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IV.

The Dialectic Digression

The dialectic digression of the contemporary socialist theater in the German Democratic Republic actually comes in two phases. The first sidestep encompasses plays from late 1957 to early 1960, the earliest of which was Helmut Baierl's didactic play (*Lehrstück*) *The Inquiry* (*Die Feststellung* [December 1957]). Heiner Müller followed with the *Lehrstück*-like plays *The Wage Reducer* (*Der Lohndrucker* [March 1958]), *The Correction* (*Die Korrektur* [September 1958]), and the purely agitation-propaganda piece *Klettwitz Report 1958* (*Klettwitzer Bericht 1958* [September 1958]). Peter Hacks's first contemporary topical treatment, *The Cares and the Power* (*Die Sorgen und die Macht*, first produced at Senftenberg in May 1960, but under discussion since 1958), and Hartmut Lange's *Senftenberg Tales* (*Senftenberger Erzählungen* [1960, not produced]) round out the first phase. The second phase of the digression from the newly reestablished realistic dramaturgy on GDR stages took place during the years from 1963 to 1966. The contemporary topical treatments in this phase were Hartmut Lange's *Marski* (1963), Volker Braun's *Dumper Paul Bauch* (*Kipper Paul Bauch* [1964]), Heiner Müller's *The Construction* (*Der Bau* [1964–66]), and Peter Hacks's second attempt at a GDR topic, *Moritz Tassow* (1965). Of these plays, only *Moritz Tassow* ever saw an audience.

It must remain clear that the relationship between the two phases is not linear, even though some of the same authors are represented in both phases. The contingencies for theatrical work were radically different in 1964 and 1958, respectively. The most important political act of the GDR, the "securing of the border" on 13 August 1961, separates the two phases. We will at this point consider only the first phase, since in the later period the ground rules—and perhaps the whole game—were changed. We must therefore consider this first phase in its own historical context, after delineating the cultural, political, and historical processes which etched its profile.

For the first time in this entire developmental study of the contemporary

topical drama of the GDR we are not embarking on virgin territory. The critical treatments of GDR drama which are available today usually consider this period the actual start of the history of the GDR theater. Even the GDR scholars neglect to look back beyond 1956. In 1964, Hermann Kähler starts his history of the contemporary socialist drama in the GDR, *The Present on the Stage (Gegenwart auf der Bühne)*, with a chapter entitled "The Prelude of the Didactic Theater." He deals there exclusively with Peter Hacks and the early plays of Helmut Baierl and Heiner Müller, regarding them as a necessary evil on the road to Bitterfeld. At the same time he casts off the period between 1945 and 1957 in a cursory footnote.¹ An editorial collective of the *Weimarer Beiträge*, the GDR's foremost periodical of literary scholarship, in 1964 gives the plays turning-point significance in the development of the GDR drama by referring to them as the "didactic-agitatory new beginning of Heiner Müller and Helmut Baierl."² The only previous play considered worthy of mention is Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*, and then it is in connection with the work of Brecht.³ A similar view is presented in the already mentioned *Theater Bilanz* (1971), a retrospective summation of GDR theater work.⁴

This type of critical evaluation by GDR scholars shows two things. It demonstrates, first of all, an aversion to the early GDR dramas, which is understandable, since the cultural-political restrictions at the time they were written did nothing to enhance their general quality. But besides this, and perhaps more important, it shows that the drama, the stepchild of GDR literature until the First Cultural Conference in 1957, has now "arrived." The consideration of contemporary drama in the literary histories reflects the increasingly important role of the theater in that society.

Western scholarship presents a perplexing problem in this context. Whereas the GDR treatments of the drama start with this dialectic digression, Western critics go one better. Not only do they start there, but they tend to stop there as well. These dramatists are generally seen as being representative of GDR drama—or at least as the only dramatists worth studying. There is some merit in this view if we are content to study only "masterpieces" and "great talents." There is no doubt that this dialectic digression represents a qualitative level of drama which,

¹ Kähler, *Gegenwart auf der Bühne: Die sozialistische Wirklichkeit in den Bühnenstücken der DDR von 1956–1963/64* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1966), pp. 193–94.

