a way, transformed into doors as they temporarily functioned as a kind of entrance to the gallery’s inside. Their function as a divider between the outside and inside has been suspended in this way and transformed into an opening and access. Thus, the windows gained a new function and meaning for the gallery’s operation. The kaleidoscope pipes constructed by the artist couple became also a means of making contact to another human being and an example of art that engages the viewer in an interactive project by making the recipient also a user of artistic space and a contributor to its content.

The three windows were also exposed as a medium of communication between artists and the outside in a number of other artistic interventions. For instance, the interventions on the windows by Andrzej Dłużniewski in 1973 and by the Cieślars in 1975 covered the normally transparent surfaces of the three windows with white and stacked various messages on them.221 Although these interventions sealed off the gallery from the outside, they also accentuated windows’ discursive potential as they became for the duration of the projects a medium for communicating artists’ ideas. In a similar vein, the French conceptual artist Daniel Buren used Repassage’s windows as a material for his installation in there in 1974. Buren’s show constituted an exceptional and politically charged event, since it was one of the very few exhibitions of Western contemporary artists organized in the gallery. This fact needs to be seen in the context of the 1970s cultural politics and Gierek’s strategy of ‘new openness’ to Western culture which stimulated greater cultural exchange with the West.222 What is more, Daniel Buren was a political

221 Dłużniewski’s project was displayed in Galeria between 25.VII-8.VIII.1973. The artist used the external sides of the windows and stacked black signs ‘Exterieurement’ (External) across the window corners, against a white background. The Cieślars’ intervention on the windows constituted an extension of their artistic action Carousel of attitudes and consisted of names of various artistic positions written against a white background.222 Daniel Buren came to Poland with Anka Ptaszkowska who had been involved in the activities of Foksal gallery from its beginnings until 1970 when a conflict within the gallery’s social circle broke out. As a result of this disagreement, Ptaszkowska withdrew completely from Foksal’s activities. In 1970, she immigrated to Paris where she met Buren with whom she co-operated on a number of projects. Thus, when Ptaszkowska brought Buren to Warsaw, she had to find different space for accommodating the French artist’s installation due to the still unresolved conflict with Foksal. The choice of Repassage was quite interesting, since Foksal and Repassage were situated at the opposite if not conflicting pole on the artistic map of Warsaw; see
artist who criticized structures of hegemonic power operating in capitalist art world which, however, contextualized in the socialist context gained interesting new connotations. Also, his exhibition was followed by a discussion over the socio-political function of art between French artist guests and Polish artists, and exposed the similarities and differences in the alternative artistic positions on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Buren’s installation in Repassage was preceded by an installation of white stripes affixed on the 10th of September on the windows of Henryk Stażewski’s studio in the centre of Warsaw.223 The event was organized under the patronage of an experimental gallery directed by Ptaszkowska in Paris called ‘21’ and signified a number in a series of consecutive events. It was attended by Polish artists and art critics cooperating with various alternative galleries in Warsaw (except from Foksal) and in Wrocław. On the next day Buren glued similar white vertical stripes onto all three windows of Repassage. Here, however, Buren’s white stripes installed on the same object of material space changed its context from a private space of an artist studio to a public space of an art gallery. The opening of the exhibition was followed by a discussion between French guests Buren, Michel Claura and Denise Zoe and Polish artists invited for the event. The discussion referred to Buren’s writings on the political and social function of art and, in particular, to his text ‘Points of reference’ which was previously published in Les Lettres Françaises. As Anka Ptaszkowska remarked, Les Lettres Françaises as a French communist party magazine was not censored by the Polish authorities and, thus, was available to read in Poland. Consequently, it constituted the main source of information about Western contemporary art for many Polish artists.224

White vertical stripes installed on Repassage’s windows were a continuation of Buren’s practice which he began in mid-1960s. Around 1965 Buren made a decision to limit his art to painting vertical stripes and the latter became a leading and repeating motif in

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223 Henryk Stażewski belonged to the pre-war avant-garde generation and from the 1970s lived together with Edward Krasiński in his flat-studio which became famous for gathering Warsaw avant-garde artists, before the internal conflict in Foksal in 1970 Stażewski and Krasiński were closely engaged in Foksal gallery circle. See ibid. for more details about the studio.

224 Anka Ptaszkowska, Wierze w wolność, ale nie nazywam się Beethoven (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2010), p.312.
his works since. This artistic move was a result of years of experimentation, which aimed at creating a work of art that was stripped off all expressive references. This practice was later on radicalised and Buren started to reproduce the stripes in a mechanical way by eliminating the necessity of painting them himself. They were produced out of prefabricated material as in the case of Repassage’s exhibition where white stripes were printed on a transparent foil and glued on glass windows. Buren’s practice of reproducing repeated vertical stripes was determined by an aim to eradicate compositional configuration and personal expression so that there were no interferences in immediate perception of work as a material whole.225 As Buren remarked, he wanted the stripes ‘simply to exist before the eye of the viewer’ and function purely as a visual fact after personal touch of the artist was removed. 226

Similarly to his other works, white stripes on Repassage’s windows were site-specific and ephemeral. As such his installations were specifically designed for the space of the original exhibition and physically only lasted while in there.227 For him, after the exhibition the work had to be destroyed as it could not be installed somewhere else. He maintained that ‘every place radically imbues (formally, architecturally, sociologically, politically) with its meaning the object (work/creation) shown there, the object presented and its place of display must dialectically imply one another’.

228 His works are, thus, in close relationship with the place where they are installed and, at the same time, they are affected by the conditions of those places.229 This closely refers to Lefebvre’s theory, which recognises the material realm as a structuring and influencing force for spatial and social practices. In Repassage Buren’s white stripes were delineated by the window frames, thus, structured and influenced by windows’ material dimension. Also, the windows became a medium for Buren’s installation, just like a canvas for a painting. By placing his stripes on the transparent window surfaces, he located his work outside the traditionally defined space for displaying art. This strategy aimed at deliberately questioning conventional

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226 Buren as cited in ibid., p.10.
227 Ibid, p. 8
228 Buren in the mid-1970s as cited in ibid, p. 9.
methods of making and exhibiting art and what is generally accepted as art and non-art contexts. In this way, it explored the relationship between the exterior and the interior of the traditional ‘white cube’ gallery space.

Buren believed that the visual should be complemented by words in order to show the totality of his practice and to make clear what has been ‘not-yet-seen’. Accordingly, his visual works were often accompanied by critical writings, in which he wrote about his works and political implications of artistic practice. In fact, already in 1969 Buren had expressed his belief that all art is political which he summarized in the words: ‘Every act is political, and whether one is conscious of it or not, the very fact of presenting one’s work/project does not escape this rule’. As the artist stated, he was influenced by writings of left-wing intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean-Luc Godard and the Situationists in his working method. He criticised the mechanisms of the capitalist art world, and museums in particular, for their oppressive mechanisms in producing culture that fits the dominant ideology. These strategies reflect his struggle against the oppressive power of the establishment and this, undoubtedly, connected him with the circles of alternative art galleries in Poland which also struggled against the restrictive state art system. He described his tactics as hit-and-run strategy of perpetually breaking with the authorities and moving on, before the latter become stronger through repairing the rupture. His left-wing affiliations and association in the West with anti-bourgeois avant-gardism had surely helped him to get permission to exhibit in Poland. And yet, the anti-capitalist and anti-institutional character of Buren’s works gained a different meaning when installed in the socialist context. For the works attacked hegemonic structures of art institutions and the dominant ideology, in the Polish context this criticism could easily be transferred onto the oppressive socialist system and its cultural institutions.

The installation on the Repassage’s windows was followed by a discussion of Buren’s essay ‘Points of reference’ in the gallery. The event turned into an interesting confrontation of artistic positions between Polish and French artists around the subject of

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230 Alberro and Alter, p. 5.
231 Ibid, p.6
233 Alberro and Alter, p. 19.
the socio-political function of art. It also demonstrates how the gallery’s organisers created an alternative discussion space that engaged in a debate that did not conform to the official socialist rhetoric. It also provided a platform for the exchange of ideas between Western and Eastern European artists who would not have been able to take up such issues if the event had been organized by the official art venues. Fragments of the discussion were translated into English and published in the *Repassage* catalogue no. 4.\(^{235}\) The discussion was introduced by a short account of ideas contained in Buren’s text. It explained Buren’s thesis on art’s politicality based on examples of two contrary artistic attitudes of Cezanne and Duchamp, whereas he acknowledged Duchamp’s strategies which questioned the institutions of museum and gallery as well as the myth of artistic genius.

During the discussion, Polish conceptual artist Zbigniew Dłubak posed a direct question to Buren about the latter’s views on what the political function of art was. In his reply French artist stated that he was not able to speak of such a function in socialist countries but only where he lived, thus, in the US and Western Europe and said:

> The political role of art is the possibilities it gives the bourgeois regressive systems in creating the illusion of liberality. It especially refers to a so-called vanguard art. So then, its political function is creating a liberal facade which hides the foundations of repression. It is possible thanks to the word ‘art’ which does not mean anything. The misunderstandings existing around this word make it possible.\(^{236}\)

In response to Buren’s criticism of the capitalist art system, Dłubak argued that art itself was inherently politically neutral but could be used for political purposes. For Buren art was never politically neutral and even the argument of art’s neutrality was in effect a political argument. In the discussion two different position became prevalent which correspond to Ronduda’s division into post-essentialist and pragmatic conceptual positions in Polish art of the 1970s.\(^{237}\) On one side, Polish artists who after the experience of Socialist Realism wanted to produce art which would be politically neutral and not involved in any socialist agendas. While, on the other side, for Buren such a character of art was not possible as even the act of separating itself from politics had political

\(^{235}\) Catalogue no. 4, (Warsaw: Galeria Repassage, 1974).

\(^{236}\) Catalogue no. 4, Galeria Repassage, Warszawa 1974, p.4

implications. Thus, this confrontation demonstrated how Polish artists constructed their apolitical artistic position and how, in spite of their intentions, the latter could have been received differently by critical artists such as Buren in the West.

As the intervention on Repassage’s windows demonstrates, Buren questioned the ingrained assumptions of our culture concerning the display of painting – hung on walls at eye level, according to size, and at specified distances apart. He asked: ‘Is the wall a background for the picture or is the picture a decoration for the wall? In any case, the one does not exist without the other’. His critique of the art system bears resemblance to artistic practice of Polish conceptual artist Edward Krasiński whose exhibition was taking place inside Repassage at the same time as Buren installed his white stripes on the windows. Krasiński’s works were shown in Repassage between 24 August and 15 September, and not coincidentally, for Krasiński was a husband of Ptaszkowska and lived with Stażewski in his studio/apartment. Hosting shows of Buren and Krasiński simultaneously constituted a very interesting confrontation of two practices which, by means of line/s, questioned the conventionality of the gallery space and art’s entanglement with the material and social context.

Krasiński’s exhibition in Repassage consisted of two types of works connected to each other and to the gallery’s walls by a blue line. They reflected Krasiński’s experimentations with artistic and exhibition space and objects on display. As Krasiński stated in an interview: ‘I started to frame reality. Part of the door; part of the toilet, and so on. Then I made these axonometric paintings. An axonometric image jutting into the drawing. That was an illusion of space, sort of’. Accordingly, his assemblage constructions were installed on the right-side walls of the gallery. They consisted of three-dimensional fragments of house interiors that were attached to plywood surfaces and looked like rectangular cuttings from everyday surroundings: a cutting of a wall with electric plugs and wires, with a fragment of a door and with a toilet flush handle. In the middle of the gallery free-standing white thin tubes were installed and connected the ceiling with the floor. Those ‘everyday’ objects constituted physical elements of the ‘lived’

238 Rorimer, p. 145.
space, the space of users. The artist appropriated and stripped them of their original functionality, finding a new use for them. He made them dysfunctional in their conventional sense and, instead, overlaid them with a new meaning as works of art. On the left-side wall Krasinski presented his two-dimensional works - plywood paintings of axonometric structures. Those geometric representations of spatial forms were painted in black acrylic paint on a white background. All canvases on the left and assemblage works on the right were embraced by the blue line, and, in this way, all surfaces and objects became incorporated into his exhibition. As Pawel Polit writes, the juxtaposition of assemblages and axonometric images in this exhibition demonstrated the fundamental dialectic of his works, both the illusory spaces and the literal surfaces invite the operation of the blue stripe.\footnote{Paweł Polit ‘The Rhetoric of the Blue Stripe’, in Świtke, p.257.} This unity of sculpture and painting with the surroundings was inspired by the aims of unism, a Polish constructivist tradition developed in the 1920s, and especially by the art of Katarzyna Kobro who thought that sculpture had no borders and should be connected to the infinity of space.\footnote{Sabine Breitwieser, ‘Edward Krasiński- Les mises en scene’, ibid., p.74.}

In a similar vein, Krasiński’s works create a dialogue between the exhibited sculpture and space, where his works and the walls became an indistinguishable unity.\footnote{Ibid., p.70} His blue line, which embraced all material surfaces of the gallery and the art works on display, could be read as symbolic of subversive artistic practice that reclaims the public space colonised by the socialist power. Krasiński introduced it into his art in the late 1960s and it was simply a standard blue scotch plastic tape, of 19mm width. He stuck his blue line always horizontally at the height of 130cm and ran it across both art works, non-art objects and all surfaces of the exhibition space.\footnote{Paweł Polit, ‘The Rhetoric of the blue line’, pp. 255-56.} In this way, his line included all that was in the gallery space, sometimes even embracing human bodies. As he explained, ‘for me a wall was an object and a subject. It exists, it is important, as well as the ceiling and floor? Them, too!’\footnote{Edward Krasiński as cited in Blake Stimson, ‘Krasiński and totality’, in Świtke, p. 101.}

Thus, Krasiński’s art recognized the subjectivity of walls, ceilings and everyday objects, everything that conventionally constituted the invisible background for an art
exhibition. For Stimson, it was in this fact that the politics of blue line lay. Namely, he argues that the blue tape draws attention to previously hidden reality, it unmasks the reality of what it has been stuck onto and it strips away the ideological scrim that obscures the truth. At the same time the artist accentuated the elements’ interconnectedness and how they need not be isolated. Krasiński’s blue line could be seen, in his view, as a kind of antecedent of Solidarity’s red line or an after-effect of Lissitzky’s red square. The concept of sociality connects Krasiński’s blue line with the Solidarity movement. He writes:

Krasiński’s line gives us a principle of sociality that is not that of structured socialist systematicity, not that of spontaneous post-socialist solidarity, nor that of competitive consumer market relations. The socialist ideal of sociality.

In this sense, we could see the blue line as demarcating and expanding the utopian space of sociality - a sociality that was constructed differently to the one defined by the state socialist system in Poland.

The blue line can also be analysed in relation to its other qualities: for instance, its colour blue by penetrating different surfaces overlays it with symbolic meaning, or an antidote for omnipresence of red in public space, or can be symbolic of universalism. For Anke Kempkes, the blue line transforms things into ready-mades and could be interpreted as ‘an early agent of institutional critique, a declamer of high-and-low hierarchies of culture, of the construction of history, memory and social interaction’. Seen from this perspective, its function is to disrupt hierarchies, a hierarchy between art work and non-art work, a practice that was characteristic of neo-avantgarde art works, as we have seen in the case of Buren's work.

The questions about the relationship between the physical and the social dimensions of the gallery space, space in general, and the nature of people’s entanglement in social contexts were also explored in installations and performances realised by Krzysztof Jung in the late 1970s. In 1977 Krzysztof Jung built inside Repassage over the period of ten

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245 Stimson, p.98.
246 Ibid., p.105.
247 See ‘Discussion of the Papers by Sabine Breitwieser and Blake Stimson’, in Świtek, pp. 116-125.
days an installation entitled Public Tangling of Space (Publiczne Motanie Przestrzeni). The project constituted a structure made of threads running from different parts of the physical gallery space and crossing over into a chaotic, web-like form. The public visiting the gallery could have observed the gradual process of developing this spatial form. As the artist explained later in the catalogue, the structure ended up having an aggressive character, even if it was not intended as to take control over the physical space but simply to meet a human being. Consequently, its final form was determined by taming its growth, so that its aggressive character would not disable meeting with another human. Later, however, as Jung explains, in an unforeseen event, the spatial structure was mutilated by the idea strange to its nature and reduced to function as a dead decoration.

The installation was conceptualised so as to symbolize a struggle between nature and man - a natural space and a space constructed as a result of human activity. The latter expressed symbolically by the structure of threads, revealed the richness of the concept of space and a construction code that is difficult to decipher. Jung appropriated the inside of Repassage in a way that broke with the traditional conception of the gallery space, mainly by incorporating the gallery’s surfaces as a medium for his art project. The ever-expanding webs hindered the access to his work inside, as at some point the structure would not have allowed the visitors to freely move around the gallery. Also, Public Tangling was a transitory and processual work that challenged the traditional conceptions of an art work and an art exhibition. For Sitkowska, Jung’s building of webs had a metaphorical and spiritual dimension referring to human existence. For Paweł Leszkowicz the artist’s ‘threading’ (‘nitkowanie’) had a communicative function as threads were transmitting emotions and impressions and emphasised emotional exchange between the actors. As he also rightly points out, in Public Tangling of Space Jung demonstrated space in its multiplicity and mystery. The web of threads exposed what normally is not visible and one does not notice, but also, it could be interpreted in the political sense as signs of one’s entanglements in a system.

250 Sitkowska, p.10.
Jung’s preoccupation with the relationship between material and social dimensions of space, and in this way, its physical and symbolic aspects found also its expression in the performance *Metamorphosis* (Przemiana) realized in March 1978. During this event, the dark space of the gallery was entered by invited guests who sat in a circle of chairs. Next, a naked person appeared and lay down in the middle of the circle in a foetal position and the artist began to spread threads around and across the participants and the naked body. The strange spider’s web produced by Jung physically connected to each other the people sitting in the circle, the artist, and the person in the centre. As Jung described the process: ‘We were living fragments of a system which with every minute was getting an increasingly dangerous expression - in the centre a naked, vulnerable, single victim; around him a number of dressed, non-anonymous viewers in an uncertain state, while we were all incapacitated, linked with the victim and each other’. When the artist suddenly disappeared, the naked man tried to free himself from threads and each time he attempted to move, his movements pulled the web that was connecting his body with those of the guests. Since the latter were tied with the person inside, they could have physically felt each movement of the ‘victim’. Thus, the performer and the audience became part of a painful process in which an unknown person tried to free himself of himself, and of the others.

The performances that incorporated the male naked body were characteristic of Jung’s artistic practices realised in *Repassage* in the late 1970s. As Leszkowicz writes, the artist’s shows introduced body art and homoeroticism to the socialist countercultural circles, which was especially noteworthy, since homosexuality and even the male body were taboos in the official PRL culture. On a metaphorical level, the performance could be read as referring to the entanglement of an individual in complex interdependent physical and social structures which, as in this instance, restrict their, and others’, independence and freedom. But also, similarly to *Public Tangling of Space*, the work subverted the conventional concept of the gallery space by transforming it into a stage on

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253 Leszkowicz, p. 189.
254 Ibid., p.184.
which the performance is enacted and which after the event leaves no material traces of artistic activity.

3.3. Gallery as a socially ‘lived’ space - strategies of resistance, and compliance to the socialist order

The socially ‘lived’ space, which this section is concerned with, constituted a dimension of the gallery’s construction that embraced various social strategies and rituals produced by organisers and artists and which subverted the socialist order prevailing outside in a number of ways. Crucially, in the context of a centrally-planned and managed culture industry in the PRL, the organisers of Galeria and Repassage managed to produce their own social networks of like-minded and non-conformist artists and intellectuals. These social networks connected the gallery with other alternative artists and galleries in Poland, and beyond. What is more, the gallery came into being and then functioned on a self-organisational basis by determining its own directors or artistic programmes, and which, again, constituted a challenge to the centrally-managed official exhibition system in Poland. Lastly, the gallery also offered space of a certain degree of personal freedom, where the stifling norms of the official social and artistic life could be temporarily suspended and inside the gallery the artists and visitors could cultivate different social rituals and ways of relating to each other. Yet, this section also sheds light on the fact that those social practices were contextualised in the socio-political realities of post-Stalinism where state control measures such as censorship and surveillance were in operation and in some cases restricted the gallery’s activities. Similarly, the gallery was bound to the socialist system through administrative and financial dependencies of the socialist organisations such as the Socialist Students’ Union and the Ministry of Art and Culture which, also, often compromised artists’ freedoms.

The artists who gathered around the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 had managed to form social ties with other like-minded artists that were loosely bound and not regulated by the officially defined criteria such as membership of the socialist organizations or the Artists’ Union. In general, the social space produced by the gallery was determined by the artists’ personal networks and, for instance, Galeria’s social space was too largely
determined by extensive informal networks which Freisler produced. The latter can also be seen as having had its origins in many art symposia and pleinairs that were organised in the late 1960s and 1970s in Poland. Many artists who later co-operated with Freisler’s gallery participated and met him during the Third and Fourth Biennale of Spatial Forms (Biennale Form Przestrzennych) organised in 1969 and 1971 by the Laboratorium Sztuki Galeria Elblag. Those events had an experimental character with a focus on conceptual art and brought together many progressive artists from different Polish cities. Many of the participating artists later constituted the core of the Polish neoavantgarde movement in the 1970s such as, for instance, Włodzimierz Borowski, Ewa and Andrzej Partum, KwieKulik, or Anastazy Wiśniewski. The events established also a close relationship between Galeria El and its director Gerhard Kwiatkowski and Freisler’s Galeria that lasted for many years to come.

The activities of the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 were also closely bound to Warsaw Art School located just over the road. In fact, the majority of artists involved with Galeria and Repassage were graduates or current students of sculpture at Academy of Fine Art (ASP). Thus, the gallery from its beginnings constituted an important networking point that linked young artists and art students interested in experimental practices without ideological engagement. Because of the restrictive character of the official art platforms, the gallery became a site where the ‘otherness’ of those students could be enacted and become a productive force even if from within a marginal position. Nearly all of the gallery’s actors were former students of two prominent professors at the ASP, namely, the architect and designer Oskar Hansen and the sculptor Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz. Both were known for their unorthodox methods of teaching and progressive attitudes to artistic practice. Grzegorz Kowalski, former student and assistant to both Hansen and Jarnuszkiewicz, recalls that Jarnuszkiewicz was always open to new ideas and respected students’ individuality. Jarnuszkiewicz also encouraged his students to take courses with Oskar Hansen, which became fundamental to the formation of their artistic worldview. Oskar Hansen through his Open Form Theory promoted the ideas of open art works which were able to exist in a new context, time, and relationship to the changing reality. The

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255 Ronduda emphasises Freisler’s dominant position in Galeria, Sztuka Polska, pp. 45-46
theory also promoted viewers’ participation in creative processes, as well as individual interpretations. These artistic ideas and worldviews ran contrary to the monosemic preferences for the official socialist art and found later expression in many art projects shown *Galeria* and *Repassage*. 257 Other artists, such as Freisler and Andrzej Dłużniewski, were former students of Marian Wnuk who was the Dean of the ASP in the 1950s and 1960s and was known for his support for avant-garde art and the foundation of the experimental design unit the *Art-Research Workshops (Zakłady Artystyczno-Badawcze)* at the ASP. 258 Undoubtedly, the presence of non-conformist and progressive lecturers at the ASP had a considerable impact on the emergence of the alternative artistic space produced in *Galeria*, *Repassage*, and beyond. To follow their artistic explorations and experimentations pursued during their studies, the artists looked for spaces outside the official venues and their restrictions, and the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street constituted an attempt to realise them.

The gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 was from its beginnings an artist-run gallery which in the context of the centrally-managed art and exhibition system was unconventional and part of the phenomenon of *galerie autorskie* in the 1970s. As such, the artists themselves were responsible for running the gallery and for its artistic profile, rather than administrative-managerial staff appointed by the state patron organisation. Accordingly, for instance, the process of appointing new directorship of the gallery followed a self-organisational model and, for instance, the 1973 nomination of new directors of the gallery illustrates the selection process as determined by artists themselves rather than imposed and regulated by the Students’ Union, later, too, the artists determined changes within the gallery using their own agency.

In a similar vein, using their own initiative *Repassage* produced a social network that connected the gallery with other alternative art spaces of a similar profile operating in various Polish cities. 259 The gallery organized in October 1973 out of Włodzimierz Borowski’s initiative a series of exhibitions *Review of Documentation of Independent*

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257 Hansen created the utopian idea of Open Form which was a skeleton of new reality, it was to expose an individual as integral part of society, designed to fulfil basic needs and desires of an individual which, based on its premises, did not contradict official ideology but was utopian and not loaded with political concessions, see Sitkowska, pp.11-12.


Galleries (Przegląd dokumentacji galerii niezależnych). Repassage invited 17 galleries from 8 cities in Poland and put the gallery space at their disposal. Each gallery could present its activities in individual shows lasting for 2 days and display the documentation of their activities, which mainly consisted of photos, catalogues, and other materials. Elżbieta Cieślar described the reasoning behind the organization of the series of art events as an attempt to produce a networking platform that would bypass the official framework:

It allowed artists and people who organized artistic life independently from the CBWA (Central Art Exhibitions Bureau) and other state ‘centres of command’, to get to know each other closer. It also constituted another act of some kind of artistic integration and the beginning of many interesting collective initiatives. One of those was Repasaż Miejski.

The organization of the show was also a strategic move on the part of the directors. Thanks to the exhibition series, the recently founded Repassage became better known within the artistic communities. In fact, in the following years Repassage co-operated with a number of galleries, for instance, Studio Kompozycji Emocjonalnej, Galeria 80x140 or Biuro Poezji Partum. Nevertheless, Ronduda still argues that Repassage had a more local character than Freisler’s Galeria.

The show, however, exposed also an explicit division within the Warsaw alternative art scene, which ran, more or less, between Galeria Foksal on one side and other independent galleries on the other. It also illustrates that both galleries built their alternative practice based on different strategies. While Repassage reached out to create a network of alternative galleries, Foksal isolated itself in the construction of their own alternative identity. As Ronduda wrote, the tension between Galeria and Foksal was noticeable from the very beginnings. Its first traces could be found in Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki where Foksal’s art theoreticians Turowski and Wiesław Borowski attacked the conceptual framework behind Laboratorium Sztuki Galeria EL. In response to this attack

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260 In the Review participated following galleries: Warsaw- Repassage, Remont, Współczesna and Biuro Poezji Partum; Wrocław - Galeria Szuki Aktualnej, Galeria Tak i Nie, Ośrodek Sztuki, Studio Kompozycji Emocjonalnej, Galeria EM; Kraków- Pi, Krzysztofory; Łódź- 80x140, Galeria Adres, Galeria A4; Poznań- Akumulatory 2; Białystok- Galeria Sztuki Aktualnej “Znak”; Katowice- Galeria Katowice; Elbląg- Galeria EL;


263 Ronduda on the tension between both galleries in Sztuka Polska, p. 192.
many artists such as Andrzej Partum, Paweł Freisler and Anastazy Wiśniewski wrote biting and ironic commentaries in Notatnik which referred to the ‘isolating’ strategies of Foksal. According to Foksal did not take part in the Review, nor in any later events that had an integrating character.

The conflict was intensified in 1975 when Wiesław Borowski wrote an article to the official culture magazine Kultura, in which he attacked a large group of artists connected to galleries such as Repassage, Wspólnoczesna, Biuro Poezji Partum by calling them a ‘pseudo-avantgarde’ and criticizing their pretentious character, banality and lack of originality. Repassage’s directors replied to the editors of Kultura in a letter proposing that ‘Central Commission for Assessment of Avant-garde Artists’ should be appointed. In a mocking tone, they challenged the notions of artistic authority and aesthetic judgement assumed by the Foksal’s art critic. They argued that someone who appoints him- or herself as the only judge of what is and what is not art, should be laughed at, because no one in the world is entitled to ‘final and infallible judgments’.

