

Erik Grimm

WRITING IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE: EAST GERMAN WRITERS AND THE RETURN OF REPRESSED IDENTITIES

From the very beginning of the debate about the cultural phenomenon of a “second” east German culture,¹ commentators have emphasized the problematic relationship between the socialist public arena and its non-institutionalized literary alternative: the readings, performances, exhibitions, and gatherings of writers who transformed private spaces or spaces offered by the church into meeting places. In collaboration with musicians and artists, writers bypassed the direct control of the state and constituted “a closely woven network of social contacts and literary subcommunication,” a “substitute public” as Klaus Michael called it.² The private sphere—apartments, studios, and backyards as well as the parish—became the preferred sites of openly advertised, nonconspiratorial events.³ Since the late 1970s, writers began evading the constraints of organizations and institutions such as the Writers’ Union, the publishing houses, the *FDJ* (the state youth organization), and the socialist party. They created such a dense social network that they were able to disseminate and exchange homemade almanacs, journals, and lyric/graphic arts editions in spite of the rigid regulations for printed matter. At the same time, these writings did not receive official recognition and promotion during the 1980s. There are many examples of unnecessary delays and arbitrary state interventions. Seminal projects such as the *Leila Anastasia* anthology that introduced twenty young east German authors did not materialize because of decisions made by the copyright office and the administrative authority for publishing houses, represented by Klaus Höpcke in the Ministry of Culture.⁴ One of the most rebellious Berlin poets, Bert Papenfuß, sums up his experience, “There was certainly no prospect of publishing books... My manuscript sat with the *Aufbau-Verlag* for ten years, from 1978. It appeared in 1989.”⁵ Consequently, there was a growing number of frustrated non-established writers who left the GDR; if they stayed, they tried to avoid contact with the officials. In the view of Hermann Kant, the president of the Writers’ Union between 1978 and 1989, “the people from the Prenzlauer Berg wanted to have nothing to do with the Writers’ Union—that was their declared program—they didn’t want to join, didn’t want to correspond with it, didn’t want to enter into discussions with it, they wanted nothing at all to do with us. The reason was that we were part of the establishment and they were opposed to establishment of any kind” (qtd. in Hallberg 147). According to Peter Böhlig, an observer and participant of these unofficial events, the emergence of independent literary journals coincided with the appearance of a new generation of artists and poets who could not be integrated in the conservative cultural apparatus and thus contributed to a new structure of the nonpublic.⁶ What is this nonpublic? In studies, anthologies, and journalistic reports of the last decade, the image of a multiform and yet homogenous literary scene has been evoked, often in reference to a generation of excluded East German writers.⁷ Commentators have used terms such as “scene” (Jan Faktor), “parallel culture” (Rüdiger Rosenthal), “creative enclave” (Heinz Ludwig Arnold) or “subculture” (Gerrit-Jan Berendse) to capture a sense of the non-conformist lifestyle and the richness of creative activities in art, literature, music, pottery etc. From a distance, the “scene” gained an aura that is characteristic of the commodification taking place since the middle of the 1980s; whether it is called the “Berliner Montmartre” (Lothar Lang), “the punk, drug, and café culture” (Karen Leeder) or “Bohemia in East Berlin” (Philip Brady), the literature of writers living in the district Prenzlauer Berg can no longer be distinguished from the public image in the West.⁸ Since the revelations about Sascha Anderson as an informer of the *Stasi* in 1991, journalists took interest in the rumor about squatters, poets, and informers and collected superficial anecdotes about the “underground.” Jane Kramer, for example, portrays the writers as

“kids who wanted to write or paint or start a rock band”⁹ in East Berlin. Unfortunately, she does not shy away from unsubstantiated value judgments, while offering little insight about the larger political significance of the events she focuses on. Due to this interest in scandalous stories, a complex social and literary phenomenon of GDR history has been reduced to the activities of some “drop-outs” in the capital.

