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COMMEMORATIONS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE 1967 CENTENARY OF KÄTHE KOLLWITZ IN THE GDR

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ABSTRACT

The article examines how the political capital of cultural anniversaries may promote national identity in an authoritarian state. It investigates whether the 1967 centenary of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) helped the GDR to build a distinct national identity in common with the aims of similar commemorations in the GDR. The twin themes of demarcation from the FRG and appropriation of the German cultural heritage dominated the ideological framework for commemorations throughout GDR history. Primary sources on both sides of the Cold War appear to have accepted the work and life of Kollwitz as essentially linked to the GDR. This reduced the need for the GDR authorities to amplify this framework when planning events. Yet a closer analysis of how she was portrayed reveals discrepancies between the theory and practice of this commemoration. The article examines two types of anniversary activity. Firstly, a film in which various narratives proposing a politicised construct of Kollwitz as an anti-fascist, communist, and pacifist appear to conflict with a domesticated paradigm of Kollwitz as 'grieving mother'. Secondly, an anniversary exhibition that concentrates rather on framing the narrative of 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat'. Despite these inconsistencies, Kollwitz's position as an existing socialist role model who contributed to the construct of GDR national identity was confirmed by the commemoration rather than noticeably strengthened.

Der Artikel untersucht, wie das politische Kapital von kulturellen Jubiläen die nationale Identität in einem autoritären Staat stärken kann. Überprüft wird, ob das Hundertjahrjubiläum 1967 von Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) der DDR half, eine ausgeprägte nationale Identität in Übereinstimmung mit den Zielen gleichartiger Jubiläen aufzubauen. Die sich wechselseitig bedingenden Begriffe 'Abgrenzung' gegenüber der BRD, und 'Aneignung' des Deutschen Kulturgutes beherrschten den ideologischen Rahmen für solche Gedenkfeiern während der gesamten Geschichte der DDR. Aber Primärquellen deuten darauf hin, dass die Akzeptanz offenbar auf beiden Seiten des Eisernen Vorhangs vorherrschte, dass das künstlerische Werk und das politische Leben der Kollwitz im Wesentlichen mit der DDR verbunden waren. Das verminderte den Druck auf die DDR-Behörden, den genannten ideologischen Rahmen bei der Planung von Feiern zu betonen. Jedoch zeigt eine genauere Untersuchung der Art, wie diese Jubiläen durchgeführt wurden, dass es Diskrepanzen zwischen Theorie und Praxis gab. Der Artikel untersucht zwei solche Aktivitäten: Einerseits einen Film, in dem verschiedene Erzählstränge Kollwitz als 'politisiertes Konstrukt' darstellen – antifaschistisch, kommunistisch, pazifistisch. Diese Darstellungen scheinen hier mit dem Paradigma von Kollwitz als 'trauernder Mutter' in Konflikt zu geraten. Im Gegensatz dazu konzentriert sich die Gedenkausstellung zum Jubiläum darauf, sie als 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat' hervorzuheben. Trotz dieser Widersprüche wurde der Status

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von Kollwitz als bestehendes sozialistisches Vorbild, das zur nationalen Identität der DDR beitrug, durch die Gedenkfeiern neu bestätigt, aber nicht merklich verstärkt.

Käthe Kollwitz emerged during her life from 1867 to 1945 as one of the most important and popular representatives of early twentieth-century German art. Thanks to her political engagement as an anti-fascist and committed socialist, she was revered in the GDR from the early 1950s onwards as an identificatory role model. Many of her etchings, drawings, woodcuts, and sculptures also reflect her political activism for First World War-related pacifist and social causes. These include especially hunger, poverty, motherhood, and – following the early death of her younger son Peter in the First World War – bereavement. Based on a comprehensive case study of Kollwitz's 1967 centenary commemoration in the GDR, this article presents an empirical approach to understanding how the anniversary capital of cultural commemorations, as a politically designated instrument of cultural policy, is developed in a state dominated by a single political party and ideological structure.[1] An understanding of the potential of anniversary commemorations to meaningfully construct and promote national identity is also a rewarding pathway to a better understanding of the GDR itself.

The article examines two important and especially relevant components of the 1967 commemoration of Käthe Kollwitz in the GDR. The analysis will illustrate how 'memory', as anniversary capital, was instrumentalised to enhance a specific GDR 'national identity'. It does so first by briefly positioning the commemoration of anniversaries and the capital that this mnemonic practice may extract within existing scholarship on national identity, both in Germany and beyond. This leads on to a summarised history of the GDR's ideological framework for the interpretation of Kollwitz, and how it was adopted at the outset for the commemoration of her centenary. The article then investigates the second stage, the actual implementation of the commemoration year, by investigating two main events. The goal here is to test and interpret any tensions and discernible gaps between theory and practice: between the commemoration's ideological agenda in terms of selected narratives on the one hand and the reality of how the plans were implemented on the other. To conclude, the outcome of the centenary is assessed in the light of its subsequent reception, longer-term outcomes, and relevance to a better understanding of the political capital of anniversaries and how it may be used to promote national identity.

The challenge of measuring anniversary reception and its relevance for national identity should be noted from the outset. When examining

[1] David Zell, 'Major Cultural Commemorations and the Construction of National Identity in the GDR, 1959–1983', Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham 2018.