The series of shows made the gallery and its activities more visible in the public space. The events were commented on, retrospectively, in the official art magazines such as Sztuka, Biuletyn ZPAP and Biuletyn Informacyjny PSP. Anda Rottenberg in her article on the phenomenon of artist galleries in Poland, published in February 1974 in Biuletyn ZPAP, referred to the exhibition series as an attempt to break the social isolation of the galleries and within the art community. She paid credit to Repassage for the extensive documentation that they managed to gather and which she could have used to describe the phenomenon. In this way, the article became a promotion for the gallery and recognition of its efforts.

However, Magda Hniedziewicz in an article on ‘small galleries’ in the 1974 issue of Biuletyn Informacyjny PSP criticized the organizational aspects of the show and its failure to integrate the environment. In the review, she pointed out to a lack of difference.

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267 See Bożena Kowalska ‘Notatnik’, Sztuka, 3 (1974), s.56.
268 Rottenberg, pp.74-83.
between the artistic profiles of participating galleries and a lack of challenging artistic positions. She wrote:

There was no single gallery that presented a different position to the avant-garde one, which, too often, is based on copying ideas of conceptualism more or less successfully. This mass-produced avant-garde is at the moment a very convenient artistic position. Since it is not officially recognised, its practitioners did not risk being accused of conformism.269

Her negative evaluation of all galleries presented during the Review series was then compared with the activities of Galeria Foksal, which, for her, was the only gallery that formulated programmes and theoretical premises and presented a coherent theory. The art critic missed out on the important point of recognising that Repassage deliberately, as they often emphasised in their catalogues, avoided programmes and theoretical statements. Hniedziewicz’s article participated in the conflict and not only contributed to the division amongst the galleries, but also reflected the interest of the magazine, which was an official publication of Fine Art Studios (PSP), the very same institution that Foksal was administratively and financially linked to.

The associate artists and organisers of Galeria and Repassage have often referred to the gallery as a space where they could practise freedom in a personal and artistic sense, that was not possible otherwise within the socialist public space. For instance, Grzegorz Kowalski, an artist involved in the gallery’s activities throughout its 11 years long life span, described the gallery as a place where people could cultivate various forms of ‘freedom’, mostly due to the gallery’s marginal position in relation to the official artistic life. He described the different mode of conduct which was possible inside but lacking from socialist life outside as follows:

People entered the dark and warm inside space of the gallery to find out that they can say and do what they want, that their anonymity will be respected. [...] In the gallery a ‘neutral terrain’ was designated [...] there was an encouraging, friendly atmosphere. And the gallery was open to everyone. Of course, not everyone entered and even those who entered were not ready to take up the offer. Some are not interested in such a personal expression, for some it is unavailable. But those who

used “neutral terrain” could have made use of this freedom for a moment and go back to their everyday matters afterwards.\textsuperscript{270}

In fact, the way in which Kowalski described the rituals inside the gallery, resembles Foucault’s description of heterotopias as being, simultaneously, open and accessible for the public and closed because operating hidden exclusions for those who were not able to use this place for a ‘personal expression’.\textsuperscript{271} Thus, the gallery created a platform for enacting ‘otherness’ in terms of behaviour and identity which had to be suppressed in the public space under state socialism.

The artists also stressed that \textit{Repassage} was about producing a different space for everyday social interactions. In there they could have temporarily suspended the repressive order outside by cultivating different rituals and way of relating to each other. A key aspect of such social practice was the ritual of drinking tea inside the gallery, as the Cieślars recollected. They offered free ‘Yunan’ tea, the main tea brand available in Poland, to every guest regardless of whether they were strangers who just popped in or regular visitors. For the artists, the ceremony of drinking tea had a special meaning as the ritual could be shared by strangers who were given an opportunity to drink together without any other purpose rather than to spend time together. These meetings and conversations over tea proved to the Cieślars of how much ‘an autonomous individual is bound in his/her existence with other human beings’.\textsuperscript{272} Thus, the directors recognized that the social space that they produced in the gallery was also part of the social structures outside. And yet, their ‘practice of staying together’\textsuperscript{273} seem to have been founded on a different notion of ‘sociality’ than the one produced by the socialist regime which was ideologically conditioned and bureaucratically controlled. What is more, the artists subverted the traditional function of an art gallery as a space where one comes to ‘consume’ art, through the social rituals that emphasised social interactions between artists and guests as the primary aim.

\textsuperscript{271} Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
The artists attempted to resist the external order and operate on their own ‘private’ terms in the gallery, however, the heterotopian space of Repassage still remained linked to the socialist order outside by a set of relations. The latter comprised of administrative and financial dependencies, as well as being subjected to censorship and surveillance by the state security service which, undoubtedly, influenced and at times compromised the practices inside and outside the gallery. The physical space belonged to and was managed by the authorities of the Students’ Union who gave the artists permission to use it for free in 1972.²⁷⁴ This in turn meant that the gallery’s directors had formal obligations to adhere to administrative duties and formalities. As such the directors had to regularly present plans for future activities and yearly programmes, which then needed to get an approval of the Students’ Union representatives.²⁷⁵ The gallery relied on financial support partly from the Students’ Union and from the Ministry of Culture and Art. Accordingly, the directors had to submit also yearly budget plans to their patrons in order to fund gallery’s activities.²⁷⁶ As Elżbieta Cieślar recounts they used to receive around 1300 złoty a month, which, at the time, was an equivalent of the monthly wages for a part-time cleaning job.²⁷⁷ However, since the yearly budget amounted to around 2200zł, the directors also regularly applied for an additional subsidy from the Ministry of Culture and Art to cover the rest of costs. The Ministry subsidised the publication of catalogues but, as Elżbieta Cieślar described, after the culture officials realised what kind of activities they financed, they stopped the additional support. Indeed, the gallery’s catalogues had to pass content control of the institution The Main Office for Control of Press, Publications and Plays (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk) which despite the general relaxation of cultural-politics in the 1970s still played a crucial role in repressing critical voices against state socialism in the public space.²⁷⁸

Thus, the gallery’s links to socialist power were manifold and the Repassage directors described the presence of repressive power, which they experienced ‘everyday’ as follows:

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²⁷⁴ A written application for a permission stored in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP.
²⁷⁵ A typewritten programme of events stored in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
²⁷⁶ A typewritten document listing the budget as seen in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
²⁷⁸ The Black Book of Polish Censorship constitutes the best document of the extent of censorship in the PRL.
Administrative power was constituted by the presidium of the SZSP and its respective representatives. The State Police was present outside, one policeman outside the gallery’s windows, other standing on street corners. Their presence was more oppressive than that of the censorship, which only intervened in the catalogues. Informants and invigilators changed all the time.279

Elżbieta Cieślar also remarked in an interview in 2002 that, in fact, the authorities wanted to close down the gallery on a number of occasions, but there always was public opinion, which the state had to take into consideration. As she recalled, in the times of real danger she used to phone a few influential people, for instance, Erna Rosenstein, Stefan Morawski or Janusz Bogucki.280 Those would call others and in this way a few hundred would turn up for the next exhibition opening. Consequently, the directors could continue running the gallery. Also, according to the participants’ accounts discussed in Chapter 5, the state security intervened on a number of occasions in the gallery activities, when they were moved outside the physical gallery space onto the street.281

These are, however, the artists’ accounts that, unfortunately, could not be verified against examination of state security files. In fact, the examination of the SB archives in Warsaw in relation to the activities of Galeria and Repassage and associate artists have not concluded with many findings. The majority of artists had individual passport folders (akta paszportowe) and, in fact, in the case of Elżbieta Cieślar in the 1980s she was assessed as running hostile activities against political interests of the PRL and was categorised as ‘unwanted person in the PRL’.282 The accessed files provided some evidence of surveillance measures directed against such Warsaw-based artists involved with Galeria and Repassage as Marek Konieczny and Przemysław Kwiec within the operational case ‘Letraset’.283 This operational case along with two other involving Wrocław artists, were discussed and interpreted by Ronduda and Jakimczyk but did not present much relevance or any information on Galeria/Repassage.284 However, the recovered documentation demonstrated the extent of surveillance of state art institutions in Warsaw such as the

280 ‘Repassage. Z Elżbietą Cieślar rozmawia Jacek Kasprzycki’, p.40; Rosenstein, Morawski and Bogucki ran other galleries and were influential figures within the Warsaw’s art scene.
281 See Chapter 5 for analyses of various events.
282 IPN Warszawa BU 01228/874
283 IPN Warszawa BU 01322/158/J (3637/2)
ZPAP, the PSP and Art Schools where many operational contacts were planted.\textsuperscript{285} What is more, the state security documentation on Warsaw ASP shows that some of the lecturers represented non-conformist, or even openly critical, attitude towards the Party and how the authorities used the method of degradation by removing them from important positions.\textsuperscript{286} In fact, these very methods were used against Emil Cieślar when he was dismissed from his lecturer’s position at Warsaw ASP in 1977.\textsuperscript{287}

3.4. Conclusion

The gallery at Krakowskie Przedmieście 24 can be seen as functioning as a heterotopian counter-space which consciously positioned itself outside the centralised exhibition system in the PRL. As such the organisers and associate artists sought to deconstruct inside the gallery the socialist order which imposed on them ideological and institutional frameworks in their artistic and social life. They attempted to resist the official discourse on art and the function of an art gallery by constructing discursively their own artistic space and publishing those ideas in magazines and catalogues. Similarly, various artistic and social practices challenged the conventional concept of the gallery and appropriated space given to them by the socialist authorities in ways that run against the official premises. In general, their practices encouraged an anti-authoritarian, if not anarchist, stance towards the political reality as well as independent thinking which in the context of post-Stalinist state that promoted political conformism gains political resonance. Also, the artists often emphasised their will to produce a different concept of ‘sociality’ which would not be constructed along the lines of the Marxist-Leninist ideology but instead would refer to ‘natural institutions of human relations’.\textsuperscript{288} In that sense, through various spatial dimensions, they undermined values and fundamental basis of socialist order by introducing a different discourse, appropriating the gallery space in own critical ways and by self-organising and forming unofficial social networks, independently of the state.

\textsuperscript{285} Ronduda, ‘Neoawangarda w teczkach SB’, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{286} IPN Warszawa BU 0365/111/3
\textsuperscript{287} Emil Cieślar, in an interview with Aneta Jarzębska, April 2012, Die, France.
However, the gallery was also caught in the socialist system by a set of relations that compromised its activities and at times made their function indeed ambiguous. As a heterotopian space, it also performed, to some degree, a stabilising role in the context of Polish state socialism. Namely, the fact that Polish socialist authorities tolerated the existence of an alternative gallery with such a contesting profile in the centre of its capital raises the question whether this was not a result of deliberate political tactics of the Polish party officials. Perhaps the latter had allowed the construction of such parallel, marginal art worlds that served as necessary ‘safety valves’ and allowed deviant artistic groups to have limited freedom so that the overall order could be maintained. Analysed from this point of view, Repassage could be seen as reinforcing the socialist system and, in fact, co-creating the myth of the liberal cultural politics under Gierek’s leadership.
Chapter 4

*Galerie Arkade* - a counter-space ‘between political obedience and artistic freedom’

Similarly to *Galeria* and *Repassage*, the East Berliner gallery *Arkade* has gained recognition for its historical significance amongst scholars and in German art journalism. However, in spite of this recognition, it has not been discussed and interpreted in any publication of significant length. For instance, Gabriele Muschter and Klaus Staeck have described *Galerie Arkade* as ‘legendary’, ‘unique’ and one of the most important galleries in the GDR, mostly, due to its director’s Klaus Werner choice of artistic programme featuring non-conformist and officially neglected GDR artists. Barbara Barsch recognises Werner mostly for creating in *Arkade* his own exhibition margin and following his own ideas about an exhibition space in the GDR context, as well as for helping young and marginalised artists in gaining some public recognition. For Bernd Lindner, the gallery broadened the artistic spectrum in the GDR but its history demonstrates also the limits against which the mediation of modern and non-conformist art in the official spaces was set. Eugen Blume compares *Arkade* with *Clara Mosch* gallery in Karl-Marx-Stadt and recognises Werner’s input in sharing knowledge and ideas about Western art movements with other artists and for giving space to the first performance in a public gallery in the GDR – Gregor-Torsten Schade’s *Das Schwarze Frühstück*. Yet, Blume also criticises the tableau character of such events in the isolated and conservative GDR context.

Indeed, *Arkade* run by Klaus Werner between 1973 and 1981 on Strausberger Square in central East-Berlin became a very important point on the map of cultural dissent in the GDR of the 1970s. The gallery’s activities were especially interesting, since Arkade had an ambiguous position due to its official status in the GDR as a sales gallery.

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289 Klaus Werner used this description when referring to the GDR artist Fritz Cremer; see Klaus Werner, ‘Lebenslauf und berufliche Entwicklung’, in Gabriele Muschter (ed. by) and Klaus Werner, *Klaus Werner: Für die Kunst* (Köln: Walther König, 2009), p.269.
292 Lindner, pp.228-29.
293 Blume, p.735.
(Verkaufsgalerie) belonging to, first, the Fine Artists’ Association (Genossenschaft bildender Künstler) and, later, to the State Art Trade (Staatlicher Kunsthandel). The gallery enjoyed, indeed, a considerable public exposure in the official press and art journalism but it also meant that at times Werner had to compromise and follow the official directives. Thus, one of the objectives of this chapter is to take a closer look at Werner’s balancing act between adhering to the institutional duties and taking risks, for instance, by including controversial art and artists in its programme. Although Galerie Arkade has been briefly described in terms of its non-conformist exhibition programme and discursive subversion in catalogues and opening speeches, the examples of important solo-exhibitions organised there such as those of Robert Rehfeldt and Gregor-Torsten Schade, or the 1978 mail-art show have never been discussed in terms of their artistic and cultural-political significance. What is more, the gallery had produced a social space that extended beyond Berlin, and even East Germany and co-created informal social networks that ran fairly independently despite the state’s control measures.

As such this chapter seeks to question first, how Arkade’s subversive character was produced based on examples of artistic, exhibition and social strategies produced inside and how effective they were in undermining the socialist order and second, what the socio-cultural function of the gallery within the East German post-Stalinist system was, and third, how the activities of Arkade reflect upon the cultural-political context of Honecker’s era and how the latter determined the fate of Arkade.

Accordingly, I have divided this chapter into three sections, which deal with different dimensions and types of subversive practices produced in the gallery between 1973 and 1981. The first section introduces the gallery’s physical space and two examples of artistic practices that transgressed the traditional model of an art exhibition in the GDR and incorporated the gallery’s material dimension into art projects. The second section focuses on the discursively constructed gallery space in Arkade’s catalogues and the exhibition opening speeches that introduced a discourse that did not rely on socialist interpretations and often contextualised East German artists within the international art history and tradition. The events and controversies surrounding Robert Rehfeldt’s exhibition in 1975 offers here a good insight into subversive strategies aimed at undermining the official mental space. Similarly, the comparison of catalogue text and press releases on the mail art exhibition in 1978 exposes Werner’s attempts at introducing
a different art historical discourse into the gallery’s publication. The third section analyses the social space that Werner and other artists produced and the position and importance of Arkade within the network of alternative art spaces in the GDR, and beyond. This section sheds more light on Robert Rehfeldt’s solo-show in 1975 and the mail art exhibition organised in Arkade in 1978 in order to demonstrate how they co-produced and participated in informal artists’ networks connecting East German mail-artists and the international movement. In the conclusion to this chapter I refer back to Foucault’s theory of heterotopia and its function in relation to the remaining space as a means of helping me to understand Arkade’s role within the socialist system in the GDR of the 1970s.

4.1. *Arkade’s facade as a site of artistic subversion*

This section focuses on the material dimension of the gallery space and the ways in which the director and the artists used and appropriated it. Artistic projects discussed below intervened in the physical realm of the gallery, its material environment, which belonged to the socialist state, and made symbolic use of its objects in ways that undermined the official order. Gregor-Torsten Schade’s performance in the gallery’s windows and Henrik Grimmling’s installation on the gallery’s facade questioned and, thus, broke with the conventionality of the gallery space as constructed and promoted by the official institutional framework. Both artists challenged the conception of the ‘white cube’ exhibition space by incorporating windows into their art projects and by appropriating them as a communication medium. In addition, Klaus Werner appropriated the green door that led to his office in Arkade by cultivating a tradition of asking artists and guests involved in the gallery’s life to sign it. Over the years the door became covered with names of various East and West German artists and constituted documentation of the people whose paths crossed with Werner’s and who contributed to the production of the gallery space.294 In this way the door became a physical symbol of the social network that connected the gallery with various artists and other art spaces in the GDR, and beyond.

The gallery itself had a central location within East Berlin as it was situated in one of the buildings on Strausberger Square on the *Karl-Marx-Allee*. *Karl Marx Allee*, formerly

294 Jan Winkelmann as cited in Muschter and Werner, p.296.
called Stalinallee, ran along nearly 2 km of the street, a monumental project of socialist architecture, which became a symbol of GDR classical modernity and, thus, a political statement. The Strausberger Square was the central point of this project and right here Arkade functioned in the ground floor space with a characteristic architectural feature of an arcade with three arches on the building’s facade. Inside the arches three over 3m high windows provided a good visual access to what was happening inside the gallery space. Thus, the location and the architectural features made the gallery a well-exposed and visible place in a busy representational area of East Berlin, and by the same token, the subversive artistic practices hosted in there were able to become more publicly visible.

Inside, the material dimension of the gallery constituted a rather conventional ‘white cube’ space with white walls, floor and ceiling space, and three large windows separating and connecting the gallery with Strausberger Square. For the majority of exhibitions this space was used in a very conventional way by showing art works hung up on the walls. However, on the occasion of Schade’s solo-show in 1979, the windows were used in a new different way. In this case, the artist staged a performance Black Breakfast (Schwarzes Frühstück) in one of the windows of the gallery. His performance involved him eating a black-coloured breakfast while being all dressed up in black and sitting on a black chair by a black table. As photographic records demonstrate, the performance was observed by the audience gathered on the pavement outside the gallery’s window on the Strausberger Square. According to Blume, who worked on a placement during his studies in Arkade, Black Breakfast constituted the first official performance in the GDR. For him, to show performance art in an official gallery in the GDR was an oppositional act against the socialist system: ‘[…] In a political system, such as the GDR, the genuine introduction of performance art meant to establish a second culture, which, inevitably, stood in conflict with the first official culture und, in this way, against the whole system […]’. Similarly, for Rehberg to pursue performance and action art under circumstances of repression and restriction of freedom, as it prevailed in the GDR, constitutes an act of courage. Indeed, considering the fact that Schade’s performance was enacted in the front window on one of

296 Blume, p.735.
297 Ibid.
the busiest squares in East Berlin, while for the socialist authorities performance and art actions remained a taboo because they represented Western ‘enemy’ culture, the event certainly carried a subversive meaning. But also, its unpredictability, temporality and intangibility went against the myth of monosemia that could guarantee singularity of meaning and was expected of cultural products produced under state socialism.\textsuperscript{299}

The choice of black for the performance could also be seen as destabilising the omnipresence of red, symbolic of communist ideology, and as introducing a multiplicity of meaning since black can be a symbol of a variety of concepts ranging from negativity and death, to anarchy, protection and mystery. As the artist explains, the performance corresponded to his Black Drawings displayed during the exhibition inside the gallery. Both had existential meaning and referred to the ambivalence of human condition. As he added, through his artistic practice he wanted to produce a different formal culture.\textsuperscript{300} The choice of the gallery’s window for his performance art is of great importance, too. By situating the event in the window, thus, in-between the inside and the outside, Schade allowed for the dialogue with the outside, the general public. The material window became here a mediator between the artist inside and the audience outside while blurring this very boundary by bringing the outside inside and the inside outside. The window symbolises simultaneous state of openness and restriction and is characteristic of Foucauldian heterotopias. Accordingly, it became a medium of contact and communication with the outside world and transgressed the boundary between the artist and the outside, and counteracted the gallery’s isolation imposed by its material dimensions and by the political context. At the same, it also emphasised the state of separateness of artistic context and of the gallery from the everyday life.

Similarly, in 1980 Hans Hendrik Grimmling used the facade of the gallery and covered its windows with a dark coloured banner with a citation written in white that referred to the subject of his exhibition in Arkade entitled \textit{Les oiseux} (\textit{The birds}).\textsuperscript{301} The banner said: ‘..Don’t go too far to the meadows, only the birds stay there...’ (‘...Geh nicht

\textsuperscript{299} As Bathrick argues, ‘artistic dissidence in the GDR often began not as a philosophical or political challenge to the ideological principles of Marxist-Leninism but as a sometimes-unintended fall into polysemic modes of address’; see Bathrick, p. 16.


\textsuperscript{301} \textit{H. H. Grimmling 1980}, exhibition catalogue (Berlin: Galerie Arkade, 1980).
zu weit in die Wiesen, da bleiben nur die Flügel...‘). Thus, his use of the facade and the content of the citation could be read as referring to spatial boundaries and to permissions for crossing them. Grimmling took on agency in this context to define the boundary of the gallery’s space and to transgress it by including the outside display windows. The normally transparent glass surfaces of windows were covered and sealed the gallery off from the external context but also accentuated their discursive potential as they became for that moment a medium for communicating the artist’s ideas. In general, both shows could be seen as artists’ attempts to subvert the traditional concept of gallery space which displayed art works on white walls and, instead, used its physical qualities in new ways. Most importantly, the public exposure of the gallery facade in the central site of East Berlin made their shows, potentially, more subversive because of their public visibility.

4.2. Discursively constructed gallery space in Arkade - catalogues and opening speeches.

Arkade was also produced through conceptual representations of gallery space constructed mainly in the exhibition catalogues and opening speeches written by Klaus Werner and other guest contributors. These textual representations supported and mediated to the public a model of artistic and exhibition practice that very often stood in opposition to the official socialist discourse. The analysis of catalogue contributions and transcripts of opening speeches points to a number of strategies that the authors used in order to dissociate themselves from the official discourse on art and construct their own conceptual space. For instance, they avoided engaging with the Socialist Realist rhetoric, made frequent references and connections to Western artistic tradition and art history, introduced textual ambiguity, or, even, interpreted Marxist ideas on art in a different way to the one imposed by the socialist regime.

4.2.1. Alternative spaces for ‘other’ art discourse

Every exhibition, which took place in Arkade, was accompanied by publication of small catalogues of 14,6cmx10cm size, about 40 pages long and printed in 500 to 1000
copies. Klaus Werner was responsible for their contents, and the catalogues usually included a short introduction about artists and their work written by him or friend art historians such as Löffler or Lang. The catalogues also contained black and white and colour reproductions of art works included in the exhibitions. In addition, from 1976 onwards the gallery regularly published small books called *Edition Arkade* with approximately 12 reproductions of artworks by artists chosen and exhibited by Werner. In general, the introductory texts in Arkade’s catalogues presented a subversive potential as they diverged from the official mode of art criticism that could have been found in other official exhibition catalogues and publications, for instance, in *Bildende Kunst*. In general, the latter responded uncritically to the aesthetic codes of Socialist Realism and the official cultural politics. Werner’s introductions did not engage with the official discourse on art in this way, rather they avoided using ideologically informed language and to use the socialist realist framework. But also, Werner often incorporated references to Western aesthetic codes that were demonized and excluded in the official discourse as individualist-bourgeois and anti-socialist.

For instance, Schade’s exhibition catalogue described the artist’s work by making no references to Socialist Realist aesthetics, nor to socialist reality. Instead, Klaus Werner uses terms and comparisons that engage more with Western aesthetic modes or philosophy. For instance, he described Schade's work by referring to Arthur Schopenhauer whose philosophy was generally criticized by Marxists. He wrote: ‘[...] the elegance of the artistic form, the metaphorical suppression of reality, Schopenhauer’s belief in the productivity of genius has not passed his works without leaving a trace [...]’. The gallerist described also the atmosphere of Schade’s art as gloomy with ‘dark image zones’ and ‘submerged-being’, yet, it is not phrased in a critical manner which would have been the case in the official art reviews because of its negative connotations. Similarly, the catalogues accompanying Thomas Ranft’s and Carlfriedrich Claus’ exhibitions in 1976 and 1975, respectively, make references to Western modernist artists such as Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso, while they also used terminology which was not infused with Marxist art.

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302 Both Löffler and Lang were well-known GDR art critics working for the official art and culture magazines who, however, showed some non-conformism by, for example, partaking in Arkade’s activities.

303 See discussion in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.

discourse. For instance, Ranft’s art was described as creating ‘meditative-cosmic metareality’ and as diverging from realist forms.\textsuperscript{305} Since abstract art was seen by the authorities as a fundamentally Western artistic phenomenon, aimed against realism and the socialist cultural politics and having nothing to do with the postulates of ‘Breite and Vielfalt’, so granting recognition to Ranft’s abstractionism carried here a subversive meaning.\textsuperscript{306}

The exhibition catalogue \textit{Seeing & Collecting (Sehen&Sammeln)} printed in 1000 copies in 1978 constituted a short informative introduction to various international artists and art movements of the 20th century. Although Werner declared in the introduction to the catalogue that they wanted to ‘emphasize the importance of realist media and pay greater attention to the socially engaged art’, the publication devoted separate pages to a number of modernist artists practising abstraction such as Paul Klee, Gerhard Richter or Sigmar Polke and also to such Western conceptual artists as Sol LeWitt, Christo or Joseph Beuys.\textsuperscript{307} No official publications like, for example, in the official art magazine \textit{Bildende Kunst} would have discussed those artists around that time. Thus, \textit{Arkade’s} catalogues produced an important discursive space where Western aesthetic codes could be smuggled into the official publications.

Nevertheless, at times the catalogue texts partook of the official discourse and anti-capitalist rhetoric. For instance, in the catalogue published for the exhibition of Klaus Staeck’s works, a West German mail and poster artist, organised in \textit{Arkade} in 1976, the text by Klaus Werner made an explicit attempt to introduce the artist as an anti-capitalist and as preoccupied with unmasking unjust reality in the FRG. As the director wrote, Staeck’s poster ‘demonstrates the class-struggle severity of confrontations against the reactionary right-wing forces in the FRG, the struggle to enforce the fundamental laws, the battle for the preservation of the social and natural environment which is focused on human beings’.\textsuperscript{308} Here, the text engaged with the socialist rhetoric and applied vocabulary typical of the official art history discourse and demonstrates how Werner’s texts sometimes also

\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Thomas Ranft 1978}, exhibition catalogue (Berlin: Galerie Arkade, 1978), not paged.
\textsuperscript{306} BStU MfS HAXX 1726, p.2.
participated, even if to a small extent, in the official ideological discourse. This partaking was surely conditioned by the gallery’s official status but also, in this case, dictated by the fact that Klaus Staeck was the first West-German artist hosted by the gallery, hence, the pressure of justifying his presence and the observation of the show by the state security would have been greater.

In general, Arkade’s catalogues were supposed to have been consulted first, before their publication, with the Board of Association (Vorstand der Genossenschaft) but, as the Stasi sources reported, it happened in very few cases.\textsuperscript{309} The contents of catalogues were pretty much left to Werner which suggests that there were serious shortcomings in the application of control measures over the official publications. The catalogue texts, indeed, were perceived as problematic for the state security officials. Their contents were listed amongst other accusations directed against Klaus Werner in the operational case OV ‘Galerie’. Namely, the closing report of 1982 mentioned Werner’s catalogue texts as not sufficiently ideologically informed and diverging from the rhetoric of socialist realism: ‘[...]The catalogue texts which were written by the main suspect emphasise the will for renunciation of socialist realism as the essential style of »true artistic self-realisation« [...]’.\textsuperscript{310} Thus, this example demonstrates that these textual representations produced a different mental space by inserting difference into the dogmatic official discourse and, in this way, undermined its fundamentals.