The popular image of the “underground” does not reflect the inner conflicts and the spread of second cultures in major cities of the GDR. Their emergence in the 1980s is an indicator of the disintegration of the socialist public sphere and the intellectual discourse “without taboos” as it was projected by Erich Honecker. The myth of a homogeneous subculture takes as a given that there is a typical representative of the scene, namely the young male poet who seeks the sensual and individualistic experience of art as an alternative to socialist everyday life. I argue that the shift toward poetry as the main vehicle of expression did not only drastically transform the role of the writer from the intellectual with political responsibilities into the apolitical but aesthetically progressive poet,¹⁰ but it also changed the view of implicit moral values which dominated the socialist public sphere. This transformation can be detected in the poets’ insistence on the principle of pleasure instead of defending the official ethics of work. In various circles of poets in East German cities, the image of the young rebel who objects to the moral and aesthetic values of the gerontocratic public sphere was cultivated. Underneath the surface of a purely textual *jouissance* in poetry, there were forces that expressed an explicitly **male** sensuality. What can be seen as an underlying politics of sexuality with liberating effects is only part of a dialectic, since the process of liberation suppressed the individual’s desire to determine one’s own gendered, ethnic or religious identity. In other words: the implicit strategy of undermining the sober public discourses—especially within the most radical strands of linguistic experimentation—followed inherent patterns that rejected repressive statutes and common moral values while reproducing stereotypical behaviors toward women and ignoring ethnic and religious minorities. Therefore, the second cultures need to be reevaluated from both a sociological and literary point of view. The refusal to participate in institutions and organizations was possible because of a certain laxness in enforcing laws and statutes. Young people who came to live in the dilapidated areas of the bigger cities were not prosecuted for squatting apartments or avoiding to work.¹¹ The “soft tactics” of the *Stasi* prevented the second cultures of getting politically radical while creating a sense of constant paranoia.¹² At least the writers overcame their inertia in order to refocus on the “here and now” of their existence and fill its semantic vacuum with concrete meaning. Most writers saw a poetic mode of expression as the most appropriate vehicle to counter the stale rhetoric of the official political discourse. As poets they ironically affirmed the status quo. To be sure, the role of the writer was rarely that of the intellectual engaging in critical discussion. The East German supplement to the public sphere always evaded open confrontation.¹³ This is one reason why there is little evidence of a debate between the established writers and the second culture of poets, painters, performance artists, political activists, and musicians. Of course, we would need to examine the whole range of cultural activities and reconstruct the historical origins of a creative writing movement in many of the larger cities of the former GDR.

In examining the return of repressed identities in East German writers of the 1980s, there are a few distinctions to be made. The examples that will be presented later must be seen in the context of newly emerging strands of poetic and autobiographical writing of the decade. How many writers were actually involved in this unofficial literature? When did they make an appearance and where can they be located? The first clarification concerns the number of writers. In the main anthologies and scholarly studies of recent years, there are about forty to fifty authors whose contributions are listed. If we add the names of those whose names were excluded in one or the other anthology, the number comes closer

to seventy. The second distinction that needs concerns the temporal frame. After 1981, the year in which Franz Fühmann's proposal to publish an anthology of younger writers was rejected, the independent activities increased until the exodus of 1984 and the simultaneous attempt to create a union of writers—the so-called “*Zersammlung*,” a disassembly – which utterly failed. After 1984, there was a much clearer division between those who participated in readings, performances, etc., and those who engaged in the various strands of political activism. Between the mid-1980s and 1989, the unofficial journals, readings, and exhibitions became well known in the west so that the groups and individuals gained pride and prestige. In the same period, semi-public discussions such as the 1986 conversation in the *Aufbau-Verlag* and the “*Wort + Werk*” exhibit at the Samariterkirche in Berlin indicate the janus-faced policy of officials to appease and integrate the poets while at the same time persecuting those who contributed to the opposition journals of political activists such as *Umweltblätter* (Environmental Pages) or *Grenzfall* (Borderline Case). The third distinction concerns the geographical centers. Due to the aura of the “Prenzlauer Berg-connection” (Adolf Endler), the specific conditions and features of literary production in Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, Schwerin, and Karl-Marx-Stadt have been largely neglected.¹⁴ Yet, writers such as Johannes Jansen, Flanzendörfer, or Durs Grünbein appeared in Berlin or Dresden, and independent art-and-poetry journals were a widely spread phenomenon in many east German cities. Fourthly, one needs to mention that the prose writings¹⁵ of Reinhard Jirgl, Detlef Opitz or already established writers such as Wolfgang Hilbig or Brigitte Burmeister cannot be separated from the dominant trend just because these works do not easily fit the label of subversive poetry (Bert Papenfuß) or a generation of those born into the GDR, the “*Hineingeborenen*” (Uwe Kolbe). The changes in the economic and cultural environment, that is, the growing publicity and commodification after 1984, did not necessarily make these distinctions more transparent. Due to the system of distributing and marketing literary works, however, the individual achievements became more tangible and accessible to a wider audience.