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this particular example of commemoration activities and outcomes of the Kollwitz centenary, the problem of measuring reception soon becomes apparent. As established in research on later, comparable anniversaries, the most immediately tangible evidence of how commemoration activities were received in the GDR may be found in recorded reception data for events that were accessible to the general public.[2] The relevance of such data to the reception of the underlying activities must then assume that the published data is accurate as first recorded, and was not manipulated for political purposes. In the activities selected for this article, attendance records for the exhibition as well as quantitative and qualitative data on audience reception for the film's screening, and for television/radio coverage would be relevant. However, the available primary sources do not provide this information. As an alternative, albeit more derivative means of measuring reception, we can therefore investigate the interaction between the aims, implementation, and outcomes of the selected anniversary activities. This allows us to gauge the *likelihood* of the potential impact on national identity, and therefore to demonstrate the political use of anniversary capital.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE COMMEMORATION OF ANNIVERSARIES

To begin, it is helpful to review concisely extant scholarship on the relationship between the concepts of commemorations and national identity, also in the context of German heritage. From an American perspective, the historian William Johnston offers a succinct introduction to anniversaries and why they are commemorated:

> In Europe anniversaries have become one of the chief means by which officials mobilize intellectuals to address matters of national and regional concern. […] Whereas in America past creators command minimal allegiance, in Europe all educated people acknowledge that certain figures encapsulate national tradition in such a way as to illuminate the present. Anniversaries provide a device by which this roster of canonical figures gets repackaged […].[3]

A number of scholars have connected the need for commemorations to times following mass societal upheavals, when a reconstruction of identities is required. This certainly applies to post-1945 Germany. John Gillis also points to an early appearance of 'invented tradition': the precedent of the French and American revolutions. These two cases illustrate an 'ideologically driven desire to break with the past, to construct as great a

[2] *Ibid.*
[3] William M. Johnston, *Celebrations: the Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today*, New Brunswick, NJ 1991, p. 23.

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distance as possible between the new age and the old'.[4] This is relevant in the case of the GDR, which shared the same motivation to create a new, socialist German identity, clearly distinct from the capitalist national identity which was emerging in post-war West Germany. In this context, Peter Burke points to the origins of German identity creation and discusses the 'social history of remembering'; he asks why some cultures seem more concerned with recording their past than others, and he links Hobsbawm's 'invention of tradition' to examples of new nation states that were formed in the nineteenth century, such as Germany and Italy, which discovered a need to legitimate their existence through multiple and repetitive public commemorations.[5] In contrast, Yael Zerubavel proposes the example of the modern state of Israel, a case that offers a noteworthy parallel to the GDR: 'When a society undergoes rapid developments that shatter its social and political order, its need to restructure the past is as great as its desire to set its future agenda.' While newly constructed commemorations may succeed when they 'manage to project a cultural representation of the past', there is a risk that such 'invented traditions' might only succeed partially or fail 'when members of the society become aware of their fabricated character'.[6] However, I suggest that Zerubavel's term, 'fabricated', is too blunt, even exaggerated, as far as GDR commemorations are concerned, as it could imply a deliberate deceit. Instead, detailed analysis of how commemoration aims were developed and articulated reveals that ideological interpretation, rather than fabrication, was a common feature of major cultural anniversaries. National identity in the GDR was thus centred on the idea of a 'socialist Germany'. As Stefan Berger points out, this conceptualisation of the GDR divides the development of GDR national identity into two phases: first, a unified socialist Germany which excluded National Socialism as part of its own history, and second, the period when the national identity of two separate German nations emerged.[7]

The first phase, from 1949 to 1965, marking the height of the Cold War, has also been described as the period during which the 'war of the magnets' was fought; each of the two German states expected their economic and moral model of society to draw in the other side like a magnet. The unified Germany would be 'liberal and Western or, "socialist", depending on which magnet proved stronger'.[8] The 'socialist nation' was officially

[4] John Gillis, *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, NJ 1994, p. 8.

[5] Peter Burke, 'History as Social Memory', in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, New York 2011, pp. 188–92.

[6] Yael Zerubavel, 'The Historic, the Legendary, and the Incredible; Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel', in *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis, Princeton, NJ 1994, p. 105.

[7] Stefan Berger, *Germany (Inventing the Nation)*, London 2004, pp. 206–7.

[8] Dietrich Orlow, 'The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945–1989', *German Studies Review*, 29 (2006), 537–58.

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declared to be founded on the twin pillars of antifascism and friendship with the Soviet Union, antifascism being one of the most important and enduring building blocks of official GDR identity.[9] In the second phase, after the mid-1960s and the advent of Ostpolitik, a separate GDR national identity emerged, promoted in all areas of society through a distinct official policy of demarcation from West Germany.[10] The effect of demarcation was such that cultural policy in the GDR became increasingly driven by the contemporisation and appropriation of cultural heritage. As Stephen Brockmann states:

> […] neither of the two Germanys wanted to imagine itself as implicated in a larger cultural unity with the enemy that it continued to reject and revile. Precisely because of the essential similarity between the Germanys, each state had to conceive of itself as fundamentally different from its counterpart.[11]

THE KOLLWITZ CENTENARY

Against the enduring reality of the Cold War and in order to understand how Käthe Kollwitz, the artist (as opposed to the political and the private persona), was officially viewed in the GDR, one needs to appreciate the evolving context of 'Kunstpolitik' within the ideology of an imposed socialist culture. In the period before 1953, 'Kunstpolitik' was predominantly formed by normative cultural policies and corresponding organisational structures in the Soviet Union. From the beginning of the GDR, however, there were clear signs of a persistent policy of cultural demarcation from the FRG, contributing to the promotion of a separate national identity for the GDR. As Lippke claims, 'Die zentrale Steuerung binnenkultureller Kunstprozesse glich einem Werbefeldzug von nationaler Dimension, der die ostdeutschen Lebenswirklichkeiten gegenüber dem westdeutschen Ideal erscheinen lassen musste, die es durch kulturelle Abgrenzung zu verteidigen galt.'[12]

This cultural demarcation was implemented by an emphasis on 'proletarian art', a German tradition stretching back to the first two decades of the twentieth century, and which remained popular after the Second World War. In the early years of GDR 'Kulturpolitik' it was, however, publicly resisted by prominent officials of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). The 'Zentralkomitee der SED' (ZK) thus published a 169-page policy book in May 1951, entitled: 'Der Kampf gegen den

[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Berger, *Germany* (note 7), pp. 206–7.
[11] Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, Cambridge 1999, p. 8.
[12] Otto Lippke, 'Kunst im Auftrag kultureller Abgrenzung – Zwischen Herrschaftsprinzip und Autonomiesehnsucht', in *Eingegrenzt, ausgegrenzt: bildende Kunst und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR 1961–1989*, ed. Hannelore Offner and Klaus Schroeder, Berlin 2000, pp. 476–8.

