Fossilized Memory: The German-Russian Energy Partnership and the Production of Energo-political Knowledge[1]

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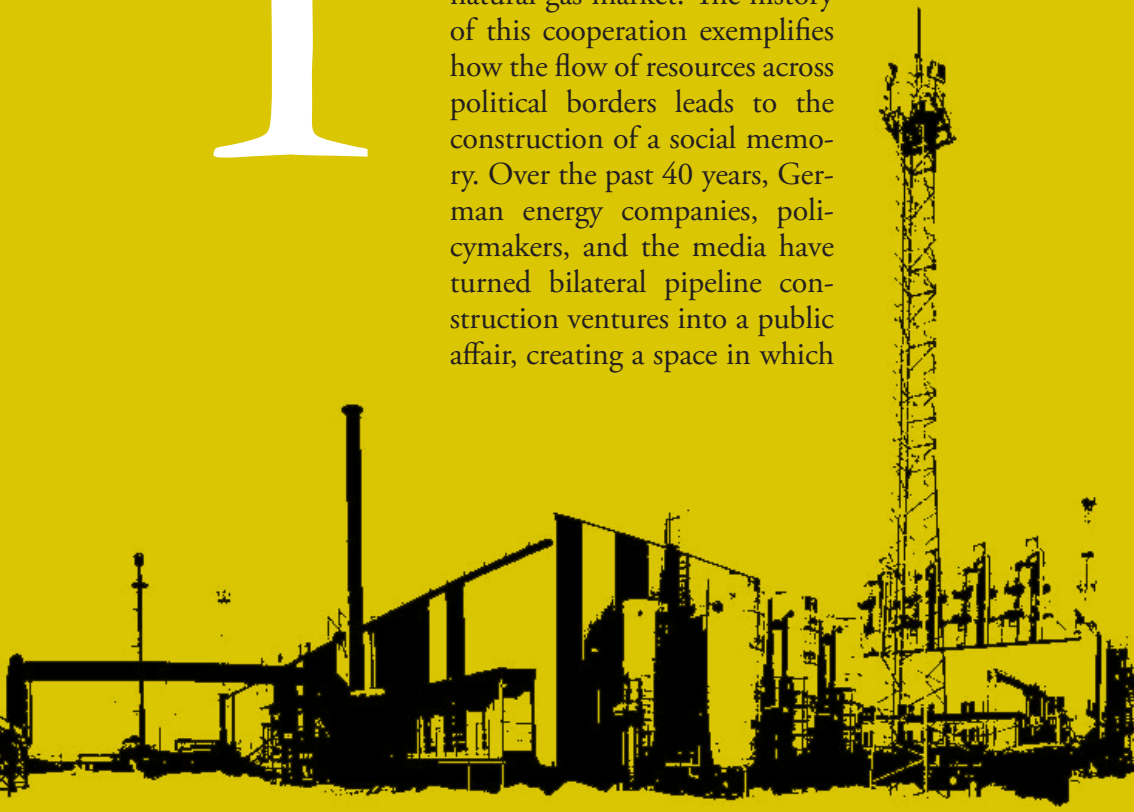
The discovery of the Urengoi gas field in 1966 marks the beginning of the cooperation between Germany and Russia in the natural gas market. The history of this cooperation exemplifies how the flow of resources across political borders leads to the construction of a social memory. Over the past 40 years, German energy companies, policymakers, and the media have turned bilateral pipeline construction ventures into a public affair, creating a space in which



the interactions of energy and politics are visible. In this article, I will focus on how knowledge of the German-Russian energy partnership has been organized, represented, and disseminated, but also on how it has been contested in the public sphere by media outlets and public relations representatives of the energy industry.

Hitherto, academic inquiry has paid little attention to the question of "how societies come to devote their attention to […] events along complex commodity chains".[2] Since the extension of the German-Russian pipeline network is not yet at an end, the progression of time generates ever new pasts, entailing a constant reframing of the representations of the bilateral trade of natural gas and altering the communicative dynamics between discourse participants. I therefore consider the notion of "sites of memory" to be a helpful analytical tool for outlining the epistemic developments of energo-political knowledge in the longue durée.

I will first introduce the particularities of the West German perspective on the German-Russian energy cooperation; I will then turn to the East German story, before outlining the intricate unification of both German corporate cultures and its mediation. Finally I will consider under which circumstances the trade of resources gains media attention lasting long enough to leave traces in public memory. Large technological networks are missing in memory studies and theoretical engagements with commemorative performances. In order to understand how and why the German-Russian energy cooperation has gained increasing public attention, I first suggest that, from an epistemological standpoint, the context (the mass media) in which the German-Russian energy partnership has been represented as an event of public concern over the past four decades requires methodological and theoretical consideration. It is well known that modern societies acquire information about the world beyond the realm of direct experiences through mediation. Theoreticians of social and cultural memory such as Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs, and Aleida and Jan Assmann

[1] Parts of this essay were originally written in German and have been translated by Brenda Black, including all German-language sources unless otherwise specified.

[2] F. Uekötter, "Recollections of Rubber," in *Imperial Sites of Memory,* F. Müller, D. Geppert (eds), Manchester University Press, Manchester (forthcoming).

have stressed the role of material artefacts and processes of mediation when describing the transformation of first-hand experiences into collective bodies of historical knowledge that outlive temporal and spatial limitations. Nevertheless, the focus has been on the semiotic content of historical visions and collective self-images. Here, on the contrary, I will begin with the assumption that mass media are self-regulating systems whose selection and representation of topics have to be explained before the content of the representations can be discussed. Why and how was the German-Russian energy partnership – which, in reality, can be described as an assemblage of singular events, participants or actors, and mediated representations – made into a 40-year-long tradition?

Secondly, I will argue that the widely-preferred concept of memory as a collective narrative has to be re-conceptualized as the "public recursivity of topical careers" in the media ("öffentliche Rekursivität thematischer Karrieren").[3] Maurice Halbwachs construed collective memory as the supra-individual (historical) consciousness of communities whose identity draws upon a common vision of their past. However, the exploitation and usage of resources and commodities usually occupy a precarious place in collective thought. Accordingly, some difficulties arise from the concept of sites of memory.[4] I attempt to resolve these difficulties by defining a "site of memory" in less figurative terms. Here, the examined site of remembrance is empirically founded. Concrete sources, newspaper articles, and the publicity brochures of energy companies from 1968 to 2012 are considered the literal site of memory. The focus shifts away from cultural consciousness. Recollections appear objectified in "communicative operations"[5] of the mass media in which the German-Russian energy partnership has been a recurring topic over the past four decades. I will show that interpretations of the extraction and trade of natural gas, as well as the construction of technological infrastructure that connects Russian gas fields and German households, has taken various shifts. Only *ex post facto* is a narrative about this "tradition" of cooperation discernible.

[3] N. Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien*, VS Verlag, Wiesbaden 1995, p. 28.
[4] Uekötter, "Recollections of Rubber" cit.
[5] Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* cit., p. 11.

System theory offers a useful framework to understand the structural functions of these recursive formulae. In his discussion of mass media, Niklas Luhmann argues that the system of mass media is a set of self-referential operations of communication. When topics recur or are revived, the presentation must deviate from earlier accounts so as to appear newsworthy. Newsworthiness – the mass media's code of conduct that discriminates between information and non-information[6], rather than between external factors like objective and subjective and true and untrue – is a key part of the system's "autopoiesis", its self-creation. Despite arguing for this self-referential quality, Luhmann expressed doubts about solipsism and stressed the importance of referential realities.[7] He spoke of structural interconnections between self-regulating systems – for instance, couplings of mass media with the economic or political system. Thus the societal function of the mass media reveals itself. The reality of mass media, Luhmann argues, forms a reservoir of options for the coordination of communication beyond the internal realm of the mass media and produces a continuous description of the world, around which modern societies can orient themselves. These constant reproductions of recourses within the media and among recipients he denoted memory: "The function of the mass media lies after all in the directing of self-observation of the social system […] What is involved is a universal, not an object specific observation. We have already spoken […] of the function of the system's memory which provides a background reality for all further communication which is constantly reimpregnated by the media."[8]

In fact, Luhmann was able to illustrate the structural functions of topical careers but he was less successful in finding convincing explanations for why particular topics are repeatedly awarded media attention, apart from cognitive programs such as scandal, morality etc.

In the wake of Actor-Network-Theory, this article has to be taken as an intellectual experiment in which I make the effort of re-embed-

[6] Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* cit., p. 122.

