

Looking for Lagonia:

On “Imaginary Bridges” and Cold War Boundaries¹

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Chapter in *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War*, Simo Mikkonen, Giles Scott-Smith and Jari Parkkinen (eds.), De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 265-280

¹ I would like to thank Evgeniya Kondrashina, Simo Mikkonen and Jari Parkkinen for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

At 12.21 on the afternoon of 28 May 1987, a pilot took off in his Cessna Skyhawk 172 single-engined aircraft from Malmi airport in Helsinki, with its destination being Stockholm. After about twenty-five minutes, he turned the aircraft first south, then east, turned off the aircraft's transponder that communicated with radar signals, and failed to respond to requests for clarification from air traffic control. At around 1pm, the aircraft disappeared from Finnish radar screens. Traces of an oil slick in the Gulf of Finland were observed by a passing helicopter, but no wreckage was seen. The Finns let the matter go – after all, it was only a single-engined Cessna, what could that possibly do?

This is of course the flight of the nineteen year old German, Mathias Rust, on his 550-mile trip to Moscow and Red Square. Rust was a child of the Cold War – born in 1968, he grew up in Hamburg during Ostpolitik and became politically aware during the Euromissiles crisis of the early 1980s. The threat of nuclear war was a formative element of his political imagination. Rust was a loner – peace marches were not his thing. Instead he absorbed himself in aeroplanes and science fiction. He was fortunate enough to have parents who supported his flying ambitions, giving access to lessons and the ability, at such a young age, to hire a plane from the local flying club for three weeks without anyone asking questions. On the surface he was working as a data processor, having quit as a bank trainee in order to devote more time to flying training.² Underneath this everyday existence, a plan was being hatched.

Rust in Cold War Culture

Rust's epic flight has so far not generated a serious academic study in English, with no scholarly article having been published on the wider cultural meaning or implications of what he did. There is one German monograph on him, published in 2012 by Ed Kuhler, but this was written in cooperation with a film production company and is largely based on newspaper reports from the time, further embellishing Rust's escapade as no more than a bizarre episode of popular culture.³ Rust has therefore occupied a prominent place in the public sphere, but there have been only brief references to him outside of the media. Anniversaries of his flight – 2017 was the most recent, marking 30 years – always bring a new round of press and tv media coverage and questions such as "where is he now?" but

² John Tagliabue. In Law-Abiding West Germany, Delight. *New York Times*, 31 May 1987.

³ Ed Stuhler. *Der Kreml-Flieger. Mathias Rust und die Folgen eines Abenteuers*. Berlin: Links, 2012, written to accompany the documentary of the same name made by the film production company Gebrüder Beetz.

rarely bring anything new to light.⁴ Rust has regularly been branded a misfit, an oddball (even in his own words), someone difficult to categorise, who didn't belong to any particular movement but was driven only by idealism. As he said in a 2007 interview with the *Washington Post* (to mark the 20th anniversary), "I was full of dreams then, I believed everything was possible".⁵ His rather wild-eyed appearances in TV interviews only seem to confirm this impression.

A critical analysis could easily (and often does) dismiss him as a bourgeois teenager born into privilege with too much time and money fuelling delusions of grandeur. His parents had rescued him from failure at school at age 14 by encouraging his wish to become a pilot and flying instructor, setting aside DM10,000 for the lessons.⁶ Gender-based analyses would not produce a better result. Rumours that he undertook the flight purely to raise his status among females have circulated. After becoming a celebrity for a while following his return to West Germany from Soviet imprisonment, Rust's image was quickly tarnished when he stabbed a female co-worker at the hospital where he was working in November 1989. The most detailed account of his post-1987 life is to be found in Oliver Jungen and Wiebke Prombka's cynical *Deutsche Nullen: Sie kamen, sahen und versagten* (German Zeroes: they came, saw and failed) from 2016, where these two journalists cover Rust along with sixteen other would-be heroes such as von Treitschke, von Ribbentrop, Egon Krenz, and Rudolf Scharping, all of whom had big plans with little (or disastrous) outcome. As one report on Rust put it, "Die Welt lachte über den Witz des Jahrhunderts ("The world laughed at the joke of the century")."⁷