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Formalismus in der Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur'. Kollwitz was initially a target in this official campaign, despite her prestigious status of having been a highly visible opponent and victim of Nazism up until her death in 1945. Although her works had already been widely exhibited in the first years of the GDR, she began to attract criticism from several hardline artists and intellectuals for her almost exclusive artistic focus on the poor and deprived sections of society. Her hitherto widely accepted status as a trailblazer for Socialist Realism was questioned by an anonymous critic, using the fictitious name 'N. Orlow'.[13] Orlow's identity attracted considerable speculation at the time and later, and is now thought to have been Kurt Magritz, a well-known, influential editor.[14] His published criticisms of 'proletarian art' also extended to the theatre. Orlow's charge stated: 'Die Fürsprecher des Häßlichen in der Malerei suchen zuweilen Käthe Kollwitz als ihre Vorläuferin und als Stammmutter der proletarischen Kunst in Deutschland darzustellen.'[15] Orlow went on to assert that Kollwitz could not be that role model as she had grown up in a bourgeois social background and had only viewed workers as the suffering class.

By late 1953, Kollwitz was fully rehabilitated, possibly due to internal regime upheavals following the 17 June uprising (see Millington's contribution in this special number). The negative portrayal of Kollwitz as a bourgeois philanthropist was abandoned, thanks to wide support from certain artists and intellectuals within the East German Akademie der Künste (AdK). By the time of her birth centenary, as will be seen in this case study, it was above all the renowned contemporaries of Kollwitz, the artist Lea Grundig and the art historian Heinz Lüdecke, who emerged during the planning and implementation phases of her centenary commemorations as favouring a more differentiated image of Kollwitz. This complexity was derived from her intertwined personae, notably as mother, as artist, and as political actor.

Given the underlying background of demarcation from West Germany, what were the authorities' key aims for commemorating her centenary? The resolution adopted by the official Kollwitz Committee of the GDR identifies how Kollwitz was to be framed. The opening section of the resolution sets out briefly the regime's objectives for the Kollwitz centenary commemoration. Crucial aspects of Kollwitz's life and work are picked out: her artistic contribution to the post-1945 art form of Social Realism, her political activism on behalf of the working class, and her connection with the Soviet Union:

[13] 'Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 17/20 (1951), quoted in Ulrike Goeschen, 'Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus: die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR', *Zeitgeschichtliche Forschungen*, 8 (2001), 445.

[14] Yvonne Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000: Biographie und Rezeptionsgeschichte einer deutschen Künstlerin*, Essen 2014, p. 335.

[15] Orlow, 'The GDR's Failed Search' (note 8), 544.

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> Käthe Kollwitz gehört zu den Begründern der sozialistisch-realistischen Kunst in Deutschland. Die Skala ihres Schaffens reicht von der Darstellung des Großen Deutschen Bauernkrieges und des kämpfenden Proletariats bis zu ihren eindrucksvollen Grafiken und Plastiken für den Frieden, gegen den Krieg. Die meisterhafte künstlerische Kraft ihrer Werke und ihre innerparteiliche Stellungnahme für den gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt hatte große nationale und internationale Wirkung. Die Solidarität von Käthe Kollwitz mit der Sowjetunion und die erste Ausstellung ihrer Werke in der Sowjetunion 1924 ließen sie auch einen deutlichen Einfluss auf die sowjetische Kunst ausüben.[16]

The Kollwitz centenary anniversary was thus designed to portray Kollwitz as an exemplary humanist and politically engaged artist, serving as a role model for a socialist GDR society. In contrast to several comparable commemorations of major German cultural icons, there is a remarkable absence of any explicit reference to Kollwitz's status and reception in the West, and in West Germany in particular. However, the lack of an accompanying hostile message towards West Germany, widely employed in the bicentenaries of Schiller in 1959 and Beethoven in 1970, does not imply any lesser claim to GDR exclusivity than those anniversaries. Kollwitz's work and legacy is instead linked to the realism of contemporary GDR artists, with an implied contrast to the widely differing styles, including abstract work, of contemporary West German artists: 'Ihr Schaffen ist ein lebendiges Erbe für die Künstler der DDR, in deren realistische Werke das künstlerische Vermächtnis von Käthe Kollwitz eingeflossen ist.'[17]

A Marxist–Leninist framework, such as was set out at the time of the earlier Schiller bicentenary, is less openly referenced. The resolution also refers to Kollwitz's interventions on behalf of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s in the context of the coincidental fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution in the Kollwitz centenary year: 'Die Ehrung ist so konzipiert, daß sie gleichzeitig ein Beitrag zum 50. Jahrestag der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution wird.'[18] The remainder of the resolution is devoted to listing the key components of the commemoration events. Neither the resolution, nor a preparatory working group that preceded the resolution, recorded any official plans to publicise the Kollwitz centenary through an official statement or through harnessing the media, as was the case for the Schiller commemoration.[19] In the same context, there is also no mention of specific educational activities for the centenary, whether at school or in the workplace. The absence of explicit and proactive policies similar to those of other commemorations suggests an official

[16] 'Beschluß über die Käthe-Kollwitz-Ehrung 1967', Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO), DC20/7482.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] 'Erklärung des Schiller-Komitees der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1959', (undated), BArch-SAPMO, DR 2/3744.