Klaus Werner’s opening speeches which he used to make on the inauguration of every new exhibition in his gallery provide further examples of attempts to produce a ‘different’ artistic discourse to the one operating officially outside the gallery. Similarly to the texts in the exhibition catalogues, the speeches are characteristic of an absence of heavily loaded ideological vocabulary, typical of the official art historian narrative in the GDR. They also often implied an element of ambiguity which was especially taken notice of by the Stasi officials. For Barbara Barsch the style of Werner's speeches became freer with time and consciously avoided the socialist rhetoric in order to leave it open for interpretations to the public. She wrote:

\textsuperscript{309} BStU, MfS HAXX/9 1726, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{310} BStU, ZA, MfS AOP 14485/82, Bd.I,BI.1, p.16, as published in Muschter and Werner, p.85.
The style of speeches became freer with time and diverged from the art historical mode of expression that was common in the GDR. His formulations were more independent and more art-related than in the usual GDR diction. Klaus Werner gave no help with interpretations and tried not to classify the protagonists in the accepted style of the Socialist Realist art - this was left open and, in this way, open to the audience. His choice of words was often provocative. He was often ironic... In the exhibitions which he had to include in his programme out of compromise, he used to make hidden sideswipes, but he always supported what he exhibited.311

Indeed, copies of opening speeches hand-written by Klaus Werner and preserved in his archive show that the gallerist made fewer and fewer references to socialist realist aesthetics and, instead, used to often draw connections and comparisons between the GDR and Western artists. The change in their commitment to using ideological language suggested by Barsch could also be read as symbolic and symptomatic of Klaus Werner’s weakening support for the socialist system. It could be also seen as resulting from the 1970s quasi-liberalization of culture in the GDR and advancing deideologisation of the system which made such practices more tolerable for the state.

For instance, in the speech opening the exhibition of the East German mail-artist Robert Rehfeldt in 1975 Werner did not at any point refer to Socialist Realism but rather situated the artist’s work in the tradition of the 1960s international art movements. He stated that Rehfeldt’s oeuvre contained ‘elements of the whole 60s movement in international art’ and underlined the experimental character of his art.312 In a similar vein, the opening speech to Carlfriedrich Claus’ exhibition described his art as sensitive to abstraction, what was, in fact, later attacked in the Stasi reports on the exhibition. The reports interpreted also Werner’s speech as containing hidden commentaries about the institutional takeover of Arkade by the State Art Trade in 1975. The informants read the director’s statement as expressing fears that the gallery’s activity would be hindered by the new patron institution. Werner’s speech was then followed by Lothar Lang’s short talk about Claus’ art. The art critic underlined the Marxist-Leninist basis and dialectic thinking as characteristic of Claus’ work which certainly could legitimise the artist’s work in the state socialist context to some degree. Yet, he also drew on the individuality of his art, which for

311 Barsch, ‘Freiräume betreten’, p.84.
him constituted the first unusual fusion of words and drawings in the GDR, while recognizing similarities in his graphic art with modernist avant-garde artist Paul Klee. For the unofficial informant, reporting about the opening, Lang’s speech was provocative and exaggerated.

Lang’s efforts to encourage the sale of art works expressed in his speech were, however, particularly negatively assessed by the Stasi and seen as taking too much individual initiative. As it is commented in the reports, the state was aware and alarmed by the possible development of an art market that would operate independently. Both Werner’s and Lang’s speeches and their interpretation by the state security demonstrate that even despite some ideological references the speeches could have still encouraged ambiguity in their textual meaning, and were in fact read as contesting by the Stasi informants. Considering the fact that the official discourse aimed at eliminating textual ambiguity, falling into polysemic modes of address was interpreted as lacking a sense of political commitment, thus, as subversive of the official discourse.

4.2.2. Postkarten & Künstlerkarten - discourse on East German mail-art

The Postcards & Artist Cards (Postkarten & Künstlerkarten) exhibition organised in 1978 was accompanied by a rather lengthy catalogue with 96 pages of an ‘art historical documentation’, as stated on its front page, with two introductory texts by Hartmut Pätzke and Klaus Werner. Along with the catalogue two articles by Hartmut Pätzke and Lothar Lang appeared in the official magazine for book art and bibliophilia Marginalien a few months after the show and a press note in the local newspaper Berliner Zeitung at the time of the exhibition. The official VbK magazine Bildende Kunst did not mention the exhibition, not even in the list of upcoming shows, nor did it take up a discussion over the mail-art phenomenon on this occasion. The analysis of the texts which were released during and after the show points out that the texts were concerned with different issues and represented different positions towards the phenomenon of mail-art and, thus, could be seen as producing different art historical discourse. While the two Marginalien articles and

313 BStU MfS HAXX/9 1726, pp.96-101.
314 Ibid.
315 More on myth of monosemia in relation to the GDR, see Bathrick, p.16.
the catalogue texts similarly historicise the phenomenon of mail-art as deriving from the
tradition of postcards, the *Marginalien* articles did not mention the American origins of
mail-art network and, in general, did not engage in any art theoretical questions. Instead,
the Pätzke's and Lang's articles were written almost entirely from a perspective of being
useful for current or potential collectors and, in this way, giving this art phenomenon a very
social purpose. Klaus Werner's catalogue text ‘Künstlerkarten’ represented a different art-
historical perspective to the *Marginalien* articles mainly in the way it made references to
mail-art’s origins in the Fluxus movement in the West and tried to include the GDR mail-
artists in the international mail-art network. Nevertheless, despite the catalogue’s
‘different’ and more open approach to art history, the texts also engage, to a certain extent,
with the socialist discourse, especially with the latter’s view of social history.

Pätzke’s and Lang’s articles in *Marginalien* and Werner’s catalogue contribution on
artist postcards referred to the international phenomenon of mail-art on a considerably
different level of informative and theoretical engagement. In general, the former
mentioned mail-art rather sporadically and did not contextualise it in any specific Western
tradition, while Werner’s text not only referred to the American Correspondence School
and Fluxus movement as precursors of mail art, but also critically engaged with theoretical
premises of the phenomenon. This juxtaposition demonstrates also the strategies used by
Werner to build a conceptual space that undermined the official art historical discourse.

Pätzke’s article in *Marginalien* devoted only three sentences to explaining what
mail-art was and defined it as a new form of artist postcard which found international
popularity in the 1970s and its supporters also in the GDR. It underlined merely that the
artists distributed their own works and were independent of the art market. In terms of
international names and representatives of the movement only the FRG mail-artist Klaus
Staeck was mentioned. Lothar Lang’s short article ‘Kleine Plauderei über das
Künstlerkarten-Sammeln’ that followed Pätzke’s text listed a few names of Western
European mail-artists from the BRD, Holland and France, however, the name of mail-art
was put in strong association mainly with the GDR mail-artist Robert Rehfeldt.316 None of
the articles recognised the American origins of the movement, nor did they explain the

functioning and democratic fundaments of the phenomenon in any great detail. The short note from the editor, which began Pätzke’s article, underlined the socio-political engagement of the GDR mail-artists by listing their subject matters, which were rather typical of ideologically infused official art, for instance, ‘understanding between nations, struggle against terror (f.e. in Chile) or criticism of environmental pollution’.³¹⁷ To aid this statement a selection of exemplary artist postcards was inserted into Pätzke’s article and consisted of images either by mail-artists from socialist countries or with clear socialist messages. What is more, the emphasis in both texts seems to be determined by their purpose of encouraging collecting of artist postcards and underpinning this phenomenon with a social function.

At the very beginning of the catalogue Klaus Werner defined the main interest of Arkade’s exhibition as mostly concerned with the influence of documentary photography and connecting the art postcard tradition with 1970s’ mail-art. Thus, Arkade’s director devoted nearly one third of his catalogue text ‘Künstlerkarten’ to describing how mail-art functions and where it had its roots. At this point his account is especially significant, as it did not follow the usual socialist rhetoric by trying to legitimise the phenomenon merely in relation to the socialist context and ideology. Instead, it defined and described the main premises of mail-art practice as it could have been written in an art historical text in the West at the time. Namely, he described mail-art as a movement which emerged in the West and was later also practised in the socialist countries and as generally based on an image-exchange between young artists. He recognised the American artist Ray Johnson and his New York School of Correspondence founded in 1962 as the precursors of the phenomenon. The conceptual foundations of mail-art are explained by Werner as a new understanding of the institution of post, execution of postcards using new experimental ideas, democratic possibility of participation in the network, and abandoning of common concepts of the quality of work.

His text also engaged with theoretical issues, which problematise the ability of the movement to maintain its countercultural and alternative character as opposed to the established art of bourgeois society. According to Werner the idea of mail-art was rather

limited to ‘resigned defence’ or ‘game-part of the participants’ and that it lacked real involvement. He argues further that mail-art’s anti-establishment and anti-institutional character had no serious political impact and the art remained isolated from the publicity:

Seen in this way mail-art remains, despite its all vitality, all refreshing impartiality and joy of communication, first of all an act of self-understanding. The criticism of establishment and bureaucratic institution moves towards a joke. The public does not participate in the postal exchange and the exhibitions are still treated with suspicion by museums.318

Yet, despite his criticism he accounted for a great deal of examples of Western mail-artists of left-wing orientation who engaged in political subjects such as struggle against the military regime in Chile, America’s involvement in South America or criticism of capitalist commodity fetishism. Thus, his text could be seen as voicing some left-wing views, but from a critical perspective and without the anti-Western rhetoric, typical of the GDR.

4.2.3. Schweinebraden’s attack on the official interpretation of Marxist theories of art

During the opening night of Rehfeldt’s exhibition on the 4th of April 1975 Klaus Werner held a short speech explaining main features of art works on display and the artist’s working methods. As the transcript of Werner’s speech demonstrates, the exhibition organiser emphasised that applying classical terms of an art image may not be best suited for Rehfeldt’s works. Instead, he situated his artistic practice within the 1960s international art movement. For Werner, characteristic of those works was the technology of materials and process of making art, which were nearly as important as the aesthetic aspects. The meaning of Rehfeldt art was not about a direct reflection of mental or interhuman relations in the world but about creating a pseudo-world of abandoned, misused things. Although Werner made a connection between Rehfeldt’s Image Experiments (Bildexperimente) and a realist mode in art, he made it in a form of mere ‘maybe’ suggestion leaving it out for the recipients to decide: ‘[…] however, in testing of media and methods they make preliminary...

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decisions about the doable and usable and maybe in this way they endorse the realist works[...].” 319 His speech underlined the processual and experimental aspects of Rehfeldt’s artistic practice and encouraged use of imagination in receiving his art, which diverged from the monosemic mode of address propagated through Socialist Realism.

However, the exhibition catalogue with an introductory text about Rehfeldt and his art written by Jürgen Schweinebraden caused the biggest controversy. The text opened with a short excerpt from Marx and Engels’ *The German Ideology* in which they elaborate on a concept of art in communism:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour. Even if in certain social conditions, everyone was an excellent painter that would by no means exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between “human” and “unique” labour amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the individual to some definite art, making him exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.; the very name amply expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities. 320

Marx and Engels criticize in this text the capitalist division of labour and how it restricts and subordinates an artist to market relations. The excerpt postulates, instead, the democratization of the aesthetic so that each individual would be able to express themselves in various ways and participate in artistic life as a creator rather than merely a passive consumer. In a classless communist society there would be no concept of a painter, a sculptor, or even no art, as the estrangement of art from life would be overcome. The quotation was provocative considering the fact that socialist state claimed to have overcome the conditions described by Marx and Engels in the excerpt. Instead of an art market like in capitalism, the circulation and distribution of artists’ work was under state

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319 As cited in Muschter and Werner, p. 99.
socialism controlled by the authorities. Thus, the quotation provocatively implies a lack of democratization of the arts as postulated by Marx and claimed by the socialist authorities.

Below the quotation Schweinebraden’s text entitled ‘Early Images’ (‘Frühe Bilder’) describes Rehfeldt’s art as demonstrating courage to the new and the unusual while also embracing the existing order. In reference to Rehfeldt’s experimentation with everyday objects and disposables, Schweinebraden calls for ‘a conscious change of common perspective towards the simple objects surrounding us’.³²¹ He argues that living according to conventions and accustomed behaviours was not adequate to the new, self-confident social position. He defends the artist’s works against the accusations of misinterpreting Marx’ conception of art. For him, the very fact of refusing Rehfeldt’s work a status of art constitutes a proof of a one-sided understanding of art and, in fact, the still operating division between the recipient and producer. He argues that there was no material basis for applying criteria of art and non-art as they constitute an agreement within a society about what art is. Schweinebraden interprets Marx’ ideas on artistic act as an attempt, a need or willingness to break with and, in this way, overcome conventions. The text exposes, by defending Rehfeldt’s art, the very structures and mechanisms of exclusions that Marx and Engels criticise in the quotation. It implies that the latter were still operating in the GDR and, in fact, constitute the reasons why Rehfeldt’s art is accused of an anti-Marxist position.

Further, Schweinebraden refers to a number of Marxist writers and theoreticians in order to argue that they also supported experimentation as fundamental to an artistic act. In his discussion of what constitutes a creative act he quotes Clara Zetkin’s statement of 1925 which, similarly, defines an artistic practice as springing from a chaotic turmoil, experimentation and a search for new solutions. Zetkin called in this citation for a right to free expression according to their own ideal for every artist.³²² Next, Schweinebraden refers to one of Brecht’s quote which postulates that art should provoke the viewer to a creative act. He also includes Robert Filliou’s statement of 1970 where the French conceptual artist argues that art understood as a permanent creation is then everything. Rehfeldt’s art is seen in reference to this citation and in Brechtian sense as a support in

³²² Ibid.
‘developing through artistic activity an active art recipient’. By underlining that Rehfeldt’s position is a socialist one, he questions the ideological foundations on which the socialist cultural officials excluded and marginalised certain artists and types of artistic practices as not socialist enough.323

Accordingly, the state security and cultural officials received the exhibition catalogue very negatively. As documentation reveals, five art scholars from the VbK were employed to work and analyse the catalogue. In general, the main accusations were directed towards Schweinebraden’s interpretation of Marxist ideas on art and ‘misquotation’ of thinkers such as Marx, Zetkin, Lenin and Brecht. The official report on the catalogue text stated:

This article is [...] a political tactlessness. In this article Schw. tries to prove using quotations by Lenin, Marx, Brecht and Zetkin, taken out of context, that the Marxist view of culture was wrong and elevates Robert Rehfeldt, who has been disclosed negatively several times and is known and processed for his negative attitude towards the GDR, as an elite and progressive GDR artist [...]324

Similarly, the director of State Art Trade Dr Pachnicke accused Schweinebraden of infusing the official discourse with petty-bourgeois conceptions of anti-art and dressing them up with Marxist ideas and assessed his definition of art as not merely a protest against the established but against Marxism in general. The reactions of both the Stasi and the Staatlicher Kunsthandel to Schweinebraden’s text demonstrate the essence of the conflict between the non-conformist intellectuals and artists who agreed with Marxist ideas on art but not with their conservative interpretation imposed by the SED party. Schweinebraden’s interpretation of Marxist conceptions of art in socialism carried too much liberalism and anti-establishment attitude and called for breaking with conventions, which of course meant the conventions of the official canon of Socialist Realism. In this way, the exhibition catalogue produced space for a critical voice in the debate on the role of art in state socialism.

The publication of the catalogue was a result of Werner’s taking risks and not showing the catalogue to the district representatives of the SED (Bezirkleitung der SED)

323 Ibid.
324 BStU MfS OV ‘Arkade’ 7030/82 Band 1
before the opening of the exhibition which normally would have happened.\footnote{BSTU Mfs OV HA XX/9 1726, p.101.} Thus, the state security had to take action retrospectively by assigning IMS ‘Verbinder’ who had a legal function in the VbK to arrange a counter-article by an art scholar in the *Bildende Kunst* issue 7/75. The article was supposed to attack Schweinebraden in an ironic way, disprove his theories and damage his authority within his circles. Meanwhile, a controlled discussion on the subject was to be opened in the magazine. The one-page counter-article by the official art historian Dietmar Eisold, entitled ‘Gewogen und zu leicht befunden’ (‘Well-disposed and too lightly judged/considered’), was to ridicule Schweinebraden’s call for breaking with art conventions and his references to Marxist theories.\footnote{Dietmar Eisold ‘Gewogen und zu leicht befunden. Zu einem Katalogtext von Jürgen Schweinebraden’, *Bildende Kunst*, Heft 7/1975, p. 359.} The text accused Schweinebraden of subservience to late bourgeoisie art movements and an attempt to popularise them by legitimising them through references to Marx, Lenin and Brecht. Eisold infused the review with a negative language aimed at diminishing Schweinebraden’s professionalism and questioning his ideological position. In general, the events surrounding the publication of Schweinebraden’s article demonstrate that the state treated the text as politically dangerous to the status quo of the official discourse and wanted to prevent its effect in the public sphere. It also exposes the strategies of the top-down manoeuvring of culture in the GDR and how the state cultural officials dealt with critical voices, but, also, how the critical intellectuals took risks when possible to transgress the state’s boundaries defining what can be said and thought.

4.3. Arkade in the network of non-conformist artists and intellectuals in the GDR

The following section focuses on the social dimension of Arkade’s functioning, its social space, in order to demonstrate that the gallery constituted a key connecting point in the network of cultural dissent in the GDR of the 1970s. Klaus Werner and his gallery participated in creation and expansion of informal artists’ networks in the GDR operating fairly independently of the state structures that imposed the official forms of sociality. The latter bound and, thus, controlled artists and intellectuals within the socialist state
associations and cultural institutions. Due to its, to a large extent, independent functioning, this network extended also to connect with some West German artists and intellectuals, as well as the institution such as the West German embassy (*Ständige Vertretung der BRD*), which, undoubtedly, went against the grain of the state’s directives.

This social network was to a large extent determined by the agency of *Arkade*’s director and his social and cultural capital.\(^{327}\) Thus, thanks to Werner’s personal relations the gallery produced an important social space where marginalised, non-conformist East German artists and dissenting intellectuals could come together, exchange ideas and provide each other support and recognition. In the context of a centrally-planned and controlled exhibition system, such an organisational model could be seen as subversive of the official order for it was constructed largely around Werner’s personal preferences. This network was also part of a network of alternative art spaces in the GDR which included quasi-official galleries such as *Arkade, Clara Mosch, Galerie oben* and unofficial art spaces such as *EP Galerie* or *Lücke*.\(^{328}\)

However, the official status of the gallery meant also that a set of relations connected it with the official social networks including the patron institutions and cultural officials as well as the state security service. This, in turn, meant financial and administrative dependencies, as well as being objected to a strict surveillance by a number of *Stasi* informants which at times restricted and compromised the gallery’s subversive activities. In subsection 4.3.1 the analysis of Robert Rehfeldt’s exhibition and state’s responses to it exposes the unofficial social network centred in the social triad of Schweinebraden-Werner-Rehfeldt and examines its political significance. The triad was identified in a network diagram (fig. 1) from the perspective of the state security service, however, considering the involvement and connections of its actors in the alternative art scene in the 1970s it can certainly be interpreted as valid, at least based on this study case. The subsection 4.3.2 discusses the mail-art exhibition *Postcards & Artist Cards* in terms of


\(^{328}\) *Lücke* was founded in 1971 by the artists Ralf Winkler, Wolfgang Opitz, Harald Gallasch, Stefan Kuhnert; see Fiedler, p. 373.
co-producing network structures that extended the gallery space across East Germany and outside the GDR by connecting with international mail-artists.

The profile of *Arkade* despite its official status as a sales’ gallery (*Verkaufsgalerie*) of the State Art Trade was, to a large extent, determined by Klaus Werner’s artistic preferences, political orientation and his network of connections. His professional career in the GDR was characterised by a repeating pattern of being employed and included by the state within various art institutions and then dismissed and reinstated somewhere else, mainly on the grounds of offending the official guidelines. His first research assignment for the state in 1966, just after his studies in art history and the army service, was prematurely cancelled due to 'unsatisfactory results' of his findings on the relationship between artists’ personality and art. In 1968 Werner was again dismissed from a position of an assistant by the Council for Cultural Studies (*Rat für Kulturwissenschaften*) at the Ministry of Culture of the GDR and sent for a probation residency in Neubrandenburg for writing an essay on the artist Helmut Diehl, who spoke against the intervention of the Soviet Army in Prague. Similarly, in 1971 Werner was dismissed from the role of a manager of print workshops at the Art School Berlin-Weißensee because of a statement against the contents of the 6th Plenum of the SED and participation in the 60th birthday party of the controversial painter Wilma Pietzke, at which Wolf Biermann was also present. His next employment at the Berlin Fine Artists Association, where he initiated the opening of *Arkade*, lasted up until the closure of the gallery and his yet another dismissal in 1981.329 Thus, as we can see, Klaus Werner had an ambiguous position in terms of his loyalty towards the SED party and its cultural politics. On one hand, he was a SED member 'out of conviction', and therefore, could be constantly reemployed by the state at various state art institutions, on the other, he was constantly dismissed for offending or not sufficiently conforming to the ideological premises.330

As Barsch argues, the constant reemployment of Werner, despite having been labelled in the *Stasi* documents as politically 'labile' already in 1972, was a result of his professional qualifications, good reputations amongst artists, experience in economic

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matters and support of artist friends with high positions in various art institutions and associations who often backed his candidature.\textsuperscript{331} The state officials could not have undermined his cultural and social capital acquired in various socialist institutions. In fact, he used his official position on a number of occasions, for instance, when he defended controversial artists such as Carlfriedrich Claus and A.R. Penck against Stasi harassment. Similarly, he protested against the expatriation of his dissident friend Wolf Biermann in 1976 in an official letter addressed to the director of Department of Culture in the Central Committee of the SED Dr Ragwitz, asking her to reconsider the decision.\textsuperscript{332} This ambiguous position toward the socialist authorities was reflected in the gallery’s profile as an official institution which had to meet demands posed on it by the state but, at the same time, attempted to produce a space for non-conformist art and artists not supported by other official venues in Berlin. In that sense, 	extit{Arkade} can be seen as having created a heterotopian space by being connected with state institutions but at the same time ‘suspending, neutralizing, and inverting’ this set of relations and functioning somehow outside and by being characterized by ‘otherness’ through, for instance, its artistic programmes.

\textit{Arkade} was also different from the other alternative exhibition spaces that also promoted non-conformist artistic practices. Jürgen Schweinebraden described the difference in the social and artistic character between \textit{Arkade} and his illegal flat gallery \textit{EP Galerie}, which functioned around the same time, as follows\textsuperscript{333}:

\begin{quote}

While Klaus Werner cared more for the GDR-artists, especially the artist group CLARA MOSCH and the probably most famous representative of them Carlfriedrich Claus, and inspired them to the gallery’s Editionen publications, my ambition was to show international art.\textsuperscript{334}

\end{quote}

Schweinebraden’s statement subsumes, in broad terms, the different social spaces that both gallery produced and mostly cooperated with. Indeed, \textit{Arkade} became mainly a meeting point for GDR artists, sometimes for artists who differed significantly in age, professional status in the GDR or the style of artistic practice. Werner hosted in \textit{Arkade} a

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\item[331] See the Stasi files published in Muschter and Werner, p. 59 and ibid., p.32.
\item[332] BStU MfS 7030/82 Band 2, OV “Arkade”.
\item[333] EP Galerie was set up in 1974, see Fiedler, pp. 321-324.
\item[334] Jürgen Schweinebraden as cited in Muschter and Werner, p.293.
\end{footnotes}
mixture of older, marginalised artists and young artists whose art did not fit in the official prescriptions and who often described themselves as representing critical Neo-Marxist position, such as, for instance, artists gathered around Clara Mosch gallery in Karl-Marx-Stadt. However, Werner also organised solo-shows for artists ‘officially accepted’, the so-called Staatskünstler (state artists), such as, for instance, Walter Womacka or Peter Hoppe. This was dictated by the difference in institutional status between Arkade and EP, namely, Werner worked from within the system, while Schweinebraden positioned himself outside, in the illegal, private sphere.

Over the years Arkade’s shows produced an exhibition space for a number of East German artists who at the time had not found nearly any recognition for their work in the GDR. For instance, at the time of his exhibition in Arkade in 1975 Carlfriedrich Claus’ art was recognized in Western countries such as West-Germany, Austria, or Japan, where he participated in many art exhibitions, while in the GDR he had had only one exhibition in over 20 years of his artistic practice. Also, Horst Bartnig’s show in Arkade in 1976 introduced his works in geometric abstraction for the first time in East Germany. Similarly, for a constructivist painter Hermann Glöckner, largely underestimated in the GDR, the gallery provided a space where he could become more visible in the public sphere.335 By this virtue, through the exhibitions and printed catalogues the gallery produced a social space where those artists could become publicly noticed for the first time and included in the art history discourse despite the marginalization which they were subjected to by the state art institutions. Arkade became in this way an important alternative platform for promotion and dissemination of works by non-conformist artists, also, for instance, through sales of catalogue copies with prints of the art works. This informal network that gathered and connected non-conformist and marginalized GDR artists in Arkade can be seen as having fulfilled an important social function in helping to legitimize artists’ activities, provide mutual support and some sort of artistic validation.336

The social space that Arkade produced was to a great extent a result of Werner’s social capital which materialized through the extensive network of relationships with

336 On social function of informal artists’ networks, see Foster and Blau, p.222.
important cultural figures and institutions created by him over many years of his career. Werner met artists such as Walter Womacka or Robert Rehfeldt at various art institutions for which he worked, for instance, Womacka was director of Art School Berlin-Weissensee, Rehfeldt was a member in the Board of the Artists’ Association. Barsch suggests that Werner's work benefited from the fact that he found some supporters and fellow-campaigners in various art associations such as Rene Gratz, Gabriele Mucchi and Herbert Sandberg who not only tried to introduce cultural politics that were oriented towards international art developments but also supported young, talented colleagues. And yet, their influences were only able to help for some time and were later not sufficient enough against the party officials.

Klaus Werner described the process, in which the network of artists and other associated personalities around Arkade was created, as initiated already during his studies at Humboldt University in Berlin. Around that time, he began to make contacts with various Berliner artists and regularly visited artists' studios. His first 'partners' constituted artists around the art critic Lothar Lang, such as Charlotte E. Pauly, Herbert Tucholski and Fritz Cremer. From mid-1970s Werner made contacts with Carlfriedrich Claus, A.R. Penck and the artists around Clara Mosch group in Karl-Marx-Stadt. As he wrote, '[...] generally, I was fascinated by the outsiders and the independents or those who, like Cremer, fought a difficult inner battle with themselves between political obedience and artistic freedom [...]'. In Neubrandenburg where he was later delegated for work, he met more non-conformist young artists such as Morgner and Ranft. As Ranft recollected, he met Werner in 1974 at Michael Morgner’s house as they all planned the organisation of the pleinair in Ahrenshoop. The connection diagram (fig. 1) obtained from the files of the operational case ‘Arkade’ (OV) maps out the main suspects of cultural dissent in the GDR. It shows that Klaus Werner constituted for the state security service a key figure in that network and had extensive connections to non-conformist artists and intellectuals in other cities such as Karl-Marx-Stadt (Clara Mosch artists, Galerie oben), Dresden (Winkler, Gröschel) and

337 Information according to Barsch, 'Zwischen Gewissheit und Zweifel', p. 32.
338 Barbara Barsch 'Freiräume betreten' in Muschter and Werner, p.79.
339 Klaus Werner,'Lebenslauf und berufliche Entwicklung', p. 269.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid.
342 Thomas Ranft as cited in Muschter and Werner, p. 291.
Leipzig (Biedermann, Christa and Gerhard Wolf). More than a half of the artists whose names are included in the diagram had exhibited in the Arkade gallery and were under surveillance of the Stasi within various operational cases.

Werner’s network of connections extended beyond the borders of the GDR and Arkade’s solo shows included also a couple of West-German artists. Namely, Werner invited West Germans to exhibit: Klaus Staeck in 1976 and Peter Sorge in 1978. Moreover, in 1980 Werner came into close contact with West German art historian Karin Thomas who published a book on GDR art in the West at the time. In a letter sent through the Kulturabteilung der Ständigen Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Department of Culture of West German Embassy), Werner suggested that she should have an insight into the unofficial art scene in the GDR situated in local niches of non-conformist art and invited her to visit Arkade in 1981. As Thomas recalled, Arkade's director was very interested in West German art and managed to get hold of literature on the subject of developments in international art. Due to the cultural isolation of East Germany, Werner’s exposure to international art works was mostly limited to reproductions in books and magazines. However, he used to pass the knowledge and books on to his artist friends. In fact, as the Stasi documentations indicates, his West-German contacts had put Werner under suspicion of the socialist authorities. In the reports by the Stasi officers he was seen as a mediator of contacts between artists and the Clara Mosch gallery in Karl-Marx-Stadt, and the personnel of the Ständige Vertretung der BRD. He was identified as having initiated the personal meeting of Karl-Marx-Stadt artists with the staff of this institution and as later helping to maintain those relations.

