RENEGOTIATING HISTORY:
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FAMILY
IN POST-1989 GERMAN LITERATURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Scholars emphasize concepts of trauma and loss to describe literary responses to the collapse of socialism in 1989. In contrast, focusing on literary representations of family, this project reveals productive coping mechanisms developed in German literature after 1989. In artistic representation, family marks the site where the GDR's dissolution and new post-1989 beginnings are negotiated. I draw on the concepts of agency, memory, and space to show how the historical transformation in 1989 affected existing family structures and how narrative family representations negotiate the historical meaning of 1989. Situated at the intersection of literature, cultural studies, and history, this project shows how family representations constitute a privileged site of post-socialist renewals.

Für meine Eltern,

Ingrid und Peter Kroh,

deren Leitspruch

"Die Familie ist immer das Wichtigste."

sich sowohl während als auch

in dieser Arbeit bewahrheitet hat.

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Introduction

During a visit to Dresden in December 1989, Helmut Kohl recalled the emotions upon the sudden

opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9th that continued to define post-wall Germany immediately

after the surprising end of its 40-year-long separation. He recounted: "Especially during these days, we in

Germany feel like a German family again" (cited in Straughn 2007, p.110). Kohl's statement is one of the

numerous examples in post-1989 German society and culture of applying family metaphors to describe

the historic event of the German unification. These metaphors range from the rhetoric about the "brothers

and sisters" on the respective other side of the wall, which was already in use before 1989 (Brüns 197), to

the numerous cartoons comparing the German unification to a marriage (Dueck 2001). While the sibling-

metaphor attempts to masks the estrangement that developed between East and West Germans during 40

years of separation, the image of marriage already signals awareness of the distinct differences between

the two partners involved as well as a critical attitude towards the assumed familial connectedness

insinuated in the comparisons of East and West Germans to siblings who grew up apart from each other.

The prevalence of family metaphors in the cultural and political imagination of the German

unification suggests a "remarkable sticking power of a family ideal in an age in which non-familial

relationships seem to be increasingly important" (Tincknell 2). Hence, this study approaches family as

crucial representational construct in post-1989 literature to examine the meanings of historical change. As

close readings and historical contextualization of selected post-1989 novels indicate, the family as social

imaginary space is doubly charged: on the one hand, the texts construct family as the social constellation

where the historic transformation of 1989 is negotiated; on the other hand, in this process the notion of

family itself is repeatedly negotiated. While the texts present a distinct investment in the normative ideal

of the nuclear family as relatively secure familial arrangement, they simultaneously undermine

assumptions about family as stable social construct, but rather emphasize that social and textual

imaginations of family have been continuously in the making before and after the collapse of socialism.

The relevance of family in the cultural imagination of post-1989 with regard to East German authors can be understood as a continuation of the family's significance as social and representational construct in the GDR. As Koopmann (2003) indicates: "Familienthemen, Familienstrukturen sind tief in das Selbstverständnis der DDR eingesickert, und das aus verschiedenen Gründen: zum einen wollte die sozialistische Gesellschaft so etwas wie eine große Familie sein, wo Brüderlichkeit, Freundschaft, uneingeschränktes Vertrauen herrschten, und dieser Gemeinschaftsgeist hat alle sozialen Organisationsformen durchtränkt" (104). [Family topics, family structures have deeply penetrated the GDR's self-image, and that for a variety of reasons: on the one hand, the socialist society wanted to be like a big family, governed by brotherhood, friendship and unlimited trust, and this community spirit saturated all forms of social organization.][1] The overall significance of family as social construct at the core of public concern and cultural fascination in the GDR is among other things evidenced by its negotiation across a variety of cinematic and literary modes.[2]

According to Kolinsky (1998) "[t]here are several reasons why the family constituted such a priority value in the GDR. Firstly, the state and its official discourse of political conformity could be excluded from the home and the circle of family members. Many families became havens of private retreat from the political prescriptions that dominated their daily lives" (14). This description corresponds to Gaus' (1983) concept of "niche society" that emphasized the importance of the private sphere as a counter-balance to pressure in the public and political sphere in East Germany. As Mueller (2013) points out "the notion of the private niche has proven to be a pervasive paradigm," mainly "because the focus on individual perspectives invites affective narratives and an emotional access to history" (198). While the assumption of a general opposition of the private sphere and the social constellations located here to the state as insinuated in Gaus' concept has been criticized (cf. Gabriele Mueller 198, Richthofen 2009),

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this study are mine.
[2] For cinematic imaginations of family in the GDR see for example Pinkert. "Family Feelings: Kinship, Gender, and Social Utopia in DEFA Film." *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: a Companion, Eds*. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage. Boston: de Gruyter, forthcoming. Regarding the relevance of literary family narratives in the GDR see for example Hell. *Post-Fascist Fantasies*. Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1997.

studies such as Betts (2010) *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* underscore

the significance of the private and particularly of social and representational constructs of family in the

GDR as well as its interconnectedness with state ideology.

The GDR's approach to family as socially construct entity positioned at the intersection of private

and public sphere was characterized by the combination of two seemingly opposing aims: the GDR

promoted matrimony as favorable traditional familial arrangement, which suggests persistent conservative

notions of the private sphere. At the same time, the GDR put state measures in place that supported

kinship structures beyond the state's definition of the nuclear family that were primarily directed at single

mothers. Both approaches appear to be motivated by the state's ultimate goal to provide incentives for

procreation.[3] Early marriage and traditional family constellations were, for example, encouraged through

connecting the distribution of scarce housing resources to the marital status of applicants. An apartment of

their own was for many young couples, hence, only available if they were married and its size was

directly related to the number of children in the family.[4] Nonetheless, single parent families benefitted

from state sponsored day cares that were a prerequisite for ensuring the GDR's goal of full time

employment and were meant to support single parents' economic independence.[5] Overall, the political

discourse in the GDR about familial arrangements emphasized a shift from the political imagination of

the family as a primarily economical institution to the family as private space where interpersonal

relations where defined by affirmative affects. Scholarship has argued that this shift has caused growing

disparity between the public and private spheres: while the former was represented as a social arena

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[3] For a discussion of examples for these state measures, particularly their representation in the Legal Code of the GDR see Urang. *Legal Tender. Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, esp. pp 98-100.

[4] For a detailed account about housing in the GDR and its significance in defining daily life see Meggle-Freund. *Zwischen Altbau und Platte Erfahrungsgeschichte(n) vom Wohnen. Alltagskonstruktion in der Spätzeit der DDR*. Diss. Universität Jena, 2004.

[5] For a discussion of the efficiency of these state measures as well as the social position of single mothers after 1989 see Kolinsky. "Women, Work, and the Family in the New Länder: Conflicts and Experiences." *Recasting East Germany: Social Transformation After the GDR*. Eds. Chris Flockton, Eva Kolinsky. London, Portland: Frank Cass, 1999. 101-125. As well as: Schuster and Taub. "Single Mothers in East Germany." *Reinventing Gender: Women in Eastern Germany Since Unification*. Eds. Eva Kolinsky, Hildegard Maria Nickel. London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2003. 151- 171.

where social interaction was often formalized and monitored, the latter was often stylized "as an outpost of individuality, potential dissent, and alternative identity-formation" (Betts 6).

During the final years of the GDR, especially in 1989, a majority of citizens sought to reclaim the public sphere as the people's sphere by transferring expressions of discontent and disagreement with governmental actions from the private sphere unto cities' streets and market squares. Research has shown that family remained a major social space where the historic events of the time were discussed and interpreted (Fulbrook 2005)[6], without glossing over already existing tensions among family members or negating the pluralization of familial arrangements. Nonetheless, the active seeking of historical change and its negotiation was foremost expressed in public mass protests before it was channeled into equally public formats of roundtables or political negotiations shortly after the surprising opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9th, 1989. In shifting the space for demanding and discussing historical change from the private to the public sphere, the GDR citizens created a counter-balance to the numerous public acts of state organized celebrations. The struggle for interpretative power over the public imagination of the GDR and its future is best exemplified by the overlapping mass-events on October 7, 1989. On this day, the ceremonial act celebrating the GDR's 40th anniversary at the *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic) in Berlin was accompanied by statewide demonstrations of citizens demanding political reforms. Their battle call "Wir bleiben hier!" (We remain here!) can be read as much as a reaction to the thousands of people who had fled the country since the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border in May 1989 as it can be understood as an attempt of recapturing the public domain and defending the citizens' impact on the political process and consequently the public and political sphere.

While the demise of the GDR, as symbolized by the opening of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, was primarily cast in public events that were supposed to embody the merging of one wrongfully separated people, the realization of deep-rooted and long-lasting feelings of alienation between East and West Germans once again shifted the negotiations of historical change back to the

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[6] Especially Chapters 3 and 13.

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private sphere and notions of family.[7] With the immense changes rapidly emerging in the public sphere

and due to their significant impact on every aspect of life – ranging, for example, from rising rents to

widening consumer options or the adoption of West Germany's Legal Code – the family became once

again the social construct that was charged with outbalancing the instability of the public sphere. As

Kolinsky (1998) summarizes: "When the social marked economy and political unification set the social

transformation of post-communist Germany in motion, the family occupied a central position in the

estimation of East Germans and often gained special significance as a retreat from state intrusion" (16).

Even more than in the GDR, after 1989 the family became the primary social constellation to counteract

not only "the harsh consequences of reunification, such as unemployment anxiety" (Uhlendorff 210), but

also the interruption of social relationships outside the family, for example with colleagues or neighbors.

These relationships had in most cases been close-knit and intimate in the GDR, but often deteriorated due

to the growing competition on the job market and an overall social instability (Uhlendorff 221). In light of

the changing public sphere, the family post-1989 "has taken on a new idealized meaning," since "it

represents a remaining realm of solidarity" (Rudd 531).[8] Even though, sociological research about the

family in post-1989 Germany confirms a "pronounced family orientation" (Uhlendorff 211) and frames it

as reaction to the prevalent uncertainties in the public sphere, the demise of the GDR also annulled the

state's deliberate penetration of the private sphere. While the significantly dropped divorce rate among

East Germans after 1989 (Schuster/Traub 2003) provides evidence for the re-evaluation of the family and

its reemergence as a potentially stable retreat, the equally low marriage rate can be seen as a reaction to

the vanishing state regulations and incentives especially for married couples.

Nonetheless, as is indicated by the width of social transformations outlined above that had to be

absorbed in the private sphere, the social space of family remained under the influence of public

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[7] Among the public events celebrating the German unification were spontaneous gatherings of West Germans on inter-German bordering crossings welcoming East Germans, who often crossed into the West in their Trabis (Berdahl "Go Trabi Go" 62) or organized events like the celebration on the occasion of the signed unification treaty that took place on Oct. 3 1990 at the Brandenburg Gate.

[8] See also Dennis. "The East German Family: Change and Continuity." *Recasting East Germany. Social Transformation after the GDR*. Eds. Chris Flockton, and Eva Kolinsky. London: Frank Cass & Co, 1999. 82-100.

discourses. As Lewis (2004) suggests: "Ultimately, the family's success [in post-1989 Germany, R.C.] depends on its adopting the right cultural practices and outward signs of social class and distinction appropriate to its aspirations" (228). While Lewis' exact definition of "success" remains unknown, her findings point to the significance of familial negotiations of the often disparate discourses about societal values and beliefs in post-1989 Germany. The cultural imagination of familial bonds researched in this study shows a similar investment in constructing family as social and representational space where experiences related to the historical transformation of 1989 are articulated, challenging normative definitions of family constellations in the process. Despite family's crucial role within the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany, scholarly contributions of the past decade have mainly focused on generational approaches in literature (Eigler *Gedächtnis und Geschichte* 2005, Weigel 2002) and cultural studies (Jureit/Wildt 2005). The oversight of family as vital component in the cultural imagination of post-1989 Germany can be attributed to a scholarly tendency to focus on creations of subjectivity and on separating gender roles from the presumably ahistorical, social conformist concept of family. Hence, familial arrangements in the aftermath of the GDR's demise have primarily been approached in social sciences, particularly anthropology (Berdahl "Consumer Rites," "(N)ostalgie") and sociology (Kolinsky 1998, Kolinsky/Nickel 2003, Huinink/Kreyenfeld 2006). Here, gendered perspectives prevail, mainly foregrounding the impact of the more traditional concepts of femininity in West Germany on the self-perception and social integration of East German woman, who had been accustomed to equal participation in the work sphere, despite the prevalence of conventional gender roles within the domestic realm of the GDR (Harsch 2007, Hering 2009).

In the field of literary and cultural studies, family as social and symbolic space has mainly attracted attention in memory and specifically Holocaust studies. Here, the emphasis has been on the family as crucial social constellation for working through historical and personal trauma (Rosenthal 2010 [1998]) and for the transfer of traumatic experiences across generations (Hirsch 2008). Whereas research about the GDR and post-1989 Germany in their real and representational contexts has often adopted the

central concepts of loss, trauma, and nostalgia (Boym 2001, Scribner 2003, Pinkert 2008,

Todorova/Bunzl/Gille 2010) from the terminology of Holocaust studies, it has mainly ignored family as

experiential and symbolic concept.[9] A noteworthy exception is Hell's study of *Post-Fascist Fantasies*

(1997) that addresses the "paternal narrative of the antifascist hero" as hegemonic founding discourse of

the GDR and hence approaches narrative imaginations of familial arrangements as part of "the GDR's

legitimatory discourse of antifascism" (254).