With the thirtieth anniversary of the flight in May 2017, it is a perfect moment to try and situate Rust within the field of Cold War culture. The cultural turn and more recently the transnational turn in Cold War studies has broadened the study of the period to include non-state actors and the everyday life of citizens, aiming to understand what they experienced and what effect this had on their beliefs and behaviour. The framing of the Cold War as simply a binary superpower military stand-off has given way to an appreciation of the role of

⁴ Finnish and international media did give the event some renewed attention for the thirtieth anniversary. See Hannu Pesonen. Mathiaksen Lento. *Suomen Kuvalehti* 21 (May 2017), 40-45; Stephen Dowling. The audacious pilot who landed in Red Square. BBC website, 26 May 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170526-the-audacious-pilot-who-landed-in-red-square> accessed 29 June 2018.

⁵ Peter Finn. A Dubious Diplomat. *Washington Post*, 27 May 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/26/AR2007052601262.html>

⁶ Viola Roggenkamp. Ein ganz besonderes kind. *Die Zeit*, 12 April 1991.

⁷ Ibid.

smaller nations, and in turn to an understanding of how all societies – including East and West – were ‘entangled’. Subjectivities were shaped by cultural, political, and economic influences that transcended national borders and render negotiable the assumption that social life should be analysed primarily according to national units. As the recent volume *Beyond the Divide* by Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen argues, “the barrier dividing the Socialist and Capitalist worlds was not fully impervious. Beneath the seemingly bipolar structure, there were corporations, organizations, unofficial networks, and individuals interacting, connecting, and communicating.”⁸

Cultural transfer took place in both directions – in fact in all directions, not simply West-East. The assumption that the West functioned as the sender and the East the receiver still permeates much of the literature. In fact, it is even harder to let go of the moral hierarchy, since pointing to a “society” or a “public sphere” in socialist states is somehow in danger of condoning the one-party systems and the forms of ideological and literal repression that went with them. As Annette Vowinkel, Marcus Payk and Thomas Lindenberger rightly point out, it remains awkward to identify a single European Cold War culture that could identify and locate a distinct set of transnational entanglements within a single continental space. Studies on divided Germany have delved into the symbiosis of East and West, but that is a special case. Nevertheless, the shift in Cold War history “from political and diplomatic to social, cultural, and media history, the history of ideas, utopias, and mentalities,” does lead to “ironing out” the Iron Curtain and treating all societies as part of the same cultural arena.⁹ For a while, both communism and capitalism were dreamworlds in their own ways, mirroring each other as much as competing against each other. Even then, “individuals, minorities or at times majorities might not feel at home within these dreamworlds, creating instead their own alternatives.”¹⁰ Rust was one such individual.

Rust, “Airworld”, and Lagonia

Rust was very much a product of this European Cold War cultural space as dreamworld. The threat of nuclear armageddon, which saturated West German culture in the early 1980s and which manifested itself in transnational social movements such as END (European Nuclear

⁸ Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen (eds.). *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe*. New York: Berghahn, 2015, 3.

⁹ Annette Vowinkel, Marcus Payk and Thomas Lindenberger (eds.). *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*. New York: Berghahn, 2012, 5.

¹⁰ Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith and Joes Segal (eds.). *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, 2.

Disarmament), was a major influence on his thinking. But the key to interpreting Rust is not through political activism, but through the imagination. Firstly, there was his passion for flying. Writing on the importance of civil aviation in the post-WW II era, Annette Vowinkel has used the concept of “airworld” to describe the unique environments and atmospheres of airports and aircraft. In her words, it is “a utopian space, a dreamworld shaped by the longing for freedom and success translating as mobility,” where access to this utopia was for long only for the privileged few.¹¹ Some have claimed that aviation also had a special place in the German imagination, merging the efficiency of technological advances with the cultural superiority of a burgeoning nationalism in the early twentieth century.¹² Vowinkel goes further by stating that during the Cold War “mobility became a synonym for (political as well as individual) freedom,” a linkage easily confirmed by the presence of the Berlin Wall and the restrictions on mobility in and from the East being a central indicator of an unfree society.¹³