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approach that was relatively relaxed and comparatively low-key. It points to a consensus among the organisers that Kollwitz was already viewed as a personality who was well established in the GDR. Being already *one of us* meant therefore being able to dispense with communication and educational initiatives otherwise needed to deliver a politically inspired appropriation of a major cultural personality.

Several narratives were employed throughout the various events to depict Kollwitz. At times, three key narratives partially contradict rather than complement each other: culturally, as artist; socio-politically, as engaged socialist and pacifist; and personally, as mother and widow. As artist, the construct of 'Wegbereiterin des Sozialistischen Realismus' was itself challenged at times. Socio-political narratives of Kollwitz as 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat', 'Freund der Sowjetunion',[20] 'Antifaschist', 'Kommunist', and 'Pazifist' were often combined and identified within her work and personal diaries. At the same time, all these same sources were often characterised as linked to the theme of the 'leidende Mutter'.

Various formal, media, and academic events took place during the 1967 anniversary year. The five key components of the Kollwitz commemoration were: media reporting and commentary (as a mnemonic activity in and of itself); formal events, including wreath-laying ceremonies and a Festakt on Kollwitz's birthday, 8 July 1967; July exhibitions in Berlin and Moscow entitled 'Käthe Kollwitz und ihre Zeitgenossen'; scholarly output, led by the AdK, including a keynote pamphlet and an academic conference in November 1967 on developments in socialist art; and a short documentary film, produced by the state-owned film studio DEFA on the life and works of Kollwitz. Certain events, such as the Festakt, wreath-laying, and academic conferences may be noted as a ritual type of anniversary activity, in so far as their agenda and format were replicated in similar cultural commemorations throughout GDR history. In the following, two events have been selected for analysis in the context of anniversary capital. The anniversary presented the regime through its stakeholders with an opportunity to exploit such capital, represented particularly by the visual facets of Kollwitz and her art. Therefore, the pictorial commonality of a film and an exhibition lends itself particularly to further examination here.

ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITY: FILM

A detailed viewing of the documentary film *Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden* provides valuable insights into how Kollwitz was portrayed in line with the above-mentioned three key narratives. Extensive extracts from her diaries and letters are quoted heavily within the documentary film, although a general caveat on the value of diaries as a primary source

[20] This wording was regularly used in the GDR, regardless of gender.

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Figure 1. Käthe Kollwitz, 'Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden' (1941), lithograph. Source: Wikicommons.

should be noted. Diaries and letters provide factual information and also record emotions, both through the subjective prism of the diarist. The Kollwitz letters and diaries add significant value to the analysis of the film by revealing clues as to how the extracts were edited in the GDR in order to support the intended narrative; that is, what was left out by the editors is as relevant as what was included. The question also arises as to why these personal records became so important in the context of this particular commemoration and to what extent they were cited as a construction of truth and authenticity to support the framing of certain (gendered) narratives.

Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden has a running time of nineteen minutes. The title is based on a quotation from Goethe[21] and was also the title of Kollwitz's final graphic work in 1941 (see Figure 1). The reference had formerly helped to establish her public profile as a pacifist when she used it in 1918 in a published anti-war appeal: 'Es ist genug gestorben! Keiner darf mehr fallen! Ich berufe mich gegen Richard Dehmel auf einen Größeren, welcher sagte: "Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden".'[22] The use of this quotation as a title may, at first, seem unusual, as it could have been received by viewers as highlighting the pacifist aspect of Kollwitz's political activity. In contrast, 'Kämpfende Kunst' was the title of a shorter, 1959 DEFA documentary on three closely linked pre- and

[21] *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Book 7, Chapter 9; reference provided in Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000* (note 14).
[22] Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000* (note 14), pp. 185–6.

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Figure 2. Käthe Kollwitz, 'Weberzug' (1897), engraving. Source: Wikiart.

post-war artists, Käthe Kollwitz, Otto Dix, and Otto Nagel. This earlier title would have been superficially more in tune with the ongoing official emphasis in 1967 on Kollwitz's socialist credentials regarding her political activism for the 'ausgebeutete, entrechtete, doch kämpfende Deutsche Arbeiterklasse'.[23] But the new title can also be seen to position Kollwitz alongside Goethe as one of Germany's foremost national icons, thus adding more weight to her cultural stature.

The film selects historical snapshots of milestones in the life of Kollwitz, beginning with the period at the end of the nineteenth century when she was already an established artist, and ending with her death in 1945. The screenplay concentrates on selected extracts from Kollwitz's comprehensive diaries, set against photographs of her works including many self-portraits, together with film material from the First World War and the interwar periods. The diary excerpts are read by an actress. This use of a first-person, dramatised voice heightens the emotional impact of the diary texts in combination with the images chosen – for example, of soldiers marching off to war, and Nazi storm-troopers in trucks. By way of contrast, the occasional voice-over commentary is provided by a speaker whose emotionless tone is more in line with the style of a documentary film.

The short opening sequence in the first seven-minute section is set against a self-portrait of Kollwitz as a young woman and the early works that gained her fame: the graphic series based on Gerhart Hauptmann's play, *Die Weber* (see Figure 2). The commentary strikes an immediate political note that broadens the political scope of the film's title: 'Inmitten

[23] (No author), 'Feierliche Ehrungen für Käthe Kollwitz', *Neues Deutschland*, 9 July 1967.

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der Wilhelminischen Ära offenbart eine große Künstlerin ihr Herz für die Ausgebeuteten und Unterdrückten'. Her life story moves to the first milestone: the early death of Kollwitz's younger son, Peter, on the Western Front. Her family tragedy is overlaid in the commentary with a further political message about the rationale for the First World War and its long-term repercussions: '1914 zieht ihr Sohn als Freiwilliger in den Krieg und auch sie selbst kann noch nicht durchschauen, daß Deutschlands Söhne für eine schlechte Sache mißbraucht werden. Durch Leid und Irrtum beginnt für die 47-jährige noch einmal ein langer Weg zu neuen Erkenntnissen.' Her personal tragedy, however, remains the main content of the diary extracts, with the 'leidende Mutter' leitmotif of her work dominating the imagery, thus seemingly suggesting that this aspect of Kollwitz's life is the key to understanding her development as a politically committed artist.