Studies about the GDR and Germany since the unification have over the past 25 years established

a vivid interdisciplinary research field. The GDR continuous to be approached by various disciplines and

the failed socialist utopia offers rich material to numerous scholars. This is, among other fields,

exemplified in the relatively recent turn in political theory and philosophy towards communism as viable

concept to assess the global and financial crises of the 21st century.[10] Historians, in contrast, have focused

on reconstructing the GDR's emergence in post-war Germany, but have also engaged with the

circumstances of its failing (e.g. Jarausch 1999, Fulbrook 2005). In literary studies, scholars have

approached post-1989 literature from a variety of angles, offering thematic or chronological overviews

(e.g. Wehdeking 2000, Grub 2003, Knobloch/Koopmann 2003, Reimann 2008), addressing specific

characteristics of individual works or a group of texts (e.g. Nause 2002, Twark 2007, Twark 2011), as

well as analyzing literature as a part of commemorating the GDR after the historic turn of 1989 (e.g.

Eigler *Gedächtnis und Geschichte* 2005, Cooke 2005, Besslich u.a. 2006). This latter scholarly approach

is also represented in the field of memory studies that is, in light of the growing temporal distance to the

GDR's existence and its demise, particularly interested in the modes of "remembering and rethinking the

GDR" (Saunders/Pinfold 2013) within the unifying Germany.

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[9] Once could speculate that because of the charged position of family in the ideology of the "Third Reich," it turned
into a marred concept after 1945, which would explain why scholarly interest in the family focuses mainly on the
historical eras before 1945.

[10] I have been alerted to this trend by Pinkert. "Toward a Reparative Practice in Post 1989 Literature: Christa Wolf's
City of Angels." *Memory and Postwar Memorials: Confronting the Past as Violence*. Eds. Marc Silberman and
Florence Vatan. New York: Palgrave McMillan, forthcoming. Pinkert also points to Badiou. *The Communist
Hypothesis*. London: Verso, 2010 as well as Douzinas and Žižek, eds. *The Idea of Communism*. New York: Verso,
2010 as works that exemplify this trend.

This study connects to previous scholarship in that it emphasizes the interconnectedness of social and cultural discourses in negotiating the historical transformation of 1989. I argue that post-1989 literature stages familial arrangements within and beyond the traditional ideal of the nuclear family as the social imaginary space where Germany's GDR-past and unification-present are negotiated. At the same time, the texts enter a discursive realm in which notions of family, particularly their functions for conceptualizations of the self are broached and debated. With the aim to create an extensive archive of literary imaginations of family and to provide an innovative contribution to the scholarly field of GDR and post-1989 studies, I have selected 13 novels that can be categorized as *Wenderomane*, in order to show how these text examine the meaning of historical change through imaginations of family in Germany after 1989. As Reimann (2008) argues, the genre of the *Wenderoman* "bildet die Geschichte des Jahres 1989/90 nicht in historiographischer Manier ab, sondern dokumentiert die Grundgefühle einer Gesellschaft, gibt Auskunft über das Befinden der Menschen und greift Diskussionen auf, die tiefer gehen als der Tagesjournalismus der Presse und Medien" (9) [does not represent the history of the years 1989/90 in historiographical manner, but documents a society's general feelings, provides information about people's condition and takes up discussions that go deeper than the daily journalism of press and media.]. The texts in this dissertation, hence, have a narrative link with the events of 1989, but beyond that also cast the historic upheaval as prerequisite for negotiating processes of the past and present that are carried out within familial arrangements. The selected *Wenderomane* represent the development of the genre over the past 25 years, with the earliest text being published in 1993 and the latest one in 2011. They further include authors from East and West Germany and range from bestsellers to novels that have received less public attention, thus providing an extensive archive of German post-1989 literature and its investment in the textual imagination of family. In order to attend to all representative dynamics related to familial arrangements, this study analyzes relationships that are located within more traditional family constellation, such as the relationships between parents and children or spouses, as well as social structures, such as friendships and extramarital affairs, that exist alongside the ideal of the nuclear family, but have here been subsumed under the notion of familial arrangements since the text vest them with

similar affective dimensions, involving feelings of love, care, and support. Further, the narrative construction of these relationships foreground their family-like characteristics through portraying the affirmative affects of caring and supporting as structurally relevant for sustaining the relationships. Friendships and love affairs as elective or voluntary kinship relations (Godbeer 8) are hence imagined in the novels as conceivably stable intimate social sphere that is not only positioned in opposition to the public sphere, but more importantly presented as counter-balance or placeholder for absent familial arrangements. The prevalence of these familial bonds situated outside of the traditional notion of the nuclear family, especially in early post-1989 texts, can be read as a commentary on the social fragmentation and pluralization of the family before 1989 that were now challenged through more traditional conceptualizations of family prevalent in West Germany. At the same time, it indicates that the cultural imagination addresses moments of crises particularly through challenging the ideal of the nuclear family as traditionally sanctioned sphere of normalization. In this regard, the return of more traditional familial arrangements in recent post-1989 texts, particularly those addressing the GDR past, hence not only suggest the penetration of the public sphere by the discursive realities of the West and its privileging of more conservative family structures, but also insinuates that individual experiences of crises continue to be expressed through their culmination within as well as their endangering effect on the nuclear family.

While post-1989 writings can thus be approached as fine-tuned indicator and archive (Seyhan 12) of societal developments, the texts selected for this study all share an investment in the concept of family as socio-imaginary space of counter-discourses that in the novels primarily seek to negotiate public modes of constructing and remembering the GDR in the unifying Germany, while concurrently addressing discourses about globalization and individualization.[11] In these contexts, familial arrangements are shaped as crucial social and representational space in which a repeatedly resurfacing longing for belonging

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[11] For a discussion of counter-discourse/counter-publics see Warner. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 49–90. For individualization see Bauman. *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001. As well as Bauman. *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty.* Cambridge: Polity, 2006. For the particular effects of globalization of families see Sherif Trask. *Globalization and Families: Accelerated Systemic Social Change*. New York: Springer. 2010.

concentrates. The texts hence suggest a desire for defined and cohesive interpersonal bonds that develop

adjacent to social and economic trends of expansion or separation and appear as imperative constellation

for complexity reduction in the 20th and 21st century.[12]

Within the archive of selected texts there are noticeable shifts with regard to the familial

arrangements that are portrayed as significant in addressing the historic transformation of 1989. The

respective textual constructions of kinship relations further intersect with specific plot components and

temporal foci. The earliest post-1989 texts, published within the first five to six years after the opening of

the wall, are, for example, mainly concerned with the challenges of the immediate post-wall years. The

narratives approach this time mainly through a singular perspective. These texts, such as Königsdorf's *Im

Schatten des Regenbogens* (1993) or Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma* (1994), question family

connections and ruptures that existed before 1989 and revisit previous definitions of familial and other

forms of belonging. They emphasize friendships as crucial social and affective structures in post-1989

Germany and imagine them as family-like constellations that provide an imaginary stability and

"familiarity" within a changing society that is mainly perceived as alienating.

This emphasis on an estranging and partially unsettling post-1989 society continues in novels

published between the mid- and end-1990s, but their focus shifts to narrations of childhood and

adolescence in the Third Reich and post-war Germany, whereas the GDR is mainly treated as a sidenote

or even only appears as a narrative void. Texts such as Maron's *Animal Triste* (1996) or Becker's (1999)

Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen exemplify a continued interest in disparities between East and West

Germans, which are still cast as the defining characteristic of German society post-1989. Related to their

emphasis on narrations of remembered childhoods, theses texts start to foreground the negotiation of

relationships between children and parents, especially their lasting impact on adult protagonists. In a

second vein, the texts continue the reflections on the social and private meanings regarding married

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[12] For trust as social mechanism of complexity reduction see Luhmann. *Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*. Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1973.

couples or love relationship and their significance within the rapidly changing society of the unifying Germany.

The challenges of the early years after the caesura of 1989 come to the fore again in the texts published after 2000. With the beginning of the 21st century and due to the increasing temporal distance to events of 1989 and 1990, texts such as Precht's *Die Kosmonauten* (2003) or Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet* (2004) again approach the immediate years after the demise of the GDR and chronicle the struggles in the unifying Germany through poly-vocal narrations. These novels continue to be invested in highlighting the charged interactions between West and East Germans. While they comment on these societal tensions through the narrations of romantic, extramarital affairs between a female East German and a male West German protagonist, they generally construct a panoramic view of affective relations within and beyond the socially contingent ideal of the nuclear family and thus emphasize the multitude of experiences in post-1989 Germany.

From 2005 onward, a noticeable shift in the narrative imagination of family takes place. The texts published around this time, such as Schulze's *Neue Leben* (2005) and Meyer's *Als wir träumten* (2006), establish a representational connection between the imagination of post-1989 Germany and the GDR, particularly with regard to family as social construct. They hence "highlight certain continuities between socialism and post-socialism, thereby challenging […] notions of total rupture present in many popular representations of socialism's collapse" (Berdahl "Consumer Rites" 35). The texts' heightened interest in narrative constructions of the GDR coincides with a growing representational investment in the tensions among East Germans (and less between East and West Germans) that are often carried out within familial arrangements. The subsequent return to more traditional nuclear family arrangement as structural element of the plot appears as a narrative trend of the past five years. It is most famously exemplified in works such as Tellkamp's *Der Turm* (2008) or Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011) and its position as representational stronghold in approaching the GDR is underscored by Meinhardt's newly published *Brüder und Schwestern* (2013).

Despite the shifting emphases in narrative construction of familial arrangements, intergenerational relationships, particularly between parents and children, constitute a representational current that emerges, with varying force, in the majority of the texts published between 1993 and 2011. Among the texts selected for this study, Sparschuh's *Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995) is the only exception. It appears that the parent-child-nexus is an especially significant representational construct in the literary imagination of historical transitions or times of crises, as is suggested by the genre of the *Väterliteratur* in West Germany (Fischer/Lorenz 2007) or the crucial function of the "paternal narrative" in the founding discourse of the GDR (Hell 1997). Similar to these textual representations of parent-child-conflicts, post-1989 literature constructs intergenerational tensions as highly gendered social interactions in that the negotiations of historical and personal transformation are mainly carried out within same-sex constellations, for example between mother and daughter or father and son. While intergenerational same-sex interactions often exhibit a negative valence, friendship as *intra*generational relationship that is often imagined between same-sex participants is in contrast defined by affirmative affects. This disparity is heightened by the fact that post-1989 texts portray these elective kin relations in opposition to failing familial arrangements, underscoring their narrative construction as familial substitutes for the protagonist. The representational foregrounding of gendered familial interactions is also apparent in the narrative imagination of relationship between spouses or extramarital lovers that come to represent intragenerational familial constellation between opposite sexes. Post-1989 literature charges these voluntary kinship structures with opposing perspectives and interpretive approaches to the GDR, its demise, and the German unification, hence relocating public discourses about the evaluation of the GDR's utopian project and its position within German history to the private sphere. The significance of gender is especially noticeable in representations of East-West-couples that are almost exclusively made up of female East German and male West German characters and cast as extramarital affairs, which suggests their fleeting and uncommitted nature. Narratives often develop these couples along stereotypical gender assumptions that are additionally intensified through the inclusion of respective East and West German stereotypes. In these extramarital affairs, the female East German partner, for example, is often portrayed

as purely driven by emotions, which connects to the narratives' emphasis on the characters' sexual

desires. In contrast, in the literary imagination of couples where both partners are from East Germany,

opposing attitudes or political stances with regard to the GDR and the German unification appear to

derive less from gender differences. While the narratives use these East German couples, often spouses or

partners in a long-term relationship, to represent the diverging post-1989 experiences among East

Germans, the differences in the partners' behavior and attitude are less connected to gender. Transferring

the contested project of German unification to affective and gendered dimensions of familial

arrangements, the texts amplify the areas of tensions between East and West as well as among East

Germans and, thus, provide a model for approaching the conflicts that take place on a larger social scale.[13]

The narrative construction of elective kinship relations positions them at times clearly opposite especially

charged topics within public discourses, for example about the Stasi, by emphasizing modes of openness,

understanding, or good-willed ignorance. While the texts never gloss over the differing post-1989

experiences, especially of East and West Germans, the inclusion of these alternative modes of East-West-

exchanges, does not only point to an alternative to the prevalent narrative models of hostile post-1989

encounters, but rather also suggests that friendly and open-minded approaches could be more common

than public discourses about alienation and mutual disregard between East and West Germans might

suggest.

Public debates, particularly about the GDR, are also echoed in the disparate representations of

East and West German familial arrangements, particularly in the degree by which conflicts affect family

bonds. While post-1989 texts emphasize the impact of 1989's historical transformation on kinship

relations in both East and West Germany, conflicts and struggles that are framed as connected to these

events or its results, appear to have a stronger effect on East German protagonists and their familial

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[13] See for example: Carstens-Wickham. "Gender in Cartoons of German unification." *Journal of Women's History* 10.1 (1998): 127-157. As well as: Dueck. "Gendered Germanies: The Fetters of a Metaphorical Marriage." *German Life & Letters* 54.4 (2001): 366-376.

constellations.[14] Causes for familial tensions that the texts relate to the aftermath of the GDR's demise

and the experiences of uncertainty in the unifying Germany range from unemployment and domestic

abuse to infidelity and political disenchantment, thus spanning a broad spectrum of societal and personal

issues in post-1989 Germany. Whereas representations of East German families in the texts selected for

this study often falter in the attempt to negotiate these struggles, West German families prove more

successful in working through tensions and ruptures brought on by German unification. Hence, in cultural

representations of familial arrangements after 1989, the ruptures of the private sphere are experienced

more intensely in kinship relations between East German characters, which are simultaneously portrayed

as already under pressure in the GDR.