Freedom of movement was one of the central issues in the CSCE negotiations during the early 1970s and was encapsulated in the Helsinki Accords and its “third basket” on humanitarian issues. The remarkable escape from the GDR by the Strelzyk and Wetzel families on 16 September 1979 by home-made hot-air balloon is a perfectly symbolic linkage of “airworld” and the strive for mobility to ensure personal freedom.¹⁴ But the case of Mathias Rust points to another form of mobility – that of the imagination, and in his case (and that of many others) the ability to imagine a way out of the Cold War confrontation and its hanging threat of unstoppable destruction. He very personally fits Vowinkel’s conclusion that “the airplane became an icon of freedom, representing the modern dream of mobility and success both symbolically and materially.”¹⁵ From the socialist viewpoint, unlimited

¹¹ Anette Vowinkel. *Flying Away: Civil Aviation and the Dream of Freedom in East and West*. In *Divided Dreamworlds*, Romijn, Scott-Smith, Segal (eds), 182.

¹² Peter Fritzsche. *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

¹³ Vowinkel, 182

¹⁴ See <https://www.ballonflucht.de/html/englisch.html>. On “Airworld” and the German (Cold War) imagination one should also mention Wim Wenders’ *Der Himmel Über Berlin* (1987). Ukrainian filmmaker Roman Balayan’s *Birds of Paradise* (2008), set in the early 1980s, also depicts imaginary flight as a means for its protagonists to escape the oppressive confines of a single-party surveillance state.

¹⁵ Vowinkel, 191. It is interesting to speculate here about how the aeroplane can also be interpreted in the sense of Bakhtin’s “chronotope”, in that air travel “creates” its own time-space configuration as experienced by the pilot and/or passenger. Writing about Rust’s flight now, we can only follow his course on the map. It is impossible to recreate what Rust was thinking during that flight, outside of his own memory. See Mikhail Bakhtin. *Form of Time and Chronotope in the Novel*. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

travel was of course a sign of a decadent society, and Rust's evident privilege fits neatly into this interpretation. From that perspective, class determines how imagination is used as a motive for action.

Extending this argument, the ultimate form of flying as escape, as an expression of freedom, is the possibility of space travel. From this perspective, the 1970s were a key decade. Having seen the race to the moon as the epitome of 1960s technological ambition and competition between the superpowers, the onset of détente and the development of combined missions set very much the tone for the decade after. The Apollo-Soyuz mission of 1975 was a high point of this new era. As Andrew Jenks wrote in 2011,

New ideas about collaboration and cooperation – which often clashed with Cold War imperatives and heroic national narratives of space conquest from the previous era — envisioned spaceflight as a way to forge a global consciousness and community.¹⁶

The astronaut as global citizen rested on the alleged “overview effect” – the claim that space travel brought about a sense of “universal connectedness” due to seeing and experiencing planet earth from an all-encompassing perspective. Jenks rightly links this to the famous Earth Rise photo taken from Apollo 8 on 24 December 1968, and its ecological manifestation in James Lovelock's book *Gaia* from 1979.¹⁷ Flying – and particularly space flight – therefore had the potential to provide the ultimate birds-eye view for a transnational, normative, revelatory interpretation of life on earth, transcending national competitiveness and destructive antagonisms.

Rust was not only an avid aviator, he was also a reader of science fiction, linking his personal ambitions in the stratosphere of civil aviation with his imaginary heroes into outer space. On the tail of his Cessna, Rust had placed a cartoon image of a space rocket, which further emphasizes the connection between his flight, “airworld”, and science fiction-generated utopias. Science fiction was of course a popular genre within both the capitalist and communist worlds. Soviet sci-fi was regarded as a lower-level genre that for this reason only felt the light touch of the censor, and for a while its faith in rational technological progress

¹⁶ Andrew Jenks. Transnational History and Space Flight. *Russian History Blog*, 5 October 2011, <http://russianhistoryblog.org/2011/10/transnational-history-and-space-flight/> .