[7] Ibid., p. 36.

[8] H.-G. Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Soul to Systems*, Carus Publishing Company, Peru (Illinois) 2006, p. 136.

ding the materio-realities, the "vibrant matter"[9] of the world we live in and that we create, into the analysis of the "referential realities" of the mass media's discourse about the German-Russian energy partnership. In her critique of the "methodological naivité" of constructivism – i.e., a life/matter binary[10] – philosopher Jane Bennett made clear that "what is manifest arrives through humans but not entirely because of them".[11] In this vein Bruno Latour criticized the "anti-fetishism of sociologists".[12] The sociology of technology, ethnomethodology, and lab studies have located social practices within a multitude of ecological – spatial, material, semiotic – conditions. The study of media communication however, is widely devoid of "vibrant matter", and no great efforts were made to determine the impact of objects and materials on the selection of topics. What exactly is it that makes the discovery, extraction, transportation, and trade of natural resources newsworthy? I am undecided about the materializations of "thingly power"[13] in mediated discourses and I will certainly not be able to give a satisfying answer, but I am sure that it is worth considering.

1. Russian Gas, Bilateral Business, and German Legacies

"Nowadays it is impossible to imagine either our everyday lives or the economy without natural gas and electricity. They are essential for our society"[14] proclaims the homepage of Gazprom Germania. This company, a subsidiary of the Russian OAO Gazprom, advertises natural gas as a "safe, environmentally-friendly, and efficient energy source". Another natural gas supplier, E.ON Ruhrgas AG in

[9] J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2010.

[10] Ibid., p. 75.

[11] Ibid., p. 17.

[12] B. Latour, "Eine Soziologie ohne Objekt? Anmerkungen zur Interobjektivität", in *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 11, 2, 2001, pp. 237-252.

[13] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. xiii.

[14] Gazprom Germania, "Energieträger Erdgas," http://www.gazprom-germania.de/erdgaswissen/energietraeger-erdgas.html (accessed 20 September 2010).

Essen, also emphasizes its "high level of environmental friendliness, and not just in comparison with other fossil fuels" on their website. Natural gas is "an energy form with a low environmental impact" and "an option for the future". In this context, a pictorial brochure of the Essen-based company suggests:

> E.ON Ruhrgas's longstanding and reliable relationship with the supplier Gazprom and its participation in projects such as the construction of the Nord Stream Pipeline actively contributes to further developing the connection between Germany and Russia and channeling natural gas to Europe for the long term.[15]

The German-Russian natural gas partnership had its beginnings in the discovery of the Urengoi gas field at the end of 1966. Both the then-existing German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) signed long-term contracts with the Soviet Union for natural gas deliveries.[16] The Soviet Union expanded their centrally planned natural gas industry from a regional to a global sector of the economy, which has provided the nation with Western investments and currencies since the 1970s.

Since the "oil crisis" in 1973 the Western European industrial nations, as well as the GDR, became noticeably more interested in diversifying their resources and energy sources.[17] One long-term effect of this change in strategy was a gradual shift from oil to gas in the heating market and the electricity industry. At the same time, the newly discovered Siberian gas fields also allowed power generation by means of coal to be supplemented with imported natural gas.[18] In the past 40 years this shift in priorities has been expressed

[15] E.ON Ruhrgas AG, "Erdgas aus Russland: Gewachsenes Vertrauen und langfristige Energiepartnerschaft", company publication, 2008, p. 8.

[16] N.M. Victor, D.G. Victor, "Bypassing Ukraine: Exporting Russian Gas to Poland and Germany", in *Natural Gas and Geopolitics: From 1970 to 2040*, D.G. Victor, A.M. Jaffe, M.M. Hayes (eds), Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, p. 129.

[17] See J. Barnes, M.H. Hayes, A.M. Jaffe, D.G. Victor, "Introduction to the Study", in Victor et al., *Natural Gas and Geopolitics* cit., p. 3.

[18] J. Stern, "Gas Pipeline Co-operation between Political Adversaries: Examples from Europe", Report Submission to Korea Foundation, 2005, p. 2f.

in Germany particularly through a greater reliance on Russian gas,[19] which has increasingly supplemented imports from Norway and the Netherlands. Russian natural gas offered the German industries a long-term alternative natural resource[20] and accounts for 36 percent of natural gas usage in Germany today. [21]

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian state-owned company Gazprom advanced to become one of the largest gas companies in the world and an outstanding trading partner for Western European and German companies, who have joined with Gazprom in making new investments such as the construction of the Baltic pipeline. In 2005, when former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder accepted an offer by the giant corporations Gazprom, E.ON, and BASF to become the chairman of the supervisory board of their consortium Nord Stream, which has since been responsible for constructing the Northern European Gas Pipeline, it caused a sensation in the German and international media. "Schröder sells his reputation for rubles" read the headline of an online article in the magazine *Der Spiegel*.[22] But Schröder's influential position on the staff of Gazprom, a company closely connected with the Kremlin and one subjected to heavy criticism since the 1990s due to its politically dubious activities, was not the primary subject to stand in the spotlight of the discussions about the Northern European Gas Pipeline. The pipeline project would endanger the German-Baltic and especially the sensitive German-Polish relations because it would bypass the land transport route which would pass through these countries and from which they stood to benefit. The newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* suggested furthermore that the pipeline construction elicited "fears of the environmental

[19] See A.M. Jaffe, M.H. Hayes, D.G. Victor, "Conclusions", in Victor et al., *Natural Gas and Geopolitics* cit., p. 467.

[20] F. Hill, "Russia: The 21st Century's Energy Superpower?" in *Brookings Review*, 20, 2, 2002, pp. 28-31.

[21] German Federal Government, *Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Öl- und Gasmarktstrategie*, Berlin 2008, p. 31

[22] A. Schwabe, C. Volkery, "Schröder verrubelt seinen Ruf", in *Spiegel Online*, 12 December 2005, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,389956,00.html (accessed 16 September 2010).

damages caused by the construction and operation, of explosives, and also of Russian espionage and the presence of the Russian military for the protection of the facilities and of dependence on the Siberian gas supply". [23] At the same time, however, the author of the article was of the opinion that "Russian gas [is] indispensable for the European [gas] supply". And indeed, the largest natural gas reserves in the world are located in Russia. At the same time, 90 percent of the natural gas in the European market is currently supplied via pipelines.[24] "The large share [of natural gas] in Germany accounted for by imports from Russia is a tradition that goes back decades," according to a report published in 2008 by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology.[25] The "political endorsement"[26] of the natural gas industry mentioned in the government report has not only given rise to pressing issues regarding the security of the gas supply among policymakers, scientists, and journalists since the 1970s; it also strikes at the heart of the political identity of a reunified Germany that is still conscious of its divided past. Political scientists in the US have spoken of the "geopolitics of natural gas" in this context.[27]

The start of construction of the Nord Stream Pipeline through the Baltic Sea in 2005 stimulated public debates about the German energy industry and the German-Russian natural gas partnership in particular. The ongoing controversy about the pipeline demonstrates how closely energy questions are entangled with the memory of the post-war period in Germany and the rest of Europe and the political self-image of Germany that arose out of this. The various organs that shape and present public opinion – energy companies, the federal government, and the media – evaluate the pipeline construction in the light of a 40-year history of cooperation between Germany and Russia on energy matters. Their arguments mutually refer to one an-

[23] H. Gramillscheg, "Ärger mit der langen Leitung. Gaspipeline durch die Ostsee: Während Geologen den Meeresboden untersuchen, hält der Protest der Anrainer an", in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 39, 2008.

[24] German Federal Government, *Bericht der Bundesregierung* cit., p. 17.

[25] Ibid., p. 41.

[26] Ibid., p. 41.