The retreat from the established modes of production of socialist culture in the late 1970s resulted in alternative self-expressive activities that created a transitional social space. This “unpublic sphere,” with its open boundaries, allowed a certain type of non-political engagement to be fostered and molded. Restricted by official intervention, surveillance, and self-censorship, encounters of writers and artists took place at sites that blurred the distinction between public and domestic. Social events turned apartments, workshops or backyards into galleries or reading halls and transformed cafés into cozy living rooms. What I call the “private sphere” appears as an always provisional space of social events that allowed their participants to find a tacit agreement on the meaning of their activism as a means of escaping political stagnation and unproductive intellectual discourse. At first sight, the private sphere seems to have been tolerant to different concerns in its pursuit of textual *jouissance* because it embraced the activities that undermined the values of work, puritanism, and rational discussion. The circulation of esoteric catchphrases and standard slogans, however, suggests that the liberating energy of displaying and disguising oneself turned into a binding force that kept the formation of personal identities in check. Apparently, the common interest in producing a web of intertextual links resulted in a certain jargon and group mentality. The tacit agreement among those who questioned the official use of language was their disregard of power and the disbelief in the utopian aspirations of the older generation. Referring to this attitude, the Leipzig-based playwright and poet Kurt Drawert stated that, “We said one cannot escape the power if one does not leave behind its language and its themes; it is a secret agreement to criticize the power, we said, and it makes it real and prolongs its life.”¹⁶ The plural pronoun “we” is revealing here, since it alludes to the predicament of these poets born into the socialist state. The non-confrontational strategies that produced the discursive

system disseminated a notion of coherence that was at odds with the attempts to define a personal identity based on gender, ethnic, or religious identity.

In the following examples, I would like to examine more closely the rediscovery or, rather, the reinvention of identities in east German literature between 1986 and the early 1990s. It will be demonstrated that the literary figures at the periphery of the second culture deviated from the main course by defining their Jewish, female, and homosexual identities. The texts of marginalized writers who were equidistant to the activities at the Prenzlauer Berg unmask the exclusionary operation that was underlying the poetic discourse of the male dominated scene. I will consider the writings of Hans Noll, Bernd Igel, and Barbara Köhler to show the particular problems of **constructing** one's self in the transitional space of the unpublic sphere. The status of the private as an **alternative** to the official socialist discourse gave certain liberties as far as an anti-bourgeois lifestyle and collective activities are concerned. But the "*asociale*" existence of non-conformists writers and artists created a role-model that prevented individuals in the "parallel discursive arenas" (Nancy Fraser) from articulating truly "**oppositional** interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (my emphasis).¹⁷ In other words: the lack of a critical intellectual opposition toward the state was mirrored in the behavior toward the male peers.

Hans Noll,¹⁸ born in 1954, the son of the writer and functionary Dieter Noll discovered the Jewish background of his mother at the beginning of his literary career.¹⁹ Trained as a painter, he started writing autobiographical prose in the middle of the 1980s. In his *Berliner Scharade* (Berlin Charade)²⁰ (1985), Noll clearly distances himself from the activities at the Prenzlauer Berg: "I never belonged to the scene even though my first studio was in its territory...." (353). A spokesperson in this narrative contemplates: "You are looking for a community, you huddle together so that—this is its side effect—the claws of the state security can more efficiently grab you." (350). In contrast to his later books, Noll mentions Jewish Germans only in passing.²⁰ Nonetheless, his narrator makes some cynical observations, for instance on Marxists of small stature and the elegant Sephardic Jews who are rarely seen because the socialists had forced them out of the country (40). In *Nachtgedanken über Deutschland* (Night Thoughts About Germany, 1992), Noll is trying to come to terms with his parents' silence about their Jewish identity. Due to their political convictions, Noll's family succumbed to the assimilation of Jews in the GDR: "Besides I knew next to nothing about the unique history of my ancestors. A 'Jewish problem' was not an issue in my family; there was deep silence as far as this is concerned. Today I can imagine this attitude to some extent but cannot approve of it."²²