¹⁷ James Lovelock. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

towards a socialist future generally diverged strongly from the more paranoid fears of its Western counterpart.¹⁸

The most popular sci-fi publication in West Germany, which Rust also knew, is the long-running Perry Rhodan series, begun in early 1961 – the year of the Berlin Wall’s construction – by two authors, Karl-Herbert Scheer and Walter Ernsting, and their mutual urge to transcend both Germany’s past and the Cold War’s artificial barriers and irrational violence is clear from the start. Scheer was just too young to fight in WW II, and he ended the war as a sixteen-year-old volunteer machinist in the German naval base in Kiel, working on submarine propulsion systems. Illness and age enabling him to avoid imprisonment, Scheer switched to writing full-time in 1948. His first sci-fi novel *Stern A funkt Hilfe* appeared in 1952 and in the mid-1950s he founded the German sci-fi club Stellaris. Ernsting, eight years older, served in the war with a Wehrmacht intelligence unit in Poland, France, Norway, and Latvia before capture and imprisonment by the Russians in Kazakhstan until his release in 1952. He then worked as an interpreter with the British military forces, and it was in that position that he first encountered American science fiction. In 1955, he published his first sci-fi novel, *UFO am Nachthimmel*, using the British pseudonym Clark Darlton to overcome the problem that his publisher, Pabel, only published sci-fi in its Utopia-series in English. Scheer and Ernsting won the Hugo Award back to back in 1957 and 1958. The Hugo Award was the creation of sci-fi pioneer Hugo Gernsback, a German emigrant to the United States who founded the popular magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1926. Ernsting would achieve fame himself as the pioneer of post-WW II German sci-fi, even having an asteroid named after him in June 2003. Perry Rhodan would become by far his most successful work, also becoming a childrens’ TV series in 1967, the year before Rust’s birth.¹⁹

The influence of the Cold War is very evident in the first Rhodan series, titled *The Third Power*, which was the theme for the first 49 weekly editions through 1961-62. Perry Rhodan is an American astronaut who travels with a small team to undertake the first moon landing in 1971. The world is at the time divided between the Western Block, the Eastern Block, and

¹⁸ Patrick Major. Future Perfect? Communist Science Fiction in the Cold War. In Rana Mitter and Patrick Major (eds.). *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History*. London: Frank Cass, 2004, 71-96.

¹⁹ Heiko Langhans. *Clark Darlton. Der Mann, der die Zukunft brachte*. Rastatt: Pabel-Moewig Verlag, 2000; Heiko Langhans. *K. H. Scheer. Konstrukteur der Zukunft*. Rastatt: Pabel-Moewig Verlag, 2001; Claus Hallmann. *Perry Rhodan. Analyse einer Science-Fiction-Romanheftserie*. Frankfurt am Main: Rita G. Fischer Verlag, 1979.

the Asiatic Federation, the latter two operating in a loose alliance against the former. Taken off course by a strange jamming signal, Rhodan's team encounter an alien spaceship from the planet Arkonide on the moon surface. The Arkonides have long dominated the Milky Way but are now a civilization in decline and are searching for other inhabited planets further away to revive their race. Rhodan strikes a deal with the Arkonide commander and returns to earth, landing in the Gobi desert in order to prevent the Arkonides' technological superiority from falling into the hands of any of the existing blocks. From there, protected by an anti-neutron shield, Rhodan attempts to establish a neutral Third Power. He succeeds, avoiding nuclear Armageddon and founding a single nation for all mankind, named Terra, but the multi-block struggle nevertheless continued in perpetuity across other planets and solar systems. That two Germans would write of an American protagonist in this way is very much an emblem of the Americanisation of West German society after 1945. Only an American, in their eyes, could possess the belief in a better future and overcome the grim realities of a divided world. Rhodan therefore represented rugged individualism, male heroics, decisive leadership – and the power of imagination to overcome all obstacles.