The second, three-minute section of the film is devoted to Kollwitz's public pacifist stance and her reaction to the assassinations of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in the immediate post-1918 period. A quotation and a still image from one of Liebknecht's last speeches connect to Kollwitz's pacifism: 'Genug und übergenug der Metzelei! Nieder mit den Kriegshetzern diesseits und jenseits der Grenze! Ein Ende dem Völkermord. Der Hauptfeind steht im eignen Land.' The choice of diary extracts displaying her reactions to Liebknecht's murder is significant in demonstrating the political background and bourgeois roots of Kollwitz, by then already fifty-three years old: 'Ich war politischer Gegner, aber sein Tod gab mir den ersten Ruck zu ihm hin. Später las ich dann seine Briefe, was zur Folge hatte, daß seine Persönlichkeit mir im reinsten Licht erscheint.' The inclusion at this point of Kollwitz's refusal to be identified as a fully committed socialist at that time may seem more surprising, although arguably weakened by the rhetorical question ending this quotation:

> Ich habe als Künstler das Recht aus allem das Gefühlsgehalt herauszuziehen, auf mich wirken zu lassen und nach außen zu stellen. So habe ich auch das Recht, den Abschied der Arbeiterschaft von Liebknecht darzustellen, ohne dabei Liebknecht politisch zu folgen, oder nicht?

Although this seemingly tortuous personal pathway to socialism may not have been unusual, any risk that this quotation might be received by the film's viewer as a distancing statement is mitigated by the subsequent explanation. The first half of the film closes with a commentary, suggesting a solution to Kollwitz's dilemma: 'und Käthe Kollwitz stellt ihre Kunst in den Dienst des Proletariats'. Yet the careful process of diary selection becomes clear from Kollwitz's words that *precede* the diary extract used in the film, and which have been deliberately left out:

> Ich schäme mich, daß ich immer noch nicht Partei nehme und vermute fast, wenn ich erkläre, keiner Partei anzugehören, daß der eigentliche Grund

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Figure 3. Photograph of Käthe Kollwitz, 'Totenmahl' ('Die trauernden Eltern') (1932). Source: Wikimedia.

> dazu Feigheit ist. Eigentlich bin ich nämlich gar nicht Revolutionär, sondern Evolutionär. Weil man mich aber als Künstlerin des Proletariats und der Revolution preist und mich immer fester in die Rolle schiebt, so scheue ich mich, diese Rolle nicht weiter zu spielen.[24]

These words, omitted by the scriptwriter, would have revealed the extent of Kollwitz's wrestling with her perceived political identity.

Six of the remaining ten minutes are centred on the long-lasting artistic aftermath of the loss of Kollwitz's son. This was the work closest to her heart: the sculpture entitled 'Totenmahl' ('Die trauernden Eltern'), located at the German military cemetery in Flanders where her son is buried (see Figure 3). The twin sculptures of grieving parents were modelled on Käthe Kollwitz and her husband, Karl. They were completed after many years of planning and financial issues, described in some detail in the film's diary extracts. The section closes with various images of the early models employed for the final sculpture and a commentary, delivered this time with noticeable pathos: 'Das Werk, um das sie seit 1915 ringt, ist vollendet 1932.' This section of the film, describing the 'Totenmahl', was regarded as relatively innovative and specifically encouraged by the Kollwitz Committee: 'Das Arbeitssekretariat begrüßt dieses Vorhaben auch deshalb, weil es mit einer bisher wenig bekannten Seite im Schaffen von Käthe

[24] Diary extract, October 1920, cited in Catherine Krahmer, *Käthe Kollwitz*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1981, p. 94.

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Kollwitz bekannt macht und es bisher in der DDR keine Filmaufnahmen des Totenmahles gibt.'[25]

The last four minutes of the film begin with a clip of dozens of Nazi brown-shirts jumping out of trucks. Quotations from her diaries, accompanied by political commentary, are once again introduced to set out brief milestones in the last twelve years of Kollwitz's life. These coincided with the height of the Nazi period: 'Das dritte Reich bricht an. Ich hoffe, daß bei einer kriegerischen Bedrohung der UdSSR, die Arbeiterschaft wenigstens der führenden Staaten Europas sich endlich zur geschlossenen Abwehr zusammen findet.' A further setback is then noted: 'Am 15. Februar 1933 müssen Heinrich Mann und ich aus der Akademie austreten, weil wir den Aufruf zur Einigung der Linksparteien unterschrieben haben. Wenn nur die Steine dort in Belgien bleiben an der Stelle für die sie gemacht sind.' While bringing out her political allegiance, this extract is the only reference in the entire film to her pre-war membership of the Akademie der Künste; the fact that she had been the first woman to be admitted as member is not even mentioned. My research to date has revealed neither an explicit nor an implicit rationale for omitting this pioneering achievement of Kollwitz. One may speculate whether a gendered reference to Kollwitz and her admission to the AdK was considered less important than, or even irrelevant to, the overall political message of the film.

The diary reference to the 'Belgian stones', that is the Flanders 'Totenmahl', introduces the remaining two minutes of the film. This final section contains short diary extracts covering her last, increasingly unhappy war years. These culminated in the death in 1940 of her husband, the death in 1942 of her soldier grandson Peter, and banishment from Berlin to Moritzburg in 1943, where she died just before the Soviet troops reached nearby Dresden in 1945. The film ends with two images: a still photograph of her last work forming the title of the film (see Figure 1, above) and a still of her 1932 poster, 'Wir schützen die Sowjetunion'. The accompanying diary extract from 1942 reunites all three key ingredients as a consolidated, framing narrative of Kollwitz: a mother/grandmother, a pacifist, and a political thinker:

> Unterdes war Hans [Kollwitz's surviving older son] hier. Er kam ganz spät zu mir herein. Da wußte ich, daß Peter tot ist. Am 22. September ist er gefallen. Darum bin ich mit ganzem Herzen für einen radikalen Schluß dieses Irrsinns und erwarte nur von dem Weltsozialismus etwas.