As much as Arkade’s social space was produced by informal artists’ networks so it was still embedded in the official social and cultural structures of socialist power. Institutionally Galerie Arkade was throughout its existence linked to the state organisations and, by the same token, state-funded which made it susceptible to the changes on top in power structures and political directives dictated by the political situation. The Fine Artists’

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344 BStU MfS AOP 14485/82, Bd.I, Bl.1, p.16 as published in Muschter and Werner, p.89.
Association which *Arkade* was initially administratively and financially dependent upon, functioned since the 1950s in various larger cities in the GDR and was founded to help artists in selling their works.\textsuperscript{345} Due to the Ministry of Culture’s planning the associations were taken over by the State Art Trade in October 1974. The new patron institution was a commercial enterprise, and constituted the dominant trade and sale network of state galleries for fine and applied arts. It was organised following a model of an industrial combine with a general director on the top to whom the district managers and gallery directors were subordinated. Plans for exhibitions, catalogues and sales formed a basis of the organisation’s work, while galleries, such as *Arkade*, managed by the State Art Trade, 

fulfilled primarily art distribution functions. As Werner’s article in Berliner Zeitung in 1974 demonstrated, Arkade, because of its official status, was also expected to occasionally manifest its ideological commitment. For instance, in the text Werner described organising in the gallery a solidarity action with Chilean people as an example of the gallery’s activities that engaged in social and political issues and were aimed at creating a dialogue with the public.

The mid-1970s return to more repressive cultural politics in the GDR was also perceptible in the extent of control that the patron institution exerted over Arkade’s artistic programme. When in July 1975 Arkade was taken over by the State Art Trade, its director Dr Pachnicke announced in an official letter that from then onwards the exhibition programme would have had to be first consulted with him and that there had been plans to engage the artists’ board in the gallery’s planning processes. Later on, the subsequent director of Staatlicher Kunsthandel Horst and the director of Fine Arts Department in the Ministry of Culture Donner were ordered to exert more control over Werner, so that the gallery’s profile would be modified. Consequently, Werner was forced to remove some exhibition of ‘late bourgeois’ art from the programme for 1980.

Arkade’s institutional status meant also that the gallery and its director were closely observed by East German state security services. As the Stasi records reveal the operation entitled OV “Galerie” was set up in 1980 with an aim of gathering information and observing Klaus Werner and his activities linked with Arkade. By that point, however, Klaus Werner had been observed for years within OV “Arkade” which focused primarily on Jürgen Schweinebraden’s network and his flat gallery EP. Werner not only used to receive silent phone calls but also the gallery was routinely observed by two spies who often stood outside the gallery before the openings - typical coercive measures designed to intimidate the victim. Arkade’s director was also approached by the state security on a number of occasions and asked to cooperate but each time he refused to. Over years the Stasi

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346 Ibid., p.89.
348 About the mid-1970s crisis, see Michael, pp. 1639-42.
350 BStU MfS 7030/82 Band 2, OV “Arkade”.
351 Werner complained about it in an interview with a Stasi official documented in BStU MfS 7030/82 Band 2, OV “Arkade”.

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surveillance of Werner had intensified as the authorities were threatened by his social network expanding beyond Berlin and because, as they described, ‘he increasingly acted the role of patron of the negative circles in Dresden and Karl-Marx-Stadt’. \(^{352}\)

When the gallery was closed down in 1981, the end report stated that Klaus Werner from the beginning was seen by the state security service as politically 'unstable' and his various activities as directed against the GDR’s cultural politics. The report described the list of accusations against the director as follows:

[...]

In a dispute at the Berlin Art School, for which Werner worked at the time, he demonstrated a questionable position in relation to issues of the party’s cultural politics. Since 1973 he has directed the gallery »Arkade«. He sought to make this gallery, which belonged to »Verkaufsgenossenschaft der Bildenden Künstler Berlin«, as independent as possible from the state institutions. From the beginning he organised exhibitions, which contradicted the GDR's cultural politics in their artistic and political approach. In order to cover up these ambitions, he involved also the so-called engaged GDR artists in the gallery's activities [...]. \(^{353}\)

In this excerpt, the state security service describes the fundamental issues, which contributed to the closure of the gallery, as a lack of ideological engagement in an artistic and political sense. The state suspected that showing ‘state artists’ (Staatskünstler) in Arkade was Werner’s tactical move aimed at diluting the cultural dissent produced in the gallery with ideologically engaged art, mostly, to legitimise its activities in the socialist context and distract from its non-conformist profile. Today, this thesis cannot be verified by Werner, it seems however as a plausible description of his subversive strategies in Arkade.

4.3.1. The triad Schweinebraden-Werner-Rehfeldt as a centre of cultural dissent

As mentioned earlier, between the 2nd and the 22th of April 1975 Robert Rehfeldt's drawings, collages, assemblages made out of moulds and found objects, and kinetic-light...

\(^{352}\) BStU MfS 7030/82 Band 2, OV “Arkade”.
\(^{353}\) My own translation according to BStU MfS AOP 14485/82, Bd.1,Bl.12,13,18 as published in Klaus Werner: Für die Kunst, (Köln, König, 2009), p.85.
installations were shown in *Arkade*. The exhibition was reviewed as controversial because of the choice of art works on display, the catalogue text by Schweinebraden, as well as the opening speeches by Werner and Lang. While I have already discussed the contents of the catalogue texts and speeches in the previous section, this subsection analyses the exhibition catalogue and the documentation around its publication from a socio-political perspective. Namely, the investigation exposes an important centre in the social network of dissent artist and intellectual circles in the GDR. This centre was formed by a triad ‘Werner-Schweinebraden-Rehfeldt’ and constituted one of the key points connecting both official and unofficial art spaces of non-conformist profile.

The works included in the show were produced by Rehfeldt between 1962 and 1972 in East Germany. Rehfeldt moved to the GDR in 1953 from West Berlin where he studied art, philosophy and psychology. He was a convinced communist and was granted a membership of the VBK in 1964, soon, however, he became critical of the inhibiting forces within this institution.\(^{354}\) He was put under surveillance by the *Stasi* in the 1970s mostly due to his numerous contacts with Western artists in international mail-art networks. Moreover, for the authorities Rehfeldt’s art, perceived as too ‘abstract and bourgeois’, did not comply with the cultural politics of the socialist state.\(^{355}\) And yet, despite Rehfeldt’s reputation of being too experimental in his art and controversies mentioned earlier regarding the plans for his solo show in *Arkade*, the Board of the Association did give permission for his exhibition.\(^{356}\) As the archives reveal, the cultural officials could not ignore Rehfeldt’s social capital acquired in the GDR, namely, long-standing engagement in various socialist projects and state institutions. On this instance, he was appreciated and recognised for his work in Pankow where he ran amateur artists’ club and he had good contacts with the District Advice Board for Culture (*Bezirksrat für Kultur*), as well as his extensive work for the Fine Artists’ Association. Thus, on one hand, the state did not like his artistic experimentation for its individualism and disseminating his own independent

\(^{354}\) BStU MfS BV Berlin Abt.XX Nr 10669 Bd 1
\(^{355}\) BStU MfS BV Berlin Abt.XX Nr 10669 Bd 1
\(^{356}\) Before the takeover from Genossenschaft to Staatlicher Kunsthandel on 1. July 1975: Vorstand der Genossenschaft decided about how spaces on Strausberger square should be used, Vorstand decided in a long-term plan what artists and when can use the gallery.
messages. On the other, they recognised him as a valuable contributor to development of the arts in the GDR, especially

Fig. 2. The connection diagram 2 (Verbindungsskizze) attached to MfS 7030/82 Band 1, OV “Arkade”

since he left West Germany for the GDR, and were prepared to tolerate his art as long as it was kept away in the private sphere and not practiced in his public work. Nevertheless, Rehfeldt’s exhibition in Arkade became still very problematic for the state officials and efforts were made to disturb its effect afterwards.

In general, Rehfeldt’s exhibition in Arkade was quite unusual for the GDR’s context as it presented art works which were undoubtedly experimental in their form and conceptual approach considering how conservative art shown in the official art venues was. The show consisted of a very few examples of more figurative and traditional in its form paintings and drawings. The majority of works on display were either abstract paintings, drawings and collages, or assemblage works- sculptural objects or installations created by

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357 BStU MfS HAXX 1726
incorporating everyday use items and materials into their frameworks. The fact that the presented oeuvre was dominated by art, which was not traditional in its execution and mostly abstract, became the main point of the criticism posed by the state officials. Dr Peter Pachnicke, who was the board representative of Arkade’s patron institution, in an official letter assessed Rehfeldt’s art works on display very negatively. He criticised the show for its emphasis on Rehfeldt’s 1960s works whose style he linked to the ‘bourgeois’ art movements such as DADA and synthetic cubism, or to collage and assemblage techniques. For him, the show had too much of a Western character and was not ‘GDR-enough’, and this was also noticed in the reactions of visitors who, as he reported, commented that ‘something like this hasn’t been shown yet’.\(^{358}\) Similarly, the unofficial informants, who also attended the exhibition described the quality of the works shown in Arkade as products of ‘poor late-bourgeois art industry’ and ‘devoid of representational resonance’.\(^{359}\)

However, the exhibition catalogue with an introductory text about Rehfeldt and his artistic oeuvre written by Jürgen Schweinebraden became most controversial. To start with, Schweinebraden was a controversial figure because of his non-conformist conduct and, thus, was closely observed by the Stasi within the operational case OV “Arkade” from the early 1970s. He was the main suspect in OV “Arkade” which at the end of the investigation included 20 other suspects from the Schweinebraden’s network and employed 4 informants to infiltrate his circles in various spheres of his life. His extensive contacts with West Germans and running of the illegal gallery in his flat in Prenzlauer Berg since 1975 belonged to the main accusations directed against him by the Stasi. EP Galerie became an important point of contact for non-conformist and oppositional artists and intellectuals in the GDR, hence, the choice of Schweinebraden for writing the catalogue text was bound to be controversial and cause a negative reception amongst the state officials. Schweinebraden was befriended with both Klaus Werner and Robert Rehfeldt and this triad constituted for the state security the networking centre for non-conformist artists’ network.\(^{360}\) The connections’ diagram attached to OV “Arkade” illustrates the political importance of this network for the East German state security service (fig.2) and

\(^{358}\) BStU MfS AOP 7030/82 Band 2, OV “Arkade”.

\(^{359}\) According to the reports by IMS “Clemens” (MfS AOP 7030/82 Band 2) and by IMS “Verbinder” (MfS HAXX/9 1726).

\(^{360}\) See the connection diagram 2, which situates all three as key players in the Berliner underground artistic scene.
emphasises the key function of alternative art spaces in connecting non-conformist individuals.

4.3.2. Postkarten & Künstlerkarten and mail-art networks

In November 1978 Galerie Arkade exhibited large numbers of art works executed using the medium of postcard by East German and international mail-artists. The show called Postcards & Artist Cards (Postkarten & Künstlerkarten) was divided into two sections corresponding to different types of postcards. The first section constituted 854 traditional postcards dated from the late 19th century until the late 1950s, while the second section contained 774 artist postcards from end of 19th century until the 1970s. The mail-art works produced in the 1970s constituted the majority of displayed items in the second section, namely, nearly 500 works by international mail-artists. The scholarship on the Eastern European mail-art phenomenon emphasises the significance of the exhibition in the GDR context. For instance, Röder argues that the exhibition ‘played a central role in dissemination of mail art in the GDR’, while Winnes and Wohlrab describe it as ‘the first comprehensive presentation of the genre of picture postcard in the GDR’. No publication, however, analyses the exhibition and its impact in much detail, while the show was an important example of subversive practice undermining the official socialist order that sought to regulate and control the gallery’s social space.

The plenitude of artist post-cards sent through for the exhibition, or loaned out from Rehfeldt’s collection, came from countries such as Brazil, Poland, West Germany, Hungary, France, or the USA. They constituted a materialised evidence of intensive and extensive mail-art exchange that transgressed the political borders between the Eastern Bloc and the West. Only thanks to the medium of the postcard, all those artists could participate in the exhibition without having to travel to the GDR from the West, which would have been very difficult, even in the post-détente 1970s. In this way, the organisation of the show did not require large financial support from official institutions that inevitably would have meant that ideologically determined selection procedures


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would have had to be in place. To engage many international mail-artists in such a project, one had to have access to the social network in which mail-artists operated. Klaus Werner’s friendships with the brothers Rolf and Klaus Staeck and with Robert Rehfeldt, who were very active in the international exchange of artist postcards, were crucial so that international mail-art works could be included. Rolf Staeck was based in the GDR in Bitterfeld and worked as a chemical engineer while his brother Klaus escaped in 1956 from Bitterfeld to Heidelberg in the FRG. The brothers lived since then in two different political systems but were in regular contact and both remained of critical-left political orientation, which became apparent in the mail-art works that they circulated in the international network.

As the archival material reveals, Klaus Werner was in regular contact with Klaus and Rolf Staeck and, in fact, the latter initiated the contributions to the Postcards & Artist Cards show by international mail-artists by sending postcard invitations for the event. Rolf Staeck’s invitation post-card decorated with postal icons and stamps called mail-artists from all over the world with words: ‘the show will be an inventory of postcards as a specific form of art, deadline 1.6.78, a catalogue will be made and sent to all participants. please pass this information to other artists’. A large number of mail-artworks came also from Robert Rehfeldt’s archive who had most extensive contacts to international mail-artists in the GDR and made some of his own collection available for the exhibition. In brief, the organisation of the exhibition and its contents demonstrate that independently of the East German institutional framework there operated informal artists’ networks that fuelled exchange between Eastern and Western artists.

The exhibition also promoted mail-art in the GDR and showed the extent of interest in this artistic practice, which, otherwise, was invisible in the public art spaces and in the official discourse on art. Before, the only show in the GDR that took place in a gallery setting and included mail-art works was a much smaller exhibition organized in 1976 in Atelierbund

363 Postcard exchange between Werner and Rolf Staeck in Klaus-Werner-Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin
364 Postcard printed in von der Schulenberg, p.66.
365 According to Grossmann and von der Schulenburg, p.64.
Erfurt in Erfurt, an art space that similarly to Arkade exhibited non-conformist and critical art. Mail-art originated in America in late 1950s and operated internationally since then as a network of professional and amateur artists who sent each other art postcards, letters and parcels. The network functioned outside of the art market, state institutions and organisations in the West for it was run completely by artists and eliminated museum and gallery from communication between the artist and the recipient. In the socialist context, in the absence of an art market, mail-art functioned outside the socialist institutional framework. Small mail-art shows organized occasionally in alternative galleries refused to operate selection procedures. In brief, the phenomenon had an anti-commercial, anti-institutional, and anti-hierarchical character. Most of the works constituted commentaries on socio-political and environmental issues, democracy, human rights and criticism of modernist art. In the East German context, to create these networks outside the official art system was subversive of the dominant order as the artists produced informal social networks for art circulation and exchange that ran to a large degree independently of the state structures. And yet, the network could not evade the mediation of the state postal service as postal communication was controlled and censored by the state security services. However, even if some postcards did not make it to recipients, mail-artists used, for instance, linguistic and visual techniques to camouflage subversive messages.

The social space in which the organiser and associate artists operated and co-produced before and during the exhibition was treated by the state with great suspicion and put under surveillance in quite an early stage. As the Stasi records on Rolf Staeck indicate especially the contact between East German mail-artists and their West German correspondence partners became problematic for the East German state security. In the opening report of the operation OV “Reni”, Rolf Staeck’s involvement in the mail-art network and contact to his brother in the FRG constituted for the Stasi the main reason for putting him under surveillance. In the report of March 1978 the Stasi officials stated that Rolf Staeck’s case was opened on the grounds:

[...] that the target person produced objects in the form of postcards of a pseudo-artistic character, had them copied in West German editions and disseminates them

367 Röder, pp.50-62.
via post to like-minded pseudo-artists in the operational area and in socialist countries [...] that the target person maintains extensive operationally significant connections, through family connections, to his brother who lives since 1957 in West Germany.  

Clearly, the socialist authorities were threatened by the informal social networks and the exchange of art and ideas which resulted from the connections.

Staeck’s files include also a record referring to the organisation of the mail-art exhibition in Arkade. In the document of 10.04.1978 entitled ‘Evaluation of evidence of the department M for OV “Reni”’ it is stated that Rolf Staeck was responsible for making and sending invitations to four persons from West Germany asking for personal contributions. More importantly, he was accused of animating Western artists, derogatorily called by the Stasi ‘pseudo-artists and outsiders of the capitalist countries’, in order to undermine ‘state measures’, while acting under the cover of official state framework in the form of Arkade.  

As further implied, the exhibition seemed to have been closely observed not because of the controversiality of exhibited art but rather for it was seen as a cover-up for oppositional activity influenced by the West Berlin far-left organisation, the Protection Committee for Freedom and Socialism (Schutzkomitee für Freiheit und Sozialismus). The accusations posed in the records were driven by a suspicion that West Berlin organisations tried to exert their influence over and win over the political underground in the GDR. The following excerpt from Rolf Staeck’s files referring to organisation of the Postkarten & Künstlerkarten exhibition demonstrates how the Stasi were ‘paranoid’ of the possibility of co-operation between artists and Western political enemy groups:

[...] For the planned exhibition, named above, it was purposely attempted in the long run to organise an exhibition according to ‘own ideas’. Established indications confirm that here a deliberate ideological and an organised enemy influence of West-Berliner Protection Committee for Freedom and Socialism is to be expected. [...] 

One can recognise here the method in the direction of enemy’s attack, where an established political underground in the GDR is used for enemy activities. Namely, that based on the connections of the suspect to Staeck Klaus, named above, as well as to the director of the State Art Trade, Dr Werner Klaus (registered for BV Berlin

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369 ‘Aktenblatt aus den Stasi-Unterlagen zu Rolf Staeck’, BStU 000078, p.52, 10.4.1978 as published in ibid, p.66
Department XX/7) the suspect plays a mediating role between the two persons named above and a great number of fine artists and pseudo-artists from the capitalist countries.\textsuperscript{370}

In brief, the socialist authorities were threatened by the independent character of the show’s organisation and the social network which connected the gallery with political artists in the West. And yet, despite the accusations expressed in the report above, the show did take place and included many mail-art works especially by West German, American and French mail-artists.

4.4. Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the gallery on Strausberger Square constituted a heterotopian space which was produced by various practices and strategies that had both a stabilising and destabilising function within the post-Stalinist context. Firstly, Klaus Werner undermined the official socialist discourse by avoiding submitting to the socialist realist rhetoric and by incorporating and promoting a Western artistic tradition that was classed by the authorities as ‘enemy’ culture. The controversy surrounding Schweinebraden’s contribution to the catalogue demonstrated the strategies used by Werner and his friends to undermine the state’s authority in defining what constituted socialist art and how to interpret Marxists’ ideas on art under communism. Werner managed to use the public space in a central East Berlin location to pursue an exhibition programme that very often did not fit in with the cultural-political directives of the SED. The organizational model, which the gallery followed, was crucial to its alternative profile, too. Although it did not operate an egalitarian model of an artist-run gallery, \textit{Arkade} managed to produce a ‘privatised’ space where Werner’s personal ideas and preferences for artistic and exhibition programmes were decisive for the gallery’s profile. Considering the context of the centrally-planned exhibition system and Werner’s ambiguous position in terms of his loyalty to the state socialist system, the practices produced by the gallery were subversive in relation the official socialist order. Also, the mail-art exhibition exposed the far-reaching informal networks that the gallery participated in and co-produced. In fact, \textsuperscript{370} Ibid.
the gallery constituted one of the key connecting points on the map of alternative art
spaces and non-conformist artists and intellectuals in the GDR.

And yet, Arkade needs to be also seen in terms of its ties with the socialist system,
since it operated as an official venue and, accordingly, was dependent on its patron
institution and top-down decisions imposed from within that framework. As this chapter
demonstrated, for these reasons Werner had to compromise at times on various aspects
of the gallery’s functioning such as including state artists into its programme and
participating in the official discourse to some extent. In that sense, the gallery has to be
seen as contributing to the state socialist system and, accordingly, having an ambiguous
socio-cultural function.
Chapter 5

Group actions in *Galeria/Repassage* (1972-1975) - artistic interventions in the socialist public space

Between 1972 and 1975 *Galeria* and *Repassage* organised three artistic events consisting of actions, performances and installations that attempted to break with a conventional setting for an art show inside the physically defined gallery space and, instead, extended the exhibition context onto the streets outside. Stoklosy called those artistic interventions *akcje plenerowe* (plein-air actions), which refers to the tradition of plenairs, and categorised them as characteristic of the first phase of *Repassage*’s activities. Indeed, the artistic actions in the public space constituted an important element of *Galeria*’s and *Repassage*’s identity and are always mentioned in the publications about the galleries.

Chapter 2 has already discussed instances of artistic projects organised in *Galeria* and *Repassage* that sought to transgress the borders of the gallery space by, for instance, appropriating the three windows of the gallery as a site and a medium in artistic communication. This chapter, however, focuses on practices that trespassed the physical border of the gallery such as walls and windows and transposed artistic practices into the streets and other urban spaces in Warsaw.

Since, in broad terms, art set outside the conventional location of an art gallery or an art museum with an open public access is normally classed as public art, those artistic activities gained a different status compared to the projects realised inside. For Lachowski, for instance, these actions indicated the process of gallery’s opening to reality and were directed against the illusionary character of artistic space as implicitly determined by a form order that was insensitive to the context of current events. Sitkowska

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371 Stokłosy, ‘Artystycznospołeczna problematyka’, p.434, as opposed to the second phase of more inward consolidation.
372 Stokłosy, Sitkowska, Ronduda and Lachowski discuss the three events in their previously mentioned publications.
374 Lachowski, p. 159
interprets those group actions as having an oppositional character to the perceived social reality through being based on a conflict between ‘private-public’. Against this background, the aim of this chapter is to analyse these examples through references to Lefebvre’s theory, and delineate the result as artists’ attempts to appropriate socialist space ‘in the midst of constraints’ and to reclaim ‘the right to the city’. The reactions of socialist authorities to artists’ interventions can be explained by referring to Lefebvre’s ideas about social struggles inherent in space between spatial domination and appropriation.

Also, as this chapter demonstrates, many of the artistic actions analysed here constituted examples of participatory art practice that engaged with the audience and challenged the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience. Claire Bishop writes about the essence of participatory art as follows:

the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.

Yet, as Bishop also point out, the issue of participatory art in the state socialist context is much more complex. Namely, while in the West such artistic practices were to challenge the individualism and the atomisation of social relations under capitalism, in Eastern Bloc participatory art was deployed not in order to support collectivist practices which were in line with the official Marxist-Leninist ideology but, rather, it constituted a means of producing a privatised sphere of individual experiences which was shared by others. Thus, participatory art in Eastern Europe was about constructing a collective art space for shared privatised experiences. Bishop also argues that because of the omnipresence of the official ideology, Eastern European artists wanted to make art that

375 Sitkowska, p.13.
376 Lefebvre, ‘The right to the city’.
378 Ibid., p.129.
was existential and apolitical, committed to ideas of freedom and individual imagination. The collectivist aspect of participatory art on both sides of the Iron Curtain had, therefore, different character. Accordingly, my analysis of the actions will also critically respond to Bishop’s argument over the political significance of participatory art in the Eastern Bloc context.

As such, the first section analyses the group event 1. Art Cleaning (1. Czyszczenie Sztuki) which was organised by Galeria over two days in May 1972. It included art projects that were situated mainly inside the gallery and outside on the university campus spaces. However, on both days the artists’ practices spontaneously extended to Krakowskie Przedmieście and the neighbouring streets. In addition, some of the street actions and performances involved the engagement of the public and as such bore resemblance to participatory art practices. During the second group event Municipal Repassage (Repassaż Miejski) in June 1974, artists associated with Repassage organised a group event which this time involved nearly all of the installations and performances being planned for outside the gallery’s space, on various streets and public places around Krakowskie Przedmiescie. Despite the initial approval of local and university authorities, however, the event was ultimately restricted by the state one day before its opening in its spatial realisation to a small area of the Warsaw University campus behind the entrance gate and, in this way, separated from the street life. The third example constitutes a series of actions, performances and installations Repassage Wherever in Poland (Repassage Gdziekolwiek w Polsce) which took place between February and June 1975. Although most of its individual projects referred to the public space in some ways, only two of the events were set up on the pavement outside the gallery’s windows but, again, the state’s intervention disrupted their complete realisation.

In order to analyse these three case studies of group artistic interventions into the socialist public space I use archival material comprising of photographs, Anita Thierry’s diary and her written reports on Galeria’s activities, interviews with artists, official and private letters between the gallery directors and other actors, as well as gallery catalogues and press releases. The group project Municipal Repassage is discussed in greater length, firstly, due to considerably more primary sources available in relation to this event, secondly, because the plans of the group events were more radical in terms of crossing the
boundary between the gallery and the public space and, accordingly, the handling of the event by the socialist authorities was also more repressive in this case. Thus, the main objective of this chapter is to answer the following questions: what were the artists’ motivations behind expanding the gallery’s activities outside the ‘white cube’ setting? In what ways can their artistic interventions be seen as examples of subversive artistic practice? What was the function of those artistic practices in the context of Gierek’s Poland? I shall respond to these questions by discussing the galleries’ activities in their multidimensionality, their inclusion of the artistic and social dimensions, and by applying the theory of heterotopia in order to expose the at times ambiguous position that the artists had in the relation to the socialist power.

5.1. *Art Cleaning* (1972) - the first attempt to extend the gallery’s space into the public space.

*Art Cleaning* was a result of meetings and discussions of artists involved with *Galeria* during the first group show *Revealing the Place* (*Ujawnienie Miejsca*) between March and May 1972. This time the organisers wanted to involve other artists from different cities and various areas of creativity, to ‘check how operative the programme for working of the gallery introduced by us is; to start cooperation with similar milieus in different cities; to introduce the gallery to the mass media and wider public’, as Anita Thierry’s diary states.³⁷⁹ *Art Cleaning* was conceptualised as a 48 hours long art festival which was to take place in the spaces of *Galeria, Sigma* theatre and outside on the Small Courtyard of Warsaw University campus. It comprised one day of gathering art objects and filling the spaces with various artistic practices, and then getting rid of their traces and cleaning all the places up by the end of the first day. On the next day, the cleared spaces were again put at the disposal of all participants without assuming any plan or order of action a priori. Later everyone was invited to join in a discussion organised inside the gallery about how to

³⁷⁹ Anita Thierry, ‘Krótka historia galerii’ (‘Short history of the gallery’), typewritten copy, Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, p.2.
further proceed with the event and, consequently, artistic activities continued until the evening time.\footnote{\textit{Notatki z I Czyszczenia Sztuki}, Anita Thierry’s diary, typewritten copy, pp.9-10.}

In terms of the event’s conceptual dimension, its aims were presented in invitation letters sent off to artist friends, invitation leaflets for a press conference on 25. April and in the official letter addressed to the Warsaw University authorities. The documents present, however, quite different ideas behind the organisation. The invitations calling for other artists’ participation and the press conference contain the same text outlining the conceptual framework that underpinned the event’s formula. The organisers wrote:

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[...] \text{One of the causes of very complicated contaminations is often falsely conceptualised art’s usefulness to society which turns into subservience and bootlicking. }
\]
\[
\text{The following is linked with it: professionalism, and also perfectionism, giving in to fashions and institutions such as art galleries, as well as ingenuity for no reason which increases chaos of superfluous information [...]}\footnote{Leaflet for Art Cleaning, Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP Warsaw.}
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The text can be read as critical of the official Marxist-Leninist discourse which demanded that art under socialism fulfilled a social function and which in practice often meant artists’ subservience to political agendas. As Ronduda points out, the event’s conceptual framework can be linked to the division in the Polish neo-avantgarde movement between the post-essentialist and the pragmatic strands. The former, which was represented by Freisler, aimed at ‘cleansing’ art from all external conditioning which could ‘contaminate’ it and make easy to consume.\footnote{Ronduda, \textit{Sztuka polska}, p.48.} In that sense, the event’s name and the action of cleaning all the spaces at the end of the first day made allusions to this artistic position. But also, the text implied the organisers’ anti-establishment and anti-institutional attitude which undermined values such as professionalism or submission to fashions and trends inherent, for them, to the institutional framework for art production.