As the above discussion of modes, trends, and shifts in the literary imagination of family in East

and West German post-1989 literature demonstrates, this study seeks to provide an innovative

contribution to the archive of representational approaches in German culture after the collapse of

socialism. In focusing my analysis on the multifarious and socially contingent familial arrangements in

post-1989 writings, this project contributes to the recent scholarly discussions about the significance of

the private sphere in the cultural imagination of the GDR and post-1989 Germany (Lewis 2009, Betts

2010) and beyond (Pisters/Staat 2005, Chopra-Grant 2006, Krasner 2010). Through the inclusion of

parent-child-relations and affective relationships that are positioned alongside the normative ideal of the

nuclear family or matrimony, this study expands the existing research scope that has been particularly

focused on these familial constellations (e.g. Eigler *Gedächtnis und Geschichte* 2005, Nagy/Wintersteiner

2012). If the analyses of relationships between parents and children has been included in previous studies,

they are often mainly concerned with texts that fit the definition of family- or generational novel (e.g.

Halverson 2006) and/or post-1989 writings that address familial arrangements in the context of the

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[14] The destabilizing impact of the German unification on West German configurations of self and nation within
cultural representations has been analyzed as "Westalgie," meaning a longer for the Federal Republic of Germany
before 1990 (Plowman 2004, Boyer 2006 esp. pp. 379f.).

Holocaust and the aftermath of the Third Reich (e.g. Söder 2009, Rutka 2010).[15] This study hence

connects with this interest in intergenerational familial constellation and extends it not only to literary

constructions of the GDR and post-wall Germany in contemporary German novels, but also beyond the

literary imagination of the nuclear family as well as family novels.

My readings of these textual representations of family after 1989 are mainly interested in

uncovering the modes of renewal in engaging with the moments of historic turmoil and upheaval

constructed in the novels. Approaching Boym's (2001) concept of "reflective nostalgia" as a first step in

refocusing the analysis of post-socialist culture beyond traumatic experiences, this study challenges the

prevalent scholarly focus on representations of loss and trauma in the cultural imagination of post-1989

Germany. While the texts selected for this dissertation continue to include expressions of nostalgia or

mourning in their narration of familial struggles after the demise of the GDR, they are at least equally

invested in productive and reflective forms of coping with the past, by emphasizing that post-1989

experiences of ruptures and loss were often transformed into modes of healing and renewal. This

investment has been neglected in prominent discussions of post-1989 literature or mainly been reserved

for the analysis of humorous texts (Nause 2002, Twark 2007, Twark 2011). In emphasizing experiences

and representations of loss and trauma, scholarship remains to be dominated by a one-sided discourse

about East Germans and their experiences after 1989, ultimately negating their spaces for agency as well

as their literary processing. As this study demonstrates, post-1989 literary imagination highlights East

German's agency in coping with the sudden historic change and the ensuing personal devaluation that has

been recorded and discussed outside of literary studies (Flockton/Kolinsky 1999, Glaeser 2000, Berdahl

"Consumer Rites").

In my analysis of narrative constructions of family in post-1989 literature, I draw on the concepts

of agency, memory, and space. I have selected these concepts as access points for my close readings,

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[15] For a discussion about *Familienromane* vs. *Generationenromane* see: Galli/Costagli. "Chronotopoi. Vom Familienroman zum Generationenroman." *Deutsche Familienromane. Literarische Genealogien und internationaler Kontext.* Eds. Matteo Galli and Simone Costagli. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010. 7-20. Print.

since they are interrelated and, as I will discuss in more detail below, of particular importance in the

context of post-1989 Germany. Approaching the imagination of family through these concepts focuses

my analyses that demonstrate how narrative constructions of family intersect with the textual

representation of memory, agency, and space in post-1989 literature. Hence, each of the concepts reveals

a significant component of the literary imagination of family after 1989, while analyzing these narrative

constructions of family simultaneously provides insights into the narrative representation of memory,

agency, and space and their specific function in post-1989 literature.

Previous scholarship has discussed the interrelation between memory and space (Nora 1989,

Bergson 1991) and has emphasized their mutual influence. In this study, I argue that this

interconnectedness is heightened in post-1989 Germany, where material manifestations of public and

private spaces become important social contexts as well as archives of widely diverging political and

private memories. This importance has increased through the commercialization of previously private

modes of GDR remembrance, frequently oversimplified in the term *Ostalgie*.[16] Through the revival of

consumer goods previously limited to the GDR and rather shunned or ridiculed by the Western markets,

the two formerly separated commercial spheres intersect after 1989, leaving a noticeable imprint on

public and private spaces, where the *Berliner Stadtschloss* is, for example, rebuild opposite of the

Ampelmännchen-Shop or *Nutella* and *Nudossi* fight over the supremacy of the breakfast table.[17] The

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[16] For critical discussions of this term see for example Berdahl. "(N)ostalgia for the Present: Memory, Longing, and
East German Things." *On the Social Life of Postsocialism. Memory, Consumption, Germany.* Ed. Matti Bunzl.
Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. 48-59; Eigler. "Jenseits von Ostalgie: Phatastische Züge
in 'DDR-Romanen' der neunziger Jahre" *seminar* 40:3 (2004): 191-206; Boyer. "Ostalgie and the Politics of the
Future in Eastern Germany." 18 (2006): 361-81; Hyland. "'*Ostalgie* doesn't fit!': Individual Interpretations of and
Interactions with *Ostalgie.*" *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR. Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities.*
Eds. Anna Saunders, Debbie Pinfold. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 101-115.

[17] For modes of engaging with GDR consumer goods post-1989, particularly their musealisation see Cooke.
Representing East Germany Since Unification. From Colonization to Nostalgia. Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005, esp.
chapter 5; Arnold-de-Simine. "The Spirit of an Epoch Is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books but Also in Pots
and Frying Pans": GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life" *The GDR Remembered. Representations of the
East German State since 1989.* Eds. Nick Hodgin, Carolin Pearce. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. 95-111;
Paver. "Colour and Time in Museums of East German Everyday Life." *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR.
Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities.* Eds. Anna Saunders, Debbie Pinfold. Basingstoke, New York:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 132-146.

economic, political or architectural opposition between East and West translates into tensions between public and private sphere that are also reinforced in the narrative imagination of the unifying Germany, which positions family almost exclusivley in the private sphere. Further, in addition to tying them to the social construct of family, post-1989 literature situates the negotiation processes of disparate public and private discourses about the GDR and the German unification within houses or apartments, consequently marking them as private spaces. These spaces hence come to represent historical oppositions (for example between East and West Germany, between socialism and capitalism) through their material infrastructure as well as through the communications between their inhabitants that take place here.

Similar to the intersection of space and memory, in the real and representational context of post-1989 Germany, space and agency connect in the public and private sphere. The mass protests of 1989 were manifestations of personal and political agency that were consciously positioned in public spaces, claiming visibility of people's demands and their inclusion in government decisions. After the opening of the wall and with the onset of the unification process, this agency quickly vanished within Western discourses that were predominantly invested in perpetrator-victim narratives (Arnold-de Simini/Radstone 28-29), limiting the publicly acceptable terms in which East Germans could represent themselves and their GDR experiences (Gallinat 160). Post-1989 literature, hence, locates the negotiation of these experiences within and across familial relationships and constructs it as a prerequisite for performances of agency in the unifying Germany. As the texts emphasize, negotiating the past is in turn connected to a character's ability to access his or her past and the texts selected for this study repeatedly underscore the significance of familial memory exchange and transfer in post-1989 Germany, particularly about the GDR and post-war Germany.

The chapters of this study are organized alongside the concepts of agency, memory, and space that have guided my close readings. The first chapter "Unfamiliar Spaces" focuses on the intersection between representations of the family and narrative configurations of space. It highlights the processes through which characters disconnect their private sphere of the family as the space of belonging from the

public sphere of the state as a space defined by alienation. Since the stable realm of the family continues

to be an imaginary for the majority of East German characters, they remain spatially and emotionally

displaced. Nonetheless, the texts emphasize productive and reflective approaches towards the characters'

displacement, for example, by portraying their efforts to free themselves of constricting and abusive

family constellations, re-imaging familial arrangements through elective kinship relations, and re-defining

their spatial surroundings.

The second chapter "Performing Agency" is particularly interested in the mutual dependency that

post-1989 literature establishes between familial relationships and a protagonist's performance of agency.

Agency is here understood as a character's ownership of intentional action (Eilan/Roessler 2003) that in

the specific context of post-1989 Germany manifests as "ein[en] starke[r] Willen der Ostdeutschen, in der

Umbruchphase Chancen der Lebensgestaltung zu nutzen" [East Germans' strong will to make use of the

chances for arranging their lives during the period of change] as well as "ein hohes Maß an

Handlungskontrolle, das es ihnen gestattet, sich auf die neuen Verhältnisse einzulassen" (Hinrichs/Priller

15) [a high degree of controlling one's actions that allows them to engage with the new circumstances].

The particular importance of agency in post-1989 is underscored by the finding that "[e]in

Transformationsergebnis wird von den Betroffenen offenbar nur dann als erfolgreich empfunden, wenn

ihnen Gelegenheit gegeben wird, die Abschaffung, Veränderung oder Neugestaltung von Strukturen, in

denen sie sich bewegen, durch ihr eigenes Handeln zu beeinflussen" (ibid. 13-14) [the result of a

transformation is apparently only perceived as successful by the people involved, if they receive the

opportunity to impact the elimination, alteration, or recreation of structures, within which they exist,

through their own actions]. At the core of the chapter are the many instances of "mutual othering"

between East and West German characters that become visible through the narrative device of "hybrid

life narratives." These can be understood as a particular mode of engaging and impacting the altered

social circumstances with the goal to reclaim agency. These narratives are autobiographical constructions

of either East or West German characters that playfully engage with, seemingly absorb, and ultimately

undermine the stereotypes they face in public or semi-public social interactions, which consequently allows the characters to negotiate a position of agency. The novels construct familial arrangements either constructed social spaces where hybrid life narratives are challenged or as a retreat where characters can renegotiate meanings of the self in a context that is less charged than the social interactions located in the public sphere. Post-1989 writings are clearly invested in emphasizing the dependency of agency with a characters' willingness to address the past and enter a critical engagement with the dominant public discourses that might challenge private autobiographical configurations. The texts present familial arrangements as crucial social constellations through which characters can approach their past and enter negotiating processes regarding the experiences in the public sphere and the constructions of the past located there.

The familial memory narratives that Chapter 2 portrayed as key component in developing a stance of agency after the demise of the GDR are at the core of Chapter 3 "Memory Contests" that analyzes the multiple narrative manifestations of the past in post-1989 literature. Here, I am foremost interested in the tensions between political and private memories that define the memory contests of post-1989 Germany and are mainly carried out within and across familial constellations. The findings of this chapter demonstrate the particular importance that selected texts place on parent-child-relationship for the transfer and negotiation of memories, which simultaneously illustrate the shifting narrative focus from elective kinship relations to more traditional familial arrangements in the literary imagination of Germany after the fall of the wall. These modifications in narrative constructions of family develop alongside a representational move "from monolinear, autobiographical narrative[s] to polyvocal, multi-perspectival fictional texts" (Saunders/Pinfold 7) as well as from reflections of memory in earlier texts to performances of memory in later writings.

Overall, this study proposes a reading of post-1989 German literature that highlights modes of engaging with the past that are focused on renewal through a close examination of their interconnectedness with familial arrangements. While literary representations of the GDR, its demise, and

the German unification process do not exclude experiences of traumatic loss, I argue that the texts simultaneously demonstrate an investment in productive and reflective modes of engaging with past and present challenges connected to the historic events of 1989. The texts selected for this study emphasize that a character's approach to 1989 as a historic moment of possibilities is determined by familial relationships. This does not suggest exclusively affirmative attitudes of the texts to family as socially constructed space, but rather indicates that all texts stress the importance of familial arrangements in negotiation the meaning of historical change through the example of 1989. Despite a particular investment in the ideal of the nuclear family, the texts portray heterogeneous kinship relations. Further, renewal and healing as coping mechanism are not exclusively linked to secure or presumably stable family arrangements. Rather, they at times depend on revisiting traumatic experiences located within the social realm of the family, on a character's opposition to destructive or abusive family relations, or on the re-organization of familial relationships by creating new familial bonds. Hence, family remains a charged and contested social and representational concept that post-1989 literature nonetheless constructs as significant impact on a character's approaches to 1989 and the unifying Germany.

In foregrounding these productive and reflective approaches to the GDR's demise and the German unification, this study highlights discourses beyond notions of nostalgia that pervade the cultural imagination of post-1989 Germany. Hence, it does not only expand the interpretative framework of German post-1989 literature, but also suggests an alternative reading of people's coping mechanism in the light of sudden historic change and quickly dissolving ideologies. Despite the uniqueness of the German post-socialist process due to the state's immediate integration into an already existing Western state (Hogwood 42), the investment of post-1989 literature in productive approaches to the past and in family as social and representational space where these approaches can play out also provides innovative access points for post-socialist studies beyond German literature.

As political discourses and public remembrance practices in Germany continue to be defined by often oversimplified paradigms such as "*Alltag* versus *Unrechtsstaat*; consumer culture versus state

oppression; *Ostalgie* versus political debate; *bunt* (colorful) versus *grau* (grey); perpetrator versus victim" (Arnold-de Simine/Radstone 28), post-1989 literature provides a more nuanced approach to the GDR past and the German unification. Without glossing over individual experiences of loss and disillusionment during the demise of the GDR and Germany's unification, the texts cast these moments of historical upheaval and rupture also as occasions of renewal. By integrating these representational notions into the scholarly discourse about German culture after 1989, this study seeks to create an opening for the mergence of new discourses about the significance of familial bonds and the meaning of historical change in the 21st century.