² Klaus Jarmatz, "Die literarische Entwicklung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," *Weimarer Beiträge*, 5 (1964), 794.

³ "In the 'Notes on *Katzgraben*' (1952/53) Brecht developed important theoretical conclusions, especially for the drama, based on an analysis of Strittmatter's play" (*Ibid.*, p. 795).

⁴ Manfred Nössig and Hans Gerald Otto, "Grundlagen einer Bilanz," in *Theater Bilanz: Bühnen der DDR: Eine Bilddokumentation 1945–1969*, ed. Christoph Funke et al. (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1971), p. 24.

viewed from traditional aesthetic perspectives, remains singular in the whole of GDR literature.

But this general qualitative improvement can easily lead to an overestimation of the literary and historical significance of these plays. In any historical presentation of GDR dramatists and their works, we must remember that the mainstream of the drama remained within the framework of the prevalent cultural doctrine which we have just outlined. Thus the following explication of this qualitatively excellent "dialectic digression" in the GDR theater must be understood for what it represents: a study of *possibilities* which never reached fruition as a model for further development. The mainstream remained characterized by positive presentations of GDR life. As the young American critic Helen Fehervary puts it, "Besides this epic-dialectic tradition, the second form of 'escape' appears in a clear tendency toward the situational. . . ."⁵ And it was this "situational" mainstream that determined the further development of the work of GDR dramatists.

Curiously, but also naturally, new developments in the drama of the GDR can be viewed in terms of age groups. The rapid development of the new GDR social structure is nowhere as evident as it is here. In a matter of ten years, from 1947 to 1957, three age groups of writers have determined the changing profile of the East German stage, and a fourth is not far behind. From Wangenheim, Wolf, Grünberg and Brecht (born around 1900), to Strittmatter, Freyer, Hauser and Zinner (born around 1915), we come to Hacks, Müller and Baierl (born around 1930) in 1957. This "generation gap" is a determining factor in the approach which the latter group takes in presenting the realities of their country on the stage. For this is the first of the three generations whose educational, social and political profile has not been determined by a pre-socialist, antagonistic class society. The traditional prerequisite of socialist drama, massive social conflict with its inherent dialectic situation, is not within the concept of reality which these young Marxists have attained. The basis of the dialectics in the plays of a Friedrich Wolf or a Bertolt Brecht, no matter how different their individual approaches are, is the economic and social class conflict inherent within their society. But by 1957 society has changed. The objective for this generation of new playwrights is the dramatization of the developmental processes in a society for which internal conflict has ostensibly been removed by the socialist/Communist order.

Of the traditions to which they could orient their own work, the dramatists of the dialectic digression chose Bertolt Brecht's efforts as the most promising touchstone. In their estimation, it was Brecht's "scientific process" of demonstrating the causality of social processes (mainly economic) that held the key to

⁵ Fehervary, "Heiner Müllers Brigadenstücke," *Basis: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur*, II (1971), 103-140.

the possibility of “dramatizing” the non-antagonistic contradictions of their socialist classless society. Werner Mittenzwei, perhaps the most astute drama scholar of the GDR, categorizes the main factors that attracted this group of authors to Brecht’s work, and differentiates their approach from that of non-socialist dramatists:

The alienation technique developed by Brecht had the greatest influence on the German socialist drama and authors like Helmut Baierl, Peter Hacks, Heiner Müller, and Hartmut Lange. The alienation technique is used in the most significant works of the socialist drama since the foundation of the German Democratic Republic. Their authors learned from Brecht without imitating him slavishly. They used his lessons individually in a manner corresponding to their specific talents. Even if these young writers have not yet learned to handle all facets of Brecht’s method, they do consciously try to demonstrate, with the means of alienation, a process in its social causality.⁶