[27] See Barnes et al. "Introduction to the Study" cit., p. 5.

other in a way that goes far beyond the solid economic facts. Energy politics and the energy industry are, it turns out, to a large degree also symbolic. In the striving for economic, political, and environmental legitimation (or de-legitimation) of the Nord Stream Pipeline, those concerned make use of an inventory of symbols which draws largely on Germany's national memory. The groups involved in this energy discourse communicate by means of a set of relevant events from the political and economic past. The interpretation of these events remains in the process of negotiation and is shaped by the various economic, environmental, and political interests and concerns of these parties. Because the discussion about energy politics is carried out in connection with the German past, it is hardly surprising that the selection of events used in the arsenal of arguments have tended to show regional characteristics specific to the history of divided Germany. Interestingly, in the course of vigorous debates about the construction of the Baltic pipeline, it is possible to observe how this historical division is to some degree overcome. Although little known to the West German public, the prestigious "Drushbatrasse" ("Friendship Conduit") and "Erdgastrasse" ("Natural Gas Conduit") projects were considered quintessential examples of the German-Soviet friendship by the East German political establishment, and in the course of recent energy debates they have found their way to the "top of the charts" in the historical narrative of unified Germany, both in the energy industry and the popular media. Thus, the energy discourse not only feeds upon existing historical narratives, which are always limited to a small subset of events, but also itself influences which events are selected. Energy resource policy and cultural memory are not separate, isolated spheres, but rather create new ecological and energy-related sites of memory. Since the beginning of the controversial energy cooperation, energy companies as well as government agencies responsible for energy policy have played an active role in the "invention" of the site of memory that is the "German-Russian energy partnership". As will be shown, their interpretive model spoke both of "rescuing the political climate" and of an avowed commitment to ecological climate protection in order to justify their bilateral operations to the media.

Today the German natural gas business is dominated by the company Gazprom Germania GmbH, the Essen-based E.ON Ruhrgas AG, the East German VNG-Verbundnetzgas AG, BASF, Wintershall Holding GmbH, and Erdgas und Erdöl GmbH (BEB). These companies are tightly connected with and dependent upon one another through appropriation of shares and the foundation of subsidiaries and joint enterprises. The German Energy Industry Act of 2005, which was designed to implement guidelines established by the European Parliament and Council on 26 June 2003 and was directed towards the goal, in the words of the German Parliament, of "increasing competition",[28] in actuality has not resulted in the desired "decartelization of the natural gas industry"[29] but rather in a fissuring of the industry. In practice, the companies mentioned above continue to divide the tasks of production, sales and distribution, and infrastructure among themselves. Furthermore, they maintain close ties with politicians and policymakers. The representatives of the energy industry are as familiar with the East as with the West and they re-affirm four decades of cooperation at each anniversary with great confidence for the future. These ceremonies always take place in alliance with the German and Russian political elite, who establish the conditions necessary for the German-Russian natural gas trade. During Vladimir Putin's state visit in 2001, for example, the chairman of Ruhrgas AG, Dr. Burckhard Bergmann, gave the Russian president a historic gas meter "as a symbol of the nearly 400 billion cubic meters of natural gas which have been delivered to Germany since 1973".[30]

A rigorous constructivist explanation of the described organization of energy complicities would read that such symbolic acts and rituals not only convey knowledge about certain events which are commemorated during anniversaries; they also provide assurances of mutual

[28] German Federal Government, *Bericht der Bundesregierung* cit., p. 7.

[29] German Federal Government, "Gesetz über die Elektrizitäts- und Gasversorgung (Energiewirtschaftsgesetz – EnWG)", 7 July 2005, p. 1.

[30] E.ON Ruhrgas AG, "Highlights 2001", http://www.eon-ruhrgas.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-E5F12DDB-987B1BB2/er-corporate/hs.xsl/3865.htm (accessed 16 September 2010).

support between politics and the industry and function as legitimation strategies. The interpretation of the past goes hand in hand with the production of models for the future as well as the goal of gaining public approval for current and future investments. An alternative way to construe the course of events is offered by the concept of an "object-centered sociality"[31] that abandons an ontological divide between cognition, power, and communication versus objects. The starting point is interrelations between experts and their object of expertise.[32] The epistemic object, i.e., the technological and/or natural object is considered to be one component among others of processes in agency and articulation.[33] In the same vein Jane Bennett's term "thing-power" "draws attention to an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve".[34] Bennett stresses the "distributive quality of agency" and reintroduces Deleuze's and Guattari's term "assemblage": "Assemblages are open-ended collectives composed of human actors and thingly actants. [...] The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone."[36] I do not claim that hegemonies or the Foucauldian nexus of power and knowledge are insignificant. I rather doubt their power to explain all the idiosyncrasies of ecological communication. To put it very bluntly: Energy companies and stock holders have adapted themselves to fossil resources and not the other way around. Energy policy manages the legal distribution of resources that unfolded their vitality long before the term "energy policy" ever entered public discourse.

[31] K. Knorr-Cetina, "Theoretischer Konstruktivismus: Über die Einnistung von Wissensstrukturen in soziale Strukturen", in *Theoretische Empirie. Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung,* H. Kalthoff, S. Hirschauer, G. Lindemann (eds), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 56.

[32] D. Boyer, "The Corporeality of Expertise" in *Ethnos*, 70, 2, 2005, pp. 243-266.

[33] Knorr-Cetina, "Theoretischer Konstruktivismus" cit., p. 57.

[34] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. 21.

[35] Ibid., p. 21, p. 24.

[36] Knorr-Cetina, "Theoretischer Konstruktivismus" cit., p. 57.

Competition for natural resources presupposes their existence and availability in the soil; their finite quality makes them valuable for human actors. The ontological properties of natural gas make a difference in the social world: they engender economic, political, and cultural desires, and have an effect on technological developments. Resources have an effect on humans; they are, in Latour's terms, actants, for they make a difference and form the basis of an object-centered sociality.[37] The mass media and publicity material communicates an account of this "life-matter relationship"[37] that (as will be illustrated in what follows) has an informative quality. If Gregory Bateson was right when defining information as "a difference that makes a difference"[38] the question is: Are resources (good or bad) news in their own right?

2. The West German Story: The Natural Gas Pipeline Deal

The historic "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal", the foundations of which were established in a 1970 contract concerning natural gas deliveries between Ruhrgas AG[39] and the Soviet state-run trading enterprise Soyuzneft-Export, has been conventionally portrayed by both energy companies and the German government as the beginning of a tradition challenged primarily by skepticism and fears on the part of media reporting. "Gazprom seems to be as elusive as the gas it produces, as enigmatic as a Russian matryoshka doll that, rather than getting smaller with each layer stripped off, instead becomes even larger and more misshapen", the magazine *Manager* wrote in 1999, asking: "Where does Gazprom end and the state begin?"[40] Given Russia's tense relations with its neighbors, who, since the fall of the Soviet Union are also transit countries for the pipeline (for example Ukraine), this ques-

[37] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. 21.

[38] G. Bateson, *Ökologie des Geistes: Anthropologische, psychologische, biologische und epistemologische Perspektiven*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 362.

[39] E.ON took over Ruhrgas in 2003.

[40] D. Student, "Frostige Oase: Innenansichten der größten Gasfirma der Welt", in *Manager Magazin*, 6, 1999, http://www.manager-magazin.de/magazin/artikel/0,2828,23192,00.html (accessed 20 September 2010).

tion concerns both the security of the energy supply and the ideal of a democratic free market economy. The mistrust of the former Soviet Union as a totalitarian and expansionist superpower has been deeply embedded in German and European memory ever since the October Revolution in 1917 and particularly since the end of WWII. Consequently, when the media gives its opinions on the German-Russian energy partnership, it makes use of idealized representations of the reunified Germany as a nation – images which portray Germany and Russia as antitheses of each other. The state-owned Gazprom is mostly assigned the role of a politically suspect business partner, as clearly seen in the controversy surrounding Gerhard Schröder's position as chairman of the supervisory board for the Nord Stream consortium, of which Gazprom holds the largest proportion of shares – 51 percent. Cooperating with an enterprise such as Gazprom, *Spiegel Online* commented in 2005, "does not correspond with the philosophy of someone who considers himself a democrat". [41] In addition, the "oil crisis" of 1973, triggered by conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors, taught the industrial nations a painful lesson: that energy resources can be employed as political weapons. The arrest of the oil baron and Putin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2003 and the subsequent collapse of his enterprise Yukos only served to strengthen the mistrust of the Russia-critical media regarding the Russian energy industry. It also gave weight to the statements of political scientists who have pointed out that a large portion of the natural gas reserves that are attractive to industrial nations are located in politically unstable countries and regions such as Russia, Iran, or Algeria.[42] However, such ideological misgivings have not diminished the interest of the German energy industry for the Russian market in the slightest, leading the online version of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to conclude in 2005 that:

> In spite of being temporarily disconcerted by the actions of the state prosecution against Khodorkovsky, Germany remained an important investor in Russia in

[41] Schwabe and Volkery, "Schröder verrubelt seinen Ruf" cit.

[42] M.H. Hayes, D.G. Victor, "Politics, Markets, and the Shift to Gas: Insights from Seven Historical Case Studies", in Victor et al., *Natural Gas and Geopolitics* cit., p. 322f.