In *Nachtgedanken*, the author's name has changed to Chaim Noll. In response to the lack of the Jewish tradition in East Germany, Noll creates a new identity that is rooted in literary history, that is the "particularity of its condensed, grandiose humanity" that manifests itself in books (19). It is Heinrich Heine who satisfies Noll's hopes to find a paradigmatic literary figure. In accepting, reconstructing, and identifying with the Jewishness of his ancestors, Noll breaks with his father and his education; he cannot tolerate the inconspicuous life in the midst of an "unloved, foreign, fundamentally anti-Semitic nation" (21). He clearly rejects the kind of Jewish-German patriotism represented by Jewish neo-conservatives like Michael Wolffsohn (22). In an ideal, almost Habermasian sense, the newly adopted Judaism compensates for the heartfelt loss of a larger urban community and the particularization of the city (145). Seeking consolation for an "appalling German reality" and Germany's lack of culture, the writer resorts to a religiously inspired literature such as Logau's, Klopstock's or Paul Gerhardt's poetry. In other words: the better Germany exists in its literature and language only while the people themselves are filled with an envy that is part of the "character of the *volk*" (58). His discomfort with the German mentality results in Noll's newly acquired Mosaic creed. At

the end of *Nachtgedanken*, Noll honors God in a stylized romantic image of the writer: “I put down my pen, open the window, watch the sky above the roofs of sleepers and thank Him who prompts these thoughts like all of them” (154). Noll seems to feel uneasy about abstaining from any political commitment. Nonetheless, he defends the contemplative mood of the distant observer by referring to the corruption of the state. Passivity is permissible as he says, quoting Seneca, who permits the philosopher to retreat from society if the state cannot be improved. Then, he suggests that only silence is appropriate, that is “quiet observation and meditation.” Noll could hardly be more explicit about his views about the role of the intellectual in a unified Germany.

For Chaim Noll and writers such as Barbara Honigmann or Matthias Hermann, the reconstruction of a Jewish German identity took place in religion and literature, where they could find a tradition of their “Jewishness” that was “repressed” by their families. Like Honigmann, these East German authors chose to take on a repressed (or previously inconsequential) Jewish identity in adulthood, as Karen Remmler maintained in recent a study on *Reemerging Jewish Culture*.²³ Another critic, Thomas Nolden, noticed that in Noll’s 1985 report *Der Abschied. Journal meiner Ausreise aus der DDR* (The Farewell. Journal of my Departure from the GDR), the author did not attribute much significance to his Jewish ancestors “for his social dissent.”²⁴ Both Honigmann and Noll are trying to come to terms with their socialist parents who rejected their Jewish heritage by compensating for the loss of family traditions with a fictitious community. I argue that this reinvention of the self originates in the incompatibility between the chosen social environment (ie. the art academy) and the norms of the socialist public sphere (ie. Noll’s father). Although Noll seems to envision a larger urban community and homogenous public sphere, his “return” to a religious Jewish identity does not entail a strong social bonding with like-minded Jewish east Germans. It is a rather isolated approach to the Mosaic belief, perhaps fostered by the influx of Jewish Russians who enlarged the small religious communities in Berlin.²⁵

The case of Chaim Noll shows that particular problems such as the (re)construction of a Jewish identity are closely linked to two aspects: first, a greater sensibility concerning the ambiguities of citizenship and family histories in the unified Germanies; and second, a growing awareness of nationalistic tendencies after 1989. As a student of fine arts, Noll enjoyed the privilege of a relatively liberal atmosphere at the academy, where he found like-minded friends. This milieu must have facilitated the decision to cut off the ties with his father.²⁶

Although Noll shares the same social space with the artists and writers of Prenzlauer Berg, the confessional prose and contemplative-religious tone has nothing in common with the radical literary practice of the poets. As far as we can tell from the writings in journals and anthologies, questions of creed or of ethnic identity never stimulated a debate in the unpublic sphere. Writers of different nationality or ethnic background—ie. Asteris Kutulas, Leonhard Lorek, Raja Lubinetzki or Mita Schamal—might have expressed their views in contributions to the unofficial journals but they did not play a major role in the creative activities.

There are other marginalized writers whose interests in evoking the past and in problematizing human relationships differ from the main topics of the independent second culture in Berlin. In the south of the former GDR, Bernd Igel and Barbara Köhler have gradually moved toward more individualized gendered positions since the mid-Eighties; both completed their process of self-definition in the new market economy after 1990. As in the example of Chaim Noll, this change is connected with the act of remembering and questions of national identity. Bernd Igel, born in 1954, began studying theology in Leipzig but soon became a shy, almost invisible participant of various cultural activities. Throughout the 1980s, he contributed to the independent journals *anschlag* (attack) and *schaden* (damage), gave readings at Endler’s culture club in