Chapter 1: Unfamiliar Spaces

In the fall of 1989, thousands of people flooded the streets of major GDR cities from Leipzig to Berlin. Regardless if they gathered every Monday or assembled on city squares just once, their slogan "We are the people!" did not only set out to regain their voice within the government's politics, but also reclaimed public space as the people's space. Protest marches, such as the famous *Montags-demonstrationen* in Leipzig, or public gatherings, like the demonstration on Alexanderplatz in Berlin on November 4, 1989, carried many citizens' long-held private frustration and dissatisfaction into the public sphere for the first time. Set against the state-organized parades and marches held on various occasions throughout the year – the last time on the GDR's 40th anniversary on October 7th 1989 – the significance of these peaceful public protests becomes apparent. In 1989 space served once again in the Benjaminian sense "as a central category with which to register and track the changes wrought by modernity: space, in this way, [became] a central forum for the unfolding of history and its consequences" (Fisher/Mennel 11). In the context of the historic events of 1989 and after, space keenly registers and reveals the interconnectedness of the public and private spheres. The *Wende*[18] as well as the ensuing German unification were public processes that marked the public sphere (politics, media, geography etc.) just as intensely as they changed the individual living circumstances of German citizens' with regard to the public (employment[19], school) and private realm (familial arrangements, housing etc.). Family as socially contingent and constructed space located at the intersection of private and public sphere, is on the one hand deeply influenced by state policies and the surrounding society and on the other hand creates a

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[18] The term Wende is used in public discourse to describe the time from the dissolution of the GDR in 1989 until the German unification in 1991. I am using it since it has become a scholarly established term, but am fully aware of its problematic implications, among others that it was first used by the GDR leadership, for example the general secretary of the SED Egon Krenz, to announce a change in the politics of the GDR.

[19] "By the end of 1991, output in the manufacturing and energy sectors stood at only 60 per cent of its pre-unification level and recovery from this deep depression began only at the end of 1992. The total numbers employed fell from 9.7 million before unification to 6.6 million in 1994. In industry itself, the numbers employed fell by four-fifths – from 3.3 million to 660,000 in 1998. In the case of the farm sector, 750,000 jobs, or two-thirds of the total, had been lost within two years of unification. Overall for all sectors, by 1994, only one in four of those in employment still worked at their original enterprise" (Flockton/Kolinsky 5).

partially secluded site within this external framework with particular rules and mechanisms. This intersection of private and public spheres with their respective spatial arrangements and their culmination in the realm of family makes space an important access point to fully understand family in post-1989 Germany society and culture.

The fundamental importance of space for a comprehensive understanding of 1989, is underscored by the fact that questions of and about space mark the 40-year-long separation of the two German states as well as the protests that ended this status. Next to its far-reaching political and existential consequences, the Berlin Wall, for example, established specific and often unusual spatial circumstances. It manifested the division of the already divided city of Berlin as well as the separation of Germany that had begun with the formation of two German states in 1949. The wall substantiated the co-existence of two Germanys aligned with two different international superpowers. It was a materialized expression of the Cold War and made it impossible for all directly and indirectly involved to ignore or overlook the various political and ideological boundaries reinforced through cement and barbwire. In addition to these "external" consequences, the wall also established a new spatial order inside its borders. Limitations, regulations, and impossible actions often dominated the spatial arrangements in the GDR. Crossing the border into so-called western countries was as difficult as it was dangerous to attempt sneaking over to the "other side" without official permission and paperwork. Traveling was complicated for the average citizen and any kind of movement beyond the boundaries of the GDR required long-term planning, various applications, and often a flawless resume (cf. Ladd 19).[20]

Even after the opening of the Berlin wall, space remained a significant concept in the respective perceptions of East and West Germany. As Lefebvre (1991) has argued in his seminal work about *The Production of Space*, "[…] every society – and hence every mode of production with its subvariants […] – produces a space, its own space" (31). Thus, for forty years the socialist East Germany and the capitalist

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[20] This was different for seniors and celebrities. For the latter it was often specifically their "flawed" behavior (meaning open criticism of the regime) that earned them the permission to leave the country, though then permanently.

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West Germany had produced unique social spaces on their respective territories that after 1989 had to be united into a coherent nation state. Traveling across the newly dissolved borders was therefore still like traveling into a foreign country. Easterners and Westerners alike encountered their neighboring yet foreign state with open eyes and the spatial facts of this visual encounter where among the early sensual impressions that formed the very first picture of the "other" state as the following description by Mary Fulbrook (2005) emphasizes: "When in November 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, Westerners were aghast at the state of East Germany: the crumbling housing; the pot-holed, cobbled roads; the brown coal dust and chemical pollution in the industrial centres (sic) of the south; the miserable offerings in the shops; the relative paucity and poor quality of consumer goods; and the ubiquitous, spluttering, Trabant or 'Trabi' cars" (1). All of these visual, auditory, and olfactory impressions seem to culminate in the color *grey* that has been used in numerous representations of the East and, for example, featured prominently in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's imagination of the GDR in his film *The Lives of Others* (2007).

The appearance of cities in Eastern Germany has improved, and even though Helmut Kohl's 1990 prognosis that the entire former territory of the GDR would soon turn into flourishing landscapes ("blühende Landschaften") has turned out not to be accurate, there have been significant renovations and refurbishments in many inner cities across the former territory of the GDR (the most prominent example probably being Dresden and the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche). Nonetheless, these architectural improvements cannot counterbalance the spatial impacts of a continuous emigration from the East that leaves apartments and houses empty and city boulevards sparsely populated.[21] The various results of the unification process – ranging from economic conditions and employment to the architectural appearance of inner cities – hence all intersect in the specific spatial circumstances of post-1989 Germany.

The literary imagination of post-1989 Germany demonstrates a keen interest in space as significant representational and social construct. Thus, post-1989 literature reflecting on the opening of

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[21] Presented in great detail for example by Mai. *Abwanderung aus Ostdeutschland. Strukturen und Milieus der Altersselektivität und ihre regionalpolitische Bedeutung* Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004.

the wall and the ensuing unification process emphasizes a close connection between the developments or alterations in familial constellations and a character's spatial experiences in post-1989 Germany. The interconnectedness of space and family in literary representations is not a recent development and family novels of the 19th century already indicate the interrelation of time, space, and literature. The division of private and public sphere arising during the 19th century deeply impacted family life and its literary representation. New forms of labor due to industrialization dissolved the entity of homestead and workplace and created new gendered roles in- and outside of the home. The nuclear family came to the fore and slowly replaced living arrangements that included extended family. The private sphere gained importance, which further focused more attention on the construction and development of private living quarters, for example through interior design. This new significance of the private sphere and the socio-imaginary construct of family is already prevalent in 19th century literature and continues to resurfaces in cultural representations ever since.[22] In order comprehensively address family as social and representational construct through which literary texts negotiate the meaning of 1989, it is necessary to examine human-space-relations as portrayed in novels about the *Wende*.[23] As the subsequent analyses show, feelings of alienation and estrangement dominate the interpersonal relations as well as human-space-relations in post-1989 narratives. Fictional representations of heterogeneous familial arrangements on the one hand clearly record the impact of altered spatial experiences typical for the post-1989 context. On the other hand these representations indicate that strained or dissolved family ties that at times already

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[22] For the sociological development of the family see: Hubbard. *Familiengeschichte: Materialien zur deutschen Familie seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*. München: Beck, 1983. Evans/Lee. (Eds.). *The German Family: Essays on the Social History of the Family in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*. London: Croom Helm, 1981. For fictional reflections of this development see for example: Leo Tolstoy. *Anna Karenina* (1877). Theodor Fontane. *Effi Briest* (1894). Thomas Mann. *Buddenbrooks* (1901).
[23] Kort in *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (2004) distinguishes between three human space-relations (**without** the dash between human and space) that will be discussed further below. Here, I want to point out that I consider human-space-relations (**with** a dash between human and space) to be more adequate for the post-1989 context, since in literary representations of the time, space functions as an agent of its own, creating a relationship with the individual in which both appear to exhibit equal power.

originate in the GDR create particular spatial needs after 1989.[24] Spatial experiences and kinship relations

in the novels are interdependent, meaning that a character's disposition within the family influences his or

her perception of space, which in turn impacts the character's familial arrangements. Further, literary

representations go beyond solely addressing the spatial experiences in post-1989 Germany and engage

with the spatial, emotional, and ideological "displacement" known from the public discourses about

society and family before and after the GDR's demise.[25] The discussion of these spatial challenges (literal

and metaphorical ones) is as important in the narratives as playing with their possible solutions, which

aligns with Elisabeth Bronfen's (1999) claim about the importance of space as independent agent in a

given text:

> […] representations of concrete space by no means merely have a referential function.
> Rather, they are in themselves meaningful, indeed self-reflexive. On the level of
> signification a tension is created, since these actual spaces are already semantically
> encoded, encodings which in part correspond to conventional perceptions of localities,
> and in part, however, contradict or transcend them. In addition to such semantic
> encodings of actual spaces, the descriptions of the way in which the protagonist […]
> behaves in a given space, and of the effect this space has upon her, also illustrates that the
> meaning of a space is determined by the character who inhabits and passes through it.
> (11)

In line with Bronfen's approach, this chapter analyzes the literary imagination of four familial

arrangements and the specific spatial circumstances that define them, revealing the impact of 1989 that

narratives place on kinship relations and their particular spatial contexts. First, I discuss the narrative

construction of matrimony and the ways it is impacted by the opening of the Berlin Wall and German

unification. The examples of three literary couples demonstrate that in the narratives an emotional

distance is accompanied by a spatial distance between partners, which inhibits their ability to reconcile

and reunite. Post-1989 novels further reveal the search for and establishment of alternative spaces that

accompany the formation of alternative kinship constellations. These alternatives range from short-term

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[24] As discussed in the introductory chapter, family in this study refers not only to the social imagination of the nuclear family, but includes kinship relations that are not included in the traditional definition of the nuclear for example married couples without children and unmarried partners living together in a committed relationship.
[25] See for example: Reinhard. *Lebensformen Europas. Eine historische Kulturanthropologie*. München: Beck, 2006. Especially Chapter II.1. Partnerschaft, Ehe, Familie, here section e) Vom Triumph der Kleinfamilie zur Auflösung der Familie? p.223-226.

sexually-driven solutions in the form of extra-marital affairs to more permanent arrangements like community living or cliques. As the second and third sections of this chapter outline, all of these alternative familial constellations are proof for the multifarious ways in which protagonists aim to rethink traditional concepts of home, family, and belonging. Nonetheless, the success of these elective kinship relations is only temporary and they falter in the end. As the novels indicate, they fail because they cannot establish a stable alternative social space for the individuals set free by dissolving nuclear families. One result of the dissolution of traditional family models was the sharp decrease of the birth rate in the East. The fourth section of the chapter discusses the narrative mechanism through which this sociological fact is negotiated in post-1989 literature and shows that the conservatively assumed congruency of family and stability also emerges in post-1989 novels. Here protagonists with fragile personal dispositions are juxtaposed with imaginations of both financially and, most importantly, spatially secured families. Only the later have children, who populate the background of the novels focusing on the renegotiation of identities in the post-1989 realm.

Analyzing family arrangements in the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany with a spatial focus, thus, demonstrates that these texts construe 1989 as significant impact on the private sphere as actual spatial as well as social construct. Scholars have begun to apply spatial concepts to their analyses of post-1989 novels, mainly to understand how urban geographies or domestic spaces are negotiated in literature. The spatial focus in the majority of this research in German studies has been Berlin (e.g. Langer 2002, Costabile-Heming et. al 2004, Gerstenberger 2008), while other cities, geographical areas or specific social spaces remain at the margins of the scholarly discourse. Similarly, the access that space offers for an innovative reading of fictional family representations, in which family is imagined as a major site for the renegotiation of 1989, has not received attention. The same can be said about scholarship focusing on family representations post-1989, which tends to overlook the function and

impact of the specific spatial conditions post-1989.[26] Therefore, this chapter extends existing scholarship on post-1989 literary representations of space and family, most importantly highlighting modes of renewal in engaging with post-socialist Germany.

Building upon John Griffith Urang's (2010) study *Legal Tender* and one of its main arguments that a close reading of love stories gives way to the ideological stakes at play in the East German cultural imagination, I address the socio-imaginary space of family after the demise of the GDR as the site where the ideological stakes of the uniting Germany surface. The close readings reveal the familial patterns and configurations that literary texts construct in the place of traditional familial arrangements and highlight the ways in which the characters of post-1989 novels are seizing their chance to rethink and redefine traditional and modern concepts of home and belonging in the time of historic challenge.

Worlds Apart: Marriages Under Pressure

In her 2009 study of love and gender in the history of the German unification, Alison Lewis addresses the prevalence of strained marriages and divorces in post-1989 literature. According to Lewis, failed marriages channel and represent the social challenges of the time:

> So hat das Scheitern der Paarbeziehung für Figuren aus dem Osten Symbolcharakter und steht für den allgemeinen Verlust an Identität und Geborgenheit. Die auffällige Zahl der zerrütteten Ehen in diesem Romanen ist somit Zeugnis eines überwältigenden Eindrucks des Ausgeliefertseins an die neue Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsordnung nach 1990, den diese Paare wahrnehmen" (32).
>
> [Thus, the failure of relationship has symbolic meaning for the characters from the East and represents the general loss of identity and security.[27] The striking number of failed marriages in these novels is therefore evidence of an overwhelming impression of feeling subjected to the new social and economic order after 1990 that these couples notice.]