2004. [...] The [German] federal government therefore welcomes the direct involvement of German energy companies in Russian natural gas and oil fields.[43]

Remarkably, the attitudes expressed in the media about the German-Soviet natural gas trade were much more positive during the Cold War era. The "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" of 1970 was a triangular transaction between a Soviet trade delegation led by the Foreign Trade Minister Patolitshev, Ruhrgas AG, Mannesmann-Export GmbH, and Deutsche Bank. Deutsche Bank was the head of a German bank consortium which provided the Soviet government with intermediate loans that would allow it to purchase the necessary pipes from Mannesmann AG. The debt was later paid back through revenue from the natural gas purchased by Ruhrgas. Subsequent contracts up through the 1980s were based on the same principle. In the context of an overall thawing of relations between the Soviet Union and West Germany, the media praised the agreement as "the largest and most politically significant East-West transaction of the post-war era".[44] The enthusiastic endorsement of the treaty was based on the belief that such "spectacular bargains"[45] would improve relations with the East and provide "more certain guarantees of peace".[46] The media received the news of the activities of the West German government and the companies Ruhrgas and Mannesmann quite positively. In addition, the contract came to serve as a model for subsequent trade agreements between West German companies and the Soviet government in the course of the 1970s. The newly flourishing trade with the East was supported politically by a bilateral German-Soviet trade agreement. According to a 1974 article in *Der Spiegel*, the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt's main goal in the agreement was to prevent the German industries from suffering

[43] "Chodorkowskij-Urteil ohne Auswirkung auf deutsche Wirtschaft", in *FAZ.net*, 31 May 2005, http://www.faz.net/s/RubDDBDABB9457A437-BAA85A49C26FB23A0/Doc~EA532128326B742FCAE4B48DB165ACD82~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html (accessed 20 September 2010).

[44] "Auf kleiner Flamme", in *Der Spiegel*, 33, 1969.

[45] "Taube Ohren", in *Der Spiegel*, 37, 1973.

[46] "Fangen wir mit der Wirtschaft an", in *Der Spiegel*, 21, 1973.

economic setbacks in the face of the oil crisis by opening trade with the USSR as a supplier of energy resources.[47] Finally, the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" was also a way to overcome the "Pipeline Debacle"[48] of 1963. During the height of Cold War tensions, the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer had given in to pressure from the United States to embargo exports of steel pipes to the USSR, with the result that German companies were forced to break existing contracts.[49] During this period (the late 1960s and early 1970s), it wasn't the Soviet Union that was the target of reporters' distrust, but the United States instead. *Der Spiegel* even speculated that the real reason the United States initiated the embargo wasn't the alleged danger to the "European flank of the NATO", but rather a desire to protect the market position of US companies involved in the natural resource industry. The German industry was "left empty-handed".[50] Thus, the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" not only served the interests of the government's *Ostpolitik*[51]; it also was seen as a sign of emancipation from the USA.

This last aspect became particularly clear in the 1980s when the Reagan administration tried unsuccessfully to intervene and prevent another natural gas pipeline contract from being made after Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan. The West German government refused to implement another embargo. Politicians and the media anticipated any number of positive results from this, both for East-West relations and for the German industry. After all, business journalism of the 1970s and 1980s called upon the German image of itself as a leader in cutting-edge technology and quality workmanship. While Siberia might be a "treasure chest" of natural resources, the shortage economy and the technological backwardness of the USSR

[47] "Kanzler Schmidt: In Moskau Weichen stellen", in *Der Spiegel*, 42, 1974.

[48] W. Nagel, "Gibst du Röhren – geb' ich Gas", in *Die Zeit*, 19 December 1969.

[49] P. Högselius, *Red Gas: Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2013, p. 52.

[50] "Sowjet-Entwicklungsauftrag: Turnier der Großrohre", in *Der Spiegel*, 19, 1969.

[51] Högselius, *Red Gas*, cit. p. 105.

hindered the Soviets from developing these resources on their own without the aid of German expertise, journalists thought.[52]

Even so, a gradual change of attitude can be discerned in the media over the course of the 1980s. The positive portrayal predominant in the 1970s of the Soviet Union as a partner for German energy policy began to crumble in the face of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and concerns that the Moscow government would intervene in Poland, where the Solidarity Movement was gathering more and more supporters. In the 1970s it was still possible to claim that the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" was above all an economic matter in which the Soviet Union had proved to be a reliable partner. But starting around 1980 public attention focused increasingly on the points of conflict in the contract negotiations. These included attempts by Soviet negotiators to lower interest rates in the triangular transactions. The Soviet natural gas export company was also criticized for raising prices. In addition, delivery delays in the winter of 1981 caused doubts about the reliability of the natural gas supply and concerns about being too dependent upon the Soviets. The increase in commissions which the German industry had hoped for also failed to materialize. This was all the more aggravating when their Soviet partners awarded a contract for the delivery of technical appliances to Caterpillar, a US company of all things.

It is characteristic of the Soviet negotiation strategy that Moscow honored the US corporation Caterpillar with a government contract: Business clearly comes before politics. They failed to give special regard even to long-time suppliers. This has been driven home particularly strongly to the men of Mannesmann.[53]

In 1981 the newspaper *Die Zeit* recognized with disappointment that while the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" decreased dependence on OPEC oil, in exchange it increased the dependence on natural gas from the USSR.[54] As long as the energy industry was evaluated in terms of the Cold War divisions, the German-Russian business rela-

[52] "Die Gas-Scheichs von Sibirien", in *Der Spiegel,* 48, 1981.

[53] "Verbissen gefeilscht", in *Der Spiegel*, 35, 1981.

[54] H.-G. Kemmer, "Energie-Vasall Bundesrepublik?" in *Die Zeit*, 20 November 1981.

tionship continued to be imbued with positive associations of promoting political stability. With the breakup of the Eastern bloc, however, this geopolitical argument became much less convincing. As a result of changes in the international political situation, the media rapidly withdrew their support for the German policymakers. Starting in the 1990s, Russia was seen more than ever before as an extremely questionable energy partner, energy companies in both the East and the West were subject to increasingly sharp criticism, and the fear of becoming too dependent upon Russian natural gas increased.

The media coverage of the German-Russian cooperation on the gas market reveals "distinctive discontinuities"[55] over the period examined. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, it wasn't the Soviet Union that was the target of reporters' distrust, but the United States instead. Cold war rhetoric was turned upside down.[56] Following Bateson, Niklas Luhmann argued that discontinuities are one of the most typical selectors in news writing, for ruptures make a difference and as such are informative. However, Luhmann's analysis of the mass media centered on the internal mechanism of the media system, therefore his theory falls short of providing adequate explanations about how topics enter the system before they run through recursive operations. The question at hand is whether the illustrated discontinuities were a mere product of cognitive and creative strategies applied by the journalists to create a story that sells. Where can the origins of discontinuities properly be located? At the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, discontinuities can initially be described as discontinuities in the writing on the geopolitical divisions of the northern hemisphere, before the German-Russian energy partnership subsequently materialized as a topic in its own right. But what made the difference in the economic or political field, around which the mass media created a mediated reality? Discontinuities must not be interpreted solely in terms of discourse constellations. Rather, academic inquiry should also take into account material or, in this case, fossil preconditions. Germany clearly does not possess natural gas resources and Russia does. The discovery

[55] Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* cit., p. 58
[56] Högselius, *Red Gas* cit. p. 3.

of rich gas fields in Russia attracted economic interests. The impact of their existence on global political and economic strategies must not be underestimated for they opened up new options for relevant actors. It might be fruitful to abandon "the habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)"[57] and rather to take into consideration that "animate things"[58] at least "co-co-ordinate" political structures and discursive operations, for they encode what might be politically and economically operable. Innovative operations on the gas market altered bilateral collaborations and altered discourses on the relationship between Germany, the USA, and the Soviet Union, thus creating news. Whatever the situated estimations, Russian natural gas recursively appeared as/in the news: At the end of the 1960s Russian gas fields meant good news; since the 1990s they have become bad news due to changing geopolitical and national contexts.