The dialectics within the social processes of the GDR are at the heart of the dialectic digression. Mittenzwei’s point that these authors avoid slavish imitation of Brecht is essential to an evaluation of their works. But the fact that these new dramatists have not learned to “handle” all of Brecht’s techniques does not necessarily detract from their contribution. For Brecht’s work shows that he himself never came to grips with the removal of the massive conflict. Whether he could not or would not is not the question. The fact is that he did not succeed in demonstrating his “method,” as Mittenzwei would have it, in a play about the social processes in the new state. The reference is, of course, to Brecht’s unsuccessful attempts to dramatize the life of Hans Garbe, the famous Siemens-Plania activist whose tremendous efforts in rebuilding a kiln while it was still under fire became symbolic of the reconstruction in the early years.⁷ (This feat is also the basis of Heiner Müller’s play, *The Wage Reducer*.)

Büsching, as Brecht called the character, is his only hero who is not a hero of the antagonistic class system. The difficulties which the topic presented were not overcome by the master, although he considered the project at length in 1951 and again in 1954.⁸ Thus it remains significant that the dialectic, scientific play-writing process was applied to the GDR reality not by Brecht, but by a new generation which perhaps had a stronger grasp of life in the GDR.

Dedicated to the advancement of their state and the propagation of the party’s cultural policy, these works of the first digression are an indication that the goal-oriented cultural policy of socialist systems does not necessarily preclude the development of genuine theater. We must remember Alexander Abusch’s

⁶ Mittenzwei, *Gestaltung und Gestalten im modernen Drama* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1965), p. 270.

⁷ The most successful treatment of the Hans Garbe subject, besides Heiner Müller’s *Lohndrucker*, was a 1954 novel by Eduard Claudius, *Menschen an unserer Seite*.

⁸ Bertolt Brecht Archiv, No. 925/01, quoted in Mittenzwei, *Gestaltung und Gestalten*, pp. 165–66.

belated call for young writers to go to the people for their subjects at the First Cultural Conference in 1957. The new plays answered this call. Helmut Baierl's *The Inquiry*, written immediately thereafter, is the first rational treatment of the contradictions between the worker and the farmer, who have a common goal, the success of the agricultural collective. Heiner Müller's *The Wage Reducer*, taking up the call of the Nachterstedt letter, presents the heroic treatment of the activist and his inherent contradictions in the development of the socialist perspective. This was the play Brecht did not write. Müller's *The Correction* is even closer to the new cultural policy; it reflects the prime goal of the economic plan by examining the difficulties of the Brown Coal Complex Schwarze Pumpe, the most important industrial complex of the day. The GDR's "Brown Coal literature,"⁹ which we will consider and define later, includes Hacks's *The Cares and the Power*, a contemporary treatment, and Hartmut Lange's *Senftenberg Tales*, which is a historical treatment of the early years of the GDR.

In short, all of the plays of the dialectic digression are close cultural reflections of the economic plan. Baierl, Müller, Hacks, and Lange gathered their materials by working alongside the people at the very locales they treat in their plays.

Helmut Baierl was born in 1926 in Rumburg, now Czechoslovakia. His career parallels the historic growth of the GDR. From 1949 to 1951 he studied Slavic languages and literature in Halle. He started his literary career in 1952 by writing plays for amateur and children's theaters. These early works were distinguished by a didactic socialist moralism with much humorous satire. From 1955 to 1957 Baierl attended the Johannes R. Becher School of Literature, the GDR's prime training ground for talented young authors and critics. Here he augmented his considerable talent with a thorough study of the orthodox Marxist-Leninist literary theory, the influence of which is evident in his mature works.