However, in the official letter presented to the Dean of Warsaw University dated 30.03.1972, the organisers used language which makes references to the official socialist discourse, most probably, in order to justify their ideas in socio-cultural terms and to receive a permission to organise the festival. The programme committee comprising of
Włodzimierz Borowski, Jan Świdziński, Marek Konieczny, Krzysztof Zarębski, Przemysław Kwiek, Anita Thierry and the ‘unofficial’ gallery director Paweł Freisler described aims of the event as follows: ‘to review existing concepts and possibilities, to search together for forms of closer relationship between art and life and society’ and ‘to later present the results to the working class community in Galeria EL in Elbląg’. The whole event was described as ‘an attempt of individual contribution to the general current of the social life renewal’. Even the title Art Cleaning is justified here as a deliberate use of irony in order to find resonance amongst young people. The artists refer here to the social function of artistic practice and its relevance to the working classes which was inscribed into the official discourse on art. Also, in broad terms, the general conception of the project as a collective event supported the socialist promotion of collectivity by engaging a large group of artists in working together.

Nevertheless, the collective formula of Art Cleaning differed from the collectivity supported by the socialist state. Namely, the event gathered more of a collective of individuals from different art networks and cities and presented their individual art practices rather than constituting a homogenous collective art show of officially accepted art styles like it was the case in the official group exhibitions. But also, as Thierry’s report indicates, the participants discussed further activities collectively in a group meeting at the gallery. Such practices resembled horizontal collectivism rather than vertical collectivism represented by the official institutions and juxtaposed the centrally planned model of culture management imposed top-down by the regime. Also, through its organisation Art Cleaning exposed and co-produced an unofficial network of young experimental artists in Poland who mostly practised conceptual art and were connected outside the framework of the state art associations. In general, the self-organisational formula, introducing democratic discussion in decision-making process and spontaneity of the events not only exposed the shortcomings of the official culture system and of its democratic claims, but also undermined the necessity of mediation of official art organisations.

383 The official letter of 30.03.1972 to the Dean of Warsaw University, stored in Repassage Archive, ASP Museum, Warsaw.
384 Ibid.
Some of the events also introduced a new concept of art practised in direct contact with the public which was reminiscent of participatory art practices. For instance, Antczak from Łódź artist group *Workshop of Film Form* (*Warsztat Formy Filmowej*) performed a concert outside the gallery and engaged the public into singing along with him. Krzysztof Zarębski left on a table on the street outside an imitation of a cactus for free manipulation by members of the public. In general, the artists not only organised spontaneous performances, actions and installations themselves, but also invited spontaneous contributions from the public. They described the idea behind it as: ‘giving the participants complete latitude to work in a situation that results from a lack of any plan of action’.\(^{385}\) They also underlined the need to observe the participants and record their conclusions and the kinds of activity they would have chosen.\(^{386}\) Including the public and opening the artistic practice to participation of the viewer was something which at its base has a value of social inclusion and public engagement but it was not practised within the framework of the official socialist art discourse. Although public participation in the production, reception and evaluation of art had egalitarian foundations and could be seen as socialist in conceptual terms, in state socialism it was not promoted, nor practised. Participatory art required of the public not to be merely a passive consumer but, instead, an active contributor to a creative act. This fact took away the means of the state’s control which are normally better facilitated by situating art in the gallery space. In a similar vein, the spontaneous character of public engagement posed a risk of inability of censorship and, at the same time, accessibility to a wider public rather than a small circle of the gallery’s visitors. The artists define themselves the terms of public action and do not rely on curators to design them.\(^{387}\) By getting out on the street—the public space, they intervened into the space controlled by the socialist power. In this way, their actions can be seen as attempts to reclaim their right to the urban life and appropriate it accordingly to their own ideas and needs.

However, on the second day of *Art Cleaning* during happenings on the Traugutta and Krakowskie Przedmieście streets the state police stepped in and, this time, they...

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386 Ibid.
387 Miles, p. 12.
removed all events from outside of the gallery, and, thus, interrupted some of the projects in their realisation. The state’s backlash can be referred to Lefebvre’s struggle for spatial domination against the democratic appropriation of urban space by the users - the artists. Yet, as Antczak later towards the end of the event said, the artists were still happy that they had managed to drag people from the street into the basement which would have never been so popular, had they not advertised themselves on the street in the first place. Also, in his closing performance Janusz Korwin-Mikke, who was later in the 1980s involved in the oppositional circles and the Solidarność movement, expressed criticism of art that was uniform and did not oppose planning and, in that sense, aptly described the general character of Galeria’s struggle against the cultural politics of the regime which found its expression in Art Cleaning.

5.2. Municipal Repassage - an attempt to produce 'new areas of artistic activity' and the confrontation with the power system

The beginnings of the group project Municipal Repassage and its conceptual foundations were described in the gallery catalogue, and published retrospectively, where on the opening page the artists defined their conceptual framework and intentions as follows:

the organisers' intention is to import artistic activities into the life of municipal body confronting art inspired by ordinariness with life itself. This kind of confrontation may allow new areas of artistic activities to be revealed. In order to do this, it seems necessary to create situations that will provide opportunities for establishing a kind of reversible union: the artist - the community.

In this statement, the artists constructed discursively an artistic space that would challenge the dominant art discourse on many levels. Here, the call for transporting artistic practices to the urban space was breaking with avant-garde conception of art that needed to be separated from the external context in order to maintain its autonomy. Ronduda categorised this strand of the Polish neo-avantgarde movement of the 1970s as ‘pragmatist’, for its aim was to open to the reality external to art and build art works at the

388 Thierry’s diary, p.6.
meeting point of art and life, by merging artistic and existential issues. For pragmatists the relationship of the artist to the reality outside of art was more important than the artist’s position towards art and existential issues. They are preoccupied with investigating, unveiling and deconstructing the boundaries of their perception, imagination and consciousness and with analysing structures and relations that rule the reality. The Cieślars as representatives of postminimalist artistic practice aimed at transforming the hermetic field of art into the field of social communication, hence, their social participatory actions demonstrated the opening to everyday life. Ironically, their ideas about removing the distance between art and life were not far removed from Marxist ideas about merging art and life.

In social terms, Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar described in hindsight the reasons behind Municipal Repassage as being a reaction to the group show organised in there in 1973 - the Documentation Review of Independent Galleries. As they described, the main idea of the group project was born out of the opposition to 'the world of independent galleries presented in Repassage, a closed and self-focussed world of artists’. Instead, they sought to make art which would allow them to make contact with people and with their surroundings outside and to signify it. Thus, it seems that the artists wanted to counter-act not only what was imposed on them by the state and its traditional concept of a 'closed' gallery space, but also by the social circle of the 'independent' galleries which, for them, was too hermetic and self-interested. They wanted to produce a space which would be 'outside' of pre-conceived forms of artistic, institutional and social life, and in this sense this space recalls Foucault’s heterotopias.

In order to counteract the institutional isolation, which Repassage artists mentioned in the intentions, the proposed art events were almost entirely planned for outside the gallery space. However, due to Repassage’s administrative dependence on the ZPAP, the artists had to apply first for the official permission to a number of local

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390 According to Ronduda, the conceptual postessentialist strand was preoccupied with questions of the pure essence of art and isolating it from human existence, see Ronduda, Sztuka Polska, p.8.
392 Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, ‘-Prasować-, Przejść ponownie-, Cerować?- Nr7’ in Sitkowska, p.77.
authorities. As the catalogue's introduction points out, they were aware of stepping into the space reserved and controlled by political power. They wrote:

A municipal body - generally speaking - a collectivity prompted by the same rules and principles of thinking and behaving, being governed by the organisations set up for the proper functioning of the principles. In such a situation, it is clear that each kind of behaviour which is not in accordance with these rules must be brought under control of the governing organisations. Thus, the performance scripts have been worked out and introduced for acceptance by the relevant authorities.393

In the text, the words 'municipal body' refer to the socialist urban space. Theoretically, in state socialism the public space was supposed to be reserved for communal use and public discussion, in practice in the PRL, however, its rules and conduct was, in fact, completely controlled by the socialist power. The party defined what was allowed in the public space and what needed to be marginalised from it.394 Thus, the text constitutes artists’ acknowledgement of such a political situation.

The archival documentation reveals that on the 29th of March 1974 Galeria Repassage wrote an official letter to the local authorities signed by the representatives of the Students’ Union and asking for permission to organise a series of art installations and performances called Municipal Repassage. The letter was addressed to the Warsaw City Council, the Department of Culture and the Department of Internal Affairs and informed the local authorities that the artistic events would be taking place on pavements, squares and streets next to Krakowskie Przedmieście in May and June as part of Spring Student Festival '74.395 Since the letter was signed by the Head of Culture Commission of the Students’ Union and the Head of University Council and not by Repassage's directors it implies that the Students Union representatives acted as mediators between the state officials and the gallery directors, and, administratively, the gallery was dependent on the acceptance of the former first.

Three scripts of planned actions were attached and, according to the letter, further descriptions were to follow. On the 2nd of May another letter was sent, this time

394 Crowley and Reid, p. 4-5.
395 Letter of 29.03.1974 stored in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
addressed to the Metropolitan Police Office and Public Transport Department of Warsaw City Council informing both state institutions of planned activities and their physical locations. Signed by the same student union representatives the letter also stated that they had already received acceptance from the Department of Art and Culture of Warsaw City Council and that they attached scripts of the planned performances. As the scripts describe, Municipal Repassage was presented to the officials as comprising of 11 individual and group art shows taking place in various places around Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and lasting for 1 up to 5 days, while only one exhibition was to be organised inside the gallery space. In the end, as described in the exhibition catalogue, ‘all steps have been taken in order to get a complete set of licences for the realisation of artistic operations planned. This stage is considered to be fully accomplished for, the idea of “Municipal Repassage” has been included in the routine organisation of city life. It was the first confrontation with the public’s judgement’. Hence, all relevant socialist authorities were informed and agreed to the nature of the shows, their locations and timing as described in detail in the scripts, which were nearly identical to the actual realisations.

Yet, the socialist reality dictated different scripts. On Friday, the 7th of May 1974, Elżbieta Cieślar picked up her artist guests Jerzy Treliński and Tadeusz Piechura, who ran the artist-run gallery Galeria 80x140 in Łódź, from the Warsaw central rail station. On the way to Repassage both artists stacked on the walls and handed out leaflets which announced a change of colour of Warsaw from blue to orange and a signal coming up on the radio on Sunday 9.6.1974 at noon. Within a few hours the stickers were taken down by the authorities and, as Elżbieta Cieślar remarks, by the time they reached the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście, she was grabbed by two men who were agents of the SB and taken for ‘a private conversation’. In the conversation room, the Head of Student Council was also present and Cieślar was posed with many questions regarding issuing permissions and signatures for the exhibition. As she further described, in the end the agents demanded a complete removal of all events from the public spaces around the Krakowskie

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396 Official letter of 02.05.1974 stored in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw
398 Translation of the leaflet: ‘Attention/ 9.6.74 at 12 o’clock Warsaw/ Will change colour from blue/ to orange/ Therefore/ 9.6.74 at 12 o’clock Polish Radio/ Will play a bugle call from the Mariacki/ Tower’, as in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw
Przedmiescie Street to the terrain inside the Warsaw University campus behind the university gate.\textsuperscript{399} Their demands were followed by the artists.

The clampdown on all performances that had been planned for the outside of the gallery on Friday before the realisation and their relocation into much less visible and enclosed space behind the university gate could indicate that the strongly spatially defined character of \textit{Municipal Repassage} posed the main problem for the socialist authorities. The artists’ intention was to produce a new artistic space of \textit{Repassage} that would reach beyond the physically defined and limited space of the gallery’s four walls and three windows. In this way, the radius of planned activities spanned from the gallery itself, through the Krakowskie Przedmieście and the neighbouring Królewska and Traugutta streets, up to the public park Saxon Garden which was situated nearly 2 km away from \textit{Repassage}. In this way, the artists could, even if only temporarily for the duration of the show, destroy the traditional formula of a gallery as physically defined by four white walls and incorporate their practices into the life of the community on the streets. In this way, they also broke with conventional ways of producing and receiving art in the isolated spaces of an artist’s atelier or an art gallery. By transposing their practices to the external urban context, they would have become public art.

When the artists chose a new physical context for realising their artistic concepts, they would have also produced a new set of relations that linked them with the community and the society outside. Some of the art projects highlighted this aspect of the production of gallery space especially convincingly. For instance, the project by the Łódź artists Treliński and Piechura called \textit{Apartment (Mieszkanie)} constituted an installation set up in the underground passage under the Krakowskie Przedmieście street. The installation was conceptualised as a reconstruction of an interior of a standard two room flat which was to be set up underground, while leaving enough room for the everyday users of the space. According to the official scripts sent off to the authorities the action was initially planned to last for 5 days and nights and 6 people intended to live in the installed flat for the whole period. As the catalogue shows it was later modified to 3 night and days (7-10.VI) and only two artists were to participate. However, the project was completely cancelled as a result

\textsuperscript{399} Elżbieta Cieślar, in an interview with Aneta Jarzębska, 04.2012, Die, France.
of the state's intervention and its scope was limited to gathering all the furniture in the archway next to the gallery.

The artists’ intention was to transform the public space of an underground passage into an artistic and exhibition space where they planned to install a ‘private’ space of a flat, thus playing on the distinction between the public and the private but also making the ordinary public site a space where art is produced and received. By intervening into the public space and shaping it according to their own needs rather than obeying urban planners’ and architects’ designs, the space would have become explicitly the space of users. It would then reflect Lefebvre’s idea of the production of new space as an appropriation. For Sitkowska, for instance, this project was provocative and she interprets it as a form of criticism of poor housing conditions in the PRL. I see it rather as a commentary on the colonisation of the private space by the state, whereas the artists demonstratively install the private space of a flat in the public space through the practice of spatial appropriation. Nonetheless, the project was not realised and its subversive effect was limited to a discursive space of a written art proposal.

Another example of an attempt to transgress the material space of Repassage was the performance by the Poznań conceptual artist Piotr Bernacki who planned to set up a stage with a large arm chair and a desk table in the middle on Krakowskie Przedmieście street from where he was to perform his poetic improvisations to the passers-by entitled Street-Algorithm. The loud speakers which were to be set up on the street had a purpose of disseminating his poems around this busy area of the city centre, thus, extending the material space of his performance even further. Here too, the project could not be realised as planned on the street and the stage was allowed to be set up behind the university gate, limiting the visibility of the performance and excluding it from the street life.

Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar’s installation Camera Obscura also had to be compromised in terms of its physical location and, by the same token, conceptually modified as its subject matter was street life. The work originally constituted a cube construction of 3mx3m made of oil cloth black outside and white inside. It applied the technique of camera obscura

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401 Emil Cieślar, in an interview with Aneta Jarzębska, Die, France, April 2012
in order to project the images of street traffic on the exterior walls of the cube. As a result of placing the object in the public space, random passers-by were to become subjects and actors of the installation, while urban life and art became closely bound together. In this way, they incorporated fragments of the reality, while subjecting them to various transformations.\[^{402}\] The artist couple placed the construction on Krakowskie Przedmieście street outside Academy of Fine Art on Friday when inside the building a graduate show was being opened. After few hours of display the authorities of the ASP demanded that the installation was instantly removed from the street.\[^{403}\] Consequently, it was moved to the small courtyard of Warsaw University campus, while the artists turned the canvas fabric inside out with white being on the exterior side. The entrance slit was closed up with a large padlock. The dislocated device which was, by this very token, made not functional and obsolete, became a symbol of state restrictions and inability of the artists to expand outside the territory of 'white cube' and transpose their practices to the public space. Overall, none of the projects planned for the outside was realised on the streets and only three actions remained unchanged, namely, '5x5' by Winiarski, 'Personality' and 'Horoscope' by Zawadzka, and 'Sacral practices' by Bogucki, only because they were planned for the inside of the gallery. The rest of proposals were relocated or remained unrealised.

The projects which made up Municipal Repassage, apart from attempting to transgress and extend the material space of the gallery, can also be seen as artists' initiatives to produce a conceptually defined gallery space which would operate alternatively to the discourse of socialist power. This 'other' conceptual space was constructed in a number of ways by either the artists referring to different artistic concepts, or by them exploring alternative ways of reality perception and values such as, for instance, spirituality or individualism. The discourse that was revealed through such artistic actions could be seen as going against the grain of the official socialist rhetoric. Below a selection of propositions made for Municipal Repassage demonstrate various dimensions to 'other' mental spaces produced by Repassage's artists.

The conceptual impulses which fed the artistic idea behind the group show came from a desire on the part of the artists to transport their activities into public spaces of the

\[^{402}\] Lachowski, p. 160.
\[^{403}\] Emil Cieślar, in an interview with Aneta Jarzębska, Die, France, April 2012
city. As the catalogue states, they sought to find inspiration in the ordinary life on the streets and confront art with life and the community as this would help them to explore new areas of artistic activity. Their concept of art as a public performance or public action which also involved participation of random passers-by and other fellow-artists, who often co-created the work of art, undoubtedly, constituted an attempt to break with the institutional framework of art and to free it of its isolation from the ordinary life and the community. This kind of artistic practice, classified by Ronduda as pragmatist strand of conceptualism, refers also to Western tradition of performance art. The latter’s beginnings reach back to the late 1960s and the tradition of Fluxus movement. Although the artists do not refer directly to these radical conceptual practices, the resemblance of the general idea behind Municipal Repassage implies a challenge to the concepts propagated by the socialist state. The clash of these two different discursive spaces was perceptible, firstly, in the press note prior to the events in the official student and youth magazine Sztandar Młodych where the latter informed about the upcoming show by provocatively asking in the title 'Is this art?'. Secondly, the clamping down on all actions planned for outside the gallery on Friday 7th of June proved that the conceptual framework for art promoted by Repassage did not fit in with premises of the official socialist discourse.

The discourse of conceptualism produced by artists in the context of state socialism and avoiding direct references to Marxist ideology constituted an alternative mental space to the official art discourse even if the latter withdrew from the socialist realist rhetoric a long time ago. In a homogenous and uniform culture, however, to refer to a set of ideas that diverged from dialectic materialism, or rationalism, or the collectivist ethos meant to introduce alternative ways of thinking and an alternative discourse. Accordingly, although, none of the projects was directly critical of the socialist reality and the party’s politics, the contestation was realised in more subtle, veiled ways.

For instance, as the only project the installation by Halina Zawadzka Personality (A Little of Everything) contained references to the socialist propaganda slogans and mentioned the Polish socialist revolutionary hero Marcel Nowotko. Yet, her use of linguistic

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405 Bryzgel, pp. 50-55.
406 ‘Czy to jest sztuka?’, Sztandar Młodych, Warszawa, 06.06.1974.
elements of the socialist reality against the exhibited objects seemed to imply an ironic distance. Her installation consisted of a collection of personal ready-made objects and fetishes which made up the everyday life of the artist. Amongst them she also included small banners of radio transmissions with slogans from the official propaganda such as, for instance, the sentence 'You’ll have such Poland as you’ll build it' (1970/1971) accompanied by classical opera texts or poems by Polish poets. 407 Nevertheless, all of the items and slogans were cited in the context of psychological and social construction of personality and could, therefore, be seen as self-critical reference rather than affirmative ideological engagement with the socialist rhetoric. What is more, in the description of the project the artist wrote of her conceptual framework as follows: 'Everything is the source of art which is founded on the premise of privacy whose reason and aim is the psychological necessity of creating'. 408 This statement and the character of Zawadzka’s installation, in general, put a very clear emphasis on the personal and the individual as opposed to the collective identity which was prioritised by the official socialist ideology. It also defined the purpose of art on a very personal basis of self-realisation, while it focuses on individual experience of reality and individualised memories as opposed to art with a social purpose.

Further, the project Behaviour by the group of three Wrocław-based artists Kolasiński, Ryba and Sztukowski called Studio of Emotional Composition (Studio Kompozycji Emocjonalnej) also responded to the concepts of individualism and publicity in the post-Stalinist public space. It was conceptualised as a group action which was to take place between 8-10.VI.1974 around the Krakowskie Przedmiescie street and involved a number of participants who had signed a pre-prepared declaration and agreed to take part in the artistic activity prior to the event. As the declaration states, on the day of the action the participants were to carry on their chests and backs white boards with their names written on them and black boards each with the individual names of the participants painted white on them were to be placed on streets around the gallery. Similarly, the action was disrupted by the authorities very soon after a couple of participants walked down the streets carrying the boards and the participants as well as the black boards were only allowed to be situated inside the university campus. 409 The limitations, which were imposed on the organisers of

408 Ibid.
409 Elżbieta Cieślar, in an interview with Aneta Jarzębska, Die, France, April 2012
the action, meant that the impact of it was significantly diminished, for its conceptual core was strongly based on the social context of public space. Still, under state socialism where the public space was controlled by the political power and individuality was repressed, the action constituted a manifestation of oppositional rhetoric and intervention into the realm dominated by the state. The artists’ project could be seen as an attempt to comment ironically on the display of individual names, which was reserved for communist party leaders or other important political figures. Here the public space was temporarily reclaimed by individuals and, thus, the project counter-acted the suppression of individuality and uniformity of the socialist public sphere and culture in general.

Some of Municipal Repassage projects produced alternative mental space by making reference to religious and spiritual experience or by exploring alternative ways of reality perception. An example of such projects constitutes the installation by Michał Bogucki and Tomasz Konart entitled Sacral practices. The artists set up inside the gallery a separated area surrounded by screens with a circle drawn on the floor and a biblical citation to the Angel of Laodycey Church on the walls. They also attached their own commentary to the installation which defined their position as follows: 'I am drawing circles- the images of spiritual reality- the symbols of irrational recognition- the signs of the state of eternity'.

Thus, during their performance the space of the gallery became temporarily for the duration of the installation a site where one could experience a different reality and feel beyond the world outside which was dominated by the materialist and rational rhetoric. In a similar vein, Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars' installation Labirynth built of white square pieces of gauze sewn together and tied on 6m high pales referred to the Bible by having on each piece a word from the 2nd verse of Genesis painted on them. In this way, the artists inserted into the public realm a religious discourse. An exploration of alternative reality perception became the subject of Krzysztof Zarębski art actions which were originally planned for the Saxon Garden but moved to the green spaces inside the university campus, namely, Osmosis and Ambush performed on Sunday (09.VI.74). The first action constituted an application of various plants on the artist's body with an aim to 'estimate the sphere of contact of a human being with a plant'. As the author further commented in the catalogue: 'The sphere is defined by the point of contact of the human body with a

plant. Defined spheres become new artistic areas'. In the second action Zarębski together with the American composer Stephen Montague experimented with how visual signs can affect our sound imagination. They investigated how the spatial arrangement of a recording tape might have had some influence on the sound imagination before and during playing the recordings. Both actions were conceptualised as to pose questions about our perception processes and designed to be performed outside in nature in order to underline the relationship between human and nature. In this way, they questioned human perception, as well as reliance on the dominant materialist discourse propagated by the official ideology. They counteracted the rhetoric of the state, which focussed primarily on man-made industrial aspects of human life and neglected the natural environment and, in this way, introduced the discourse of ecology which was largely silenced in the state socialist system.

The group show Municipal Repassage, as well as the activities of Repassage, in general, can also be seen as having produced a different type of social space that was based on a different conception of sociality and a more horizontal version of collectivism. Firstly, the artists tried to overcome the social isolation of art and artists from the community in the form of conceptual framework for the show and to produce new occasions for interactions with people on the street. Thus, nearly all performances were conceptualised for being performed in a public context of street where they would have been exposed to passers-by and incidental participants while the latter would be able to look at or even participate in the act of creation (e.g. Behaviour, Street Algorythm, Apartment or Camera obscura). The formula of participatory art which was embraced by many projects in Municipal Repassage did not, in theory, run completely against the socialist concept of art as a collective practice. In fact, there were attempts on part of the socialist authorities to organise meetings and workshops with artists at factory settings or in the 1960s and 1970s the state used to rather willingly support the organisation of pleinairs and art symposia. Yet, in practice, the factory art events were always heavily loaded with ideological directives and not allowed any spontaneous interactions, while pleinairs and artists' symposia also ensured that the artists' environment was isolated from the rest of the

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412 Ronduda, Sztuka Polska, p.198.
413 Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta, p. 295.
community during those events. Hence, Municipal Repassage’s formula of artists’ spontaneous interactions with the urban community and its reconciliation of individualism and collectivism went far beyond the state’s conceptual framework. The concept of social participation in art production promoted by the socialist officials was restrictive and inflexible compared to the ideas proposed by the artists.

Secondly, the artists’ projects had also broken with the strictly professional official framework of state art associations by including in their activities not only art school graduates or professional artists but also by offering a platform for artistic expression to current, not established, art students and amateur artists. To get involved in Repassage’s activities, one did not have to fulfil a requirement of belonging to the ZPAP or other state artists’ associations. For instance, Zawadzka or Dobroczyńska who took part in Municipal Repassage were not professional artists but showed great interest and passion for art and, therefore, could exhibit in the gallery. For Ronduda, the inclusion of amateur artists constitutes an anti-institutional stance against the official framework of art production and distribution in the PRL which restricted access to state galleries and museums for non-members of Artists’ Union and non-professionals, even if it contradicted Marxist postulates for democratisation of art.414

Lastly, Municipal Repassage also exposed and co-created an informal network of artists and intellectuals operating in different cities, galleries, or even countries. The link that Repassage established with other artists in the network of artist-run galleries and conceptual art practitioners was represented by the group of artists associated with the Łódź artist-run gallery Galeria 80x40 who proposed Apartment and by a large group of conceptual artists and voluntary participants from Wrocław who organised the action Behaviour. What is more, two propositions were made by conceptual artists from abroad, namely, Reflection by the Czech artist Venceslav Kostov and Ambush by the USA artist Stephen Montague. Thus, the gallery established informal social ties with networks of other like-minded artists that reached beyond their local community and, what is more, those contacts were initiated on the personal basis independently of the state artists’ associations. Consequently, on one hand, the relations with other conceptual artists and

414 Ronduda, Sztuka Polska, p. 198.
galleries made *Repassage* less isolated in terms of being part of a larger networked phenomenon but, at the same time, it made it more hermetic, and by this virtue heterotopian, against the remaining art spaces as these relations differentiated them considerably from the state platforms and networks.

**5.3. Different practice of collectivity in the socialist public space - *Repassage* Wherever in Poland**

In 1975 Ewa Łubińska made a short 23 minutes long documentary about a number of art events taking place in *Repassage* between February and June 1975 with a title - ‘Coverage about the activities of Gallery Repassage’ (‘Relacja z działalności Galerii Repassage’). The film, which has never been shown on the Polish TV, shows short reports about nine artistic projects realised in and outside the gallery as part of the art events series *Repassage Wherever in Poland* (*Repassage Gdziekolwiek w Polsce*). The opening shot of the documentary presents frames of Warsaw streets in their ordinary order of life. Then the director shows the viewers the Main Gate of Warsaw University campus which is followed by a shot of an old, free-standing door in the middle of Krakowskie Przedmiescie street outside the University Gate and the gallery *Repassage*. The door was the street installation *Door* (*Dzwii*) by Piotr Piwowarczyk that was set up outside *Repassage* for a couple of days in May 1975 and which is shown in the film as causing confusion or indifference amongst passers-by. The shot was followed by images from different performances and actions realised in the gallery and accompanied by an experimental jazz soundtrack marked by dissonance. In general, the documentary portrays the gallery as an experimental art space while it also questions the readiness of the artistic practices shown.