Approaching the textual representation of these failed relationships with a focus on their spatial circumstances and experiences reveals distinct differences for each partner. Within the narrative

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[26] See for example: Eigler. *Gedächtnis und Geschichte im Generationenroman seit der Wende*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2005. Lewis. *Eine schwierige Ehe. Liebe, Geschlecht und die Geschichte der deutschen Wiedervereinigung im Spiegel der Literatur*. Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach Verlag, 2009.

[27] The German word *Geborgenheit* describes an emotion arising from the combination of feeling secure, sheltered, and comfortable, which is difficult to capture in the English translation.

construction of struggling couples encountering the post-1989 world, each partner tends to be connected to a specific spatial realm that differs from the one in which the other partner predominantly exists. The couples' spatial separation in the narrative tends to develop parallel to each partner's evaluation of recent German history, with the spouse embracing the unifying Germany mainly situated in the public sphere or at least outside of the home and the partner with a more critical, possibly even skeptical approach to the unification primarily remaining at the private sphere of the family home. Subsequently, the texts emphasize the differences in each partners' experience of spatial circumstances after 1989, which are often opposed to each other, frequently prolonging the stereotypical ideological differences of the Cold War and continuing familial tensions already in place before 1989. The narratives hence connect spatial disparities and different interpretative stances regarding the recent German past, and both are constructed as crucial impact on the characters' opportunities to reverse the downward spiral of their relationships, which are portrayed as already under pressure before 1989.

Public vs. Private: Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*

Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen,* published in 1995, foregrounds the disparate post-1989 experiences of two spouses and links their respective approaches to 1989 to the spatial context in which the majority of their action is located. Sparschuh's text is among the first humorous reflections on the impact of 1989, a vein in post-1989 literature that is famously epitomized by Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, published in the same year. The novel's style and tone has therefore attracted much of the scholarly attention, marking it as a part of the picaresque tradition.[28] As Jill Twark (2007) has argued in *Humor, Satire, and Identity: East German Literature in the 1990s*, "these texts emerge out of established satirical tradition in GDR literature" (2) and react to the economical and cultural rupture of 1989. The countering of the *Jammerossi* stereotype in these novels is seen as a way to empower East German identities (ibid. 7). In addition to the novel's satirical tone, other scholars have focused on its subtitle

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[28] See Twark (2007). For contrasting argument see Nause. *Inszenierung von Naivität. Tendenzen und Ausprägungen einer Erzählstrategie der Nachwendeliteratur*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002, which describes the humoristic tone in the novels by Sparschuh and Brussig not as picaresque but as 'staged naivety.'

"Heimatroman" and analyzed the kind of *Heimat* developed throughout the narrative, particularly with regard to the tabletop fountain as central element of the plot and symbol of belonging.[29] The scholarly focus on the male protagonist and character-bound narrator Hinrich Lobek as well as the attention to the narratives' use of irony and satire has limited the attention that research has directed to the specific familial constellations in the novel and the impact of space on Hinrich and his wife Julia's inner-marital opposition. Their marriage is facing challenges, which the text attributes to their different attitudes regarding the post-1989 circumstances. The novel substantiates their emotional opposition through the differences in the spaces they (can) access.

At the outset of the novel, the main protagonist Hinrich is restricted to the private realm of the couple's apartment, a space that aligns with Kort's (2004) definition of a personal or intimate place. According to Kort "[P]ersonal place […] is the location of identity, moral integrity, and mystery. Personal place-relations, when not subordinated to social space, reveal their own real and potential value" (172). In opposition to this ideal set-up, the text underscores that protagonist's relation to the private space of the apartment is significantly influenced by social space[30] or public sphere since his unemployment restricts Hinrich to the private realm, the only exceptions being walks with the dog. His unemployment has resulted in spatial limitations and in an all-encompassing immobility: "Eigentlich bewegte ich mich gar nicht mehr, sondern saß seit meiner Abwicklung nur noch in der Wohnung herum" (10)[31] [Basically, I did not move at all, but only sat around my apartment since I had been downsized]. Looking at this self-description, the ironic attitude of the novel has to be kept in mind, since Hinrich's behavior and character strongly resembles the West German stereotype of the slow-minded and immobile East German. Hinrich's immobility is nonetheless noteworthy, particularly because of his unsettling relationship with apartment to which he is confined:

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[29] See: Langer. *Kein Ort. Überall. Die Einschreibung von "Berlin" in die deutsche Literatur der neunziger Jahre.* Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag 2002**,** p.151-3. Magenau, "Berlin Prosa." *Text der Stadt – Reden von Berlin. Literatur und Metropole seit 1989.* Eds. Erhard Schütz, Jörg Döring. Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 1999. 59-70.
[30] According to Kort (2004) social/political space "is created by the relations of people to one another, the structure of those relations, and the laws and mores that regulate them" (20).
[31] All references refer to: Jens Sparschuh. *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen.* München: Goldmann Verlag, 1997.

Dann wieder – und das lag wahrscheinlich daran, daß ich mit Freitag eingesperrt war – kam mir die Wohnung wie ein Tier vor. Das aufgeklappte Maul der Tür – und hinein, ins dunkle Innere. Der lange Flur – die Speiseröhre, die dich verschlingt. Fenster, trübe Augen, die den Blick nach draußen kaum freigeben. Die Rohre sind Adern; Därme die Abflussrohre, ingrimmig glucksend [...] Unterm dünnen Putz, im mürben Fleisch der Betonwand, das flimmernde Nervengeäst, die elektrischen Leitungen. (11-12)

[Then again – and that was probably because I was locked in with Freitag – the apartment appeared to me like an animal. The gaping muzzle of the door – and into the dark inside. The long hallway – the gullet devouring you. Windows, dreary eyes that barely clear the view to the outside. The pipes are veins, intestines the waste pipes, chortling grimly. […] Beneath the thin plaster, in the concrete wall's brittle flesh, the glimmering neural branches, the electric cables.]

The description of the apartment as an animal devouring the protagonist suggests feelings of constriction and unease, undermining the positively connoted "intimacy" usually associated with the private living quarters. The character-bound narrator's remarks focus on the prohibited connection to the outside that the dreary windows epitomize and that enclose Hinrich in a prison-like space. The text portrays the protagonist as inactive, immobile, and unable to influence his surroundings or to move beyond simply noticing his dire spatial circumstances.

The character's sphere of action widens after he successfully ends his unemployment by picking up work as a salesmen for tabletop fountains. Nonetheless, as a door-to-door salesman he remains tied to the private realm of apartments, if even now to other people's private spaces. The limitation of his character to personal and intimate spaces as defined by Kort is further highlighted by the fact that even the source of his eventual success as a salesman originates from the secluded space of his private craft room. Hinrich refurbishes one of the tabletop fountains and turns it into an ostalgic souvenir with a platform that resembles the shape of the GDR and the famous Fernsehturm of Berlin as fountain, making a spatial miniature of the GDR the core of his economic success. Additionally, Hinrich decides to keep this real reason for his success a secret from his colleague and superior and thus, the product's visibility is limited to apartments and private associations.

In contrast, the text positions Hinrich's wife Julia in the public sphere and foregrounds that she despises her husband's immobility (11), which she equates with mental inflexibility and stubbornness.

She did not lose her job post-1989 and is portrayed leaving the private space of the apartment early each

morning (7) to go to a never clearly defined employer located in an office building (15). Unlike her

husband, she frequently enters the public sphere, if not for work, then to meet with her friend Conny. The

novel situates Hinrich and Julia for the most part in different spatial (in subsequently social) spheres,

which ultimately impacts their experiences of the other's dominant spatial circumstances and their

relationship. For the protagonist Hinrich, the world outside his despised apartment is perceived as just as

hostile (14), whereas it is described as Julia's predominant spatial context. This in turn allows her a

different realm for social interactions, while Hinrich remains severely socially challenged.[32] Here, the text

exhibits an interesting play with gender stereotypes in that it is the male partner who is limited to the

domestic sphere and the female who assumes the part of the breadwinner for the family. This inversion of

normative gender roles aligns with the satirical slant of the novel, but could also represent an ironic

commentary on the image of the emancipated East German woman or the emasculated East German man.

The failure of Julia and Hinrich's marriage at the end of the novel does not come as a surprise. As

the text suggests, their relationship fails not only because of their completely opposed experiences of

post-1989 Germany, mainly due to their different employment statuses, but also because they spatially

exist in two different worlds. While the spaces they encounter overlap at times, for example within their

shared apartment, their respective experience of these spaces is portrayed as opposed. Julia's moving out

towards the end of the novel is thus the physical manifestation of a distance and opposition that had

already developed within the privacy of their home after 1989.[33] It is, thus, exactly the family's

positioning at the intersection of private and public spheres that creates the friction between Hinrich and

Julia and ultimately cause their marriage to fail. The text constructs the couple's struggles along the lines

of the tensions arising between the private and the public spheres in post-1989 German society. Disparate

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[32] This of course might yet be another Western cliché of the East German taken to its extreme.
[33] The text does not provide information on the characters' relationship in the GDR. It can be assumed that there have been tensions and disagreeing attitudes before that lead up to Hinrich's and Julia's different approaches after 1989, but their interactions must have been different, otherwise Julia would not remark on the changes in Hinrich's behavior that she starts noticing since he is unemployed (e.g. Sparschuh 15).

discourses regarding the evaluation of the GDR past as well as the vision for the future ultimately find their way from the public/political sphere into the realm of the private and intimate, where they have to be negotiated. As Lefebvre (1991) points out: "Private space is distinct from, but always connected with, public space. In the best of circumstances, the outside space of the community is dominated, while the indoor space of family life is appropriated" (166). It appears that in the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany, the public space of politics and media increasingly limited East German's ability to appropriate their private space according to their ideals and wishes. In the case of the protagonist this creates the uncanny atmosphere he experiences in his own apartment. The text frames his inability and presumable unwillingness to communicatively engage with his surroundings and to address his and Julia's struggles as hindrance for the successful solution of their problems. By relocating the arguments from opposing public discourses regarding the GDR and German unification to the familial relationship in the private sphere the text amplifies the interpersonal tensions that can arise as a result of these disparate perspectives. Further, the emotional distance between both partners is narratively underscored by the text's spatial configuration that emphasizes the character's different approaches to the historical transformation of 1989. The novel particularly highlights that the absence of communication between spouses renders the negotiation of their differences and of the social challenges in post-1989 Germany unsuccessful. The ultimately failing matrimonial relationship, hence, indicates the stakes of social tensions that remain unaddressed and the challenges they can present to the project of the German unification.

East vs. West: Brigitte Burmeister *Unter dem Namen Norma*

Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma* intensifies the opposition between private and public spheres through the juxtaposition of East Germany and West Germany, even more so since both geographies are represented through characters that are originally from East Berlin. Published in 1995, Burmeister's novel does not subscribe to Sparschuh and Brussig's ironic style, but rather utilizes in-depth descriptions of personal relations before and after 1989 to paint a critical picture of the *Wende*. Here, a

couple's life functions as the screen onto which the impact of 1989 on individuals and their personal

relationships is projected.[34] While much of the scholarship on Burmeister focuses on her narrative

strategies, especially with regard to gender, her choice to place a failing marriage at the center of her post-

1989 narrative, has also attracted attention.[35] As Lewis (2009) argues with regard to the novel:

> Durch die Ehekrise der Hauptfigur zeigt Burmeister, wie Vorstellungen von der
> Kleinfamilie und den Geschlechterrollen innerhalb der Familie durch die Wende im
> Wandel begriffen sind. Kleinfamilien und Ehe haben ihre Anziehungskraft als utopische
> Orte verloren, an denen Hoffnungen und Wünsche erfüllt und Freiheitsbestrebungen von
> Mann und Frau befriedigt werden können. (117-18)
>
> [Through the marital crisis of the protagonist, Burmeister shows how perceptions of the
> nuclear family and of gender roles within the family are in flux because of the *Wende*.
> Nuclear families and marriage have lost their attraction as utopian spaces in which hopes
> and wishes can be fulfilled and the man's and woman's aspiration for liberation can be
> satisfied.]