Baierl's *The Inquiry*, first produced at Erfurt on 27 December 1957, is a direct and forceful exercise in didactic agitational theater. Without any circumlocution, Baierl seizes the prime problem of the agricultural collectivization process, the quest to overcome the traditional property-oriented mentality of the German farmer, and subjects it to dialectic scrutiny. The impetus that starts the dialectic didactic *Lehrstück* process, aimed at teaching both actors and audience a political lesson, is the return of Finze, a farmer who had fled to the West. The

⁹ In the aesthetic system of the GDR, where art must be functional, instructional, and moral, with social, economic and technical implications which work toward the absolute goal of a socialist world, the discovery of a conversion process on 10 July 1952, whereby bituminous coal will yield enough heat to smelt iron ore, became a literary phenomenon. The measure of strength of an economic system in the modern industrial world is not gold; it is steel. The production of steel until this time had been limited to the availability of anthracite coke, which the GDR did not possess in any relevant quantity. Therefore, this discovery was perhaps the most far-reaching event, in economic terms, in the history of the GDR. Thus there developed a quantity of literature which can be called *Braunkohlenliteratur*.

chairman of the collective, whose background is that of an industrial worker, declares that Finze's goods and lands, which were appropriated by the collective according to law, must be given back to him, also according to law. This creates a dispute among the members, who naturally resent having to give up land which has increased in productive value through their work to one who had essentially sold them out. Finze declares, however, that the chairman had forced him to flee by trying to blackmail him into joining the collective.

In order to arrive at the truth, the chairman and Finze reenact their conversation of the night before Finze fled with his wife. Nothing is achieved, since the two men only reinforce their original points of view. Then the scene is "alienated" by a character reversal; Finze and the chairman exchange roles. This results in a premature declaration that the chairman was indeed at fault. Some members find this too simplistic; so a third scene is played in which the farmer Benno, of the same sensibilities and background as Finze, takes the job of the chairman, trying to convince Finze to join the collective at the crucial moment.

This is the successful experiment. Finze falls out of his role of portraying himself on that historic evening, and asks to join now. The members find this good, but again too easy, and ask him to wait. No one was at fault. In the quest for the success of socialism, the chairman had been too impatient because he did not understand the traditional historical point of view of the farmer. The farmer, in turn, had been alienated—not by the idea of socialism in agriculture, but by his refusal to accept rapid wholesale changes. It had only been necessary to find someone who could speak to him in his own language.

The lesson Baierl teaches as well as any playwright can teach anything is in line with the position of the SED agricultural policy in 1957. The conviction for the ideals of socialism cannot come through power. The power of socialism comes from the individual convictions of its base of power, the class-conscious people. In the quest for truth, for true conviction, Baierl rejects the standard superficial thought processes which tend to cover up rather than expose the inherent difficulties, the contradictions of the socialist society. He urges a thought process of thinking, rethinking, and thinking again from different perspectives to uncover the dialectic process of the socialist system, a process he demonstrates in *The Inquiry* with excellent results.

This is agitation in the theater. GDR theater critic Christoph Funke sees this as having the best effect on an audience, much in the way the originator of this dramatic technique, Bertolt Brecht, had thought of it. He sees success in this play in that "the dramatist Helmut Baierl throws the stick of dialectics between the legs of his audience."¹⁰ This causes the viewer to fall rough and tumble into an experience "which can only be presented through the efforts of thought."¹¹

¹⁰ Funke, "Über Helmut Baierl," in Helmut Baierl, *Stücke*, (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1969), p. 235.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The formal aspects of the play reveal a distinct application of the technique of the "classic" Brecht teaching play. Short scenes are prefaced by provocative descriptive titles. Commentary and introductions and conclusions are given in the form of songs. Each scene ends with a gong. Throughout the dialogue, care is taken to demonstrate problems rationally by means of forcing players to exchange roles, perspectives, and even ideologies. The play is nevertheless realistic in scope. Although there is no doubt that Baierl developed his technique of realistic portrayal independently of Peter Hacks, it is Hacks who describes the technique best in "The Realistic Theater Play" ("*Das realistische Theaterstück*"), the essay which provides a theoretical base for the whole of the dialectic digression: "the specific in collusion with the general is named by Brecht as the characteristic detail (in characterization: the social gest; on a large scale: the typical plot). The characteristic detail is the central aesthetic category of realism."¹²

Although Baierl draws his characters swiftly and schematically, it is this attention to the characteristic detail, already defined by Hacks, which makes his people more real and their problems more credible than any tedious naturalistic characterization could. A piece of dialogue from the fourth scene, "The Accusation" ("*Die Anklage*"), will serve to illustrate this. The farmer Finze categorizes at once his individuality and his historical role as a German farmer, while the chairman demonstrates his capabilities, rationality, and functionary mentality as they talk not to, but past each other:

THE FARMER: Yes, you said that; and you pressured me to join. So I went to the West. Do you think it was easy for me to leave my farm? Over there in the camp I had dreams every night. I heard my cows bellowing and I saw weeds grow in my fields. It is the chairman's fault, but forget it. I just wanted to clear this up. That's all.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, the case isn't closed. This is a grave accusation. Farmers! I'm not aware that I forced him to go. Look, you decide for yourselves. I discussed the situation with him; one. He didn't want to join; two. Result: He would have remained an independent farmer. Three. No one could have done anything to him for not wanting to join. Running away is not a part of this addition. You put that entry in yourself, Finze.¹³

This is realistic characterization as described by Hacks:

Now, surprisingly enough, is the time to break a lance for attention to detail against such people who fight against realism under the poetic flag. They don't notice that realism is also a type of naturalism. But it is widened through the category of the dialectic. They don't see that the most thoughtful thing in the world, the characteris-

¹² Hacks, "Das realistische Theaterstück," *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, V/10 (1957), 92.

¹³ Baierl, *Die Feststellung*, in *Stücke*, pp. 13-14.

tic detail, is differentiated from the emptiest thing, the naturalistic detail, only because it is selected from the perspective of the social essence.¹⁴

It is essentially Baierl's process to identify and describe his characters in terms of their social roles. For him, the worker or the farmer cannot exist as such without his role in his class, and such a class cannot exist without the awareness of that existence by individuals who are workers and farmers. This is also the central conflict in the play. How can industrial workers—the chairman had been one—assume a role in a productive collective of farmers who have a greatly different social background? The answer: by emphasizing the essential similarity of their basic objective, socialism, while still respecting their individuality.

The process reconciles their inherent differences by changing the conditions around them. This is not a traditional conflict situation but a contradictory one, according to Hacks's view in this "programmatic essay."¹⁵ Conflict is seen here as the private manifestation of the social category of contradiction. Conflict is obsolete in this scientific age, according to Hacks, since it is based on the theory of the unified soul. Hacks further postulates that contradictions, on the other hand, exist, and that they are the basis of the situation expressed in the socialist drama because they show "reality as changeable, thus beautiful"¹⁶ in a dialectic process. But Hacks is on shaky ideological ground here. By postulating contradictions as the force of change toward the "beauty" of a Communistic ideal, he himself contradicts the basic tenets of socialist realism as interpreted in the party line, where the positive solutions, and not the problems, should predominate.

A close look at the dialogue in the play reveals that the chairman and the farmer use essentially the same diction. Would it not be more realistic to differentiate the social roles through the use of dialect and other speech peculiarities? For Baierl, and again Hacks, that technique is obsolete because it is simply camouflage and not a relevant dramatic expression of social functions. The action of the farmers Benno and Finze in telling jokes to each other is a characteristic social gest. If they would use dialect in talking to each other, the social gest would lose its significance in favor of superficial non-characteristic detail, or naturalism.

Hacks identifies the special use of language demonstrated in *The Inquiry*, the plays of Heiner Müller and Hartmut Lange, and his own *The Cares and the Power*:

¹⁴ Hacks, "Das realistische Theaterstück," p. 93.

¹⁵ "Remarks about conflict: Contradiction is something other than conflict. Conflict is the private side of contradiction, it is its inner reflection since contradictions are not manifested except in contradictory actions. This private side is artistically irrelevant since its third rate meaning in the realm of social causality is evident: Its existence is, at the least, debatable. The theory of conflict rests on the theory of the unified soul, on the assumption that there is inherent in man a working, ordering, systematizing force which has as its goal to eliminate all contradictions" (*ibid.*, pp. 102–3).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

The working class does not speak its own language. Since it now rules, it speaks the old language of the rulers, except better. Dialect is not typical of its language. That is classbound and agrarian. The individualistic expression of the plebian original is not typical of it either. The working class has taken the highly developed medium of communication of the bourgeoisie, and uses it for its better ends.¹⁷

Baierl, whose experience before this play was restricted to amateur plays and children's theater, was understandably rewarded for this effort. He was named a dramaturge at the Berliner Ensemble, and served there from 1959 to 1967, where he also fulfilled his own "social role" as the Ensemble's party secretary.