The majority of art projects introduced in the film engaged in some way with the street outside and the external context. For instance, the performance *Clean hands* (*Czyste ręce*) by Michał Bogucki (screenplay) and Tomasz Konart (actor) in which Konart dressed in

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415 ‘Relacja z działalności Galerii Repassage’, film by Ewa Łubińska, TVP Warszawa, 1975, 23’14; The film has never been shown on Polish television, is available from the TVP Archive in Warsaw.

416 There are inconsistencies in the number of art events included in the series in the film and in Sitkowska’s monograph. Namely, according to the film there were 9 events and according to Sitkowska’s account only 8, see Sitkowska, p.7-8, while the catalogue IV (1975) also mentions 8 events.
white is standing on a pedestal in front of one of the windows and washes his hands, his shirt and trousers in black paint, was realised with the gallery windows wide-open so that the happening could be watched by the public outside on the street. Sitkowska writes that the performance made camouflaged allusions to the actor and the socialist Party supporter Ryszard Filipski and his mono-dramas. Similarly, the installation Doctor’s round (Obchód) by Jerzy Kalina where the artist filled Repassage’s space with nine hospital beds and hospital tables while, instead of patients, potatoes, onions, pot plants, and sand were placed in beds, was also realised with the gallery’s windows opened. As Łubińska’s film shows, the gallery director Elżbieta Cieślar invited and brought in people from the street outside to come and take part in the event inside.

Two of the events shown in Łubińska’s film were situated outside the physical space of the gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście street. The earlier mentioned installation Door by Piwowarczyk was placed outside the gallery between the 28th and the 30th of May and consisted of an old door freestanding in the middle of the pavement, lit from below with a bulb. The shot with the door in Łubińska’s documentary is followed by utterances of passers-by who are asked to express their reactions to the art object. While the film shows some of the public passing by the installation without taking much or any notice of it, the others say that they did not know what it represented or they were not familiar with such type of artistic practice. Clearly, by demonstrating that the project failed to be conceptually accessible and readable to the public, the film questions and undermines this type of artistic practice without directly discrediting it. However, it also raises the issue of the reception and effectiveness of public art for recipients not familiar with conceptual art. Yet, a short text written by the gallery directors in the catalogue below the photo of Door reports quite different reactions of the spectators. It describes that one of the passers-by said: ‘This door leads to the New World’. Expressed in this way, the passer-by emphasised the open meaning of such artistic projects which could be interpreted differently by different people. Similarly, according to the catalogue text a porter of the building next to the installation reported seeing a group of students around 9pm stopping by the installation. Some of the students sat down by the door, sang, played guitar and

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417 Sitkowska, p.13.
418 Catalogue V (Warsaw: Galeria Repassage, 1975), not paged; stored in Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
danced for nearly an hour. In this way, the installation encouraged and co-produced a new form of sociality amongst the passers-by and could be seen as participatory art practice. As the directors further explain, the installation ‘was removed because it was disturbing the public order’.

Piwowczyk’s Door needs also to be seen within the socio-political context, as it certainly disturbed the dogma of public art in state socialism in Poland of the 1970s. The latter consisted mostly of ideologically infused monuments and sculptures of socialist ‘heroes’ and workers executed in Socialist Realist, expressionist and abstract styles. Since the socialist authorities sought to control the meanings and uses of space, as Crowley and Reid argue, public art had to adhere to those official claims and fulfil its social function by promoting the socialist order. In this way, taking an object of everyday life out of its context and placing it in the street was not fitting in with the official art paradigm. It could also imply a polysemic mode of address as a freestanding door could be interpreted and reacted to in various ways as, in fact, the documentary demonstrates. Even the fact that the installation caused in the viewer confusion and inability to read it disturbed the official aim of achieving singularity of meaning and assuring readability of public art.

The documentary film shows also towards the end the action by Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars Second-hand shoe collection, in other words, plagiarism realised between February and summer 1975. In the film the viewer can see several pairs of second-hand shoes laid out on the window sills and on the pavement outside the gallery. A group of passers-by is having a look at the collection and some people are trying the shoes on. The artists call and encourage the public to ‘Try your foot to shoes!’ A voice-over comments on the artists’ idea behind the action and says ‘trying second-hand shoes is about making contact with previous owners’. For this action the Cieślars had collected 120 pairs of second-hand shoes from their friends over the period of one year. As they stated in the catalogue, the collection consisted also of titles written on paper, conversations with the artists and notes inspired by conversations, and reflections about

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419 Ibid.
420 Ibid.
421 Crowley and Reid, p.5.
the action. However, they also noted that it was an unfinished, processual project, which was still worked on and manipulated.

In a conversation with Grzegorz Kowalski and Waldemar Raniszewski published in the catalogue the artist couple explained where the idea for the project came from. Namely, they were intrigued by various facts linked to people’s daily use of shoes like their purpose, stages of their life, relation to and impact on the human body. This led them to a reflection that shoes carry on them traces of humans’ standing posture and attitude to life, which is also biologically conditioned. They wanted to confront those traces on used, already shaped shoes with shoes that were still being shaped by human feet. In brief, as Kowalski subsumed it, the subject of the project was ‘shoes as carriers of information about their users’. The artists also included in the title word ‘plagiarism’ which is explained in the conversation as referring to the question of authorship of their artistic project. Firstly, the word announced that they would use any media that were available in art, or consciousness, so far, while the external graphic aspect was to be merely a technical circumstance. Secondly, it referred also to the artists’ awareness that the real authors of information included in the Collection were designers, producers, users and authors of decoding, in other words, the participants of their action. As the Cieślars explained they wanted to ‘drill’ into the issue using any possible means regardless if it meant crossing the boundary of what classifies as art.

The artists wrote that they counted on people’s intervention and co-operation so that the situation was fluid and not constructible. In this sense, the action constitutes an example of participatory art practice which engages the audience and challenges the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience. In the group action Second-hand shoe collection, the artists become collaborators in the shoe exchange which had an unclear beginning and an end as the shoes are further used and moulded by the next owners. The passers-by were crucial agents of the exchange and also became co-authors and observers of the event. Such artistic practice breaks with the conventional form of making art where the public remains passive observers and consumers. In this way,

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424 Ibid.
it constituted a social practice where the interactions between the artists and the passers-by and other artists become the medium. But also, on a more political level, the event can be seen as an attempt of reconciliation of individualism and collectivity in a way that runs alternatively to the state’s premises. The Cieślars’ action was not necessarily aimed at restoring collective awareness but, as the artists stated, it was about comparing the traces made by individual users in the local community. Yet, their idea of sharing authorship of their art work with shoes producers, users etc. relates closely to the Marxist ideas on art which criticised its specialisation and elitist character, while also calling for democratisation of artistic production. Again, however, Marxist ideas were not put into practice in public art and spaces in state socialism in Poland. By this virtue, the action exposed the shortcomings of the official claims made by the culture politics. The photographic image of a collectively exchanged and gathered collection of individual shoes in different styles and individualised shapes could be seen as symbolic of the temporary reconciliation of individualism and collectivism that this group show attempted to produce.

In the epilogue to these three group actions, I shall briefly refer again to the issue of the state’s intervention in the artists’ activities. There is no evidence found so far in the resources of the Polish SB (IPN) archives, who and when and why put the gallery under surveillance. What remains are the participants’ testimonies which tell the stories of undercover state security informants visiting the gallery on regular basis and, in fact, of the SB officers directly approaching the artists prior to Municipal Repassage launch. What is more, as Anita Thierry’s diary listed between March 1972 and end of January 1973, the gallery dealt in this short space of time with six authorities’ interventions - three interventions by the state police for street activities, two by ORMO (Volunteer Reserve Militia) for adverts hang out on the street, once by the Życie Warszawy newspaper for painting the gallery’s windows yellow and twice by university administration for the yellow windows and Christmas eve celebrations.425 Above this, the censorship of the galleries’ publications constituted another state measure that the artists had to put up with. For instance, in the 1975 catalogue, in which the exhibitions and events of Repassage Wherever in Poland were reported about, the photos of Grzegorz Kowalski’s happening Chair on pages 6 and 7 were completely blacked out. Although in this case, the censorship could

425 According to ‘List 21.03.71-31.01.73’ (‘Wykaz 21.03.71-31.01.73’), ‘Anita Thierry’s diary’, Repassage Archive, Muzeum ASP, Warsaw.
have been a result of offending the rules of ‘social decency’ for the photos contained nudity, so in covering up some of the photo shots of Gutt’s and Raniszewski’s art poster Krakowskie Przedmiescie- A Study of Photographic Record was certainly determined by a more ideological justification.

5.4. Conclusion

The actions, installations and performances produced for each of the group shows discussed above were determined by the artists' will to break with the physical limitations of a conventional gallery space and the latter's separation and isolation from the everyday life outside. Instead, the directors and artists sought to involve the normally passive passers-by and observers of their artistic activities in their projects. In this way, they introduced a new artistic paradigm which changed the relationship between the artist and the audience into a more reciprocal and engaging interaction. What is more, transitory and temporal character of these activities inverted the traditional art practices and exhibition order where a gallery constitutes a space for completed work of art, a space for its display and storage, while the artist is excluded from this stage of art process. In fact, the gallery is practically eliminated from its role of a mediating space between the artist and the viewers. By these very virtues, the artists opposed the conventional formulas which was dominant in the official galleries and art museums in Poland in the 1970s. By doing so, Galeria and Repassage positioned themselves marginally vis-à-vis the state art exhibition system. Their strategies could also be seen as a heterotopian attempts to invert or neutralise the set of relations defined for an art gallery by the authorities which wanted to enclose it in a 'white cube' space, marginalise and separate it from the rest of the public space.

Yet, the subversive character of the actions analysed in this chapter was also built on the basis of producing a different social space and challenging the way that social relations were regulated by the socialist power. This was to be mainly achieved by developing a different notion and practice of collectivity which was based on a shared space of individual experiences rather than a melting pot of collective identity as promoted by the state ideology. But also, the artists managed to build and operate within informal social networks of artists that ran independently from the structures and organisations designed
for socialisation by the authorities. These alternative forms of sociality also found expression in the way the artists wanted to relate to their audience by destroying the hierarchical structures where the artist is a unique author and producer while the viewers just passive consumers. The questioning of these conventional and undemocratic relations exposed their existence in socialist society and exposed the ways which Marxist postulates of democratisation of art still remained empty slogans in the post-Stalinist reality.
Chapter 6

Arkade pleinairs: artistic ‘deviance’ under Stasi control

In the 1970s in the GDR the plein-air practice, a tradition of outdoor painting, was revived and used not only in relation to painting but also to sculpture or graphic arts. In general, the pleinairs organised by the socialist state constituted collective workshops in rural or industrial settings to a given subject matter that was determined by the organisers. The ‘open-air’ character of those events did not always refer to working outdoors in the nature but rather outside the artists’ studio and in a social context which often involved work in industrial combines or factories. Such conceptualised artists’ meetings were widely supported by the socialist cultural institutions. For the latter, the pleinairs constituted a means of implementing cultural politics which aimed, in general, at promoting collective art production and compliance to Socialist Realist aesthetics. Parallel to those state-organised events, in mid-1970s there emerged an alternative practice of pleinairs realised by artistic circles gathered around the alternative art galleries Arkade, Clara Mosch and Galerie Oben. For these groups, by contrast, pleinairs provided predominantly an opportunity to experiment with new art forms such as action, performance and video art outside the restrictions of official socialist art venues. They also became platforms for expressing critical views on socialist reality and state’s cultural politics and sharing them with other like-minded artists.

426 The term pleinair refers to the tradition of ‘open-air’ painting, as opposed to the atelier-based work, which was widely practised and popularised by the French Impressionists during the second half of the 19th century. The 19th century phenomenon of the mass movement of European artists from urban centres into the countryside was part of wider cultural developments, a longing for the countryside as compensation for accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation. Within those artists’ colonies plein-air painting formed the back-bone of the artistic practice which was intertwined with a particular form of sociability. This retreat was a result of a desire to escape the dictates of the academies. In the German tradition, the plein-air practice was also widely cultivated in the numerous artists’ colonies which emerged in Germany around 1880s. The artists living and working in those communities were often aligned with völkisch movements dissatisfied with urbanisation and materialism. See Jules Laforgue, ‘Impressionsm’, in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds, Art in theory 1815-1900: an anthology of changing ideas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Nina Lübbren, Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe 1870-1910 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, Modern Art: A critical introduction (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Shearer West, The visual arts in Germany 1890-1937: Utopia and despair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
Yet, neither the official pleinairs nor their alternative variants have been granted any extensive academic attention so far. In fact, the subject of ‘alternative’ pleinairs has only been covered in a few short analyses within more general publications on the GDR art. For instance, Blume’s contribution in *Kunstdokumentation SBZ, DDR: 1945-1990* mentions alternative pleinairs as opposing those organised by the Fine Artists’ Union but only briefly in a wider context of activities of Clara Mosch group and their gallery in former Karl-Marx-Stadt. As he points out, the French word *pleinair* translates into ‘in freier Luft’ (literally, ‘in free air’) in German which in the context of the GDR gained a double meaning: on one hand, it meant collective work in an open-air setting, and on the other, the adjective ‘free’ suggested a possible artistic and political ‘alternative’ as the aim of those symposiums. For him, this second ‘subversive’ meaning was decisive for artists such as the Clara Mosch group in reviving the name *pleinair*.\(^{427}\) Similarly, Claudia Mesch in her book on modernism during the Cold War writes only briefly about pleinairs and, mainly, in relation to the Clara Mosch group and their performance art and actions. She sees those events as Bakhtin’s festivals where customary social, political and economic identities are suspended and alternative collective ones can be enacted.\(^{428}\) Siegbert Rehberg in his essay about art actions in the GDR refers only to one example of the 1977 pleinair in Leussow and merely in terms of the land-art - happening *Leussow-Recycling* which was realised during the event.\(^{429}\) The state-organised pleinairs are discussed more extensively in relation to the cultural politics in the GDR by Manuela Bonnke but, again, are analysed in isolation from the alternative variants organised by Arkade, Clara Mosch and Galerie Oben.\(^{430}\)

Hence, this chapter’s aim is to fill this academic gap, firstly, by comparing the state-organised pleinairs with the alternative variants in a more systematic manner, and secondly, by providing an in-depth analysis of pleinairs organised by Klaus Werner between 1975 and 1981 against the cultural-political conditions of Honecker’s era. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which those alternative artists’ meetings can be seen as having produced subversive artistic spaces and what function they fulfilled in the East German context. At the same time, I seek to shed new light on what kind of institutional and political

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\(^{427}\) Blume, p. 728.  
\(^{428}\) Mesch, p. 195.  
ties bound these events to the power structures and, ultimately, compromised the organisers’ and artists’ efforts to undermine the socialist order. My analysis focuses on the pleinairs which were organised by Klaus Werner, in particular, for in this way they constituted an extension of Arkade’s activities into the external space outside the gallery’s four walls. Accordingly, those pleinairs can be seen as having produced temporal heterotopias that reflected the artists’ and organisers’ efforts to transgress the borders of the gallery space and produce an ‘other’ space in ways that refer to Lefebvre’s spatial triad of mental, physical and social space.

6.1. The state-organised and alternative pleinairs in the GDR

Both the official and the ‘alternative’ pleinairs organised in the GDR in the 1970s took place in various holiday villages, very often in remote parts of East Germany. The participating artists were accommodated in the state-run holiday homes belonging to the funding cultural institution or industrial combines for the average period of 2 to up to 4 weeks.431 This physical remoteness from the urban environment and from the institutional context of a gallery/museum, or a studio, constituted the main aspect of resemblance between those two variants. In both instances, it could have created a sense of being somehow disconnected from the everyday life and art institutions. Thus, the pleinairs’ setting in state holiday resorts instantly brings to mind Foucault’s example of a ‘new kind of chronic heterotopia’ in the form of the vacation villages.432 For Foucault, the latter constitute types of temporal heterotopias which begin to function ‘when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time’.433 Set away from the places of everyday life and activity and, thus, breaking with traditional time, vacation villages offer a temporal suspension of normality and the possibility to live a utopian dream where working place and holiday setting merge together. Yet, the utopian dream which both types of pleinairs were supposed to produce differed fundamentally. While the official pleinairs were designed to create contexts where the socialist dream of integrating art and artists into the life of working classes could be temporarily realised, the meetings organised by Klaus

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431 According to various pleinair documentation in the VBK archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
432 Foucault, ‘Of other spaces’, p.20.
433 Ibid.
Werner produced an opportunity to escape the very rules and restrictions imposed on artists by the socialist authorities. The latter were intended to produce temporal spaces where artistic freedom could be practised more than from within the institutional framework.

In terms of ideological premises of the official events, as Bonnke argues, since the mid-1970s the organisation of pleinairs became for the socialist authorities a method of integrating industrial enterprises into the state cultural politics, mostly out of financial reasons. Artists’ meetings understood in this way were, therefore, always organised in cooperation by the Artists’ Union, state enterprises or combines, state bodies, such as the Cultural Association of the GDR (Kulturbund) or the Culture Fund (Kulturfonds), and other mass organisations. Due to their official character and sponsorship, the subject matter was always ideologically determined and revolved around themes such as labour and working-class or peasant environments. The artists invited to the official pleinairs had to be members of the Artists’ Union, which was responsible for the selection of candidates as well as for defining art theoretical framework. In order to create better relationships between workers and artists, the participants would spend half of the time in the industrial spaces and then continue their work in holiday resorts belonging to the industrial combines. They were accommodated for free in the holiday houses and received a stipend which covered the living expenses during their stay. At the end of such pleinairs an exhibition of works produced was organised and usually comprised of industrial landscapes and workers’ portraits executed in socialist realist manner. The combines were then encouraged to purchase artists’ works for the factory interiors and some art works had to be donated to sponsors. The local county authorities were also involved. For instance, the local party secretary (Bezirksekretär) had to sign permission and the organisers usually had to meet with the mayor of the city in which the pleinair was organised. The event programmes had a rather rigid and ideologically determined formula which was rehashed in each case.

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434 Bonnke, p.371.
435 See the official pleinair statutes in the archives of VBK-Berlin, VBK-Potsdam, VBK-Halle, VBK-Cottbus, AdK Berlin.
436 Ibid.
As the VBK-archival documentation reveals the organisation of pleinairs constituted for the cultural authorities also a platform for the realisation of premises of the Bitterfelder Weg doctrine which was explicitly addressed in the official pleinair reports.\textsuperscript{437} For instance, the documentation of the 1974 International Pleinair in Warka (Poland), organised through cooperation of the VBK and the Polish ZPAP, defined the two main premises of the event as: firstly, to connect working classes with artists through a direct contact, for instance, on the streets with passers-by, and secondly, to connect the artists to social life by creating relations to other artists and state officials.\textsuperscript{438} In a similar vein, the effectivity report (Wirkungsbericht) of the 3rd International Pleinair Müggelsee in 1977 emphasised that the collective work during the pleinairs was to dismantle the isolation of an artist from the socialist community. It stated:

The contribution’s goal is to change one-sided ideas about the working method of visual artists which often still exist. According to those ideas an artist produces his paintings exclusively in the closed space of his atelier. The great response of painters and graphic artists to the international pleinair which is organised yearly by the VBK and financed with money from the Cultural Association proves how false these ideas are[...]. The main objective is to create a basis for discussion of creative problems using the specific object in the stage of production, for promoting the individual cooperation and the collectivism. The pleinair should become the source of creativity, should set new standards for own work, allow the participants to experience commonality, to make contacts and conversations.\textsuperscript{439}

Thus, the pleinair was to create an opportunity to change the ‘false’ ideas about artists working on fringes of society and in isolation from working classes. Instead, artistic production was to be promoted as a collective work which engages with the socialist society and gets inspiration from it.

The Müggelsee pleinair was also accompanied by a documentary film whose script entitled ‘Pleinair - painting outside’ (‘Pleinair - draußen malen’) sheds light on the

\textsuperscript{437} Main slogans of the programme which was introduced under Ulbricht during the culture conferences in Bitterfeld in 1959 and 1964 were to eliminate the ‘separation between art and life’ and the ‘alienation amongst artists and the people’ through propagating amateur art production and a strong social and creative focus of the artists on the production sites, see Bonnke, pp. 189-190.

\textsuperscript{438} ‘Plener Warka ’74’, VBK-Archiv Berlin, AdK; it is important to note that the word 'international' was always limited to other Eastern Bloc countries, no Western artists were represented.

ideological basis and goals that underpinned the organisation of state pleinairs and that were to be disseminated to the public. The images of empty ateliers with which the documentary began were to demonstrate the new practice of artists leaving their studios to actively take part in the socialist life outside. The script demonstrates clearly that the pleinairs were conceptualised so as to undermine the Western bourgeois conception of an artist as an outsider working in isolation from society and the working classes. The film was to suggest the socialist artists’ closer relationship to workers produced through the sequences that emphasised a direct contact with the visitors (‘community spirit’) and that suggested that artistic work had also an element of physical labour (‘the aspect of physical work’). The script stated:

[…] the idea of the artist who works alone in his atelier proved to be persistent. It was produced in the time of capitalism for which it was more convenient to push the artists to a position of an elite outsider of the society. Today artists understand their work solely as a result of their individual participation in the social life. This insight transforms the character of art production. The artist seeks the collective.\[440\]

Hence, for the socialist authorities such conceptualised pleinairs became spaces where the ideal of integration of artists and the working classes and of art and life could be realised, even if only temporarily. In this way, those pleinairs fulfilled a function of Foucault’s *heterotopias of compensation* - these ‘other’ spaces that are ‘as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorganised, badly arranged, and muddled’.\[441\] They had a stabilising effect in creating the idealised image of effectiveness of the party’s cultural politics, but, at the same time, highlighted also the fact that the ‘really existing’ socialism outside this temporal context failed to achieve its ideological goals. Considering the fact that the Bitterfelder doctrine was first introduced in 1959 and that its premises were still being put into practice and promoted by the state as late as in the mid-1980s, the social conflicts which the doctrine was to resolve, obviously still existed.\[442\]

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\[440\] Script of a film documenting the pleinair ‘Pleinair - draußen malen’, VBK-Archiv, Berlin, AdK Berlin

\[441\] Foucault, p.21.

For Klaus Werner and the associate artists, on the contrary, pleinairs constituted mainly an opportunity to escape the ideological constraints of the official programmes and organisational models, and to experiment with radical art practice such as conceptual or action art.\footnote{See Klaus Werner, ‘die pleinair’, *Galerie Oben 1973-1983*, ed. by Gunar Barthel (Karl-Marx-Stadt: Kunst der Zeit, Galerie oben, 1983), p. 37-38; ‘Brigitte Milde. Interview mit Gregor-Torsten Kozik’, in *Clara Mosch 1977-1982: Werke und Dokumente: Claus, Ranft-Schinke, Ranft, Morgner, Schade* (Berlin: Galerie Gunar Barthel, 1997), pp. 36-54.} Thus, their artists’ meetings in holiday villages did not seek to realise the ideological premises of the Bitterfelder doctrine such as attempting to connect the participating artists with working classes and organising work in industrial settings. Neither did the subject matter of their art works follow the usual prescriptions of portraying physical labour, workers’ or peasants’ portraiture or industrial landscapes executed in a socialist realist manner. Instead, the open-air character and location outside the traditional gallery space allowed the artists to undertake such types of art projects which could not have been produced in an atelier or a public place. Their actions, performances and, especially, land-art installations, required open space and were too controversial, as well as often technically impossible, to be organised within the four walls of a state-funded gallery space like *Arkade*. For instance, the action *Leussow-Recycling* realised during the 1977 pleinair near Leussow involved making use of a large deforested space on the fringes of the local woodlands. Similarly, during the 1981 pleinair near Gallentin the physical space played a key role in the action by Michael Morgner. In *M. überschreitet den See in Gallentin*, filmed with a video camera and regarded today as the second video artwork made in the GDR, the artist performed a ritual crossing of the lake situated just outside the holiday resort in Gallentin where the pleinair’s participants were accommodated.\footnote{Blume notes that the first video art project was filmed in the private gallery run by Jürgen Schweinebraden in Prenzlauer Berg called *EP Galerie* in 1979, see Blume, p. 731.}

What is more, all *Arkade* pleinairs, except for the last one, were realised under the institutional auspices and financial support of either the Fine Artists’ Association or the State Art Trade, and not the Artists’ Union. This meant, on one hand, that they were tied to an official institution and, in this way, justified in their realisation for the socialist authorities; on the other hand, it also allowed the organisers to evade the rigid framework of the VBK patronage. Hence, the participants of *Arkade*’s pleinairs did not always belong to the VBK and, in fact, the meetings connected a network of non-conformist artist circles.
from various cities in the GDR who were often classified by the state security as of 'unstable attitude' or 'politically hostile'. As the detailed analysis of individual pleinairs will demonstrate, the organisers managed also to use the available facilities in ways that ran against the prescriptions of political power.

And yet, most probably because of the same connection to the official institutions which issued permissions and allowed to use state facilities, the organisers of pleinairs adhered to the official formulas of pleinair workshops in some aspects. For instance, some pleinairs incorporated visiting lectures by officially supported figures, public discussions or a closing exhibition for local community which had a conventional character and was very reminiscent of the events organised during the official VBK pleinairs. In general, however, differently to the official pleinairs, the artists’ meetings organised by Klaus Werner attempted to produce heterotopian spaces where the socialist ideological prescriptions could be suspended and a differently conceptualised artistic space was produced. These temporal art spaces fulfilled the function of heterotopias of illusion in which what was classed by the state as artistic ‘deviance’ could be enacted and which exposed everything outside as even more illusory. The destabilising and stabilising aspects of alternative pleinairs will be analysed by focussing on two pleinairs, in particular, namely in Leussow and in Gallentin.

6.2. Leussow and Gallentin pleinairs: two study cases in spatial transgression

To assign the authorship or organisation of the alternative pleinairs to one gallery or group in most cases does not do justice to the collective efforts and nature of this phenomenon. However, because of the scope of this thesis, I concentrate merely on examples of pleinairs in which Arkade and Klaus Werner played an important part and omit those in which the other galleries’ actors had decisive input. Thus, the gallery and Klaus Werner were involved in co-/ or organisation of five pleinairs between 1975 and 1981 in

445 Terms used very often in the Stasi reports in reference to non-conformist artists.
446 Rehberg refers to them as Arkade's pleinairs, see Rehberg, 'Verkörperungs-Konkurrenzen', p. 139-40; Blume defines, for instance, only the Ahrenshoop and Gallentin pleinairs as a collaboration between Galerie oben and Arkade, see Blume, p. 734.
447 Other pleinairs of a similar alternative character were organised mainly by Thomas Ranft or Gunar Barthel: Hiddensee (1975), Tabarz (1983), Gross-Zicker/Rügen (1982), Gager/Rügen (1983).
Ahrenshoop, Ostauer Scheibe, Leussow, on the island Rügen and in Gallentin.\textsuperscript{448} Klaus Werner figures as the main organiser of all five pleinairs and was joined in his responsibilities on the occasion of the first pleinair by Georg Brühl, the director of \textit{Galerie oben} at the time, and of the last one by Thomas Ranft, a member of \textit{Clara Mosch} group. In terms of participants the meetings’ constituted a mixture of artists from main cultural centres of the GDR such as Berlin, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Leipzig and Dresden with many names reappearing in each pleinair.