Leipzig and created artist books. A volume of poetry with the enigmatic title, *Das Geschlecht der Häuser gebar mir fremde Orte* (The Sex of Houses Gave Birth to Strange Places) (1989) made him known to a wider audience in the West. Igel's prose poems oscillate between dream protocols and a tone reminiscent of Novalis, Trakl, and George. In an antiquated tone, the dream images evoke a childhood experience in which the body becomes the site of conflicting ideals of the self. The poetic persona is often a lonely child in bed who awaits dusk in his bed or is hiding in the nearby woods. The dream images portray a distant father whose military uniform and boots in the wardrobe raises questions about his true status and identity. The child feels guilty since it cannot adequately respond to the role it is expected to play before the father who seems to be a prison guard. The child's feelings of inadequacy are expressed in deep anxieties about bodily functions; the child constantly worries about sweat, excrement, urine, and the faulty way it uses language. "Warmth seemed to be just a warm word." Rather than analyzing this traumatic experience, the poem submerges into the past by reliving it as a dense web of allusions to the child's somber fears and sexual fantasies. The feeling of coldness prevails—a "Nachbar" (neighbor) becomes a night ghost, a "Nachtmahr."²⁷

Bernd Igel's political position is most directly expressed in a commentary on Jakob von Hoddis' poems,²⁸ "I see myself placed into the midst of outdated social structures [and] a revolution suffering of suffocation" (1330). Interestingly, Igel reveals his personal convictions in between the lines of a review rather than in a topical essay. Moreover, such open statements about political stagnation would not have been made before 1989. Apparently, the crisis of the political system allowed Bernd Igel to reveal his discontent with the state more openly while identifying with the tragic fate of the expressionist poet who died in an asylum. His gender identity is still covered by a collective subject, "our generation born in the fifties," which experiences the political stagnation of the state. He sees an affinity to the experience of the expressionists, particularly Jakob von Hoddis. Igel explains that he sees himself threatened by circumstances in which socialism is propagated as an ideology rather than as a form of living. He closes in saying that "only in its character as a form of living it is important to me" (1330).

This review of Hoddis' poems signals Igel's readiness to redefine his public persona. It is the beginning of a difficult process of coming to terms with a new social role after undergoing a sex change. As a woman, Bernd Igel called himself Jayne-Ann Igel. In an excerpt of a long diary called *Fahrwasser* (Navigable Water),²⁹ published two years after the review, Igel rejects an interpretation that defines identity as East German citizenship. Instead, she insists on a commonly shared experience of the self (301). In a confessional, autobiographical tone, the author describes the process of coming-out as leaving a hiding place; it is the end of being silent about her sexual identity and therefore the start of writing from scratch (302). Jayne-Ann worries that her appearance still changes between "plump girl" or a "long-haired man" (306). In an entry from December 12, 1989, she feels relieved that she can escape her father's projections of her identity: "I don't have to quarrel with father, to maintain the image of my self against his imagination" (303).

In a short essay on Jayne-Ann Igel, Wolfgang Hilbig gave the most illuminating comment on his/her works in a thoughtful introduction³⁰ to the poet's diary *Fahrwasser*, which never appeared in print. He reflects more on the specific problems of constructing identity in poetry than on the social ramifications of this sex change. Hilbig is enough of a sensitive reader to recognize the importance of this diary in its documentation of an autobiographical "I" that is distinct from the poetic subject characterized by its inventiveness and its double-gendered identity (298). His account, however, plays down the queer identity in order to construct a universal, neutered poetic subjectivity that would transgress the fixed gender roles.

It is noteworthy that Igel's radical decision to change her sexual identity coincides with the transformation of the political landscape and the new possibilities of exploring and

redefining one's self in the larger context of citizenship. It is as if the 1980s slogans of transgressing boundaries materialized in the least predictable way. For those who had engaged in a revolt of the senses against puritanical state politics³¹ versus the search of group identities in the private sphere gained a new momentum. In Berlin, poets such as Frank- Wolf Matthies, Sascha Anderson, Bert Papenfuß, and Uwe Kolbe inverted supposedly political allusions to riots in the street into sexual innuendoes. Similarly, the Leipzig poets gave an erotic undertone to poems in distorted everyday language. What at first sight appears as a politics of sexual liberation in groups of predominantly male poets was haunted by the specter of ethnic and gendered identities of writers who had kept a low profile until the end of the eighties. At the same time, those writers at the margins of the allegedly homogenous "scene" tried to explore the repressive forces of their upbringing; turning toward the past, the individual is more outspoken about the double roles of parents as functionaries as if the authority had lost its power after the dismantling of the wall. In *Fahrwasser*, Jayn-Ann Igel confessed, "What I was hiding for years, I am allowed to be now" (300).