By the end of her life Kollwitz had, according to the film's storyline, fought her way to accepting an arguably utopian vision of socialism as the only 'true path'. She goes on:

[25] Letter from Gerhard Heilmann [AdK], addressed to 'Herr Wrede, Direktor des DEFA Studios für populärwissenschaftlichen Film', dated 22 November 1966, AdK-O, 720.3 BL385.

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> Ich beschließe noch einmal zum dritten Mal dasselbe Thema aufzunehmen. Diesmal kucken die Saatfrüchte der Mutter überall aus dem Mantel heraus und wollen ausbrechen. Aber die alte zusammenhaltende Mutter sagt 'Nein! Ihr bleibt hier. Einstweilen dürft ihr euch raufen. Aber wenn Ihr groß sein werdet, habt ihr euch auf das Leben einzustellen und nicht wieder auf den Krieg.' Das ist nun einmal mein Testament. Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden.

The film creates the overall impression that the images of Kollwitz, her works, and historical film clips are well matched to the commentary and selected diary extracts. In other words, it is the soundtrack that dominates rather than the visual aspects. The choice of images achieves a balance that suggests Kollwitz's life was interwoven between her personal tragedy and the causes she espoused. As is the case with the GDR media coverage and official speeches, not discussed in this article,[26] the film may be seen to reinforce an established interpretation of Kollwitz's specific legacy and its contribution to national identity in the GDR rather than promoting a new one.

ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITY: EXHIBITION

Another major cultural event of the commemoration year was an exhibition hosted by the AdK and opened on 8 July 1967, entitled 'Käthe Kollwitz und ihre Zeitgenossen'. This demonstrated that one of the competing narratives of Kollwitz, that of 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat', was possibly the most important one for the AdK of the GDR in its central role as organiser of this particular event. Despite being dedicated explicitly to Kollwitz's centenary in the official catalogue, the exhibition included only six works by Kollwitz herself, alongside 210 works by 100 artists from nine countries.[27] One reason suggested for exhibiting other artists was the fear that comparatively recent Kollwitz exhibitions in 1960, 1962, and 1965 would have lessened public interest in this event.[28] In consequence, Yvonne Schymura also proposes persuasively that the overriding rationale for the academic establishment to choose a different concept was the opportunity to display the wider international applications of Socialist Realism. The AdK's vice-president, Eduard Claudius, however, explains the curation concept in a more general introduction to the catalogue as being to present 'die Persönlichkeit und das Werk der Künstlerin in einem großen Zusammenhang'.[29] Without alluding to the Socialist Realist

[26] Discussed in more detail in Zell, 'Major Cultural Commemorations' (note 1).
[27] Horst-Jörg Ludwig, Ursula Stelzer, and Helga Weissgärber, *Käthe Kollwitz und ihre Zeitgenossen: Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag von Käthe Kollwitz am 8. Juli 1967*, Berlin 1967, p. 3.
[28] Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000* (note 14), p. 364.
[29] Ludwig *et al.*, *Käthe Kollwitz und ihre Zeitgenossen* (note 27), p. 3.

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movement by name, Claudius spells out the exhibition's context with an explicit connection to Kollwitz:

> Es gibt eine große Zahl von Künstlern, nicht nur in Deutschland, sondern auch in anderen Ländern, die wie Käthe Kollwitz von den großen sozialen Problemen und revolutionären Ereignissen ihrer Zeit gedrängt wurden, mit ihren Arbeiten Partei zu ergreifen. Viele dieser Künstler werden durch diese Ausstellung zum ersten Mal in Berlin bekannt gemacht, darunter auch einige, deren Arbeiten hauptsächlich Mitgefühl mit den durch die Klassengesellschaft entrechteten und verarmten bekunden.[30]

The narrative of 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat' as the core political driver in Kollwitz's life is thus chosen as the common denominator in the show. The six selected works by Kollwitz all follow this theme, bearing the titles: 'Kampf im Wirtshaus', 'Zyklus "Ein Weberaufstand"', 'Zyklus "Bauernkrieg"', 'Aufruhr', 'Verbrüderung', 'Heimarbeit', and 'Brot!' (see Figure 4). Kollwitz's commitment to the cause of the socially and politically oppressed proletariat is also attributed to the works of the other artists selected. Beyond major German contemporaries of Kollwitz such as Ernst Barlach, Otto Dix, George Grosz, Oskar Kokoschka, and Max Liebermann, the selection was expanded to non-German artists, constituting around a third of the total. The inclusion of representatives from five West European countries and prominent names such as Camille Pissarro and Georges Rouault provides a clear indication of Kollwitz's role, and by implication that of the GDR, in taking the lead in responding artistically to the universal issue of oppression.

Claudius positions the topic as not only retrospective but as an ongoing scholarly task, associated with the upcoming anniversaries of the twin pillars of Marxist–Leninism, in 1968 and 1970 respectively: 'Die Ausstellung soll der Beginn einer eingehenden wissenschaftlichen Erforschung des gesamten Problemkreises sein und in weiteren Ausstellungen, so zum 150. Geburtstag von Karl Marx und zum 100. Geburtstag von W. I. Lenin ihren Niederschlag finden.'[31] This reference also implicitly helps to further anchor the narrative of Kollwitz as 'Freund der Sowjetunion' – albeit ranked in secondary importance to the works chosen to promote the unifying narrative of 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat'.