In 1986, the year before Rust's flight, a jubilee edition of the first twenty-five years of Perry Rhodan was produced by the Moewig publishing house. It was also the year of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik in October, which promised much for a new era of détente, but ultimately seemed to bring few results. Rust was apparently so dismayed by this outcome that he aimed to carry out his own Perry-Rhodan daredevil escapade, bypassing governments, transgressing borders, and disrupting the established order, just like the American astronaut-hero had done. By flying to Moscow he would create an "imaginary bridge" between West and East, setting himself up as an emissary of peace. At his Moscow trial he responded to the charge that he had offended the Soviet people by apologizing but also declaring "I believe that the promotion of world peace and understanding between our peoples justifies this flight."²⁰ For this purpose he had written a twenty-page text with the title "Lagonia", describing a plan for a democratic world order, which he hoped to deliver to Gorbachev. It has not been possible to locate a copy of this notorious text, and we don't know if it ever found its way to Gorbachev, but it has cemented Rust's image as a teenager lost in fantasy. Published accounts claim that the text called for a basic right to housing for all, full employment through state-run enterprises, and an end to material greed and desire.

²⁰ Roggenkamp. Ein ganz besonderes kind.

As one observer put it, such a manifesto against the market economy “could easily be used as a party programme for the Left.”²¹

Rust’s “Lagonia” was therefore a mix of fantasy utopianism and growing up for his first fifteen years under the social democratic governments of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. Where did he get Lagonia from? In October 2010, the theatre company Studio Braun, based in Rust’s home town of Hamburg, produced the musical “Rust: Ein deutscher Messias” that saw the actor Fabian Hinfrichs portray him as a dreamer wandering through his utopian Lagonia, encountered by three soothsayers who decide to enter “the valley of the Bermuda triangle to decode the Rust phenomenon.”²² Lagonia is a term sometimes used for utopian locations, but it does not appear in the Perry Rhodan series, and it is not clear where Rust took it from. The earliest known reference is to be found in John Leland’s *Itinerary* from 1540, which describes the Irish nun Breage, founder of the Cornish parish of the same name, as coming from the region of Lagonia in Ireland, perhaps referring to Leinster since this is known as Laighin in Gaelic.²³ With this association of a distant, unspoilt, pastoral paradise, the term must have been used in fantasy literature, but the only publication that appears with it in the title was published in 2016.²⁴ It is therefore unclear what the source of Rust’s Lagonia actually was.

The Flight and its Aftermath

Testing his endurance for the flight to Moscow, Rust first flew to Reykjavik via the Shetland and Faroe islands, and visited the location of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit of the previous year, Hofdi House. A later account had quoted him saying “I was so disappointed with the failure of the summit and my failure to get there the previous autumn.” Had he planned on interfering with the superpower meeting itself? Or was this an imaginary flight he wished he had taken? It is not clear.²⁵

²¹ Oliver Jungen and Wiebke Prombka. *Deutsche Nullen: Sie kamen, sahen und versagten*. C.H. Beck, 2016.

²² Katrin Ullmann. Flug auf dem Flokati-Teppich, 21 October 1987, http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4808:rust-ein-deutscher-messias-studio-brauns-neue-fantasie&catid=56

²³ John O’Hanlon. *Lives of the Irish Saints: With Special Festivals*. J. Duffy & Sons, 1873, 137.

²⁴ Silviu Aiftincai. *Lagonia: The Sacred Earth*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.

²⁵ Tom LeCompte. The Notorious Flight of Mathias Rust. *Air and Space Magazine*, July 2005, <http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/the-notorious-flight-of-mathias-rust-7101888/?no-ist=&story=fullstory&page=2>

On his trip from Helsinki to Moscow, Rust faced two encounters with scrambled MiGs from Soviet air defence, but both times his apparently harmless appearance and steady course and altitude prevented hostile interpretations. The West German flag on his aircraft's tail was either not reported or disbelieved by the MiG pilots' superiors on the ground, and one wonders what they made of the cartoon-like rocket symbol as well. But Rust's flight actually benefitted from previous tragedies. Soviet air defence had shot down two civilian airliners in the previous decade, both of them belonging to Korean Airlines. On 20 April 1978, KAL 902 from Paris to Seoul was shot at when entering Soviet air space near Finland, making a crash landing with two fatalities. On 1 September 1983, KAL 007 was attacked as it crossed Kamchatka and the Sakhalin peninsular, with the loss of all 269 passengers and crew. President Reagan condemned the attack as "a crime against humanity" and every effort was made to use it to undermine the Soviet Union's credibility and legitimacy in international affairs. These much larger incidents set the context for the more restrained response to the single-engined Cessna as it crossed the Finnish Gulf into Estonia and on to Russia in May 1987, as the Soviet air force could now only open fire based on orders from the very top. The confusion over a small civil aircraft prevented the request going that far up the chain of command. Five years later, after the break-up of the USSR, the transcripts of the discussions within the air defence units were released, revealing the following exchange:

Maj. Gen. Aleksandr Gukov: There's just one thing that fazes me. Birds fly north in the spring. But this is coming from the north.

Lt. Gen. Y. Brazhnikov: I still think we will come to the conclusion that it was geese. So Aleksandr Ivanovich, it will be birds.

Maj. Gen. Aleksandr Gukov: Yes, sir, let it be that. Yes sir.²⁶

In short, the Russians wanted the irritating little plane to disappear. But there was more. 28 May, the day of his flight, happened to be Border Guards Day, an annual holiday that meant security was slightly lax. Coincidence? Rust had to convince the disbelieving interrogators after his landing that there was no connection. Then there was the bridge next to Red Square that he landed on. Usually strung with six sets of telephone and electricity wires, on the day of his arrival several sets had been removed for maintenance, allowing him just enough space to manoeuvre the aircraft. Again, the response from his Soviet captors was disbelief – how was this possible?

²⁶ Look! In the sky! It's a bird! No, a cloud! *Newsweek*, 120/1, 6 July 1992, 48. See also the longer account in Michael Dobbs. *Down with Big Brother: The Fall of the Soviet Empire*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

Rust was able to interact with Russian civilians on Red Square for a short while before security forces arrested him. This short period of interaction, the content of which must be lost forever, represents a remarkable moment of unexpected East-West interchange. 1987-88 was already a period of surprise and shock for Russian citizens as they began to appreciate the greater meaning of *perestroika*.²⁷ But for the state authorities, Rust still had to be treated as an intruder. Charged with illegal entry, violation of international flight rules and hooliganism, Rust was put on trial and given a four-year sentence, but eventually released after 14 months following an appeal by West German foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Gorbachev won another favor through this minimal humanitarian gesture – after all, he took full advantage of the chance arrival of Rust in Moscow. Refusing to meet with the German, Gorbachev instead took the opportunity to fire the Defence Minister Sergei Sokolov, the head of Soviet Air Defence Alexander Koldunov, and many other lower ranks, in order to establish his control of the air force command, having announced only three months previously that he was prepared to negotiate an Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty with the Americans. Sokolov had long been a thorn in the side of Gorbachev's turn towards rapprochement with the West. Rust had inadvertently triggered a purge that bolstered Gorbachev's grip on the military, a not insignificant development as the Soviet leader moved to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the Cold War.²⁸

²⁷ See Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

²⁸ See William Odom. *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998; Ilya Zemtsov and John Hynes Farrar. *Gorbachev: The Man and the System*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989, 325.



Fig. 2: Mathias Rust flying over the Red Square in Moscow on May 28th, 1987.
Source: Lehtikuva. Photograph by Hannu Podduikin.



Fig. 2: Mathias Rust flying over the Red Square in Moscow on May 28th, 1987.
Source: Lehtikuva. Photograph by Hannu Podduikin.

This link between Rust and Gorbachev's perestroika has fuelled ongoing Russian suspicions of a bigger plot, since for many the coincidences were so great that Rust must have been part of a coordinated effort to undermine Soviet prestige.²⁹ An example of Rust's continuing status in Russian self-perception and popular culture was provided in dramatic fashion on the popular Russian talk-show *Pryamoi Efir* in 2013. Invited on to the show to talk about the episode 26 years after the fact, Rust instead walked into a set-up designed to discredit not only him but also the entire Gorbachev era. The show was titled "Mathias Rust: A Dove of Peace?" and when asked to explain his act Rust repeated his wish to create "an imaginary bridge" between East and West. But the questioning turned to the string of coincidences that occurred: not being shot down, the lack of wires on the bridge, the border guards' holiday, the presence of cameras on Red Square, the extra time it took to fly to Moscow indicating he must have landed on the way to change clothes, all of which led to the assertion that Gorbachev, together with allies in the Western and Soviet governments, had engineered the flight in order to remove opponents of arms control such as national war hero Sergei Sokolov. The accusations culminated in an emotional tirade:

²⁹ See Stuhler. *Der Kreml-Flieger*, 117-130.