Lewis' argument that the function of family as utopian refuge gets lost in the post-1989 context implicitly

supports Gaus' (1983) findings about the GDR as a niche society where the private sphere is charged with

high expectations regarding its ability to allow for personal freedom and self-fulfillment. Both scholars

present the family as a utopian space in the GDR and as a construct that only changed after 1989. This

neither matches the social reality of the GDR nor the way in which literature engaged with the private

sphere before 1989. In fact, "[U]nification itself resulted in a dramatic drop in [divorce, R.K] numbers to

an all-time low in the post-war era. While every fourth marriage ended in divorce in 1989 and the GDR

had one of the highest divorce rates in Europe, marriages became uncommonly stable with just one in five

ending in divorce in 1992" (Kolinsky "Women, Work, and Family" 109). As Gabriele Mueller (2013)

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[34] It is never explicitly stated that the two characters are married, but this is assumed in the majority of the
scholarship. What is certain is that Marianne and Johannes are in a long-term relationship.
[35] On narrative strategies see for example: Harbers. "Die leere Mitte : Identität, Offenheit und selbstreflexives
Erzählen in Brigitte Burmeisters Roman "Unter dem Namen Norma"." *Weimarer Beiträge* 50.2 (2004): 227-241.
Gebauer**.** "Vom "Abenteuer des Berichtens" zum "Bericht des Abenteuers": eine poetologische "Wende" im
Schreiben von Brigitte Burmeister." *Weimarer Beiträge* 44.4 (1998): 538/553, For a perspective on gender see:
Ledanff. "Trauer und Melancholie: 'Weibliche' Wenderomane." *GDR Bulletin* 25 (1998): 7-20. For a position of
Burmeister as female GDR author see: Kaufmann. "Adieu Kassandra? Schriftstellerinnen aus der DDR vor, in und
nach der Wende: Brigitte Burmeiser, Helga Königsdorf, Helga Schütz, Brigitte Struzyk, Rosemarie Zeplin." *Women
and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*. Eds. Elizabeth Boa/Janet
Wharton. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 216-225.

states "the 'withdrawal into the private sphere' become both a prevailing theme and an artistic strategy in the 1970s and 80s" (199) and literary works of the time broached the issues of alienation, loneliness, and estrangement within the family, for example in Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund* (1982) or Uwe Saeger's *Vom Überschreiten einer Grenze bei Nacht* (1988). The private sphere and the social realm of the family within were thus already strained before the historical rupture of 1989. But it was the upheaval of long-held beliefs, the fulfillment of dreams, and the disappointment of hopes that emerged in the fall of 1989 and during the ensuing years that caused many to reevaluate their familial relations as well. In Burmeister's fictional reflection on this altered status of the private sphere, the spatial distance between spouses as well as each partner's strong reservations regarding the other's living space heighten the alienation that defines their relationship.

Johannes, the male spouse in the couple, has decided to take a job in Mannheim (West Germany) and to leave Berlin, where he and main protagonist and character-bound narrator Marianne had lived until the post-*Wende* setting of the novel, . Since the text situates Johannes work in an office and Marianne work as a translator at home, they too embody the division between private and public already encountered in Sparschuh's novel. Here, the text intensifies this opposition by situating their work environment as well as their private, domestic space in West and East Germany respectively. In doing so, the novel highlights that the characters' spatial distance precedes their emotional detachment and the separation at the end of Marianne's visit to Mannheim. Similar to Sparschuh's characters, Hinrich and Julia, the ways in which Johannes and Marianne address post-1989 Germany differ greatly. Johannes is portrayed as East German character who has decided to leave his former political sentiments and opinions behind and to focus instead on defining a position for himself in the new society, willing and ready to adjust in order to fit in. Marianne, in contrast, wants to remain in Berlin, not necessarily for sentimental reasons, but as the text indicates, because she is convinced that the past of the GDR and the future of the united Germany will be negotiated there.

The spatial experiences constructed in the novel are dominated by Marianne's perspective as the character-bound narrator. The attitudes regarding East Berlin and Mannheim ascribed to her by the novel highlight the spatial opposition to Johannes, which prevails even when they are together. During a visit to Johannes, Mannheim is presented as the spatial symbol for all of West Germany, which overwhelms Marianne with its shimmering bluntness. Upon her arrival, the immaculate appearance of a Pomeranian seems to verify her mistrust towards the "other" Germany and in turn towards the space her husband has chosen for their future:

> Er sah so künstlich aus, ein Bild von einem Spitz. Die dunkelgrünen Hecken, das rötliche Pflaster des Gehwegs wie geschaffen für sein Weiß, noch weißer wenn er dort entlanglief, von seinem Grundstück bis ans Ende der Straße in sachtem Trippelschritt, der grazile Körper mit dem flauschigen Schwanz so leicht dahin, die Pfötchen aufgetupft in gleichmäßigem Rhythmus, und nach kurzem Aufenthalt, in geringfügig gesteigertem Tempo, genauso anmutig, monoton und unhörbar zurück zu der Gartenpforte, wo ein silbergrauer Herr ihm entgegensah, in der Tasche seiner Flanellhose gewiß den Schlüssel, mit dem er das reizende Geschöpf aufzog, bevor er es auf den Laufsteg entließ. (205)[36]

> [He looked so artificial, the very picture of a Pomeranian. The dark green hedges, the red pavement of the sidewalk just made for his white, even whiter when he passed along, from his property to the end of the street with gentle scurry steps, the delicate body with the fluffy tail ever so lightly, the paws dabbed in a steady rhythm, and after a short stay, with a slightly increased pace, just as comely, monotone, and inaudible back to the garden gate, where a silver-grey gentleman awaited him, in the pocket of his flannel pants certainly the key with which he wound up the charming creature before releasing him on the catwalk.]

Artificiality determines the entire scene. The unnaturally white, perfectly groomed dog reflects the equally sterile and uncanny surroundings. The dog and its silver-haired, flannel-pants-wearing owner in combination with the dark green hedges and red sidewalks stage a textbook image of philistine life. The protagonist is taken aback by this still life of suburban perfection and clearly assumes the position of an excluded on-looker. The narrative constructions of the daily interactions in her apartment complex in Berlin differ greatly from the exclusive privacy established by privately owned houses surrounded by hedges and other border-like demarcations. The protagonist's stay in Mannheim is hence defined by feelings of exclusion, which resurface again and again in her retrospective reflections of the visit: "An die

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[36] All references refer to: Brigitte Burmeister. *Unter dem Namen Norma*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994. Print.

Grundstücke reichte meine Vorstellung noch, in die Häuser nicht mehr. Aus den Fronten auf die Innenräume, die Ausstattung zu schließen, hätte mich im Spiel mit Norma gereizt. Allein gab ich auf und begnügte mich mit zufälligen Einblicken. Was verstand ich denn von echt oder unecht, von Stilen, in und out" (209-10) [My imagination could reach the properties, but not the houses. To draw conclusions about the interior space, the décor based on the outside had tempted me in a game with Norma. On my own, I gave up and was content with accidental insights. What did I know about authentic and fake, about styles, in and out]. Throughout her stay, the protagonist remains unable to cross the invisible social borders and to gain access to the inner workings of this society. A spatial alienation takes hold of her and she cannot move beyond the beautiful outer appearance of their neighborhood. The novel depicts Marianne as feeling illiterate and unknowledgeable regarding the interior of the houses, a private and intimate space so foreign she cannot even reach it imaginatively. Because she does nothing to change this situation but rather remains a passive on-looker, Marianne remains on the sidelines of the space and society she encounters in Mannheim. She cannot establish a positive relation to either the social/political places or to the personal/intimate space, both remain foreign to her.[37] In contrast, Johannes embraces his new environment and can picture a life in West Germany. Unlike Marianne, he is portrayed as already having crossed the social borders, which the narrative exemplifies through his ability to decipher the social codes of his new surroundings.[38]

The couple's spatial opposition is even more obvious in the protagonist's feelings upon returning to Berlin. The difference in Marianne's attitude towards Berlin compared to Mannheim is summed up in the description of her sentiments upon her arrival: "Alle Häuser, an denen der Zug jetzt vorbeifährt, sind

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[37] As Kort (2004) argues: "[r]elations to places are richly positive when places are both depositories of meaning and themselves evocative and significant. As places evoke something from persons and persons evoke something from places both are altered. There is potential in both persons and places that is actualized by their relation to one another" (199f.). None of these positive relations develop between Marianne and Mannheim, which heightens the intensity of her spatial alienation and demonstrates the extreme distance (physically and emotionally) between her and Johannes.

[38] "Er nahm einen Schluck und fing an mit den Grimassen und Geräuschen des Weinverkostens. Aus Spaß, dachte ich, lachte und lobte ihn, weil es so albern aussah wie echt. Er war gekränkt" (Burmeister 214). [He took a sip and started the grimaces and noises of wine tasting. For fun, I thought, laughed and praised him because it looked so ridiculously real. He was hurt.]

Häuser in Berlin. Die Stadt ist da, hat sich nicht von der Stelle gerührt, während man ihr für eine Weile den Rücken kehrte. Auf unverrückten Gleisen nimmt sie den Zug in sich auf. Ihre heimkehrenden Einwohner begrüßen sie im Stillen. Oder hörbar. Da bist ja, sagt weiter vorne eine Männerstimme und klingt gerührt" (175) [All the houses that the train is now passing are houses in Berlin. The city is there, it did not stir from the spot while one turned one's back on it. On un-displaced tracks it absorbs the train. Its homecoming residents greet her silently. Or audible. There you are, says a male voice further to the front and sounds moved]. Stability is the defining feeling that Marianne encounters upon her return. On the syntactic level the description oscillates between individual city parts or the train's path and Berlin as an encompassing whole. This rhythmic alternation moves linguistically from house to city to train tracks and back to city. Through the various descriptions of stability ("did not stir from the spot," "un-displaced") and the steady oscillation of her gaze, the text heightens Marianne's impression of the anthropomorphized city that is welcoming, enwrapping, even absorbing her. The narrative emphasizes a sense of belonging that the protagonist shares with the group of fellow travelers, but even outside this group she automatically assumes the position of a homecoming resident just by crossing her hometown's borders. The man's somewhat surprisingly heartfelt "There you are" uttered in Berlin dialect, marks him as another home-comer and resonates with the protagonist's feeling of recognition upon her return.

The public spaces described in Mannheim and in Berlin are fundamentally opposed. In both instances, Marianne arrives by train, a space that Bronfen (1999) terms "neutral territory," since "[t]hese are empty, free spaces which may have a revitalizing influence, since they do not make any demands upon the character who traverses them, yet they are also not experienced as private, protective spaces" (20). Upon her arrival in Mannheim, Marianne exits this neutral realm only to remain on the margins of the unknown public space she encounters. Thus, Mannheim is narratively rendered as what Bronfen calls "contemplative space" where "the subject, though centred in lived space, stands as a corporeal contemplative being in the periphery of the surroundings which it perceives only as frontal space, clearly demarcated from it" (51). Berlin in contrast functions as "atmospheric space," which "is an enveloping

space which the subject experiences directly and intimately and which is permeated by his or her mood. It expresses the ordinary bond between subject and space prior to the assumption of a reflexive or a functional position" (Bronfen 48). Even though the text positions Marianne in the neutral territory of the train, she connects emotionally with her familiar surroundings, reestablishing a close bond with the city upon her return from Mannheim, where this close connection between subject and space was clearly absent.

Marianne's focus on the stable character of Berlin is in contrast with her vivid descriptions of numerous changes in the first part of the book. There the protagonist details the alterations in her neighbors' and her own life that intersect with architectural alterations around them. After experiencing extreme alienation in the social and personal space of Mannheim, Berlin is portrayed as the un-displaced city that counterbalances Marianne's feelings of displacement. At the same time, Berlin's dirtiness and the predominance of concrete and cement is mentioned more frequently after her return, revealing a new sense for the city after visiting the green hedges and tidy sidewalks of Mannheim.[39] Despite these new elements in her perception of Berlin, it is here where she returns to an apartment she calls her own, "her" café and friendships that arose out of or survived the political turmoil of the past years. The text portrays these elective kinship relations as similar to the affective dimensions of matrimony and ties them to Berlin. At the same time, Berlin is cast as the city to which Johannes does not want to return, which symbolizes the couple's geographical and ultimately spatial predicament and through which the narrative reflects the intensifying marital crises.

As the novel exemplifies through Marianne's visit to Mannheim, neither Johannes nor Marianne can access each other's spaces. Their respective personal/intimate spaces are not identical anymore and

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[39] "Die Stadt dröhnte, aufgelebt im Abflauen der Hitze, die hier noch zwischen den Häusern stand wie eingemauert, von Asphalt und Pflastersteinen hochstrahlte, brandige Gerüche entfachte im Gemisch der Ausdünstungen aus Tor-einfahrten, geöffneten Fenstern, unterirdischen Gängen und Rohren. Staub und Abgase, Hundescheiße in zwei Meter Entfernung, Zuschauer über unseren Köpfen, Fußgänger dicht an an (sic) uns vorbei" (Burmeister 259). [The city was buzzing, revived in the waning heat that here remained immured between the houses, beaming up from asphalt and flagging, igniting smoky smells in the mixture of evaporations from gateways, opened windows, underground passages and pipes. Dust and exhaust fumes, dog shit two meters away, bystanders above our heads, pedestrians passing us closely.]

their attitudes towards the alterations in the social/political space differ greatly. The novel emphasizes that both spouses approach the historic changes of the present differently, which destabilizes their matrimonial relationship: Johannes addresses the historic transformation of 1989 by leaving his past behind and starting anew on the "other side" of the former border, embracing it as a historical moment of possibilities; Marianne, in contrast, is focused on consciously registering the alterations in her "familiar" surroundings and her neighbor's personal lives. While she as well approaches the unifying German as a historical constellation that opens up new possibilities, she also seeks a way to renegotiate the meaning of 1989 within the private and public spaces of East Berlin. The novel demonstrate how these differing attitudes create an emotional distance in their relationship that already existed before 1989 and when they still lived together in Berlin, but multiplies after 1989 and with every geographical mile between them. Johannes and Marianne cannot successfully exists in the other's respective "territory," which includes the geographic space they inhibit as much as the social and economical circles they chose for themselves post-1989. Their inability to negotiate their differences within their familial relationships is described as the result of a conscious refusal to compromise and adjust as well as a nearly physical rejection of the private and public spaces the other spouse has chosen. While Johannes moves to the West and seeks acceptance by his new West German colleagues, the protagonist stays behind and searches for ways to address the new social, political, and historical circumstances through observing and contemplating the changing public spaces and altered interpersonal relationship. The text, hence, describes the collapse of Johannes and Marianne's marriage as shaped by their inability to create a shared living environment as well as strong familial bonds. It ultimately fails because the social, political, mental, and emotional realms of their lives are opposed. Their struggles connect the question of space with the question of *Heimat* and belonging, which also feature as a prominent theme in Peter Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr*.