The energy companies themselves present a completely different view of the situation, of course. E.ON Ruhragas, which has a joint share in Wintershall (a sunsidiary of BASF) in the Nord Stream Consortium and maintains close business relations with Gazprom through mutual appropriation of shares, continues to respond with geopolitical rhetoric to the public's doubts about the political integrity of Russia and the dangers for the security of the energy supply which could result from this. The "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" is still presented as having been "an important pillar of political détente"[59] during the Cold War. The corporate branding and promotional material of E.ON Ruhrgas AG portrays both the 1970 contract and the construction of the Nord Stream Pipeline as part of a single continuous tradition spanning decades:

> The natural gas industry in Germany – in the old German federal states [FRG] as well as the new ones [former GDR] – has obtained gas from Russian since 1973. [...] In August 2006 a large percentage of these contracts were extended until 2035, and a new agreement about deliveries via the Nord Stream Pipeline through 2035 has been agreed upon.[60]

[57] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. vii
[58] Ibid.
[59] E.ON Ruhrgas AG, "Erdgas aus Russland" cit., p. 20.
[60] Ibid.

Or consider a promotional flyer from Gazprom Germania, which includes a photo depicting Russian president Medvedev and Foreign Minister Steinmeier pressing a symbolic "start button" for the opening ceremony of the Baltic pipeline construction. The flyer suggests that:

> Only a close friendship between Russia and Europe based on a history of co-operation and due consideration of the interests of both parties will enable the partners to meet the challenges of the 21st century. [...] The past 40 years have shown that the Russian supplier has always fulfilled its obligations. [...] Promising investments in such projects as the Nord Stream Pipeline [...] guarantee the stability and security of the Russian natural gas deliveries for decades to come.[61]

The German government's "Report on the Oil and Natural Gas Market Strategy" gives an impression that industry and politics are singing the same tune.

> The large proportion of imports coming from Russia has a long tradition. [...] In the past centuries Russia has always proved to be a reliable supplier. This partnership must be developed further. [...] Additional diversification of sources of supply and transit routes remains a central concern. In the case of natural gas the Baltic pipeline Nord Stream is a substantial contribution to the efforts to expand the trans-European networks.[62]

As a country poor in natural resources, Germany and its government are dependent upon the private natural gas industry, both in terms of economic and energy policy. On the other hand, without the investment guarantees of the German government, these companies would not be able to make investments in their "friendly relationship" with their Russian partners. The government and energy companies join in defending themselves against any doubts about the correctness of this partnership and strive to protect the political climate both with Russia and within Germany by emphasizing that Russia has never been responsible for any disruptions in the natural gas delivery. As it happens, Germany and other EU countries have had repeated problems with natural gas deliveries because Russia was

[61] Gazprom Germania GmbH, "Mit Erdgas in die Zukunft", company publication, 2008, p. 13.

[62] German Federal Government, *Bericht der Bundesregierung* cit., p. 41

involved in conflicts with transit countries such as Ukraine. However, thus far these conflicts have never resulted in serious shortages.[63]

In addition to PR aimed at justifying their actions, the energy companies also make use of strategic sponsorship. For example, E.ON Ruhrgas AG supports the financing of the Petersburger Dialog, an annual gathering of key players in politics, business, the media, and science, which was called into being by the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2001. During the 2006 session of the Petersburger Dialog, Professor Georg Unland, Rector of the TU Bergakademie Freiberg, and Professor Vladimir Litvinenko, Rector of the National Mining Institute in St. Petersburg, signed a "Memorandum for the Foundation of an Ongoing German-Russian Natural Resource Forum" in the presence of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin. This forum was to pursue the goal of "discussing and developing strategies for the effective use of fossil, mineral, and alternative natural resources." Additionally, the two universities planned cooperative research projects.[64] In order to realize these goals, the research institutions formed a research group whose members include the industrial partners OOO Gazexport (the successor to the Soviet state trading enterprise Soyuzgazexport, which was integrated into OAO Gazprom in 1991) and the Leipzig Verbundnetz Gas AG (VNG).[65] The controversial energy companies thus secure a place for themselves outside of the energy industry in various sectors of the public sphere through such cooperative projects with universities, as well as through providing financial support for other cultural, educational, and sports institutes – for example, the Bundesliga soccer team FC Schalke 04. Their company logos appear on all the pamphlets of the organizations and events they sponsor.

Compared with the media coverage, promotional material from

[63] "Putin und EU streiten über Gasprom", in *Zeit* online, 24 February 2011, http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2011-02/putin-konfrontation-eu (accessed 3 October 2011).

[64] Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg, "Report 41. Nachrichten aus Lehre und Forschung", http://tu-freiberg.de/presse/report/R41November06.pdf (accessed 20 September 2010).

[65] Ibid.

the energy industry and governmental reports have developed a surprisingly consistent interpretation of the events over the past 40 years. Furthermore, the brochures of relevant companies and the governmental reports bear an uncanny rhetorical likeness to each other. The essence of these texts is less to provide a background reality for further communication than to represent the energy industry's mission, which in fact hasn't changed much over the decades. The objective is the extraction, trade, and transportation of natural gas. Altogether the assemblage (including human and non-human actants) that is known as the German-Russian energy partnership is rather solid in its structure, for a handful of enterprises share the market. Quantities of gas to be delivered, transport routes, and competition with gas suppliers (for instance from Norway or the Netherlands) are stipulated by policymakers in such a way that competition is limited. The stability of the assemblage is mirrored by the industry's self-presentation in the media. It should be mentioned that since competition is restricted and all operations on the market are endorsed by policymakers, the promotional material does not promote or advertise in the proper meaning of the word, nor are the actors required to align their self-presentation with the ideological critique of the mass media.

In conjunction with extensive PR activities, the sponsoring campaign is intended to win the import countries' trust in the energy companies and support for the construction of additional pipelines between western Europe and Russia. Above all the campaign seeks to influence the customers. Through its advertisements, the energy industry reminds the viewers who directs the natural gas trade between Russia and Germany. Precisely because the traders and producers operate beyond the perception threshold of the users, they develop open spaces through public relations. Through advertisements, promotions, and sponsorship, they manipulate their audience even while declaring their motives. Precisely because advertisers reveal their interests, they are allowed to pursue the sought-after memory in a rather blatant manner.[66] In the case of the energy indus-

[66] Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* cit., p. 86

try's self-promotion, the properties of memory do not require new information – unlike the mass media, which constantly reframes its evaluations of the bilateral gas business. Rather, the commemorative mode of operation entails a stoic ignorance towards journalistic misgivings, for instance, regarding Gazprom's undemocratic nature. For the natural gas industry it is a crucial not to respond to the critical voices. Frame theory has shown that the negation of a frame activates the same frame.[67] Thus the most proficient strategy to counter the mass media's suspicions is to ignore them. Confidence in the German-Russian energy partnership is produced through pronounced discursive stability and modes of public presence that don't cause any harm. By creating a uniform narrative, public relation experts secure the energy industry's unique market position for the future.

The companies also claim to "actively support the intercultural dialogue between Germany and Russia"[68] in order to "build bridges between the nations".[69] As one of the financial sponsors of the reconstruction of the Amber Room in the Catherine Palace near St. Petersburg, E.ON Ruhrgas contributed to a project that was presented to the public as "a symbol of German-Russian friendship".[70] For the citizen of the former East Germany, the phrasing might well evoke certain political rituals from over 20 years ago, perhaps even the climax of the German-Soviet friendship as manifested in the construction of the "Drushbatrasse" and "Erdgastrasse" in the 1970s and 1980s.

3. The East German Story: "Drushbatrasse" and "Erdgastrasse"

In 1968 the first international treaty between the GDR and the USSR was signed, including details of natural gas imports. In 1974, during the 28th session of the Council for Mutual Economic Assist-

[67] J.I. Saeed, *Semantics*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2009, p. 365.
[68] Gazprom Germania GmbH, "Mit Erdgas in die Zukunft" cit., p. 28.
[69] Ibid., p. 13.
[70] E.ON Ruhrgas AG, "Geschäftsjahr 2003", p. 46, http://www.eon-ruhrgas.com/cps/rde/xbcr/er-corporate/Ruhrgas_GeBe03_de.pdf (accessed 28 September 2010).

ance (Comecon) in Sofia, the delegates of the participating countries signed a "General Agreement" on cooperation in the development of the natural gas fields in Orenburg. In return for the natural gas deliveries the countries committed to taking over the construction of sections of the natural gas pipeline "Soyuz" in the Soviet Union. This included relocating natural gas conduits, constructing compressor stations and providing technical equipment and supplies. From 1974 to 1978, East Germany took over the construction of what came to be called the "Comecon Pipeline", a 550 km section of pipeline in Ukraine. As part of the Urengoy Agreement in 1982 and the Yamburg Agreement in 1984, the GDR committed itself to constructing additional sections of pipeline, known as the "Erdgastrasse" ("Natural Gas Conduit"), in Ukraine, Belarus, the Urals, and Kazakhstan. In order to fulfill their contract responsibilities, the GDR recruited a total of 15,000 workers (primarily male) from various state-owned enterprises and conglomerates who carried out the pipeline construction as contractors and sub-contractors. Like Ruhrgas AG in West Germany, the East German VEB Verbundnetz (part of the conglomerate "Schwarze Pumpe") served as the central purchasing and distribution agent.