The cases of Igel and Noll gave the impression that gendered and religious identities emerged as a consequence of a growing self-realization. In order to upset this logic of a progressive liberation of repressed personal identities, I would like to examine the writings of Barbara Köhler, who lived in Karl-Marx- Stadt (Chemnitz) and Leipzig before she moved to the West. Among the works of the few women poets emerging in the 1980s, Köhler's poetry is at the venue of conflicting influences and it indicates the significant changes that occurred after 1985. Her poems are less conventional than those of Uta Mauersberger or Kerstin Hensel and yet they maintain a voice which steers again the most radical strand of the grammatological techniques of the 1980s. With writers such as Christa and Gerhard Wolf, she shares an interest in exploring her childhood near Karl-Marx-Stadt and the fate of tragic historical figures such as Hölderlin.

From the beginning of her career, Köhler set out to determine the role of women after the "Ausreisewelle." In 1985/1986, Köhler and her friend Melle exchanged a number of letters that appeared in the unofficial journal *schaden* (21 copies). The occasion was Melle's decision to part with his friend and leave the GDR in 1985. The letters focused on the impact of the political standstill and a divided Germany on their relationship and thus made their private dispute into an event shared by others. In the context of discursive strategies, this correspondence is unique—it blurred the distinction between the intimate emotional communication and the journal's approach to subvert the official jargon by "translating" it into a highly ambiguous poetic mode of expression. What allows this correspondence to reflect the disillusionment after 1984 is the openness of this conflict, given the fact that the unofficial art-and-poetry journals followed a widely accepted policy of playfully ironic and yet non-compromising content to avoid giving the impression of political conspiracy. There are a number of important features. First, the writers seem to have self-censored the expression of emotions to a large degree. Each letter is composed ambiguously as a response to a monologue. Second, the self-expressive tone of "love letters" is replaced by a mixture of analytical language, a play on idiomatic phrases and literary quotes. In her letters, Köhler poses as the querist who sees Melle as the quitter. To her, the FRG resembles a "steppe" in comparison to the "desert" of the GDR (54). The other half of Germany is not completely the truth (52). She accuses Melle of blaming the failure of their relationship solely on Germany while seeing her body torn apart by the impossibility to reconcile her political convictions with her attachment to her partner of seven years. Moreover, she realizes that her body and the body of women in general have become the object of male desire. Against a philosophy of negativity that she seems to connect with Melle, she is desperately looking for harmonies and a change toward the "human" via language (46). This correspondence has literary qualities because of numerous references to Kleist, Hölderlin, Heiner Müller, and

Rilke. More importantly, these letters reverberate with Hölderlin and the Romanticists (interestingly, Christa Wolf's *Gesprächsraum Romantik* (Chatroom Romanticism) appeared in 1985).³² This literary style conceals the direct expression of "love." There seems to be no public place for speaking about emotions other than "literature" inasmuch as it transforms personal experience into a poetic idiom that offers a critique of everyday language. Rather than establishing a dialogue, the letters serve as a self-interrogation³³—they help to overcome silence: "one confesses in the torture of silence" (54). The self-referential language used in this correspondence indicates the attempt to break through the camouflage of metaphors (54) and offer a literal reading of the quotidian metaphorical language. It is through this approach to writing that Köhler differs from Christa Wolf's stance. Through language (playing on everyday idioms), Köhler seeks to explore variations instead of the one and only identity. In her two volumes of poetry, *Deutsches Roulette* (German Roulette) and *Blue Box*, she developed her gendered perspective by dismantling quotidian idioms about love. The binary opposition of male/female is questioned by locating the "subject" at the dystopian place of a grammatical and infantile "it." The concrete experience of her childhood is sublated in a general critique of the conventions of upbringing. The ironic affirmation of an "it" as the origin of poetic speech both endorses and challenges the search of a neutral point of view because it superimposes the utopian androgyny with the objectification of the "it" as child and legal object. Although Köhler's poetry has shifted its focus from the division of Germany to more "cosmopolitan" topics since 1985, its main concerns are still anchored in male-female partnerships that are examined in exercises of solitude. Accordingly, the first poem of *Blue Box* (1995) recognizes the speaker's isolation as the condition of reflections on gender identity, "I am practicing solitude" the first poem begins.³⁴ While writers such as Gabriele Stötzer-Kachold articulated a radical feminist critique, Köhler's female subject shrank to a less pronounced and far more modest position of the poetic "it."