The structure and content of the catalogue offers clues as to how Kollwitz and her contemporaries were presented to the wider public beyond the exhibition's visitors. The cover features a self-portrait woodcut of Kollwitz, which is not one of the actual exhibits and does not point to the chosen context and political message of the exhibition. However, the choice here makes sense; it reminds the reader and visitor of the personality being commemorated by the staging of the exhibition itself. The catalogue is a

[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*

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Figure 4. Käthe Kollwitz, 'Brot!', final version, 1924. Chalk lithograph (transfer), Kn 208 III. Kölner Kollwitz-Sammlung. © Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln.

modest twenty-eight page booklet, containing a list of all works exhibited, where they were held at the time, and short biographies of the artists. The booklet closes with photos of only twenty-eight of the 210 works. 'Brot!' (1924), one of Kollwitz's most iconic works, is the only one of the six exhibited that is reproduced in the catalogue. It appears in a group of several photos with an explicit political theme or message, such as Lea Grundig's 'Diskussion zwischen Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten', and Martha Schrag's 'Arbeitslose'. Its prominent placement as the penultimate photo deserves special mention. 'Brot!' is inserted between Hans Grundig's 'Selbstmord ist kein Ausweg – Kämpft mit der KPD' (1930) and the

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closing reproduction of John Heartfield's poster, 'Kämpft mit uns! Wählt Kommunisten – Liste 4' (1930). As Kollwitz never joined the pre-war German Communist Party, it was therefore arguably crucial to visually emphasise her alignment with the Communists. Her famous work may thus be seen to be closely linked to the works on either side, both of which refer specifically to the Party.

Consistent with the other artists in the exhibition, the paragraph on Kollwitz merely lists her key biographical dates with no further commentary. For example, it mentions her election as member of the AdK in 1919, but, as in the film, there is no mention of her having been the first female member. Again, in this instance, one may speculate as to why the AdK, the sponsor of the exhibition, would refrain from alluding to this milestone in its own membership history. Might it have been thought to dilute the main political message of the event? Given the presumed space limitations in this section of the catalogue, it becomes evident that it is mostly the politically relevant dates that were chosen to set the scene for the choice and context of Kollwitz's works. The loss of her son, Peter, in 1914 is therefore the only personal date listed after her marriage in 1891. Kollwitz's public protest as pacifist in 1918, her trip to the USSR in 1927, and even her exhibition in Moscow in 1932 are all preferred to later personal milestones such as the death of her husband in 1940, the death of her grandson Peter in 1942 on the Russian front, and her banishment from Berlin in 1943 – all of which arguably influenced her final works.

The catalogue also contains the hint of a contradiction in how the exhibition was finally executed. A comparison of the works listed and the twenty-eight reproductions selected for the catalogue reveals an anomaly. Three works by world-famous artists – van Gogh's 'Road Workers', Bonnard's 'La petite blanchisseuse', and Beckmann's 'Die Nacht' – are all pictured, misleadingly, in the catalogue, yet are absent from the list of exhibits. There is a note in small print at the end: 'Aus konservatorischen Gründen konnten nicht alle für die Ausstellung erbetenen Werke ausgeliehen werden.' However, a closer review of where the actual exhibits were held at the time reveals only museums and private collections within the Soviet bloc. The commercial and poster artist Klaus Wittkugel makes a sweeping attack on officials in West Germany in his inauguration speech for the exhibition. He puts forward a more significant, although unproven political reason for the absence of certain works: 'Bonn hat sich an politischen Manipulationen schuldig gemacht und verhindert, daß man in großem Umfang Leihgaben aus Westdeutschland und den übrigen Ländern des NATO zeigen konnte.'[32]

[32] 'Käthe-Kollwitz-Ehrung anlässlich ihres 100. Geburtstags, Mappe 5: Ausstellung und Festakt, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AdK-O, Nr.720', cited in Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000* (note 14), p. 365.

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In short, the exhibition differs in one important respect from other activities in the Kollwitz centenary commemoration and the way in which they were addressed in GDR media as well as official speeches. The concept of the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue focuses almost exclusively on one construction of Kollwitz: 'Kämpferin für das Proletariat'. This appears to have been justified by the unifying context of Kollwitz's artist contemporaries and their works of Socialist Realism selected by the curators. The 'Freund der Sowjetunion' allusions and the link to German pre-war communism go well with this single narrative. On the other hand, and in strong contrast to the film, both the pacifist and the grieving mother iconography that characterise so many of Kollwitz's best-known works is completely ignored. This single-narrative slant may have been politically expedient, but it is all the more remarkable if one reflects on the artistic and intellectual background of the AdK's members acting here as curators. In comparable major cultural commemorations such as the 1959 Schiller Bicentenary and the 1970 Beethoven Bicentenary, there is considerable evidence of intellectuals within both the AdK and the Deutscher Kulturbund (DKB)[33] displaying a degree of agency in deviating from the act of promoting only political messages and narratives within anniversary events.[34]

The above-mentioned coincidental linkage to the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1917 was addressed by staging the main Berlin exhibition, as well as the initial screening of the documentary film, at the Haus der Deutsch-Sowjetischen Freundschaft in Berlin. The exhibition was subsequently shown in Moscow, as a further mark of the importance in both countries of linking Kollwitz's personal history to the 1917 revolution, thus underlining that Kollwitz was 'one of us' in a wider, Soviet bloc context. As a literal representation of the GDR–Soviet friendship, this may have arguably contributed to, and even positively enhanced, a particular vision of GDR national identity based on a demonstration of socialist inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

Contradictions emerge when attempting to evaluate the extent to which the Kollwitz commemoration produced a noticeable change in how she was subsequently viewed in the GDR. A decrease in the profile of further Kollwitz-related anniversaries and exhibitions suggests that the centenary

[33] The Deutscher Kulturbund (DKB), also known after 1974 as the Kulturbund der DDR, was a mass organisation of the GDR. It was first set up in 1945 by the Soviet military administration to promote anti–fascist culture in their occupation zone. Closely integrated in the GDR's political structure as part of the SED-led National Front, it became the most important agent of cultural policy for the regime. By the 1980s it numbered over 250,000 members in hundreds of local hobby and cultural clubs.