All pleinairs were set up far away from Berlin, each time in a different location and in different nature surroundings (fig.3). For instance, two of \textit{Arkade}'s pleinairs were organised by the Baltic sea - the 1975 pleinair in the spa house of the popular GDR holiday town Ahrenshoop and in 1979 in holiday homes belonging to the VEB Ziegelwerke Halle on the island Rügen. Two others were set close to the north-western borders with the FRG - in 1977 in Leussow in the holiday house of the State Art Trade and in 1981 in the children’s holiday camp of the Schweinemast combine in Gallentin. The 1976 pleinair in the mountain holiday resort in Ostauer Scheibe was situated as far as 10 miles next to the Czechoslovak border. The marginal geographical location of pleinairs could also imply a strategic political position. For instance, Soja argues that peripheralness is a strategic position that disorders, disrupts and transgresses the centre-periphery relationship itself. For him, marginalised groups can form counter-hegemonic cultural practice pushing against oppressive boundaries set by political power.\textsuperscript{449} Thus, such spatial differentiation can be seen as both oppressive and enabling. In the case of alternative pleinairs organised by Klaus Werner the dislocation to remote holiday villages marginalised their activities in terms of their public visibility and impact but, at the same time, enabled them to develop cultural practice that pushed the boundaries of artistic production accepted in the GDR, of social practice of art pleinairs, as well as of gallery space as it was defined by the socialist power.

\textsuperscript{448} Klaus Werner listed all pleinairs in Klaus Werner, ‘die pleinairs’, in Gunar Barthel, pp. 38-39.  
\textsuperscript{449} Soja, \textit{Thirdspace}, p.84.
In order to discuss the artistic, social and political impact of Arkade’s pleinairs I have chosen to concentrate mainly on two examples of artists’ meetings in Leussow in 1977 and in Gallentin in 1981 for a number of reasons. Firstly, their collocation can provide an insight into change in the organisational model of alternative culture in the GDR between the late 1970s and the early 1980s which can be seen as resulting from the change in the cultural-political climate. While the 1977 pleinair in Leussow still had a semi-legal character, and was organised under the auspices of the State Art Trade, in Gallentin the organisers completely omitted the administrative and financial links to either the VBK or the State Art Trade. Secondly, those two pleinairs succeeded in the production of the most experimental art works, out of all Arkade’s pleinairs, which engaged with conceptual art discourse and, therefore, met with a lot of criticism from the side of cultural authorities. And thirdly, due to the state of available archival resources, these two cases represent the best documented meetings thanks to their still existing photographic and textual representations. Both pleinairs were also closely observed and reported on by the state security which provided rich source of information about those ephemeral and rarely recorded artistic and social practices.
6.2.1. Arkade's pleinairs as producing alternative spaces for performance art in the GDR

Before moving on to the two cases study I will firstly draw on the issues surrounding performance art practice in the GDR and its reception by the socialist authorities. Namely, during the pleinairs organised by Klaus Werner the participating artists produced actions, art installations and performances which in the GDR of 1970s belong to the very few early examples of conceptual art practice. Actions and performances such as *Meer auffüllen* (Ahrenshoop), *Leussow-Recycling* (Leussow), *Baumbesteigung* (Rügen) or *M. überschreitet den See in Gallentin* (Gallentin) created new spaces for artistic practice that opposed the state's conceptions of art in many ways. As a person responsible for the artistic programme, Klaus Werner remarked that, indeed, the main aim of pleinairs' organisation was to create opportunities to practise new forms of art production or hold lectures about international art. Bearing in mind that even in the mid-1970s the state authorities were still strongly in favour of Socialist Realism as an official art practice, so conceptual art produced during Arkade's pleinairs could be seen as having subversive potential in relation to cultural politics of the East German state. Indeed, action and performance art did pose problems for the socialist authorities on many levels.

Firstly, this type of art, in general, questioned not only stylistic conceptions but also the image itself which led artists to counteract the materiality of an art work. In an effort to broaden the notion of art, action and performance artists sought to dissolve the boundaries of art forms by incorporating, for instance, theatre, poetry or film as well as banal everyday activities. As the art process becomes more significant than its end product, the latter is non-existent or often destroyed so that it cannot be manipulated into the art market or institutional system. In the GDR the official art was to fulfil a clearly

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450 In general, action and performance art oriented towards process was discovered relatively late in the GDR but there were examples of art actions already in the 1970s in the illegal *EP Galerie* run by Jürgen Schweinebraden. Blume argues that the impulses came in mid-1970s mainly from art students at art schools which then were spread to artists' groups and friends' groups outside the state institutions, see Blume, p. 734.


452 Klaus Werner, 'Lebenslauf und berufliche Entwicklung', in Muschter and Werner, p.270

demarcated social function of reinforcing state ideology by using the representational form of socialist realism. In such a context action and performance must have been too intangible and, therefore, difficult to control for the state power. For Rehberg, the state’s antagonistic reaction to performance and action art in the GDR was directed mainly against 'the impertinences of uncontrollably manifested physicality'. He suggests also that in the case of Arkade's pleinairs, as well as other alternative art practices at the time, the programmatic dissolving of boundaries of art forms which was accompanied by self-irony and laughter could have undermined the established cultural seriousness. What is more, he sees the attack of action artists on the image as, in fact, more aggressive in the GDR than in the West because of the more restrictive cultural-political circumstances.

Secondly, actions, happenings and performance had in the GDR very clear associations with Western art practice. During Arkade's pleinairs not only some artists produced actions or performances but also lectures about contemporary art developments and Western art movements were held, mainly, by Klaus Werner. Both types of practices contributed to dissemination of Western art discourse in the hermetic cultural-political context where for the authorities it signified an ideological inclination towards capitalism and siding with a political 'enemy'. Hence, the participants contributed to production of ‘alternative’ art discourse which opposed the official Socialist Realist rhetoric and its intellectual isolation. This discursively constructed space during the pleinairs can be seen as subversive through its intellectual engagement with the Western art discourse antagonised by the state. In a similar vein, Blume argues that engagement and production of conceptual art in the GDR had, in fact, oppositional meaning. He writes that ‘in the political system such as the GDR to properly introduce performance art meant to establish “a second culture” which inevitably had to be in conflict with the first official culture and thus, in opposition to the whole system’. Yet, in the same article, he also argues that performances and actions realised during the pleinairs in the 1970s had imitative character and simply copied Western tendencies, for in the GDR at the time there were no intellectual pre-conditions for such artistic practices.

455 Ibid., p.117
456 Blume, p.735
Indeed, the general antagonistic attitude of cultural officials towards action and performance art was expressed in the VBK committee reports or in the discussions in the official VBK magazine *Bildende Kunst*. For instance, the 1979 VBK committee report demonstrated that the institution was clearly against showing documentary photography and action art within the 9th Dresden Art Exhibition (*Dresdner Kunstausstellung*), a yearly show of the officially approved art, because: ‘Actions [as well as photo documentations] will not be shown because they do not comply with the concept of our call for proposals’. The first public discussion about action art in *Bildende Kunst*, which unfolded in the early 1980s, provoked by the 1981 Erhard Monden’s exhibition in *Arkade*, illustrates points made above in my discussion. Namely, action art’s reminiscence to Western art, its 'self-reference' and uncertain function in socialism posed main dangers. The reactionary VBK-president Willi Sitte and his supporters criticised action art for its threat of 'charlatanism' and lack of social consequences. For Hermann Raum, action art was seen as not able to suspend the contradiction between art and life through its ‘escape into inner circles and separation from social changes and demonstrative refusal’.

The general dogmatic attitude of Sitte to new art forms was also expressed during the meeting of the Board of the VBK in 1980 where he condemned them as ‘avantgarde escapades’ and that ‘as long as I am an elected president, it will not happen [...] where we have nothing to say at the end’.

Thus, under the circumstances of such antagonist reactions and institutional exclusions as it was the case in the GDR in the 1970s and early 1980s, to pursue an art practice such as action and performance art meant to challenge the normative order of the socialist system. This, in turn, often was linked to professional and financial implications, for action or performance artists could not exhibit or get commissions within the state art institutions. Hence, Rehberg argues that performance and action art under circumstances of repression and restrictions of freedom, as it prevailed in the GDR, constitutes an act of courage. He writes:

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457 As cited in Rehberg, p.119.
459 Willi Sitte as cited in Rehberg, p. 146.
In such a situation, it is clear that it is about courage - and even if it was a group-supported act (which does not mean that aesthetic fashions and contagious effects do not play any role here). It obviously destabilised the prevailing order by unpredictability of the physical presence. In this respect, the case which I depicted is about embodiment competitions (Verkörperungskonkurrenzen), for the representative embodiment of desire for life and freedom on the other side.\textsuperscript{460}

And yet, Rehberg’s argument does not recognise the fact that while such practice can have a destabilising effect on the dominant order, it can also sustain power. For instance, Johnson argues that every form of resistance is never entirely separate from dominant structures and ideology and, basically, functions as a necessary margin where the abnormal can be enacted.\textsuperscript{461}

6.2.2. Leussow pleinair- subverting the notion of a gallery and of an art object

In 1977 Klaus Werner organised his third pleinair in a remote holiday village Leussow situated close to the north-west border between the GDR and the BRD. Surrounded by large areas of forests and nearly 150 miles away from Berlin the holiday resort of the State Art Trade and natural landscape created a new context for artistic practice. During the two week stay in Leussow the artists participated in artistic and social events such as exploring the surrounding area, making art, discussions, lecture and a film projection as well as an exhibition which showed the results of their work.\textsuperscript{462} The pleinair is today frequently mentioned mainly in relation to the land-art installation/action Leussow-Recycling created by Karl-Marx-Stadt artists Morgner, Kozik, Ranft and Biedermann and a multiple called Leussow-Koffer released subsequently in 1979. The land-art action and its traces in the form of the Leussow-Koffer challenged the standards prescribed for the state pleinairs and for the official GDR art on many levels. Firstly, it produced an unconventional and temporary gallery space which functioned outside the official framework and its institutional constraints. Secondly, the ephemeral and conceptual character of Leussow-Recycling installation/action opposed the socialist conceptions of art and constituted a manifestation of an alternative conceptual space.
which the artists produced. Lastly, the network of social ties from which the pleinair resulted and which it, simultaneously, produced demonstrates functioning of informal artists’ networks which connected individuals who made different meaning of existing socio-political conditions in the GDR.

During the pleinair in Leussow the artists also organised other activities, which did not form part of the Leussow-Recycling action, but challenged the official socialist discourse, too. The statements of unofficial informers sent after the pleinair to the Stasi headquarters in Berlin reported, for instance, about another art installation which was set up in the club room of the holiday resort. The installation consisted of a TV channelled to a Western TV station with a copy of the official party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* in front of it with a hole cut out in the middle. According to an official report by an unofficial collaborator with a reference to artists’ conversations, the installation was conceptualised as a commentary on ‘filtration’ of Western media by the state newspapers. What is more, the official reports mentioned also the lecture by the art historian Lothar Lang in which he spoke about the GDR’s participation in *documenta ’77*.\(^{463}\) Lang, as member of the official GDR delegation during the event, reported to the participants of the Leussow pleinair about the protest of West German artists during the *documenta* exhibition and showed them the leaflets which were distributed.\(^{464}\) During *documenta ’77* a number of West German artists protested against the GDR participation in the show and distributed a list of GDR artists who were forbidden and pursued by the state. Since these facts were completely omitted in the official media coverage of *documenta ’77* in the GDR, Lang’s lecture became an alternative communication and information platform for the participants.

And yet, the organisation of the Leussow pleinair was given official permission by both the Artists’ Union and the State Trade Art as the letter from 13.05.1977 demonstrate.\(^{465}\) The participants used the state facilities of the State Art Trade and, in that sense, remained connected to the state institutional framework. These links were also created by the fact

\(^{463}\) In 1977 the GDR took part in the prestigious international art exhibition *documenta* in Kassel (West Germany) for the first time, based on documentation *‘documenta ’77’*, Beziehungen bildende Kunst, Ministerium für Kultur der DDR, Bundesarchiv, DDR1/8171


\(^{465}\) Letter signed by the director for fine art in the State Art Trade Peter Huse in Klaus-Werner-Archiv, AdK, Berlin.
that the pleinair adhered in some aspects to the formula of the official pleinairs. I refer here mainly to the closing exhibition staged in the club room of the holiday house. It showed the effects of artists’ efforts and consisted of traditionally executed drawings and paintings hung up on the walls and spread on the tables. As such it resembled the closing shows organised at the end of the official state pleinairs. Also, the presence of official figures such as the state art historian Lothar Lang or the director of the State Art Trade Peter Huse reminded of the formula of the VBK pleinairs. The links to the socialist system were also established by the presence of Stasi unofficial collaborators who reported extensively about the pleinairs.

As Klaus Werner wrote in a text which was included in the 1979 released multiple that the Leussow Recycling constituted a spontaneous confrontation of artists with nature. The artists involved appropriated an area of forest clearing 5 km away from the village by collectively building there a number of geometrical structures using wood relics. The process was then accomplished by destruction of all produced works by setting those on fire and turning them into ash. The photographic documentation of the whole process, artists’ drawings and Werner’s text, together with ash remnants of wooden structures enclosed in four test vials, were subsequently published as a multiple. Such artistic practice bears close similarity to land-art practices that emerged in late 1960s in the United States and later in Western Europe. Around this time a group of American artists such as, for instance, Smithson, Heizer or Morris, transported their practices outside the gallery and museum into open landscape and created ephemeral pieces using natural elements or by recycling waste. Their use of natural materials was determined by a lack of interest, or even distrust, in technology and a desire to produce sustainable art. At the same time, their move away from museums and galleries into remote landscape kept them at a distance from institutional and commercial framework of art. However, as Tiberghien points out ‘moving away from these spaces is also extending them’ and the art market and collectors eventually found a way to incorporate this type of art into the art market.

466 Leussow-Koffer, multiple, 1979, Lindenau Museum, Altenburg.
468 Ibid., p. 12.
Similarly, for the Leussow-Recycling project the artists used natural elements which were part of the landscape context and transformed them into ephemeral art works. Thus, the forest and deforested field became a means of artistic practice as well as gaining a function of an atelier/studio and a gallery space. At such a distance from the official institutions the artists could practice art which would not have been allowed by the socialist officials in a public space otherwise. Yet, their move away from the gallery and museum had quite different implications. Namely, in the capitalist context Land-Art practice constituted a critique of the art market and questioned galleries and museum as privileged sites to display art.469

In the East German context, the ideological control over artistic output, its form and contents, exerted by the state within official art venues would have been of primary factor in the artists’ move away from the gallery. Within the socialist public venues art was subjected to the official directives regulating the exhibition system, which for instance, excluded non-members or non-candidates of the VBK from exhibiting and receiving work assignments. The VBK constituted the only organisation which professionally associated artists in the GDR and which closely cooperated with the Ministry of Culture and the State Art Trade. In its decision-making it was obliged to follow the official lines of the party’s cultural politics. In this way, the 1978 statute of the VBK-DDR clearly stated its commitment to socialist realism in the opening pages: ‘The Fine Artists’ Union of the GDR acknowledges its commitment to Socialist Realism- as the expression of the essence and the reality of the socialist society and in promoting young talents’.470 It also reserved the right for the VBK to condition the membership according to the artists’ commitment to cultural politics of the state on the grounds that ‘the member of the VBK-DDR works according to the cultural and art policy of our socialist state’.471 Hence, compared to state-organised events which constituted an extension of the party’s cultural politics, Arkade’s pleinairs attempted to escape the state cultural institutions from their restrictions on artistic and political choices.

The remains and documentation of the Leussow actions were, subsequently, in 1979 published and disseminated in the form of a multiple named Leussow-Koffer (Leussow

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469 Ibid., p.63.
471 Ibid.
case). The object contained organic traces and photographic prints of artists’ activities during the land-art action and art works created out of this experience. Thus, *Leussow-Koffer* constituted a series of 38 identical art objects printed by Werner and Ranft each including: four test vials with ashes of burnt installations, prints of a text by Klaus Werner, 4 etchings by Morgner, Kozik, Ranft and Biedermann, photographic documentation on 24 sheets of silver bromide paper, 4 photos on dias, 2 photos on canvas by Ralf-Rainer Wasse and a title page. All was enclosed in a wooden case with the *Arkade* and *Clara Mosch* logos on the top cover.

The form of artists’ multiple in which *Leussow-Koffer* was produced, refers to the tradition of Duchamp’s ready-mades and later was used by Western conceptual artists to document their ephemeral art practices. The medium was based on the idea of industrially reproduced art which broke away with the concept of an original and unique art work. In the GDR context, the concept of ready-mades and multiples circulated only amongst alternative artistic circles and had an immediate connotation with the Western art practices. Hence, to create such art objects and circulate those within the GDR context produced an alternative artistic practice which was based on a set of ideas originating in the Western capitalist context. What is more, to print the series of multiples Klaus Werner and Thomas Ranft used illegal ways and, in this way, reproduced and distributed art works outside the state facilities and the institutional framework. Namely, the Stasi reports imply that they used their personal connections with the workers of the West German embassy in Berlin who helped them to acquire specialist paper for printing the photographic documentation. Through the network of social relations which made it possible for art objects to be printed, the *Leussow-Koffer* became a materialised product of informal social networks between culture workers and artists and the same time further produced social links between those who acquired the copies.

Thus, during the Leussow pleinair its participants produced a number of art works and events which in terms of their conceptual foundations constituted a challenge to the discursively constructed space of the socialist officials. Firstly, as a land-art installation/action *Leussow-Recycling* challenged the traditional classification of art and,
especially, the prevailing socialist realist discourse. The artists did not execute representational paintings of surrounding landscape in accepted socialist realist aesthetics like it would have been the case during official pleinairs. Instead, they created temporal objects directly in the natural environment. Their art installations did not imply a clear and direct social function and did not operate with visual language characteristic of socialist realism. Consequently, this non-conformist relationship to the official art practice was explicitly echoed in the discussion over the *Leussow-Recycling* during the 9. Congress of the VbK in 1983.

The stenographic scripts of the debate between artists and art theoreticians and the VbK presidium over the role of socialist realism in GDR society demonstrated the collision between reactionary forces on side of the VbK president Willi Sitte, and his supporters, and the VbK-members who represented a more open and inclusive conception of art in state socialism. During the meeting *Leussow-Recycling* was used as an example of artistic practice which did not fit into the criteria of socialist realist discourse and was attacked by Willi Sitte’s camp for a number of reasons. Namely, the first point of criticism made by Kober related to the language of the text by Klaus Werner which was included in the multiple *Leussow Koffer*. The text constituted a commentary explaining the creative process and the relationship between art, artist and nature and referred in many places to the Western art terminology. For the VbK-member Kober the terms used by Werner such as ‘identity, frustrated ambient, genuine, art-workers, stimulation, formed object space, creative fiction, life-forms, snap-shots’ were ‘the still life of our days, as Brecht called it then’.\footnote{474 'Stenografisches Protokoll. Beratung der Arbeitsgruppe 1 am 16.Nov. 1983’, 9. Congress des VbK-DDR, VbK-Archiv, AdK Berlin.} Thus, he accused such ‘phenomena’ of lack of social engagement and relevance to the socialist discourse. Similarly, Willi Sitte remarked on a lack of any criteria of Socialist Realism that could be applied to such objects as ‘ash’ in the *Leussow Koffer*. He was resistant to operate in a mental space which is not easily readable to the recipient: ‘and we must not divert in spaces, where we cannot understand each other anymore, where everything is allowed [...] where the things completely dissolve, where there are no criteria’.\footnote{475 Willi Sitte, ibid.} The ephemeral character of *Leussow-Recycling* installations also posed problems for the reactionary member within the VbK Heinze who expressed doubts in
regard to the effectiveness of such art due to its temporary character. Overall, the discussions demonstrate the alternative artistic space which emerged through production of Leussow-Recycling action and the multiple Leussow-Koffer and how it clashed with the official art discourse of the socialist authorities.

6.2.3. Arkade pleinairs and the production of ‘unregimented’ social space

The phenomenon of Arkade pleinairs was based on collective social interactions between artists, gallery directors and sometimes the community where the events were organised. However, by adopting different rules of conduct and abandoning the social role which the state expected artists to fulfil the participants produced an alternative form of sociality which differed from the state-defined collective work schemes. Firstly, as the co-organiser of Gallentin pleinair and the director of the alternative gallery Galerie oben in Karl-Marx-Stadt between 1979 and 1987 Gunar Barthel wrote, the pleinairs offered, apart from an opportunity to work creatively together, an alibi for collective gatherings which would not be restrained by official regulations. He wrote: ‘However, it was less about the classical open-air painting and much more about creating a form of alibi for a joint and unregimented meeting and artistic cooperation’.  

In a similar vein, Klaus Werner wrote about the pleinairs in his memoirs that they produced a social space which was built on different values to the pleinairs organised by the state institutions such as the VBK. He wrote:

[...]instead of the programme we placed an emphasis on encounters, and the memories are still witnesses of such encounter, of creative, euphoric, electrifying – rarely discontented encounters. If there had been a pamphlet, it would have been the unity of the contradictory, the satisfaction of needs by means of friction or the like.  

Thus, Arkade’s pleinairs opposed the state pleinairs with a pre-programmed formula and ways of social interactions predetermined and regulated by the socialist

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authorities. Instead, the organisers and artists practised their own rules of conduct which operated within the circle of participants. For instance, the pleinairs did not have a clearly defined official socialist agenda and social purpose as it was the case with the state organised events which were supposed to be linked to the subject of work and working classes. As Werner also emphasised, Arkade's pleinairs did not pose pressures on the artists in terms of producing a certain number of works which have had to be donated or sold later to the funding combines.478

Secondly, the circle of participants of Arkade's pleinairs was not determined by the VBK board but rather it was a result of Klaus Werner's links to various groups of artists who shared a similar set of ideas about art. Klaus Werner was closely connected to artistic networks in Karl-Marx-Stadt gathered around the local galleries Galerie oben and Clara Mosch. In fact, it was the proposal of the director of Galerie oben Georg Brühl who first instigated the co-organisation of the pleinair in Ahrenshoop with Klaus Werner at the end of 1974.479 The pleinairs involved mostly young artists based in Berlin, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Leipzig and Dresden – cities that developed informal artistic networks during the 1970s. These networks connected individuals who did not want to conform to the Socialist Realist canon and, thus, were very often marginalised by the state art institutions. Also, a large number of the participants had previously exhibited in Arkade, for instance, Goltzsche, Kozik, Ranft, Vent, Morgner or Biedermann. Werner wrote that there were no restrictions on what kind of practice the participants had to pursue and he differentiated between two types of artists who took part in the pleinairs. Namely, the first type was more traditional painters who executed traditional outdoor painting and the second type was 'Konzeptionisten' (conceptualists) who experimented with different art forms during these gatherings.480 Hence, differently to the state pleinairs, the artists did not have to adhere to the official art form of Socialist Realism, rather they were given freedom to follow their own artistic preferences and explorations. The 1977 pleinair in Leussow provides the best example of this, for during the pleinair the Clara Mosch artists with help of a few other Berliner artists produced the land-art action Leussow-Recycling, while some other artists produced more traditional paintings. What is more, during the last pleinair in Gallentin the

478 Ibid., p.37.
479 Ibid, p. 36
480 Ibid, p.37
social networks were extended even more and the event became an interdisciplinary meeting, in which not only visual artists but also non-conformist literary figures were involved.

Nevertheless, the social space which the pleinairs produced was still, in certain ways, connected to the art institutional system. These ties were produced, for instance, by the state funding bodies, the Fine Artists’ Union and the State Art Trade, to which the organisers had to apply with their proposals and which provided financial support. Also, as Jacoby points out, the organisers and gallery directors fulfilled the ‘bridging’ role of mediators between the state and alternative groups. For her, the connection to state institutions was produced by the ‘pivot point’ persons (Drehpunktpersonen) - people who interacted not only with the establishment but also with subcultures. For instance, by being members of the VBK committees such individuals produced direct links to the Cultural Association, Fine Artists’ Union or Sales Association.\footnote{Petra Jacoby, Kollektivierung der Phantasie? Künstlergruppen in der DDR zwischen Vereinnahmung und Erfindungsgabe, (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), p. 91} In terms of Arkade’s pleinairs these links were produced mainly by Klaus Werner who through his professional career at various state art institutions such as Ministry of Culture or VEB Centre Fine Art, had personal relationships with cultural officials such as, for instance, the state artist and vice-president of the VBK-DDR Walter Womacka. Georg Barthel was a member of the VBK committee in Karl-Marx-Stadt before his involvement with managing Galerie oben. In practice, the links produced by the ‘pivot point’ persons guaranteed easier access to the state facilities which, as we have seen, could have been ‘misused’ for their own projects.

### 6.2.4. Gallentin pleinair as a social space connecting non-conformist cultural networks

The last pleinair organized by Werner in 1981 in Gallentin was especially significant as it exposed the expanding informal networks of critical artists, art critics and writers in the GDR. The event took place between 20.09 and 4.10.1981 in a children holiday resort in the north-west part of the GDR, near the Schweriner Lake. It was the largest out of all Arkade’s pleinairs and involved nearly 40 artists and writers from cities Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt.\footnote{BStU MfS HAXX 12180, p. 48.} As a consequence of its organization Arkade’s director was dismissed
from his position and the gallery was closed down subsequently. Although the pleinair was similar in the sense of physical and artistic space, it differed from its predecessors in the way its social space was constructed. Firstly, the pleinair was organised completely illegally in terms of avoiding the mediation of state administration and of illegal use of state facilities, but also because during the pleinair an illegal ‘private’ sale of artworks took place. Secondly, the event brought together wider non-conformist cultural circles in the GDR and, thus, became an interdisciplinary event which could be seen as heralding a new development in the functioning of alternative groups later in the 1980s.

Differently to the previous pleinairs in Gallentin the participants included new circles of a younger artist generation, oppositional literary circles of established and amateur writers and poets, as well as an artist from West Germany for the first time. This development signalled new processes taking shape in early 1980s in the GDR which were bringing together non-conformist and oppositional circles from different areas of culture in order to cooperate outside the official framework. First of all, the participation of Christa Wolf, a renowned critical GDR writer, and of the oppositional Nachwuchsautoren (emerging young writers) such as Papenfuß, Döring and Häfner demonstrated the growing pressure for expression of alternative views outside the constraints of the socialist public space. Also, their participation in the pleinair allowed their unpublished work to become known to wider alternative artists’ networks. Bringing together individuals and groups from different areas of cultural production but with a shared critical vision of the socialist reality created a sense of an alternative community which was more ‘unified’ and, therefore, could have been more effective in organising themselves.

The pleinair became also a meeting point of various interconnected groups of non-conformist artists and writers/poets from different cities inside the GDR. The participants included the Dresden artists from the artist group ‘Lücke’ (Freundenberg, Weidendorfer) who between 1972 and 1979 organised illegal exhibitions in various spaces in Dresden. Karl-Marx-Stadt was represented by the critical artists from the former Clara Mosch gallery (Kozik, Morgner, Ranft), as well as the director of Galerie oben, Gunar Bartel. From Berlin,

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484 Ibid., p.37.
485 Ibid., p.49.
a number of critical artists participated such as Monden, who was officially discredited by the VBK for his art actions, or Goltzsche and Bußmann, both marginalised by the state institutions. A large number of artists and writers came from Leipzig such as Biedermann, who co-created the Leussow-Recycling project, and Gerd Harry Lybke who in 1983 set up an illegal artists’ gallery Eigen+Art that later became one of the most important social space for dissenting artists in Leipzig and in the GDR, in general. As the state security documentation reveals, the majority of the participants was ‘operationally processed’ by the Stasi and assessed as ‘politically-hostile’. Thus, this social gathering became an occasion to not only exchange information and ideas about art and cultural politics in the GDR but also further establish the network of relations which linked these various groups together outside the official framework of various associations.