What makes the three East German writers remarkable examples of the real existing double-bind of the private sphere of the late 1980s is their way of exploring the social constructedness of personal identities. Against the labeling of "being born" into the GDR, they go public in order to resist the identification with "natural" roles offered by the official and unofficial cultures. None of them corresponds with the image of the "male drop-out" on the margins of socialist society. Noll's, Igel's, and Köhler's writings underwent significant transformation since the mid-1980s. All three of them harked back to literature to connect a specific tradition with the newly constructed personal identity. In presenting "private" issues in the "unpublic" sphere they negated the matter-of-factness and the grammatological techniques of the literary groups in Berlin, but neither Köhler, Igel nor Noll entered the socialist public arena to reflect on the social conditions of this transformation of identities. The process of finding one's Jewish, female, homosexual or transsexual identity in writing does not simply follow the logic of a liberation of the self. Instead, it is an encounter with many obstacles, such as broken traditions and a lack of diversified peer groups and academic communities who might be able to support these voices from the unpublic sphere.

ENDNOTES

1. "Die Schatten werfen ihre Ereignisse voraus: eine Rücksicht," [epilogue] *Ein Molotov- Cocktail auf fremder Bettkante. Lyrik der siebziger/achtziger Jahre von Dichtern aus der DDR* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1991) 392.
2. See Klaus Michael in his interview with Robert von Hallberg in *Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State. Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR*, ed. von Hallberg, transl. Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 137.
3. See Christa Ebert and Sascha Anderson in Hallberg, *Intellectuals* 122, 259.
4. See Adolf Endler's comment on the anthology *Leila Anastasia*—later published in the west as *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung*—in his and Gabriele Dietze's interview with Hallberg 307. cp. "Zum Vorgehen in der Angelegenheit der Anthologie 'Leila Anastasia.'" *Strategiepapier des Büros für Urheberrechte, Vogel oder Käfig sein. Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften der DDR 1979-1989*, ed. Klaus Michael and Thomas Wohlfahrt (Berlin: Galrev, 1992) 302-303.
5. See Bert Papenfuß in Hallberg, *Intellectuals* 275. For other comments on censorship in the GDR see *Fragebogen Zensur: Zur Literatur vor und nach dem Ende der DDR*, ed. Richard Zipser (Leipzig: Reclam, 1995).
6. Peter Böthig, "Und; Undsweiter; Undsofort..." (Bibliophile Zeitschriftenprojekte, Siebdruckbücher) *Vogel oder Käfig sein* 273.
7. For an account of this "Ausschluß aus der Öffentlichkeit" see Klaus Michael, "Sprache und Sprackkritik. Die Literatur des Prenzlauer Bergs," *Die andere Sprache. Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, coed. Gerhard Wolf (Munich: text + kritik, 1990) 236. See also Geist, *Molotov-Cocktail* 392. The exact numbers of authors who belong to this "excluded generation" varies. For instance, Geist lists thirty-four poets born in the 1950s, nine in the 1960s; nine out of forty-three poets are women poets; Karen Leeder adds another nine poets to this list so that she comes up with forty poets born in the 1950s, twelve poets born in the 1960s; fifteen out of these fifty-two poets are women poets. Due to Leeder's decision to limit the pool to poets born after 1950, important older writers such as Häfner, Strzyk, Rosenlöcher, Wagner or Hilbig are not mentioned. Leeder's list could easily be expanded by Lothar Fiedler, Gino Hahnemann, Heidemarie Härtl, Andreas Hegewald, Martin Heydecke, Michael Rom, Frank Weiße, and Udo Wilke.
8. Rainer Schedlinski accurately pointed out that the image of a world of bohemiens does not do justice to the everyday life at Prenzlauer Berg: "...here in Prenzlauer Berg it wasn't a Bohemia. There weren't only artists; there was a perfectly normal social structure. There were alcoholics, asocial types, also some who made a lot of money dealing in automobiles, and barkeepers" (qtd. in Hallberg 269).
9. Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory. Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996) 155. There are several blunt statements such as "the new Prenzlauer Berg poets were into 'subjectivity'" (192) or "a poet named Alexander Anderson" is simply characterized by "He was not a very good poet" (156); the journal *Temperamenta* (sic) is called the "best underground East German literary magazine" (209), Schedlinski's *Die Rationen des Ja und des Nein* is translated as "The Ratio of the Yes and the No" and Suhrkamp appears as "Suhrkamp, the Frankfurt publisher" (201).
10. There are numerous comments on this apolitical role of the young poets. See for example: Jan Faktor, "Brief vom 2. Januar 1993," in Zipser 125.
11. See Anderson, Schedlinski and Papenfuß in Hallberg, *Intellectuals*, 259, 267, 277.
12. See Adolf Endler and Jan Faktor in Hallberg, *Intellectuals*, 306, 315.
13. Their term "supplement" renders the non-confrontational course of many writers. Rainer Schedlinski for example rejects the term "alternative" (sic); his journal *ariadnefabrik* is part of the "nicht-offizielle literatur" which escapes the "herkömmlichen öffentlichkeitsbegriff" since it "... führt zwangsläufig dazu, in gedanken eine gegenöffentlichkeit zu konstituieren, die dann mit den konventionen des öffentlichkeitsbegriffs in konflikt gerät, weil dieser, in seinem aufklärerischen sinne, stets alle meinen muß, während, wie im vorliegenden falle, diese öffentlichkeit teilbar geworden ist" "An das Literaturinstitut der Akademie der Wissenschaften," [*ariadnefabrik* 5/ 1988] *Vogel oder Käfig sein*.
14. This view is shared by Klaus Michael, Uta Grundmann, Michael Gratz and others. cp. Michael Gratz, "Was sollte sich daran ändern? Anmerkungen zur Debatte um DDR-Literatur und 'Underground'-Kultur," *Verrat an der Kunst? Rückblicke auf die DDR-Literatur*, eds. Karl Dreiritz and Hannes Krauss (Berlin: Aufbau, 1993) 45.
15. For example writers such as Reinhard Jirgl, Norbert Bleisch, Henning Pawel, Detlef Opitz, Peter Wawerzinek, Brigitte Burmeister, Katja Lange-Müller, Irina Liebmann, Gerd Neumann and Wolfgang Hilbig.
16. Kurt Drawert, "'Es gibt keine Entschuldigung.' Offener Brief and Rainer Schedlinski," *Haus ohne Menschen. Zeitschriften* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1993) 64.

17. Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 81.
18. Noll's works are closely connected to the places in his biography: *Der Abschied. Journal meiner Ausreise aus der DDR* (1985); *Berliner Scharade* (1987); *Der goldene Löffel* (1989); *Nachtgedanken über Deutschland* (1992); *Taube und Stern. Roma Hebraica. Eine Spurensuche* (1994); *Leben ohne Deutschland* (1995).
19. For an account of the role of East German Jews in the former GDR see: Robin Ostow, "Becoming Strangers: Jews in Germany's Five New Provinces," *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany. Life and Literature Since 1989*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler (NY: NY UP, 1994) 62-74. For details of Noll's family background see Thomas Nolden, *Junge jüdische Literatur. Konzentrisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995) 31, 34-37.
20. Hans Noll, *Berliner Scharade* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1987). 21. cp. Nolden 65. 22. *Nachtgedanken über Deutschland* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1992) 15. 23. Karen Remmler, "En-gendering Bodies of Memory. Tracing the Genealogy of Identity in the Work of Esther Dischereit, Barbara Honigmann, and Irene Dische," *Reemerging Jewish Culture 186.-Honigmann left East Berlin in 1984*.
24. Nolden 34.
25. For an account of this development see Robin Ostow, "Becoming Strangers: Jews in Germany's Five New Provinces," *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany* 65. cp. Nolden 16.
26. See Helga Schubert's comment on the conflict between fathers and sons, Hallberg 195-6.
27. In a poem by Bernd Igel: "Noch nicht. Nicht mehr," *Sprache & Antwort. Stimmen und Texte einer anderen Literatur aus der DDR*, ed. Egmont Hesse (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1988) 73. 28. Bernd Igel, "Du vom Traum verlassene Stätte Mensch," [Jakob von Hoddis. *Dichtungen und Briefe*. Zurich 1987], *Sinn und Form* 6 (1989): 1325-1330. 29. Jayn-Ann Igel, "Fahrwasser," *Sinn und Form* 2 (1991): 300-307. The book itself never appeared. 30. "Über Jayn-Ann Igel," *Sinn und Form* 2 (1991): 294-299.
31. See Grimm, "Der Hohlkörper des Gedichts: Zur Poesie des Prenzlauer Bergs," "*im widerstand/im mißverständnis?*" *Zur Literatur und Kunst des Prenzlauer Bergs*, eds. Christine Cosentino and Wolfgang Müller (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1995) 91-118.
32. Christa Wolf and Gerhard Wolf, *Ins Ungebundene geht eine Sehnsucht. Gesprächsraum Romantik: Prosa und Essays* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1985).
33. The parenthetical admonitions make that absolutely clear: "bleibt nur die möglichkeit meine geschichte zu behaupten. (und nicht als bloße behauptung, als tun barbara!)" (49)
34. Barbara Köhler, *Blue Box. Gedichte* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1995) 9.