In addition to the construction of the pipeline and natural gas facilities, the state also assumed responsibility for expanding the infrastructure along the course of the pipeline; that is, housing, schools, and other facilities were constructed for the future Soviet operators. Both the building materials and the technical equipment were purchased from West Germany – for example, the pipes manufactured by Mannesmann AG, which were also being employed in the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" arranged by the West German government at the same time.[71] The "Drushbatrasse" and "Erdgastrasse" projects were embedded in one of the largest political campaigns of the GDR. In 1974, Klaus Siebold, the Minister for Coal and Energy, declared this socialist integration project to be a "national youth project" which was officially overseen by the Freie Deutsche Jugend ("Free German Youth",

[71] R. Karlsch, "Erdgasverträge und Trassenbau", in *medium gas,* 3, 2008, p. 56, http://www.vng.de/VNG-Internet/de/3_Presse/mediathek/unternehmensmagazin/mg_archiv/index.html (accessed 29 August 2013).

FDJ). As a result of this, by 1976 2,500 of the 4,000 on-site workers, foremen, and engineers were members of the FDJ.[72] Those involved in the project included welders, turners, and various other technicians, mechanics, and loggers, as well as masons, cooks, cleaners, medical workers, and of course FDJ officials, nicknamed "kulturniks", who arranged leisure activities for the workers as well as political events and joint assemblies with the Soviet youth organization "Komsomol".

The pipeline was declared to be the "construction project of the century"[73] and was praised as "a tangible expression of socialist economic integration". The East German and Soviet energy cooperation was considered "the optimal alliance between the national economies" of the two countries and a cornerstone for "creating the material and technological basis for a shared communist future".[74] It is worth noting that the public discourse in the two German states regarding their respective energy cooperation with the USSR show astonishing similarities. The "future-oriented enthusiasm for technology"[75] wasn't just prevalent in the GDR. West German newspapers, too, saw the "Natural Gas Pipeline Deal" as an "indication of East-West relations becoming more objective as a result of economic and scientific-technological interchange".[76] In much the same vein, the East German media also praised the intention to secure peace between East and West, speaking of "a piece of visible peace-making policy" and "cooperation between two nations with different social systems to the economic advantage of both".[77] As the technological and environmental historian Joachim

[72] K. Belwe, *Zentrales Jugendobjekt der FDJ "Erdgastrasse"*, Gesamtdeutsches Institut, Bundesanstalt für Gesamtdeutsche Aufgaben, Bonn 1983.

[73] Zentralrat der Freien Deutschen Jugend, *Am Bauwerk des Jahrhunderts: Erlebnisse vom Zentralen Jugendobjekt "Ergastrasse" der Freien deutschen Jugend*, Verlag Neues Leben, East Berlin 1985.

[74] G. Eggers, H. Matthies, M. Neumann, U. Völkel (eds), *Abenteuer Trasse: Erlebnisse und Beobachtungen*, Verlag Neues Leben, East Berlin 1978, p. 5f.

[75] J. Radkau, *Technik in Deutschland vom 18. Jahrhundert bis heute*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 388.

[76] M. Gräfin Dönhoff, "Signal aus Moskau: Auch im Wahlkampf darf Bonn sich nicht schwerhörig zeigen", in *Die Zeit*, 1 August 1969.

[77] Zentralrat der Freien Deutschen Jugend, *Am Bauwerk des Jahrhunderts* cit., p. 14.

Radkau writes, "the history of technology in Germany can still be considered a single history during the period of German division!"[78]

The mass media's appraisals of the nascent pipeline network as a "piece of visible peace-making policy" in East Germany and as "East-West relations becoming more objective" in West Germany can be interpreted not solely as metaphoric references to ideological convergences but also as the media's representation of an object-based alteration of East-West relations. In the 1970s and 1980s the media reported on what Latour called the "interobjectivity"[79] of the pipeline enterprise, which had been accomplished with an East German work force and West German pipes and additional technical equipment. Interobjectivity challenges concepts of social theory that designate modes of interdependencies such as intersubjectivity, intertextuality, and interdiscusivity, for it describes a "fabric that includes non-human actants".[80] During the construction and expansion of the pipeline infrastructure throughout the 1970s and 1980s, East-West relations were subject to discursive re-framings, but the interpretation of economic acts of cooperation cannot be restricted to the symbolic superstructure of power relations, acts of governance, etc. The construction and expansion of the pipeline network not only generated political realignments; it also established a material connection between states. What is more, the assembly produced a permanent modification of the physical environment. The pipeline's "material recalcitrance" outlived the great geopolitical reformations of 1989 and therefore became a source for future newswriting in the 1990s, as will be illustrated later.

The technological, interobjective, and discursive similarities should not cause us to overlook the substantial differences, however. In the East German media, Radkau notes, "the Marxist dogma of the progress of the productive forces was still in effect – and by [these forces] was meant more concretely technology and technologically

[78] Radkau, *Technik in Deutschland* cit., p. 399.

[79] Latour, "Eine Soziologie ohne Objekt?" cit., pp. 237-252.

[80] B. Latour, "Technology is Society Made Durable", in *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, J. Law (ed.), Routledge, London 1991, p. 103.

skilled people".[81] At the core of the East German media campaign, therefore, was the ideal of proletarian internationalism, in which "friendship between nations" and "achievement of the [socialist] plan" were guiding principles. The "Trasse," as the project was usually referred to, was considered a site of "communist education".[82] The campaign for the pipeline was carried to East German society through the media. The official newspaper of the FDJ, "Junge Welt", followed pipeline construction through a series of exclusive reports, the state-owned DEFA Studios shot four documentary films about it, and multiple volumes illustrating the project were published. The pipeline builders were called "the proletarian reserve forces", "young revolutionaries", "heroes of labor", and, in reference to the blue shirts of the FDJ uniform, "blue-shirted ambassadors". In addition to official awards and ideological rewards recognizing their "fight for the daily plan-plus",[83] they also enjoyed various material rewards and sociopolitical advantages such as high wages (by DDR standards), access to export goods, preferential treatment in receiving vacation, allotment of places at the university, apartments, telephone connections, and automobiles.[84] The far-reaching media campaigns and special privileges for workers came to an abrupt end with the fall of the Wall and reunification. The construction project "Erdgastrasse" was brought to a close in 1993 after a substantial reduction in personnel and the integration of West German companies into the project.

It is astonishing how much the publicity material of the now-private energy companies today resembles the "friendship" mantra of the FDJ campaigns during the GDR pipeline construction in the USSR. It almost seems as though the public relations experts for energy companies located in the former East German states, namely VNG and Gazprom Germania, merely made a few adjustments to their word choice after 1989, replacing the idea of communism with that of Europe. After all,

[81] Radkau, *Technik in Deutschland* cit., p. 391

[82] Zentralrat der Freien Deutschen Jugend, *Am Bauwerk des Jahrhunderts* cit., p. 108.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Belwe, *Zentrales Jugendobjekt* cit.

since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the relevant reference point for their business operations is no longer Comecon, but rather the European Union. Apart from that, the natural gas industry remains dedicated to the ideals of shaping the future and technological progress. The companies prefer to work with each other to achieve these goals, as shown by a 2008 article entitled "A Poisonous Cocktail"[85] in *Der Spiegel* which denounced the "old boys' network" at Gazprom Germania. The magazine identified the traditions of the natural gas industry since the construction of the "Ergastrasse" as above all a matter of the people involved. Thus the 50-year anniversary of the Leipzig-based VNG was attended primarily by familiar faces from East and West German energy giants who have played a leading role since the 1970s in the German-Russian natural gas business. Among the guests and speakers were the German chancellor Angela Merkel, high-ranking officials of VNG's partners E.ON Ruhrgas, Gazprom, and the BASF subsidiary Winterhall, as well as Kurt Biedenkopf, Prime Minister of Saxony, Wolfgang Tiefensee, the Minister for Transportation, Building and Urban Development, and finally the ambassador of the Russian Federation Vladimir Kotenev, who became the chief executive officer of Gazprom Germania in July 2010. Kotenev was already well-acquainted with German policy-makers and the successor of Hans-Joachim Gornig, the former government representative of the natural gas pipeline construction in the GDR and one of the founders of Gazprom Germania.