From a similar bourgeois intellectual background, but with political sensibilities developed in the new state, comes Heiner Müller. Müller was born in Eppendorf, Saxony, in 1929. Immediately after the war, he worked as a librarian and a journalist before acting as a research fellow for the German Writers' Union in 1954–55. After this, he was the editor of the journal *Young Art* (*Junge Kunst*). Among his first works for the stage was *Ten Days That Shook the World* (*Zehn Tage, die die Welt erschütterten*), written jointly with Hagen Müller-Stahl and adapted from John Reed's book. This play about the Russian Revolution premiered at the Neue Volksbühne am Luxembourgplatz in Berlin in 1957. His *Klettwitz Report 1958* (*Klettwitzer Bericht 1958*) was produced by Armin Stolper and Horst Schönemann at the Landestheater Senftenberg. *The Wage Reducer* (*Der Lohnprücker*), perhaps his most successful contemporary play, premiered at the Städtische Theater Leipzig in 1958. *The Correction* (*Die Korrektur*) was produced at the Maxim Gorki Theater, where he was a dramaturgical assistant, in the same year.

Müller's treatment of the Hans Garbe topic was, along with Baierl's *The Inquiry*, a play that prophesied a new direction in GDR theater. "Retrospectively, *The Wage Reducer* in particular shows itself as a 'turning point' in our dramatic development, as something entirely new," writes Hermann Kähler.¹⁸ This, one of Kähler's more lucid critical statements, is just praise for the wrong reasons. Kähler's reasons for rating the play highly are that "in this play, the German workers stepped out of their lives onto the stage as historical subjects; as characters to be taken seriously; as history-making personalities."¹⁹

But what Kähler describes here is not Müller's play; instead, it is closer to *Büsching/Garbe*, the play Brecht did not write. Neither characterizations nor personalities receive the major thrust of Müller's attention. Whereas Brecht was concerned with characterizing Garbe, the individual, as a semi-tragic hero of the socialist revolution, Müller's primary concern here is not with individuals, but

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸ Kähler, *Gegenwart auf der Bühne*, p. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

with social processes. Specifically, Müller explores how workers relate to work as a social process in building a Communist society.

Brecht's "great play" concept, coupled with the inherent difficulty of portraying the first of his heroes to support rather than oppose the prevailing political-economic system, necessitated an extensive barrage of alienation techniques, including a chorus and various theatrical devices.²⁰ In contrast, Müller's approach is disarmingly direct, simple, and designed to prevent the characters' domination of his dialectic exercise. This depersonalization technique is excellently indicated in the play's prescript: "The action takes place in the German Democratic Republic in 1948–49. The story of the circular kiln is known. The characters and their histories are fiction."²¹ Where Brecht had planned a broad historical chronicle showing the development of an individual, Müller concentrates on a short period of time, a crisis situation. There is little, if any, psychological motivation, even less detailed characterization, and virtually no examination of the causality of the action. There is only action in a series of short scenes which start just before the dramatic climax which brings them to a close.

This actively inserts the audience into the process on the stage and forces it to take sides again and again. It means that reactionary points of view expressed by some characters appear equal in strength and conviction to the revolutionary views of others. The playgoer is caught in the squeeze. Müller does not develop the socialist perspective through the dialogue; instead, he postulates it and dialectically demonstrates its superiority. He shows no shining examples, only alternatives of action in crisis situations. The playgoer chooses.