Retired Air Defence Officer: “How would you look in the faces of the people who, as a result of your actions, died from a heart attack, were demoted in rank, went to prison, lost their pensions? [...] If you could look in their eyes, the eyes of their wives and children, and all of the people who you harmed with your dove’s flight.”³⁰

The mood on the show was laden with ugly nationalist overtones. Rust’s imaginary bridge of peace was now no more than further confirmation of the West’s determination to collapse Soviet power, with Gorbachev the traitorous willing accomplice. Regular attention for Rust in the Russian media continues to follow this interpretation.³¹

Conclusion

The subtitle of this chapter is “On ‘Imaginary Bridges’ and Cold War Boundaries.” Rust crossed the Soviet boundary and directly involved himself in the gradual process of East-West reconciliation going on at the time. But Cold War boundaries here also refer to his absence from Cold War historiography. This can be further expanded. In their book *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe* from 2012, Bozo, Rey, Ludlow and Rother gathered together an excellent overview of projections and formulations as to how the leaders of the time saw an end to the Cold War emerging. The book overall has a statist orientation, with non-state actors represented in various chapters, but only in one, covering Charter 77, are they deemed an actual subject of singular interest. The editors remark that

Within civil societies, groups of individuals may also have entertained visions of ending the Cold War: consider, for example, the role of experts ... or scientists on both sides of the Iron Curtain, ... or the role of dissidents in Eastern Europe ... But such visions may also have been associated with *processes rather than actors*: for example ... the importance of the Helsinki process or that of European integration ...³²

³⁰ Anya Loukianova. A Cessna-Sized Hole in the Iron Curtain, Revisited. *Arms Control Wonk*, 7 May 2014, available online < <http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/604381/a-cessna-sized-hole-in-the-iron-curtain-revisited/>

³¹ See for instance The Journalist failed to repeat the Flight of Mathias Rust. *Russian Gazette*, 17 May 2017, <https://rg.ru/2015/05/17/polet-site.html> which comments that “Many experts are still convinced that Rust’s flight was planned and executed as a very serious operation which involved the special intelligence services from many leading countries.” A more balanced view is given in ‘How Mathias Rust helped Gorbachev,’ *Argumenti i Fakti*, 28 May 2015 http://www.aif.ru/society/history/zaletnyy_gastroler_kak_nemec_matias_rust_mihailu_gorbachevu_pomogal

³² Frederic Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow and Bernd Rother (eds.). *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945-1990*. New York: Berghahn, 2012, 3 (emphasis added).

This approach sums up the reason why Rust has so far not occupied any place in Cold War Studies. Not part of an identifiable “process” and not fitting easily into an interpretive paradigm, it is easier to sideline him as not worthy of scholarly attention. That way, history – as the narrative of “important and influential events in the past” – does not need to “deal” with his idiosyncrasy. Yet it is certainly possible to situate him within an expanded understanding of what Cold War studies encompass. In the 1970s there was already a recognition of how private individuals could function as diplomatic actors, and how this needed to be taken into account in the study of international relations. The seminal collection *Unofficial Diplomats* of Maureen Berman and Joseph Johnson covered “private international relations” and the role of non-governmental individuals and groups in influencing the passage of events through their own direct contacts.³³

Since then, other moves have been made to insert individuals into the mix of inter-state contacts, emphasizing their particular influence both inside and outside diplomatic spaces.³⁴ Rust himself intended to act as a kind of diplomatic envoy, although as a self-chosen representative of the West (or, more appropriate, of humankind). However, he could not be easily fitted within the study of the “Cold War everyday”, since his story was so exceptional, except from the perspective of how nuclear danger permeated his worldview beyond science fiction and led him into taking such a unique and dramatic step in response.³⁵ The history of everyday life makes the ordinary unordinary (as a topic of research), whereas with Rust, the unordinary has in some way to be made ordinary in order to encapsulate its meaning. In this sense, Rust’s flight was his way of dealing with Cold War reality as he perceived it. While others marched or protested, he flew to Red Square.