According to Stasi documentation, in organising the Gallentin pienair Klaus Werner and Thomas Ranft had completely omitted the institutional framework of the VBK and the State Art Trade. The event was not reported to the local police, which was obligatory in such cases, either. The contract between the director of the holiday resort and Thomas Ranft was signed without having informed any of the local authorities or cultural institutions. What is more, despite its illegal status the artists managed to hang out posters of the coming events in a museum in Schwerin and an engineering school in Wismar inviting local community and amateur artists to take part in the Künstlerfest (artists’ festival) organised on 26.09.1981. Without permission of the State Art Trade on the 25th of September Klaus Werner carried out an auction of graphic works and drawings by participating artists, West German posters, a photo signed by a West German painter and philosopher and books signed by Christa Wolf. The money which was raised from the auction was used to cover the costs of the event which was self-funded by the organisers. What is more, Michael Morgner’s performance of crossing the lake M. crosses the lake in Gallentin (M. überschreitet den See in Gallentin) was filmed using a camera which was illegally acquired by Klaus Werner using his contacts with the worker of the West German embassy in Berlin. As part of the pleinair Klaus Werner showed also films using video

486 Fiedler, pp.317-320.
487 BStU MfS HAXX 12180, pp.43-48.
equipment which he hired from the state film archives using the stamps and official letters of the State Art Trade without the latter having been informed about the event.\textsuperscript{488}

Thus, Klaus Werner and Thomas Ranft attempted to produce a completely autonomous artistic space by abandoning any institutional involvement with state power or by misusing the official facilities for unauthorised and private activities. Through Klaus Werner’s auction they established an alternative circulation of art works which operated outside the State Art Trade and did not adhere to the VBK directives regulating the sale and value of art works.\textsuperscript{489} And, what is more, through the involvement and mediation of West German artists and workers of the West German Embassy this multiple reached outside the borders of the GDR and became a part of art market in West Germany.

6. 3. **So far and yet so close – Arkade pleinairs through a Stasi lens**

Arkade’s pleinairs produced temporary artistic spaces that were in many ways disconnected from the state art institutional framework, in terms of their physical remoteness, their discursive space or the social networks. However, as it turned out, this new relocation outside the four walls of the gallery space did not guarantee the participants to be outside of state control. As mentioned earlier, the seemingly less repressive cultural politics under Honecker were accompanied by greater expansion of Stasi surveillance over non-conformist cultural networks. Arkade’s pleinairs were, too, subjected to close observation by the Stasi unofficial collaborators, which, ironically, provides today an extensive, even if not always reliable, documentation of these temporal and ephemeral events. Although some artists were aware at the time that the pleinairs might have been kept under surveillance,\textsuperscript{490} when in early 1990s it became publicly known that an ‘unofficial’ Stasi informant operated from inside the Clara Mosch group, it took everyone by surprise.\textsuperscript{491} A close friend and artist-photographer, a member of Clara Mosch group, Ralf-

\textsuperscript{488} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{489} The official fee structure (‘Honorarordnung’) decided by the Ministry of Culture defined a set value of art works sold in the GDR, mainly according to their size and subject matter, see ‘Honorarordnung’ of 1971, DR1/9860, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde.

\textsuperscript{490} BStU MfS HA XX 2169/92, p.27 the report describes a conversation between some of the artists involved, in which they expressed such an awareness.

Rainer Wasse, figuring in Stasi documentation under the pseudonym “Frank Körner” since 1973, accompanied the artists in nearly all their artistic activities and documented all Arkade's pleinairs in a photographic and written form. A large number of operational reports written for and by Department XX of the Ministry of Security of the GDR illustrate the extent of observation and the main lines of accusations directed against the artists’ activities during the pleinairs.

As one can conclude from the reports regularly produced by IM “Frank Körner”, the state security service was informed about nearly all artists’ activities during the pleinairs in great details. During the Leussow pleinair Wasse, as a photographer and an insider, was able to closely participate and denounce on all art actions and installations produced there. Prior to the meeting in Leussow he was contracted by the Stasi with a paid assignment and instructions to what he should look out for when gathering information. In the document of the district office Leipzig the state security officials specify main points of their interest, how and whether successful the artists tried to influence like-minded colleagues with their mind-set; aims of the pleinair and on what basis the participants were chosen, as well as the content of the programme and the lectures held by art historians.492 In general, Klaus Werner was assessed as constituting ‘a key position’ in the connection of ‘hostile-negative’ elements in various cities in the GDR.493

Despite prior knowledge about the plans of the meeting in Leussow, no reports seem to have been issued during the actual pleinair and only on 10.10.1977 the district office Neubrandenburg wrote an official letter to the headquarters in Berlin in which they clarified their actions regarding the supervision of the event. In fact, the letter is a justification of lack of actions undertaken by the district state security office. As the report makes clear, the Neubrandenburg officials did not manage to ‘realise an aspired coordination of safeguarding of the pleinair’ because no agreement was made with them from the side of the district offices in Karl-Marx-Stadt and in Berlin and no demand for information was communicated even if, as they emphasised, the majority of the persons figured in the Stasi records in both district administrations. The only official visit was made by the delegation of 3 officials from the local VBK office which, as reported, was met with

493 BStU MfS HA XX 12181, p.43.
unwelcoming reaction on the side of the participants. As the document also reveals, the
district officials were completely unaware and uneducated in terms of contemporary art
phenomena, or even what was happening on the GDR’s art scene. For instance, *Leussow-
Recycling* project was misspelt in the same report as an ‘Invivoments’ and the *Clara Mosch*
gallery as ‘Gerda Moschner’. The land-art installation was interpreted by them as ‘a
document of a lack of sense of direction of human struggle’ and one of the other land-art
objects as ‘a big symbolic wall’ which points out a poor understanding of artistic
practices.\(^494\)

In general, in the subsequent official correspondence between different state
security offices the majority of participants were assessed as ‘negative and hostile’ and the
*Leussow-Recycling* project as borrowed from the decadent Western art tradition. The
authorities were also informed of all critical views about social reality in the GDR, cultural
politics or the state of socialist art that were expressed during the pleinair by a number of
participants. Nevertheless, the reports do not contain any instructions for further political
measures that were to be undertaken against the dissenting elements. Neither did the
state authorities attempt to prevent the publishing of the *Leussow-Koffer* multiple, even if
Wasse informed in a number of reports about the efforts of Klaus Werner and Thomas
Ranft to acquire, mostly unofficially, necessary printing resources.\(^495\)

Mainly due to its illegal status, the last *Arkade* pleinair in Gallentin caused a greater
reaction of state officials and had further-reaching consequences, especially for Klaus
Werner. Thus, while the artists and writers were realising their projects in Gallentin, an
intensive letter and telegram exchange between various Stasi and culture offices was taking
place. What is more, based on the reports from a number of unofficial collaborayors
involved in various circles that made up the fabric of pleinairs, the state security service
was informed about the plans of organising Gallentin pleinair well in advance. As early as
on the 13\(^{th}\) of May there was an official note made in the documentation of *OV “Galerie”*
stating that a pleinair in Gallentin was planned from 21.9 until 4.10.1981 and that the State
Art Trade and the VBK would ‘presumably’ be informed about it.\(^496\) The report by IM ‘Frank

\(^{494}\) BStU MfS 14485/82 Band 2 OV “Galerie”, p.61.
\(^{495}\) BStU MfS XIII/1184/68 “Frank Körner”, Teil, 2, Band 3, p. 163.
\(^{496}\) BStU MfS 14485/82 Band 3 OV “Galerie”, p.45.
Körner’ of 16.07.1981 provided also further information about participating artists, including the invitation of West German artists. Four days before the start of the pleinair another IM ‘David Menzer’ gave further clues mainly regarding the type of art that was planned for the meeting and the ‘Sprachlos’ project which, nota bene, later became one of the main points of accusations against Klaus Werner. Thus, despite the illegality of its organisational process, the details of the Gallentin meeting seem to have been known to the socialist authorities as early as 4 months in advance of the event.

The first letters from the district Stasi offices in neighbouring Schwerin and Rostock informing about the illegality of the pleinair in Gallentin were not issued until 25.09.1981 and 27.9.1981, respectively. The local office of the Culture Ministry in Rostock sent a ‘notice about a special incident’ to the Minister’s office four days after the start of the pleinair and a further extended report followed three days later on 28.09.1981 in a form of a telegram. Despite all detailed information on the nature of illegal conduct that took place before and during the event, such as contempt for official permissions or misuse of state facilities, the letter of 28.09.1981 sent from the MfS BV Rostock stated that the pleinair would be retroactively authorised and one would refrain from any criminal proceedings. This was supposedly decided after consultation with the District Board for Culture Rostock (Rat des Bezirkes für Kultur Rostock) and other ‘relevant’ organs. 497 And yet, the telegram of the same date addressed to the Culture Minister Hoffmann sent from the District Board Rostock asked the minister about directives regarding the evaluation of the meeting and what measures needed to be taken. This could suggest that certain decisions were made without waiting for the approval of the Ministry or higher administrative instances. What is more, the report of 27.09.1981 sent from MfS BV Rostock to the Department XX in Berlin asked for the advice on how to react to the incident effectively in political terms and that the same was also to be consulted with the district leadership of the SED in Rostock. Overall, this complex web of institutional power agencies which were involved in the reaction to and decision making about dealing with the pleinair illustrates the extent of bureaucracy as well as a dispersed structure of state power in the GDR.

497 BStU MfS BV Rostock AKG Nr 555, BStU, p.50.
The decisions about political measures that were to be taken against the organisers and participants of the Gallentin pleinair were made in the following month. The report written by the Department XX of the Ministry of State Security on 16.10.1981 listed all wrongdoings committed during the pleinair: firstly, conscious decision to omit the institutional framework of the VBK and the State Art Trade, secondly, a preoccupation, in opposition to the official VBK pleinairs, with non-representational art such as abstract art or artistic ‘experiment’, thirdly, misuse of state facilities by Klaus Werner who illegally obtained films and a film projector from the state archive and used it during the event, and lastly, staging an independent auction of art works by the BRD artists. The artists and organisers were also accused of political hostility and ‘negative attitude to the party’s cultural politics’. 498 Ultimately, the state’s main concern seemed to have been the fact that Klaus Werner and the artists breached the monopoly of the state on too many levels. For the authorities, the participants dismissed the aesthetic prescriptions of state art institutions, misused state facilities and used them as an opportunity for 'private' gatherings and attempted to establish an 'alternative' platform for sale of art works.

The closing letter of 05.11.1981 from the Fine Art Department of the Ministry of Culture addressed to the Culture Minister Hoffman subsumed their political evaluation of the event. The pleinair was assessed as a well-planned provocation that aimed at challenging the state to undertake administrative measures. The direct organisational circle was fully aware of the illegality of their event and deliberately sought to disseminate the effect of their provocation by inviting a large number of artists. Their activity is compared with that of oppositional groups:

A majority of artists invited belong to those forces who, in cultural-political and artistic terms, represent such a viewpoint that brings them close to an oppositional group. The efforts of the enemies to form an artistic opposition as foundation for a retrievable political opposition had not, in fact, stopped even after 1976, only the methods became more variable and more difficult to see through. While the core of such artists does not increase in personnel, the potential grass-roots became significantly wider, especially in the centres Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and Karl-Marx-Stadt. 499

498 BStU MfS HA XX/AKG 119, pp. 166-170.
499 BStU MfS 14485/82 Band 3 OV ‘Galerie’, p.100.
Thus, the statement demonstrate that the socialist authorities did recognise the oppositional potential in the activities of alternative artistic groups but the latter were understood as a result of Western political manipulation rather than of the artists’ alienation from and discontent with the state’s cultural politics. Nevertheless, the weight of accusations was placed on Klaus Werner, who was removed from the position of Arkade’s director from 31.12.1981. The rest of the ‘negative-hostile’ participants of the pleinair were to be integrated more into the VBK and the procurement system so that they can be influenced ideologically in a more effective way. 

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated examples of heterotopian practices that were produced outside the gallery space, miles away from Berlin, for in the context of the 1970s GDR to experiment with actions, performances or happenings one had to relocate outside the official framework to marginal spaces like holiday villages. The juxtaposition of Leussow and Gallentin pleinairs has demonstrated that the non-conformist artists and intellectuals began to realise the impossibility of operating from within the system and consequently Gallentin pleinair was organised illegally without permissions from patron organisations. It signalled the change in the way alternative art galleries would function in the coming decade accompanied by a generational change. Namely, completely outside, in illegal private spaces.

The analyses of the state reactions to the pleinairs illustrate also the change in methods of dealing with dissenting elements in a post-Stalinist system. The state applied more subtle methods of repression through, for instance, dismissal and professional isolation rather than imprisonments. In this case the state security professionally degraded to Klaus Werner in order to minimize his cultural and political influence. In the case of the Clara Mosch circle the state attempted to destroy personal relationships inside the group so that its integrity could be dismantled. 

501 The Stasi attempted to destroy the marriage of Thomas and Dagmar Ranfts and plant a seed of envy and suspicion amongst the members by granting only some privileges of exhibitions abroad etc., see Gunar
However, the administrative process involved in dealing with both pleinairs by the Stasi exposes also the shortcomings of the GDR’s system of controls where decision-making required contacting various internal and external power agencies. This meant that the reaction could have been considerably slowed down and on the way some decisions had to be made by local power agents without approval in the higher administration levels. The state did not attempt to disrupt the artists’ meetings in Leussow and Gallentin despite prior knowledge about the plans and on-going reports provided by the participating unofficial informers. In fact, except for Gallentin, there is no evidence of any direct consequences that the organizers and participants of the pleinair in Leussow had to subsequently suffer. One can assume that the state, in fact, allowed and tolerated the organization of alternative pleinairs, while making sure they were under close Stasi observation. From this point of view, the pleinairs could be seen as also having a stabilizing function or, in Foucault’s terms, as functioning as temporary counter-sites where artistic ‘deviance’ could have been enacted under control.

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Conclusion

wherever there is power, there is counterpower 502

As Castells points out, power is never a simple top-down exercise but depends on the interactions with counterpower. Correspondingly, the socialist regimes in Poland and East Germany of the 1970s were only able to impose their cultural politics on artist to a degree as they also had to respond and adapt to the counter-pressures from below. This thesis has examined examples of cultural practices which were produced in spaces of alternative art galleries where artistic counterpower could be exercised. By comparatively analysing two case studies of Galeria/ Repassage in Warsaw and Arkade in East Berlin, this research has addressed the questions of differences and commonalities in functioning of those spaces and, in broader terms, of their socio-cultural function within two different post-Stalinist contexts.

That individual galleries have so far only seen a modicum of academic attention has meant a notable lack in the literature on this phenomenon in that both have long been celebrated as examples of non-conformist, and in some cases even oppositional, exhibition practices that regularly pushed against the official structures. Yet, the academic gaps in commentary and scholarship have turned out to be even larger when considered alongside alternative art galleries in the Eastern Bloc in the 1970s. Aside from Piotrowski’s two short analyses, there simply have not been any publications that have looked at the phenomenon from different and yet commensurable post-Stalinist perspectives so far; or any publications that have used the wide variety of available primary sources, rather than basing its conclusions on the materials published in the secondary literature.

Thus, my analyses have used the primary sources published within two monographs and until now unexamined archival documentation comprised of photographic, textual, film and state archival records. Having worked through this rich material, I have arrived at a more detailed and multifaceted picture of how the organisers and artists produced those

spaces and how their activities related to the wider cultural-political processes prevalent in the GDR and the PRL in the 1970s. Indeed, one of the main objectives of this thesis was to expand beyond the usual analyses of art galleries as seen from the perspective of artistic practices exhibited there and embrace their multidimensionality that included artistic, exhibition, organisational, discursive and social strategies.

To pursue such a holistic approach, I have used Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space which interprets space as a three-dimensional process interconnecting the mental, the physical and the social dimensions. Applied in a micro-level analysis, Lefebvre’s theoretical framework turned out to be extremely useful in the identification of different forms and strategies of socio-cultural subversion. As such, the case studies demonstrated how the directors and artists produced alternative conceptual spaces in their catalogues, writings or opening speeches which undermined socialist power on the level of discourse and language. In the context of repressive post-Stalinist regimes, the production of discourse was, to use Foucault’s words, ‘at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures’ and texts critical of the regime were excluded from the public sphere. Yet, as the examples have proved, critique was still possible but in indirect and more subtle ways by, for instance, promoting alternative systems of reference, truths and values. The most telling example of such a subversive strategy provided the controversy around the catalogue text by Schweinebraden which undermined the socialist discourse on art and its authority by exposing an alternative interpretation of Marxist ideas on art. In terms of Galeria and Repassage, the artists used catalogues as space for publishing their anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical views while also questioning the social order and its foundations.

The galleries also presented artistic practices that appropriated the physical space of the ‘white cube’ gallery in new experimental ways and broke with the conventionality of the state exhibition venues by, for instance, using windows as a medium of communication with the outside (Buren, Cieślars) or staging a performance in them (Schade). What is more, Galeria and Repassage artists attempted to transgress the gallery borders by transposing their actions and installations to the public spaces outside and reclaiming their right to

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urban space. Because of the more repressive context in the GDR, Klaus Werner and his artist friends had to relocate to pleinair settings in holiday villages where they pursued artistic experimentations that were unacceptable for the socialist officials.

The analysis of both galleries through Lefebvre’s triad revealed also the social dimension of their activities which had subversive potential in relation to the prevalent socialist structures. Most importantly, the organisers and artists produced different forms of ‘sociality’ that escaped regulations of the state organisations and their ideology. In Galeria/ Repassage the artists sought to reconcile individualism and collectivity within their group art projects. Their model of collectivity was, however, much more horizontally constructed than the one imposed by the socialist state. In a similar vein, for the participants of Arkade’s pleinairs the temporary social space that the pleinairs produced was ‘unregimented’ and freer. These forms of sociality were determined by the directors’ and associate artists’ informal social networks that operated fairly independently from the official forms of socialisation such as artists’ unions and associations.

To move on to the higher level of macro-analysis that tackles the broader questions of the galleries cultural-political function, I have complemented Lefebvre’s perspective with Foucault’s theory of heterotopia. As such, both galleries have been analysed through their creation/production of counter-spaces that were linked up with the network of socialist spaces in various ways but at the same time could suspend their relations with that network or selected parts of it and so operate technically outside the official exhibition system. More specifically, I have identified them as heterotopias of illusion- spaces where ‘deviant’ artistic and social practices could be enacted and isolated from the rest of the society but which, at the same time, emphasized the illusory character of the order outside. As illusory heterotopias, the galleries fulfilled both stabilising and destabilising social function and, therefore, had an ambiguous character in relation to socialist power. They were able to disturb the established order by counteracting the uniformity and homogeneity of the official socialist culture and by empowering marginal artistic subgroups through their use of space but, simultaneously, they still functioned within the radius of state control and possibly served as a necessary margin for the enactment of the abnormal.
What the analysis using Foucault’s theoretical approach highlighted, is contradiction in that the galleries have been often referred to as ‘independent’ exhibition spaces but were not autonomous in the administrative or financial senses, for they functioned under patronage of the official socialist organisations, or institutions. In the GDR context of the 1970s alternative galleries such as Arkade, Clara Mosch or Galerie oben belonged to the official art organisations such as the Cultural Association of the GDR or later the State Art Trade. Galeria/ Repassage, like most of artist-run galleries in Poland, were subsidised by and administratively responsible to the Students Unions. Yet, I have agreed with Nader that the patronage of student associations in the Polish context, instead of the official art organisations (BWA, ZPAP, PSP) had an impact on the lesser degree of state control over their artistic output. For instance, the reconstruction of the process of getting permissions for Municipal Repassage in Chapter 5 demonstrated how at times local powers within Students’ Unions went against the grain of the official prescriptions. Even in a more restrictive cultural-political context of the GDR, Werner was still able to escape state control mechanisms and publish controversial, or even critical texts, as it was the case with Schweinebraden’s contribution, without previous consultation with the censoring bodies. This suggested that the galleries’ actors sometimes had more agency than one would imagine.

The aim of this thesis was also to provide an analysis of the depth and extent of repressions by state security services that both galleries and associate artists were exposed to and which compromised their activities on some occasions. Although there is more accessible evidence on surveillance of Arkade than Repassage, both were observed by the state security, whose strategies in the 1970s were based on systematic harassment, intimidation and invigilation instead of persecution of dissent elements. As the chapters on Arkade have demonstrated, the degree of invigilation of artistic circles in the GDR was much greater and, in fact, some of the participants of Arkade’s pleinairs worked or denounced for the Stasi while co-producing those events. Since the East German state security service was generally better organised and had nearly 30 times higher number of unofficial informants than the Polish SB, alternative artistic networks were infiltrated more systematically there. This meant that it was much more difficult to escape the state’s

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504 Nader, p. 408.
control, however, not impossible, as, for instance, the organisation of *Arkade’s* pleinair in Gallentin proved. The organisers and artists still managed to pursue their illegal artistic activities, even if the Stasi was well-informed about the events at the time. As I have shown, the consequences materialised only subsequently in Werner’s dismissal and the gallery’s closure a few months after these events. The directors of *Repassage* also faced repressions from the Polish authorities when the political atmosphere in the *PRL* in the late 1970s began to get increasingly tense. When Emil Cieślars was dismissed from his lectureship at ASP Warsaw on ideological grounds, Cieślars’ family was left with little financial resources and ultimately was forced to emigrate to France in 1978.\(^{505}\)

In broader cultural-political terms, the stabilising function of the galleries was also seen in this thesis from the perspective of the quasi-liberalisation of both systems in the 1970s. Both East Germany and Poland of the 1970s constituted examples of post-Stalinist regimes, however, the system in the *PRL* had moved further away from the totalitarian model of rule than the GDR and represented a less repressive stance towards non-ideological cultural production. This meant that Gierek and Honecker’s regimes were prepared to tolerate cultural dissidence, but at differing levels in both contexts, and allowed for some concessions for tactical reasons. For instance, as Bathrick has argued, the East German regime wanted to improve the relationship between the party and artists and, in this way, strengthen the state’s position. Or as Mielke claimed himself, the strategy of cultural liberalisation was designed to help the state infiltrate the artistic circles even deeper.\(^{506}\) These ‘liberal’ cultural-politics of the 1970s in the Eastern Bloc created, as the Hungarian dissident Haraszti wrote in 1988, the condition of the ‘velvet prison’ to ensure the obedience of the artists and intellectuals. By introducing a system of economic rewards and by relaxing cultural controls the state managed to win artists’ support in the preservation of the system out of self-interest.\(^{507}\) Following these arguments, the activities of alternative galleries could be seen as serving as necessary ‘safety valves’ in order to allow for some degree of ideological deviance to be produced in spaces that are although publicly

\(^{505}\) Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars, in an interview by Aneta Jarzębska, April 2012, Die, France.
\(^{506}\) Dümmel, ‘Kunst, Kultur und Stasi’, p. 110.
\(^{507}\) Haraszti, p. 9.
accessible so still pretty marginal and closed in rather small circles of like-minded art intellectuals.

Accordingly, for Piotrowski, in the PRL the dependence of alternative galleries on state funding was convenient for the socialist authorities, since it pressured artists to disengage from politics and, ultimately, led to wide-spread conformism as artists depended on state’s support.508 What is more, since politically neutral art was for a post-Stalinist system sufficient for maintaining the status quo, artistic practices of most of the Polish neo-avantgarde artists are viewed by Piotrowski as apolitical and conformist for they did not directly criticise the regime.509 The Polish regime’s liberal attitude to modern and post-modern art has been seen by some scholars as a strategic manoeuvre and as such was aimed at binding dissenting elements to the system.510 In this way, the practices of alternative art galleries can also be seen as co-creating the myth of the liberalism of the Polish regime and in this way reinforced that very illusion.511

These arguments, however, lose some strength when applied to the East German context where the SED was still imposing socialist realism as an official artistic style and cultivated a dogmatic attitude towards modern art up until the end of the 1970s. The politics of cultural liberalisation did not run as deep here as to tolerate neo-avantgarde art practices, nor to allow for artist-run initiatives within the official framework. This more restrictive framework for artistic production, accompanied by a greater isolation arrested artistic processes for a longer time and consequently, as I have shown in chapters about Arkade’s activities, experimental art events such as performance or happenings and actions remained very rare and did not happen there until the later 1970s. It also determined a different spacialisation of experimental artistic practices which had to be produced illegally and transposed to the unofficial, private spaces of flat galleries and artist studios, or to pleinair settings. Consequently, the official art spaces such as Arkade in the GDR were much more traditional in their artistic programmes and organisational structures. Nevertheless, as Gallentin pleinair demonstrated, the East German state security still consented to realisation of illegal activities during those events despite having been informed about

508 Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta, p. 291.
509 Ibid., 289-290.
510 Turowski, p. 31
511 Piotrowski, How to Write, p. 13.
them at the time which could provide evidence that the changing conditions in the late 1970s forced the state to withdraw from direct suppression. The limited liberalisation of culture in both countries defined its boundaries at different points, which had, in turn, an impact on what transgressing these boundaries by artists and intellectuals in both contexts involved. In general, the activities of Polish alternative galleries seemed more radical and challenging towards the socialist order, yet, East German galleries of non-conformist profile were set against a more repressive socialist system. Therefore, when analysing the galleries’ function and ways of functioning it was necessary to relativise their strategies against their cultural-political context.

This thesis constituted a response to the academic debate about the conformist character of alternative culture in the 1970s. As I have demonstrated using my case studies, these critical judgements, however valid, have not paid enough recognition to the fact that alternative galleries such as Arkade and Galeria/Repassage produced a variety of discursive, spatial and social practices and strategies that transgressed the borders and pushed against the constraints of the official order. They undermined the very fundamentals, which the socialist regimes relied on to organise and control artistic life and the society, in general. Both galleries introduced new social, exhibition and artistic forms to homogenous and uniform socialist space and appropriated the latter in ways that challenged its socialist identity, for instance, by introducing alternative art discourse, self-curatorial and self-organisational practices or by sabotaging state’s monopoly for art circulation. Ultimately, those subversive practices have been seen as symptomatic and, at the same, nourishing the process of self-contained privatisation and gradual disintegration of post-Stalinist systems and their structures. These developments were underway already in the 1970s, although set in with different speeds in the GDR and Poland, and the galleries’ heterotopian practices reflected this ‘hidden’ reality of late socialist society, not yet perceptible on the surface of the official culture.

The histories of both gallery spaces ended at the onset of the 1980s decade which concluded in the disintegration of the Socialist Bloc. In 1981 Arkade was closed by East German authorities after the dismissal of Klaus Werner as the gallery’s director on the basis
of him having offended the official cultural politics on various levels. \footnote{BStU MfS AOP 14485/82, Bd.I, p.16, as published in Muschter and Werner, p. 85.} In December 1981 Repassage ceased to exist, like many of this type of spaces following the introduction of martial law in the PRL. Before its closure it was run for a couple of months by Jerzy Słomiński and used as a meeting space for Warsaw University students on strikes. \footnote{Sitkowska, p. 10.} The closures of Arkade and Repassage were symptomatic of a turn in the cultural-political climate and the way the alternative art spaces could have functioned in East Germany and Poland. In the GDR, the beginning of the 1980s was marked by the entrance of a new generation of artists and coming to existence of new alternative exhibition spaces. The latter positioned themselves completely outside the official framework and as, for instance, the famous Leipziger gallery Eigen+Art were run often as an atelier or a studio, or in churches, in order to avoid complications with the GDR officials. \footnote{Teschner, \textit{Behauptung des Raums}.} In Poland due to a more dramatic change of political situation, alternative artistic life had to be transferred to private spaces of flat galleries, studios, or churches, out of necessity. \footnote{Piotr Lisowski, ‘War State. Expanding the Battlefield’, in \textit{Państwo Wojny/ War State}, p.78.} Thus, in both countries spaces of private flats and churches became new sites for production of critical or experimental art. However, as Guzek points out in relation to the Polish context, independent art circulation, the so-called ‘pitch-in culture’ (\textit{Kultura Zrzuty}) that emerged in the 1980s built on the experiences of the 1970s conceptual galleries, and of the private exhibition spaces such as, for instance, Partum’s flat gallery \textit{Biuro Poezji} or KwieKulik’s art documentation centre \textit{PDDiU}. \footnote{Guzek, p.26.} Piotr Lisowski also argues that the idea of web of independent locations which was developed in the 1980s had its roots in the neo-avantgarde operations of the 1970s. A similar thing could be observed in East Germany, where the proliferation of private galleries in the 1980s certainly had its precursors in the pioneering activities in private spaces of Die \textit{Lücke} group and Schweinebraden’s flat gallery \textit{EP} in the 1970s. \footnote{Fiedler, p. 297.} Thus, alternative exhibition spaces functioning in the 1970s also played an important role in the emergence of the independent and unofficial circulation of art during the last decade of state socialism in Eastern Europe.
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