These continuities in personnel and management in VNG and other East German energy companies created a particular set of challenges for the companies seeking to maintain their corporate image, as they were forced to deal with (or at least live with) the legacy of the socialist state. The company's chronicle particularly emphasizes the treaties between the USSR and GDR as key events in its development. The fact that these agreements were accompanied by one of the largest political campaigns by the single-party government is mentioned neither in the VNG chronicle nor in *medium gas*, the publicity brochure of the company, however. The reasons why pro-

[85] J. Dahlkamp, F. Dohmen, U. Klußmann, G. Latsch, J. Schmitt, S. Simons, "Giftiger Cocktail", in *Der Spiegel*, 35, 2008.

motional texts tend not to correspond to ideological concerns have been explained earlier. On the other hand, the modernization of the company since reunification is described in great detail.

4. The Intricate Unification of the East and West German Stories

In the course of the reorganization of the energy industry in East Germany, the natural gas import company VEB Verbundnetz Gas began to establish itself as an independent company as early as the spring of 1990, breaking away from the conglomeration Schwarze Pumpe. The West German companies Ruhrgas and BEB supported it in this process, as well as the Federal Ministry of Economics, with the result that the state-owned enterprise was turned into a joint-stock company (the current VNG) a few days before the two German states signed a treaty agreeing on monetary, economic, and social union on 18 May 1990. Ruhrgas AG acquired 35 percent of the shares and BEB 10 percent; today EWE Oldenburg, Wintershall Holding GmbH, and Gazprom Germania also own shares of VNG. While the publicity brochures of VNG suggest that Ruhrgas AG and BEB "[helped] the Leipzig company with the first steps into a free market economy"[86], *Der Spiegel* expressed a different opinion. In 1990, the magazine remarked in the title of an article about the reorganization of the East German energy company for the new economic order that there was "too much scheming going on".[87]

The changes in the energy industry during the transition period can scarcely be described as a harmonious unification process. In 1991 *Die Zeit* even referred to an "East German natural gas war".[88]

[86] R. Karlsch, "Vom Plan zum Markt. Die Transformation der ostdeutschen Gaswirtschaft", in *medium gas*, 4, 2008, p. 46, http://issuu.com/vngag/docs/medium_gas_2008_4 (accessed 13 July 2013).

[87] "Zu viel gemauschelt: Deutsche Konzerne kämpfen um das lukrative Erdgasgeschäft in Ostdeutschland; Auch die Russen mischen mit", in *Der Spiegel*, 43, 1990.

[88] M. Huber, H.-G. Kemmer, "Kampf der Monopole: Ist die Energieversorgung in den neuen Bundesländern nach dem Jahreswechsel gefährdet?" in *Die Zeit,* 13 December 1991.

During this time VNG was carrying on fierce price wars in its competition with Wintershall Erdgas Handelshaus GmbH (WIEH), a joint subsidiary of BASF and the Russian company Gazprom. After reunification the new federal government took over the "Yamburg Agreement" made by the GDR in 1986 with the Soviet Union. The supplier VNG was allowed to purchase the natural gas from Yamburg at the so-called "Waidhaus price", the cost which Ruhrgas AG paid when the gas entered German territory at Waidhaus in Bavaria. The privately owned WIEH acquired the right to set prices as a result of the "Orenburg Agreement", thus achieving a monopoly on the delivery of natural gas in the former East German states. When the gas entered Sayda in Saxony, WIEH calculated a higher price than the federal government.[89] VNG, backed by their shareholder Ruhrgas, filed a legal complaint and attempted to force WIEH to adjust their prices for the gas in Sayda to correspond with the Waidhaus price. In response, WIEH cut off deliveries to VNG. According to *Die Zeit*, the real issue was a dispute between the natural gas importer Ruhrgas and BASF. The latter, according to the journalist, wanted to challenge the privileged position on the market held by the monopoly.[90] Intervention by the anti-trust authorities was necessary before the conflict could be settled and a pricing compromise was negotiated between WIEH and VNG. The end of the political Cold War era was succeeded by an economically heated period, at least in respect to the fierce competition on the German-Russian natural gas market. What is portrayed by the energy companies today as a cooperation between the partners of the Nord Stream Consortium is in fact the result of a series of hard-won compromises which drew the criticism and mistrust of the press. But even if the critical attitude of the media towards the energy companies has remained unchanged since 1990, the companies – who have reached an understanding with the politicians in the public discourse since reunification – are assured of their political blessing. Chancellor Angela Merkel, for example, praised the VNG during its 50-year anniversary celebration

[89] H.-G. Kemmer, "Machtkampf der Monopole", in *Die Zeit,* 1 November 1991.
[90] Ibid.

as "a model business in the former East German states".[91]

In the media discussion of the East German pipeline construction the term "Trassenbau" ("conduit construction") became the established name for these large-scale economic projects, and after reunification, too, the projects continued to be well known in the eastern federal states. The local media and natural gas industry contributed to this, as well as "Trassenvereine" ("pipeline associations"), which were founded in the 1990s by former employees of the GDR pipeline projects. Regional newspapers and the popular East German magazine *SUPERillu* reported on regular get-togethers for the former pipeline builders. The multimedia project "Damals in der DDR" ("Life Behind the Wall"), coproduced by the Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, and Looks Films TV, included the "Trassenbau" as a memorable and characteristic event in the history of the GDR. The Stadtwerke Chemnitz (Chemnitz Department of Utilities) and Erdgas Südsachsen created an exhibition about the project entitled "Faszination Erdgas" (The Fascination of Natural Gas") at the Chemnitz Museum Night in 2007. The documentation "Honeckers Jahrhundertbau" ("Honecker's Construction Project of the Century") by Jürgen Ast and Hajo Obuchhoff, who had himself taken part in the pipeline construction, was so successful that it was broadcast repeatedly both on regional and national TV stations.

The pipeline construction is unquestionably an East German site of memory which demonstrates more than just the functioning of the youth organization FDJ and the mechanisms of socialist propaganda. For many East Germans – thousands of former pipeline laborers, old boys' networks, and journalists – the German-Russian Energy Partnership is first-hand biographic experience: They were or still are part of the assemblage. Among their communities, the construction of the "Drushbatrasse" has maintained a high profile in collective memory and they have managed to generate publicity for themselves.

Since the start of construction of the Nord Stream Pipeline, inter-

[91] "50 Jahre VNG", in *medium gas*, 3, 2008, p. 8, http://www.vng.de/VNG-Internet/de/3_Presse/mediathek/unternehmensmagazin/mg_archiv/index.html (accessed 16 October 2013).

est in the German-Soviet natural gas partnership has increased, and national (not just East German) media has focused its attention more and more on the "Trassenbau". In 2009 the national public broadcasting station Deutschlandfunk aired a three-hour feature entitled "Das blaue Wunder bei Fünfzig Minus" ("An Unpleasant Surprise at Fifty Below") about the construction of the "Erdgastrasse". It focused on the lives of the ten thousand Germans who were employed in the Soviet Union for the project. During the same year, the "Trassenbau" – or at least the landmark date of 1 October 1975, when the first seam for the "Drushbatrasse" was welded – was shown as a characteristic event of the post-war years in the multimedia project "60 x Deutschland" produced by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Civic Education, bpb) and the broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg (RBB). This program, too, paid particular attention to the everyday lives of the workers. Finally, an article in *Die Zeit* from 15 April 2010 explicitly connected the "Trassenbau" in the GDR with the Nord Stream Pipeline as part of a single chain of events in German energy history. The notice about the inauguration of the first section of pipeline construction was framed by two large pictures with the captions "westbound" and "eastbound". The first picture showed the Russian president Medvedev ceremonially opening the construction project; the second, two East German welders working on the GDR's section of the "Drushbatrasse". "The fact that [West] Germany was willing to provide pipes even back then was an act of friendship which is now paying off", the announcement suggested.[92] These backwards glances at the past do not wallow in nostalgia, however. The role of the FDJ and the disastrous financial ramifications for the East German State of the pipeline project are also discussed. Nor does the article neglect to mention the harsh working conditions under which thousands of men and women labored for two to ten years on the pipeline construction in the Soviet Union. And it does not let us forget that these pipelines still contribute substantially to the natural gas supply in Germany and central Europe today. While the politicians and energy companies are often subject to criticism, the radio and TV pro-