Germany vs. World: Peter Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr*

Among the novels discussed in this study, *Eduards Heimkehr* is one of the most well-known post-1989 texts. Published in 1999 as the third volume in Schneider's Berlin Trilogy it received wide

attention by literary critics as well as among scholars and has since been translated into English in 2000.[40] Schneider is among the West German authors who engage with the German unification, particularly the time shortly before and after 1989. His works belong to the most critically acclaimed writings about 1989 (the so-called *Wendeliteratur* discussed in the introduction) and as a West German author he inhibits a distinctive position within the literary negotiations of 1989.

Scholarship has, thus far, focused its attention on the novel's topography, especially the representation and function of Berlin, as well as on the negotiation of German history, specifically in regard to Germany's Nazi Past and the youth movement of 1968.[41] One of the most recent discussions of the book by Agnes Mueller (2008) takes a rather critical stand towards the novel and reads the book with a focus on gender and ethnicity, arriving at the conclusion that "[i]nstead of undermining antisemitism [sic],

sexism, and totalizing prejudices of East vs. West, *Eduards Heimkehr* affirms all of those stereotypical inscriptions" (253). In addition to highlighting aspects of Schneider's narrative that remain underrepresented in other studies, Mueller's findings reveal a tensions between the main protagonist Eduard and his wife Jenny that is ultimately spatially charged, which is the focus of this section's analysis.

For the majority of the novel, the spouses do not inhabit the same geographical space. Jenny remains in California with the couple's three children, while Eduard is taking up his new engagement at the (former East German) Institute of Molecular Biology and investigating his inheritance of an apartment

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[40] The other two works in the trilogy are *Der Mauerspringer* (1982, in English as *The Wall Jumper*, 1984) and *Paarungen* (1992, in English as *Couplings*, 1996).

[41] For studies regarding the function of Berlin see for example: Costabile-Heming. "Peter Schneider's 'Eduards Heimkehr' and the image of the 'New Berlin'." *German Studies Review* 25.3 (2002): 497-510. Lützeler. " 'Postmetropolis': Peter Schneiders Berlin-Trilogie." *Gegenwartsliteratur* 4 (2005): 91-110. For a discussion of the novel's rendering of German history see for example: Baer. "The hubris of humility: Günter Grass, Peter Schneider, and German guilt after 1989." *The Germanic Review* 80.1 (2005): 50-73. Mews. "The Desire to Achieve 'Normalcy' - Peter Schneider's Post-Wall Berlin Novel *Eduard's Homecoming*." *Studies in 20th and 21st Century Literature* (Special Issue on Berlin). 28.1 (2004): 258-85. Rinner: "Intergenerational Conflicts and Intercultural Relations: Peter Schneider's 'Eduards Heimkehr'." *Gegenwartsliteratur* 7 (2008):204-222. For an overview over Schneider's oeuvre see: Lützeler. "Phantasie, Widerstand, Mythologie: der Erzähler Peter Schneider." *Phantasie und Kritik*. Eds. Ibid. Berlin: Rowohlt, 2005. 9-77.

building in East Berlin. Eduard is challenged spatially by the unifying Berlin, since the all-encompassing and overshadowing construction sites discussed in detail throughout the novel define his spatial experience of the city. In contrast, Jenny, during her visit to Berlin, is more disturbed by the alterations in the behavior and attitude of Berlin's residents than by the architectural changes. Even though both are shown to struggle with alienation in the social/political space (interestingly making their experiences resemble more the ones of East Germans than West Germans post-1989), they face different challenges.

Their unease in the public spatial realm of Berlin is further increased by the absence of a personal/intimate space to which they could retreat. This personal space is missing on the one hand because Eduard is still living in a hotel room and thus in a semi-private/public space and on the other hand because he and Julia face a crisis on the intimate level of their marriage. As it turns out, Eduard is unable to sexually satisfy his wife, which the novel describes as a bigger problem for him than for her. This major element of the novel's side plot is a recurrent theme throughout the story and is only solved towards the end, where intimate and spatial experience once again coincide: Eduard is successful in finding an apartment for his family, who joins him in Berlin and, after being able to ensure Jenny's orgasm, the novel portrays an arrival at a spatially and emotionally secured family realm.

With regard to space, Jenny's character is dually charged. She mainly appears as a representation of the American West, the country where she and Eduard have lived for the past years, but she is further cast with regard to her non-German Jewish heritage that severely impacts their marriage.[42] Mueller (2008) summarizes the way in which Jenny is framed in the novel as follows:

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[42] Eduard, for example, avoids shouting stereotypical German words like "Halt" [stop], "Achtung" [attention] or "Stehenbleiben" [stand still] due to their charged post-1945 connotation (77). Jenny admits that during her first pregnancy she felt burdened with her family history and guilt about having a German as the father of her child (77). Despite all this, the narrator argues that "zwischen ihnen selbst hatte die Schuld der Nazigenerationen nie, auch nicht beim schlimmsten Streit, zu einem sichtbaren Konflikt geführt" (76f.). ["the guilt of the Nazi generation had never, even during the most heated arguments, led to an open rift between Eduard and Jenny themselves" (53).] Their marital struggles and spatial opposition undermine this assessment. All German citations referring to Peter Schneider. *Eduards Heimkehr.* Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2000. All translations into English from: Peter Schneider. Eduard's Homecoming. Transl. John Brownjohn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2000. Print.

Hence, the gender politics of the text, in as much as they concern Jenny, suggest a gender identity that is tightly bound to a Jewish identity, and that is laden with longstanding racist and sexist stereotypes. […] The character of Jenny thus epitomizes the traditional male sexual fantasy of the Jewish seductress, evoking a concept that I have elsewhere termed 'gendered antisemitism' and that is even more disturbing in its dubious constellation within what otherwise seems like a modern, enlightened female character. (246)

Building upon Mueller's emphasis on the interconnectedness of female and Jewish positionalities in Jenny's character, one can argue that in their marriage Eduard and Jenny ultimately renegotiate historically charged opposition. No matter if Jenny represents Americans or (non-German) Jews in this opposition, her juxtaposition with Eduard is spatially charged and develops along the lines drawn during World War II. The impact of this antagonism is further explained through the fact that the text presents Eduard's clearing of his grandfather's name as prerequisite for the couples' eventual reconciliation and "successful" intercourse.[43] It is only after refuting the misconceptions about his grandfather and after selling his inherited apartment building to squatters that the novel positions Jenny and Eduard within a presumably secure personal/intimate space. As I will discuss further below, the text underscores the particular importance of this private space as the location of long-term familial arrangements through its opposition to Eduard's fleeting affair with an East German colleague that the texts mainly locates in the public sphere.

Interestingly, among the struggling married couples in post-1989 literature discussed in this chapter, Eduard and Jenny are the only couple whose relationship actually survives the turmoil of the *Wende*.[44] The narrative suggests that this is due to the fact that neither of them is from East Germany and therefore the actual impact of the German unification on their identity and their job prospects is minimal and rather positive. Hence, the novel exemplifies that post-1989 texts construct West German families as better equipped to address the pressures of the historic transformation of 1989. Even though the rupture of

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[43] Part of the plot is the suspicion that Eduard's grandfather had unrightfully gained possession of the house that Eduard has now inherited. Squatters accuse his grandfather of seizing the house from its Jewish owner after the Nazis established a law against Jews possessing property.

[44] There are minor characters in other novels whose marital struggles do not end in separation or divorce, but as protagonist Eduard's success in saving his marriage is the exception.

1989 causes a temporary spatial separation and the displacement of both spouses, both characters are shown to experience the moment of uncertainty and change as one of possibilities, which the text exemplifies through their respective new employments. While it might not come as a surprise that a West German author constructs the West German nuclear family as social ideal that is able to withstand the tensions and pressures of post-1989 Germany, this study shows that East German authors subscribe to this narrative imagination of the presumable stable West German family unit as well.

Approaching the post-1989 literary imagination of matrimony with a spatial focus reveals the interconnectedness of spatial experiences and the alterations of familial relationships in the aftermath of 1989. While there are sociological studies and governmental reports that have recorded the impact of 1989 on families as well as architectural studies addressing the spatial changes in post-1989 Germany, literary representations of the unifying Germany emphasize the correlation of these two processes.[45] Post-1989 texts use the narrative construction of spatial oppositions to represent and underline the emotional distance between spouses, which are further constructed as decisive factor that hinders the characters in overcoming their spatial and inner-marital differences. Despite their critical approach to matrimony, the texts remain invested in kinship relations as socio-imaginary concept to negotiate the meaning of 1989. As I will discuss further below this is demonstrated by their construction of elective kinship relations that take the place of traditional familial arrangements and channel the characters' prevailing longing for community and belonging.

Islands Instead of Bridges: East-West-Affairs

As soon as the idea of Germany's unification took shape, cartoons and caricatures began to appear that compared the political process of the unification to marriage. This metaphor has prevailed

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[45] For recent studies on the family see: Scheller. "Partner- und Eltern-Kind-Beziehungen in der DDR und nach der Wende." *Familiale Lebensformen im Wandel*. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschehen. B19 (2004). Web. 26 Sept. 2012. Beck-Gernsheim. *Reinventing the Family: In Search of a new Lifestyle*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. Regarding the architectural changes in Eastern Germany see for example: "Neues Leben für ostdeutsche Städte," Sept 2010. Web. 14 March 2013. Or "Sozialverträgliche Sanierung ostdeutscher Innenstädte: Konsequenzen für die Versorgung mit Wohnraum und Gewerbeflächen." Web. 14 March 2013.

over the past 20 years and resurfaces nowadays mainly around October 3rd on the occasion of the unification's anniversary.[46] What is noteworthy about this trend is that the animation of the two Germanys united in matrimony is gendered in that the East is always constructed as female spouse and the West as the male partner, thus reflecting and reproducing, among many others, stereotypes regarding the role of the male provider as well as West Germany's economic superiority. Further, this casting aligns with findings of the feminist discourse that has exposed the female as the perceived "other." As Susan Morrison (1992) points out: "[…] the GDR was also depicted as "other." The "other" is doomed to definition and marginalization only in terms of the "dominant" […] As we know from the political events of 1990, the GDR has indeed lost its independent status and its identity is rapidly becoming blurred – at least officially – into that of the FRG" (45, quoted in Urang (2010) 195).

The literary imagination of post-1989 Germany has furthered this trend of the East's feminization by repeating the geographical infused gendering. In the representation of East-West-affairs, the female partner always originates from the East, which might be connected to the myth of the more sexually-liberated East German women (in comparison to their West German counterparts).[47] Jurek Becker's *Amanda herzlos* (1992) was one of the earliest novels that took up the topic of East-West-eroticism and is just one of numerous works that seek to approach 1989 through the representation of East-West-couples (Lewis 2008). While the image of the married couple lingered on among political cartoons, literary representations of the German unification have meanwhile replaced long-term marriage with short-lived and dominantly sexual affairs.

The rise of extra-marital affairs in post-1989 literature can be read as a critical commentary on the marriage metaphor of the unification. A long-term commitment between protagonists from East and West

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[46] A detailed discussion of this trend can be found in Dueck. "Gendered Germans: The Fetters of Metaphorical Marriage." *German Life and Letters* 54.4 (2001): 366-376 as well as the introduction of Lewis (2009). Further: Hanel. *Das erste Jahr: politische Karikaturen aus dem Jahre eins der deutschen Einheit*. Königswinter: Naumann-Stiftung, 1991.

[47] For discussion of the function of sex in the GDR see Herzog. *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. As well as the documentary by Meier. *Do Communists Have Better Sex* (2006).

appears in the texts as rather complicated the more time has passed between 1989 and the novel's

publication. Instead, the texts favor the short-term alternative of love affairs to portray the German

unification process and its challenges. These affairs are cast as the realm of escape from marital problems,

no matter if these are of emotional or sexual nature. While these affairs alleviate the protagonists'

struggles and sorrows for a while, they ultimately fail in the narratives. In this, they share an interesting

trait with the romantic plot of the so-called *Ankunftsromane* in the GDR.[48] As Urang (2010) outlines, in

these novels typical for the 1960s in the GDR, "a central love story tends to structure the plot and

contribute to the "arrival" of the protagonist(s). The curious thing about these love stories, however, is

that they usually fail" (64). In the post-1989 version of this plot, the East-West relationship is enlisted as

an entryway for the East German protagonist into the society of the unifying Germany that is ultimately

dominated by the West German societal model. The emotional connection between the partners is

described as a basis on which to encounter the new societal order. While the relationships of the

Ankunftsromane usually fail because the private relationship does not confirm to social and political

expectations, the affairs of post-1989 texts are ultimately unsuccessful because the partners involved have

different expectations regarding their union. Further, an affair is by definition framed as a short-term,

uncommitted encounter, in which people only engage for a limited amount of time. This means that in

employing an East-West affair rather than a long-term relationship or even marriage, post-1989 novels

cast their doubt on the strength of the East-West connection that was put forward through the matrimonial

metaphors used in the political and media discourse already shortly after the official German unification

in 1990.

Spatially, affairs are a literary trend that post-1989 texts clearly connected to the metropolis.