The Wage Reducer's plot is relatively simple. The scene: the beginning of the German Democratic Republic. The situation: a need for increased production, a lack of labor, materials and food, and bad living conditions. Given: a disparate group of masons and mason's helpers, old Nazis, old Communists, fence sitters, and one *new* Communist. Balke has the new perspective: Increased production comes first, then better working and living conditions will follow. His perspective, however, is unimportant. The important thing is how all the others react to it and how it influences their work.

Balke works hard and thereby increases the production standard. The others call him names. He works harder; they threaten him. He tries the impossible, to rebuild a kiln while the fire chambers are still in operation. When a brick is thrown at him while he works on the kiln, one of his companions suggests that he keep it as evidence. But Balke just rubs his sore spot and asks if the brick is dry. When he learns that it is, Balke simply applies mortar and uses it to continue his work. Dry bricks are rare.

²⁰ Cf. Käthe Rülicke-Weiler, *Die Dramaturgie Brechts: Theater als Mittel der Veränderung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), pp. 172 and 258.

²¹ Heiner Müller, *Der Lohndrucker*, in *Sozialistische Dramatik: Autoren der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), p. 174.

But all this is to no avail. The workers who oppose his ambitious efforts beat him up, and the management distrusts his motives because he had denounced a Communist saboteur during the Hitler regime. But again, his tenacity gathers support. Gradually, it becomes obvious that the economic sustenance of all depends on the success of the project. The collective effort is not a matter of choice, but of necessity.

But this even Balke must learn. Karras has been his foremost adversary, but more men are needed to repair the kiln in order to meet the demands of the plan. Karras is impressed only by the necessity. The director asks: "Karras, what about you? You're a kilnmason." Karras looks at Balke, who turns away, and replies: "That's Balke's soup; let him eat it."²² At this point, Schorn, the party secretary who was imprisoned by the Nazis on the strength of Balke's testimony, interjects: "Balke didn't climb into the kiln for himself."²³ Karras answers simply, "When should I start?"²⁴

But now Balke's own personal motivation and stubborn pride break into the open. Karras had been one of those who had beaten him up. Consequently, Balke tells Schorn: "I can't work with Karras."²⁵ This crystalline example of Müller's dialectic dialogue concludes with Schorn's reply: "Who asked me if I could work with you?"²⁶ In the final scene of the play, Müller again effectively demonstrates the dialectic process between the individual, the collective, and necessity:

15. (*Factory gate. Morning. KARRAS appears. Behind him, BALKE.*)

BALKE: I need you, Karras. I'm not asking out of friendship. You've got to help me.

KARRAS: (*Stops*) And thought you wanted to build socialism all by yourself. When do we start?

BALKE: Now. We don't have much time.²⁷

With an economy of plot, action, and characters, a simplicity of structure, development, and diction, Müller's play is reduced to the essential. Hacks had called for a realism dependent on the characteristic detail. Müller presents nothing but characteristic detail. In this play, playwriting is reduced to an arrangement of essential dialectic structures which determine social behavior. There is an obvious artificiality in the terse dialogue and the concentrated scenes. In addition, the condensed diction at times turns the language into abstract poetic modules. Thus in Müller's play, alienation is internal rather than external; there are no songs, commentary, or reflective digressions. No one can escape noticing that it is a realistic *play*, and not a realistic representation of reality.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

This technique is effectively agitational and provocative on a highly intellectual level. The dialectic structure of the play does not rely on inherent massive conflict or a confrontation of old and new, but relies instead on the contradictions of the new situation, the conflict between what has already been realized and the reaction against further progressive development. Müller thus postulates a utopian view. His dialectic process actually moves between two poles, the socialist society of the GDR which he postulates, and a future socialist society of the GDR which could be better. Müller agitates his audience by presenting the victory of the new processes as completed before the final curtain. Thus the play “tries to carry it [the battle] into the new audience which decides it.”²⁸

With the success of these two works by Baierl and Müller, it could now be assumed that the didactic theater play was a strong base for the future development of GDR drama. This became an even safer assumption when dramatists responded artistically to a crisis situation in the GDR economy and a series of plays appeared using brown coal production as subject matter.

²⁸ Müller, *Der Lohndrucker*, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, V/5 (1957), 116.