[92] *Die Zeit,* 16, 15 April 2010, pp. 14-15.

grams are more sympathetic when portraying the lives of the workers. The viewer becomes familiar with the often unknown realities of life for the average East German citizen. In contrast with the many negatively charged East German sites of memory, such as the Berlin Wall or the detention centers for political prisoners, the "Trasse", in spite of the ideological context in which it arose, represents one of the few industrial accomplishments of the East German state.[93]

And how does the formerly state-owned natural gas import company VNG deal with the "Drushbatrasse" and "Erdgastrasse" and its socialist past? Its attitude is above all flexible and directed towards the future. The company's marketing is careful to adopt, on the one hand, the political language of the reunified Germany, and on the other, the economic language of the energy industry. It praises the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 and German reunification in unequivocal terms. At the same time, however, the accomplishments of the GDR are emphasized:

> Fifty years after [VNG's] founding and eighteen years after the crucial process of privatization, Prof. e.h. Dr. Ing. Klaus-Ewald Holst also looks towards the future with enthusiasm. In a world which is constantly moving onwards, companies must also constantly change. [...] The experiences and events of the last fifty years justify this optimism: they have shaped this company like no other. Holst gives as an example the peaceful demonstrations in October 1989, which decided the fate of all East Germans.[94]

Finally, the East German pipeline project and above all the integration of West Berlin into the East German gas network in 1985 are cited as important events in the politics of détente between the two Germanys. The transport of natural gas to West Berlin, which VNG arranged together with Ruhrgas AG, encouraged "change through rapprochement".[95] In reality the political leaders of the GDR agreed to allow the country to be used as a transit country only with great reluctance and after pressure on the part of the Soviet Union, which had

[93] M. Sabrow, *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, C.H. Beck, Munich 2009.
[94] "50 Jahre VNG" cit., pp. 6-7.
[95] Karlsch, "Erdgasverträge und Trassenbau" cit., p. 56.

long since learned to strategically exploit the economic potential of its natural gas resources.[96] There is no doubt that the transformation of VNG after reunification was not just a result of restructuring measures for the free market economy, but also to a large degree a symbolic reinterpretation and re-conceptualizing of its company image. The success of this transformation is anchored in the company's status as a prestige project of the former GDR. The pipeline projects, the company's promotional material suggests, "provided an opportunity to modernize parts of the economy and offered long-term security of the [natural gas] supply which, since 1990, has benefited reunified Germany as well".[97] The chairman of the OAO Gazprom, Alexei Miller, expressed this idea in similar terms during a speech at the fifty-year anniversary of VNG, referring to a recurring motto of the German-Russian natural gas partnership, namely "a secure future […] with Gazprom as a reliable supplier and VNG as a reliable customer".[98]

A pipeline is a classic example of a network that "gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties".[99] During the transition period the "material recalcitrance"[100] of the pipeline ensured its longevity. While the surrounding sociohistorical world changed, with state borders being redrawn, economic systems reorganized, and agreements renewed, the path of the pipeline remained unvaried. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, governments and businesses repositioned themselves within the German-Russian energy partnership. A new position was achieved in relation to a) other relevant (social, political, economic) parties on the natural gas market and b) within the space of operations delimited by the pipeline route. Importers, traders, and purchasers of natural gas all had distinctive commercial interests. Yet each participant was entitled to negotiate prices with the business partner only within the geographical point of reference (Waidhaus or Sayda) that had been attributed by

[96] Stern, "Gas Pipeline Co-operation" cit., p. 2f.

[97] Karlsch, "Erdgasverträge und Trassenbau" cit., p. 57.

[98] "50 Jahre VNG" cit., p. 7.

[99] B. Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik", in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, B. Latour, P. Weibel (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, pp. 4-31.

[100] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. 1.

the contract. Apparently Latour was right when he stated that "each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute".[101] The case demonstrates that academic inquiry in "procedures to authorize and legitimize are important, but it's only half of what is needed to assemble. The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the *matters* that matter, in the *res* that creates a *public* around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly".[102] Far-reaching changes in the sociopolitical world, coupled with the immutable existence of the pipeline, generated fierce price wars on natural gas. This new situation, in which parties were repositioned around the matter that matters, stood out from earlier versions of the assemblage and thus qualified to appear in the newspapers. Comparing new to old versions, it was said, generated the informative code of news writing. Thus the memory of the history of the Russian-German energy partnership – or the mediated representations of it, to be more precise – has been important at every stage of reporting on the issue.

5. Solipsism or Vibrant Environment? Towards a Theory of "Fossilized Memory"

In this essay I have suggested that life/matter dualism in constructivist approaches is problematic from the beginning. Because the exploitation and usage of resources usually occupy a precarious place in collective thought yet can be discovered as a recurring topic in the newspapers, I introduced a concept of memory that is not limited to the symbolic content of narratives. Instead, memory is understood as recursive operations of empirically identifiable phenomena, in this case representations of the German-Russian energy partnership in print media over the past four decades. According to Niklas Luhmann, recursive formulae are at the core of communicative operations of the mass media. Nevertheless, they must offer something new or unsettling in order for the updated topic to qualify as informative and newsworthy. The mass media's societal function lies in the self-observation of society insofar as the mass media's memory provides a background reality for further communica-

[101] Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik" cit. p. 5.
[102] Ibid., p. 6.

tion among recipients. Conceptualized in this way, memory denotes a communicative practice, and the analytical focus shifts away from cultural consciousness and collective thought.

System theory can help us learn much about how topics circulate within the self-regulating system of the mass media and how accounts and information leave the system. Yet little can be said about how they enter it. Information, according to Gregory Bateson, is "a difference that makes a difference"[103]. In connecting this idea with Latour's idea of non-human actants that have an effect on the (social) world, I addressed the question of whether fossil resources qualify as news in their own right. This led to the proposition that news items about the German-Russian Energy partnership constitute a mediated representation of an assemblage of relevant human and thingly members that have effects on each other.

The German-Russian energy partnership is embedded in a multitude of sociopolitical, economic, and technological operations that repeatedly outpace each other. Similarly, the ontological properties of that assemblage do not remain unaffected by historical changes, as was illustrated by the example of the transformation process. Of informative value for the media are the interdependencies of human and thingly actants. Political and economic-industrial actors appropriated Russian natural gas through the establishment of a transportation infrastructure. Nevertheless, it would be too shortsighted to assume that humans one-sidedly manipulate nature. The construction of the pipelines was shadowed by a recalcitrance of the installed pipeline conduit, which also had effects on the relationships within the assemblage. The properties of things affected social configurations. Stories of this process of interobjectivity are what have appeared in the newspapers. Recollections of earlier representations of the fabric are needed to make the news accountable.

In his study about the reality of the mass media, Niklas Luhmann described the latter as a closed system. Despite illustrating this self-referential quality, he emphasized the structural interconnections between fundamentally self-regulating systems, for instance between the mass media and the economy. In this respect, my essay prompts

[103] Bateson, *Ökologie des Geistes* cit., p. 362.

the question of how far "matters that matter"[104] entail a hinge that connects social systems with each other.

However, in order to come to a firm conclusion, further research is required. First of all, it was said that the energy discourse also feeds upon existing historical narratives (primarily Europe's postwar history). Academic inquiry therefore needs to focus its attention on the relationship between material infrastructure and symbolic superstructure. As Jane Bennett wrote, "Humans encounter a world in which nonhuman materialities have power"[105] but they also encounter a pre-interpreted world in which humans are equipped with power and cognitive creativity. The concept of interobjectivity challenges related concepts that designate modes of interdependencies – such as intersubjectivity, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity – but does not necessarily prove them inadequate. More theoretical and methodological work is needed here. Secondly, an analytical specification of the matters involved in the German-Russian energy partnership needs to be done. What exactly are the ontological properties of the commodity of natural gas and the constructed technological infrastructure of the pipeline, and what idiosyncratic effects do they cause? Last but not least, for analytical purposes I distinguished between the assemblage of the German-Russian energy partnership in terms of energy policies and economic operations on the one hand and the system of mass media on the other hand. Only in this sense is it consistent to ask how far commodities or matter constitute a hinge between system-specific operations. Consequently, further inquiry is needed to clarify whether this binary distinction is adequate. It may be that journalists – even though they reproduce the mass media's code of information/non-information – are likewise part of the assemblage, for Russian natural gas has an impact on their commemorative performances.

[104] Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik", cit. p. 5.
[105] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* cit., p. 16.