[34] Zell, 'Major Cultural Commemorations' (note 1).

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marked a high point for Kollwitz in the GDR, and that the public discourse around Kollwitz thereafter was static at best.[35] Evidence from a later planning document of the DKB, however, suggests that, at least in the first few years after 1967, there was official intent to refer back to the centenary by intensifying Kollwitz-related cultural activities:

> 25. Todestag Käthe Kollwitz am 25. April 1970: Für diesen Gedenktag sind keine besonderen Ehrungen vorgesehen. Wir verweisen auf die große Kollwitz-Ehrung zum 100. Geburtstag im Jahre 1967. Wir werden unsere Kollwitz-Ausstellung verstärkt einsetzen und Freundeskreisen und Clubs behilflich sein bei der Gewinnung von geeigneten Gesprächspartnern für Ausstellungsgespräche.[36]

Kollwitz continued to be memorialised in an increased naming of public spaces in the GDR such as streets and squares, as well as schools and workplaces; this fact alone must be seen as an intent to reinforce a sense of GDR national identity among the wider population towards her political and artistic legacy. Yet when it comes to a more tangible post-1967 legacy, it is surprising that neither the AdK, as primary champion of Kollwitz, nor any other GDR institution established a permanent museum and resource centre dedicated to Kollwitz. This omission is all the more remarkable compared to developments in West Germany, where – admittedly private – initiatives in Berlin and Cologne established such centres in the mid-1980s, which still flourish today.

Considering the apparent acceptance by West German media and intellectuals of Kollwitz's spiritual links to the underlying ideological framework of the GDR's foundation, there was hardly a need by the GDR authorities to demarcate a claim to her legacy by appropriating her life and work through educational and other propaganda means, including the film and the exhibition. More importantly, the analysis here demonstrates that each of the three proposed narratives of Kollwitz – artistic, socio-political, and personal – received differing emphasis during the anniversary events. Unlike the exhibition dominated by a single message, evidence from the film and other events explored elsewhere supports a conclusion that no one narrative came to dominate the commemorations at the expense of the other two. These different approaches may be seen as reflecting the responsibility and ultimately the agency – albeit limited – of different stakeholders in organising or commissioning the centenary events – that is the AdK for the exhibition and the Ministerium für Kultur (MfK) for the film. In the absence of earlier, comparable celebrations, the strength of her image within GDR society had taken shape gradually over the previous twenty-five years. This meant that the composite Kollwitz narrative,

[35] Schymura, *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–2000* (note 14), pp. 380-4.

[36] 'Beschluß des Sekretariats des Präsidiums des DKB vom 9.12.1969 über den Beitrag des DKB zur Gestaltung der kulturellen Gedenktage des Jahres 1970', BArch-SAPMO, DY27/3035.

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as presented in 1967, was likely to have been acceptable to the population at large; if anything, it served to reinforce her existing status in GDR culture by supporting rather than incrementally boosting national identity relating to this icon of German art culture.

In more general terms, this example of anniversary practice in an authoritarian state indicates the potential limitations of anniversary capital as an instrument to visibly and measurably promote a political agenda. It demonstrates that predetermined, ideologically driven aims – such as set out in the official resolution for the Kollwitz framework – can create a complex framework of narratives that are not necessarily compatible or complementary. Subsequent evidence of agency in the inconsistent interpretation of these aims by stakeholders responsible for their implementation may further reduce the intended impact and success of their contribution to the anniversary. More positively, however, these very same limitations also allow the analysis of anniversary capital in practice to produce useful new insights into the complex nature of that particular state and society. The GDR regime understood throughout the political need for the interlinked concepts of national pride, patriotism, and national identity to be encouraged wherever possible. It is therefore plausible to conclude that anniversaries had the potential, as political capital, to affect national pride and national identity positively. However, it can also be argued that this was not necessarily a result of GDR citizens accepting, or even understanding the regime's demarcation and appropriation ideology, but rather of focusing on the personalities themselves. Positive anniversary outcomes, such as a modicum of renewed cultural awareness and participation are also established in a wider review of the anniversary activities.[37] Further such evidence of the reception of the Kollwitz centenary may be obtained from an analysis of media coverage of activities and related documents in the AdK and DKB archives. These activities include the 'Festakt', the ritualised state commemoration ceremony common to most major cultural anniversaries in the GDR, and a good example of the performative notion of remembrance noted in the introduction to this special number. In this article, a film and an exhibition are selected as examples of typical anniversary activity in the GDR; they illustrate that anniversary capital, deployed for political purposes, may be judged to have had an influence on the GDR's population, even if that effect was not the one specifically intended.

The Kollwitz anniversary also provides valuable insights relevant to our understanding of the GDR regime. Martin Sabrow, in his volume co-edited with Jürgen Kocka, argues that a socio-cultural GDR history provides an ideal empirical foundation for a model of 'consensus dictatorship'.[38] This

[37] Discussed in more detail in Zell, 'Major Cultural Commemorations' (note 1).

[38] Jürgen Kocka and Martin Sabrow, *Die DDR als Geschichte: Fragen, Hypothesen, Perspektiven*, Berlin 1994, pp. 197–8, p. 208.

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approach was subsequently reinforced and expanded by Mary Fulbrook in the 'participatory dictatorship' model.[39] The anniversary activities examined in this article show that a degree of differentiation, individual agency, and divergence from official ideology did exist in the GDR, thus supporting these models. In this way, an empirical approach to researching anniversary capital also contributes meaningfully to the historiography of the GDR.

[39] Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR*, Oxford 1995, p. 276.

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