The collective dreamworlds of the Cold War were not all-encompassing. Both in the East and the West, individual dreams did not necessarily coincide with the official collective ones Alternative dreams could also be developed into counter-forces.³⁶

³³ Maureen Berman and Joseph Johnson (eds.). *Unofficial Diplomats*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. See also John Richardson (ed.). *The Human Dimension of Foreign Policy, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 442 (1979).

³⁴ Giles Scott-Smith (ed.). Who is a Diplomat? Diplomatic Entrepreneurs in the Global Age. Special Issue of *New Global Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 1, 2014.

³⁵ See Alf Lüdtke. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Everyday Experience and Ways of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; Thomas Lindenberger. Everyday History: New Approaches to the New History of the Post-War Germanies. In Christoph Klessmann (ed.), *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History*. New York: Berg, 2001.

³⁶ Romijn, Scott-Smith and Segal. *Divided Dreamworlds*, 2.

For the West German popular press he was initially the “young messiah” daring to challenge “the system”, and *Stern* paid DM100,000 for exclusive rights to his story. But *Stern*’s published account only set him up as “a dangerously unhinged daydreamer”, and his image as the cranky kid was set: “Man hatte vom Modus Messias in den Modus Ikarus gewechselt.” (“He had switched from a Messiah figure to an Icarus figure”)³⁷ This media hype undoubtedly contributed to his wayward life thereafter, including his legal offences and curious career.

However, to leave it there would miss the point. Rust was himself fully a product of Cold War culture, a child of Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, a reader of Cold War-influenced, Americanised West German science fiction, and someone who understood the symbolic significance of flight – Airworld – to transgress the borders of East and West. He became politically aware when he was 15 – in 1983, the year of East-West tension, SDI, and KAL 007. He was also (and continues to be) a source of and inspiration for European “Cold War culture”. He inspired the West German pop group Modern Trouble to write “Flight to Moscow” (1987) with the line “Now Uncle Sam and Pentagon, They couldn’t do what he has done, Gorbachev he had no laughs, When Mr Rust signed autographs.”³⁸ He has inspired contemporary opera and has been the model for film characters such as the fictitious “Mathias Rust Band” in the Norwegian movie *Mannen som elsket Yngve* (The Man who loved Yngve) from 2008.³⁹ While Rust was still languishing in a Soviet prison, his Cessna Skyhawk 172 was taken on a “celebrity tour” by French entrepreneur Paul-Loup Sulitzer, who referred to it as “a symbol of a feat of peace and freedom”.⁴⁰ It was subsequently reproduced as a miniature model airplane kit by the Italeri toy company.⁴¹

Rust was driven by his imagination to reject the false borders of Cold War Europe, but in Putin’s Russia he continues to represent the corruption of the Gorbachev era and the scheming duplicity of the West. Rust therefore represents many dimensions of European Cold War culture: one actor, many processes, in the meeting of East and West. His singular act continues to fascinate precisely because of his rejection of the orthodox binaries of the

³⁷ See Jungen and Prombka. *Deutsche Nullen*.

³⁸ Modern Trouble. Fly to Moscow. Chic Label, 1987. The single made it to no. 57 in the West German charts. The band only released one other song.

³⁹ *Mannen som elsket Yngve*, directed by Stian Kristiansen, Motlys productions, 2008.

⁴⁰ Mathias Rust’s Plane to Tour. *New York Times*, 12 November 1987. The aircraft was thereafter sold and exhibited in Japan before returning to Germany as a permanent exhibit at the Museum of Technology in Berlin.

⁴¹ See <http://shop.italeri.com/Products/21807-2764-cessna-172-skyhawk.aspx> accessed 29 June 2018.

Cold War narrative, and the challenges in placing this within a historical narrative of the times.