Romantic affairs in the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany are with few exceptions situated in

Berlin. The metaphorical character of the city as epitome of the German unification and the spatial

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[48] The most famous examples of this genre would be Reimann *Ankunft im Alltag* (1961) and Wolf *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963). For a detailed analysis see Urang (2010), Chapter 2 "Love, Labor, Loss," p. 61-93.

closeness of East and West mark this choice of location as rather obvious. The predominance of Berlin as the location for East-West encounters underscores the city's metaphorical position in the process of the German unification that arises from its unique position during the Cold War as the space where Russian and American interests came face to face with each other. After the opening of the Wall, Berlin turned into the stage on which symbolic acts of unification were performed and so evolved into the urban embodiment of the *Wende* and German unification.[49] Since matters of space and geography had been influential throughout Germany's 40-year-long division, spatial questions were at the foreground in Berlin from November 9, 1989 on, when the spatial separation of a city and a nation come irrevocably to an end:

> Um das Ende des kalten Krieges zu feiern, war Berlin mit Recht die weltweit bevorzugte Bühne. Nirgendwo hatten sich die weltmachtpolitischen Turbulenzen der zweiten Jahrhunderthälfte auf derart anschauliche, verwirrende, widersinnige Weise ausgewirkt. Kein anderer Ort war in so ausschließlicher Weise zum Symbolbild der Systemkonkurrenz geworden wie dieses Doppelgebilde: Zwei Halbstädte, die in allem als Antithese zur jeweils anderen konstruiert, trotzdem[50] unentrinnbar aufeinander fixiert waren. (Kil 373)

> [In order to celebrate the end of the Cold War, Berlin was rightly so the worldwide preferred stage. Nowhere else had the political turbulences of world power in the second half of the century made an impact in such a visible, confusing, and paradoxical way. No other place had been so exclusively the symbolic image of competing systems as this double formation: two half cities, that had been constructed in everything as the other's antithesis, and were nonetheless inescapably fixed on each other.]

Questions on how the political unification of the city could be implemented on a spatial, architectural level moved quickly to the foreground of political debates. The answer of spatial questions and concerns was pressing since the area that had been dominated by the Wall and its extensive border installation was now to become the center of the new, unified Berlin. Making the undertaking even more complicated, Berlin had to cope with 40 years of ideological and geographic division as well as with the remnants of the Third Reich and the architectural leftovers of previous centuries as the German capital. History

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[49] Among these symbolic acts are for example the opening of the Brandenburg Gate on December 22, 1989 with Helmut Kohl being welcomed by Hans Modrow; the New Years celebration 1989 also at the Brandenburg Gate; the parliament's decision on June 20, 1991 to move the seat of government from Bonn to Berlin.
[50] In contrast to Kil, I would argue that East- and West-Berlins fixation on each other did not exist *despite* but *because* of their antithetical relationship.

created the urban areas that Andreas Huyssen (1997) famously termed *The Voids of Berlin* and that

include the architectural and spatial voids that will continue to define Berlins' appearance. In contrast,

Costabile-Heming et al. (2004) interpret 1989 as the moment to redefine Berlin, since this historic turn

"has also afforded Berlin the opportunity to create a new image for itself, one that can serve as a counter-

balance to the city's politically charged recent history as the capital of Nazi Germany and former East

Berlin as the capital of the German Democratic Republic" (3). The two scholarly positions exemplify the

realm within which the future of Berlin was and is negotiated, paralleling the tensions and questions that

individuals had to face and address all over the unifying country.

The literary imagination of post-1989 amplifies the impact of a charged public sphere on familial

arrangements by locating the East-West-affairs either in the personal/intimate space of a characters'

apartment or at the sidelines of the social space in the metropolis.[51] The romantic affairs constructed in

post-1989 literature, hence, portray East-West-encounters on an intimate spatial and affective level. The

exchanges between partners come to represent, undermine, and challenge the negotiation of 1989 in the

public sphere and it is through the coalescence of social and intimate space, that the unification's risks

and chances emerge.

Doomed by Space: Irina Liebmann's *In Berlin*

The strong autobiographical influence in Irina Liebmann's novel *In Berlin*, published in 1994,

positions it within the first wave of writings from immediately after 1989 that mainly consisted of

autobiographical accounts, which is also the aspect of the novel that has received much scholarly

attention.[52] The distinction between autobiography and fiction remains blurred throughout the entire story,

which is told by a character-bound narrator in the first or third person, who addresses the protagonist

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[51] As seen for example in Hettche. *Nox* (1995) and Lottmann. *Deutsche Einheit* (1999).

[52] For an overview of the different thematic foci of post-1989 narratives see Grub. *'Wende' und 'Einheit' im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003. For the function of autobiography in Liebmann's works see: Marven. "'Die Landschaft ihrer Gedanken': Autobiography and Intertextuality in Irina Liebmann's Berlin Texts." *New German Literature. Life-Writing and Dialogue with the Arts*. Eds. Preece/Finlay/Owen. Oxford, Bern, Berlin et.al.: Peter Lang, 2007. 267-281.

sometimes as "Liebmann." She is the single mother of a teenage daughter, who only appears on the sideline of the narrative that focuses instead on elective kinship relations, such as the protagonist's friendships as well as her love affair with a West German film critic. Their first encounter occurs during one of the West German character's visits to East Berlin and while the text never addresses his family status explicitly, the reader is informed that he has children of his own, whom he does not want the protagonist to meet (102).[53] The secrecy of their meetings and interactions is heightened by their unspoken agreement that the protagonist has to wait for his calls and hence she never initiates contact (93). Through this the narrative suggests that the West German character is already in a relationship with somebody else.

In the beginning of their affair the partners see each other daily (66), but only for a limited amount of time, since the West German character always has to return to West Berlin before his one-day visa expires at midnight: "täglich gehen sie das Stück bis zur Grenze, Mitternacht läuft sein Visum ab, näher, noch näher, aber näher kann sie ihm nicht mehr kommen, denn dann steht der Zaun vor der Brücke, bis morgen [...]" (66) [daily they walk the stretch up to the border, his visa expires at midnight, closer, even closer, but she cannot get any closer to him, because then there's the fence in front of the bridge, until tomorrow]. As the text reveals in the characters' parting ritual, the spatial realities of the divided Berlin impact their relationship. The novel emphasizes that the couple has to arrange their meetings according to the political relations between the respective countries they come to represent. The public/political sphere, hence, interferes with the characters' private desires and dictates the spatial and temporal circumstances of their affair. Every meeting can only promise temporary unity before they have to part again at the border. When the text states "she cannot get any closer to him," it expresses both the couples' spatial separation at and through the border fence as well as the emotional gap that remains in place every time the partners have to part. While normalcy would have been difficult to achieve under the

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[53] All references refer to: Irina Liebmann. *In Berlin*. Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002.

conditions of an extra-marital affair in the first place, it becomes unattainable because of the characters'

residency in different and ideologically opposed states. During the visits of the West German lover they

spend time at the narrator's apartment, and thus in her private/intimate space, as well as walking through

the public space of her neighborhood. Thus, while the male character gains access to the narrator's spatial

surroundings, she remains on the outside of his daily spatial realms.

The protagonist's desire to remove the spatial limitations of their relationship and to unite with

her lover is portrayed as her reason to apply for a special visa that would allow her to stay and live in

West Berlin. The protagonist's wish to leave East Berlin for the West is intensified by feelings of

limitation and narrowness as well as the dull appearance of her spatial surroundings that are exemplified

through her perceptions of East Berlin:

> Kuttengrün, Lodengrün, Polizeigrün, Polizeiblau, Anorakblau, Wattejackeblau, Jeansblau
> bis grau bis Schmutzfarbe Blau, wenn sie Fahrt kriegt, die Bahn, in der schleifenden
> Kurve, erhöht sich das Klappern zum Heulen manchmal, quietscht rechts rum, rein in die
> Kastanienallee, wo es enger wird, dunkler, Putz platzt wie Rinde an den Fassaden, blüht,
> und an diesen Borken ebenso wie an den Einschusslöchern halten sich Dreckbatzen von
> vierzig Jahren, von fünfzig, von sechzig, das Trottoir wellt sich, Pflaster wechselt mit
> Pfützen und Erde [...] (14f.)

> [Frock green, loden green, police green, police blue, parka blue, padded jacket blue, jeans
> blue to grey to dirt color blue, when it get's going, the train, in the abrading curve, the
> clatter heightens into a howl sometimes, screeches to the right, into the Kastanienallee,
> where it gets narrower, darker, the plaster chips like bark of the facades, blossoms, and
> on these rinds as on the bullet wholes dirt lumps of forty, fifty, sixty years take a hold, the
> sidewalk waves, pavement changes to puddles and soil]

Dirty streets and crumbling buildings are the defining elements of the protagonist's spatial experience in

East Berlin. Houses still display signs of past wars and the protagonist guesses that they have not been

refurbished for 40 or 60 years. Similar to Marianne's train travel in Burmeister's *Norma* (1994), the

narrator encounters her surroundings from the neutral territory (Bronfen 20) of a streetcar. While moving

through the city, the narrator remains on the outside of the cityscape, an onlooker at the margins. Her

perceived social outsider status is, thus, replicated in her spatial relationship with East Berlin. She

accesses East Berlin as "contemplative space" (Bronfen 51) that she can perceive and analyze, but not

relate to on an emotional level. Consequently, the text emphasizes the protagonist's relief upon receiving

the special permission to live in West Berlin that results in her quickly abandoning the depressing

atmosphere of East Berlin.

The interconnectedness between the protagonist's spatial experience and her love affair is

underscored in the narrative construction of her first impression of West Berlin. Here the defining color

spectrum is golden and light, thus establishing a clear linguistic antagonism to the depiction of East

Berlin. While the narrative uses dark shades to describe the part of the city that kept the protagonist and

her lover apart, West Berlin where they could now be together more easily is described as an open,

moving, and golden space:

> Es steht die Victoria golden wie immer im Tiergarten über dem Kreisverkehr, Berlin
> unterwegs, alles dreht sich, das kleine, versperrte Berlin in den Mauern bewegt sich an
> dieser Stelle als Rad um die Frau herum, die Autos glänzen, auch wenn der Himmel
> bewölkt ist, sie glänzen, sie fahren in alle Straßen rein, so und so, so rum, so rum, ist alles
> nicht schlimm. (83)
>
> [The Victoria[54] stands golden like always in Tiergarten[55] above the roundabout, Berlin on
> tour, everything is turning, the small, barred Berlin within walls moves at this spot as a
> wheel around the woman, the cars glisten, even though the sky is cloudy, they glisten,
> they drive into all the streets, here and there, this way, that way, nothing is a problem.]

The atmosphere in this scene differs greatly from the previous description of East Berlin due to the color

scheme as well as the lightheartedness best captured in the narrator's final assertion that "nothing is a

problem," everything will be ok. Adjectives and verbs describing the polished and beaming atmosphere of

West Berlin dominate the picture and the protagonist's entire environment appears as golden and

glowing. Movement prevails within this scene, even though the protagonist is still located on its margins,

only witnessing the bustling traffic from a distance and not being situated in a car or a means of public

transportation. This is particularly noteworthy since narrative reflections on any kind of movement are

absent in the first scene described above, despite the fact that there she is situated in a streetcar and

actually moving through the city. While the narrator remains again on the margins of the contemplative

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[54] This refers to the Victoria Column designed in 1864 to commemorate the Prussian victory in the Danish-Prussian
war and featuring a statue of goddess Victoria.
[55] District of Berlin.

space she perceives, this time she expresses a positive emotional bond to this unfamiliar urban site. The two scenes exemplify how the text underscores the fundamental opposition of East and West Berlin through the protagonist's spatial experiences, which are influenced by the love affair and simultaneously shape the relationship.

Against the protagonist's expectations, her move does not have a positive impact on the affair. To the contrary, the partners' geographic closeness in the absence of a dividing border strains the relationship and results in the characters' separation. Having lost the major incentive to live in the West, the protagonist now experiences a strong desire to return "home" to her old apartment, which supports the assumption that the texts establishes a close connection between the affair and the protagonists' spatial experiences. As Gabriele Eckart (1997) argues, it is during one of her trips back to her apartment in East Berlin, that the protagonist realizes the reason for the affair's failure: "Es scheint die übergroße Nähe zu sein, die ihn abstößt, die Leichtigkeit, mit welcher er sie jederzeit erreichen kann" (316) [It seems to be the abundant closeness that repels him, the ease with which he can reach her anytime]. The novel hence represents the inner-city border not as an obstacle but rather a prerequisite for the affair. Overcoming it again and again each day only to abide to its laws by midnight heightened at least the West German lover's feelings for the protagonist. Removing the impact of the border from their love's equation also seems to remove the aura of their affair. As the text shows, living in the same state, on the same side of the border, turns this love affair into one like every other fleeting relationship. Whereas the few limited hours the couple was able to spend together in East Berlin were always exclusively located in the intimate, private spaces and reserved for each other, the affair is now negatively impacted by the concerns and issues of daily life that push the previous core interests of romance and sex aside.

Within these spatial and emotional circumstances, the novel underscores the protagonist's intensified longing for the affective social dimensions of her life in the GDR that are embodied through her friends and the familiar spaces in the East. Therefore, after the opening of the Wall ("Berlin ist offen." 171 [Berlin is open.]) she immediately relocates to the East, frantically searching for a new apartment.

While rediscovering her neighborhood, she encounters the post-1989 destruction of buildings with a feeling of loss (171f.) Despite the absence of the border, the glistening of West Berlin does not expand into the East. Instead, gigantic construction sites that do not shine or beam at all replace the narrowness of East Berlin but intensify its dust and bleakness. As the text emphasizes, the characters' feeling of loss does not arise from the destruction of the East alone, but rather manifests itself in the concurrence of a parting lover, the subsequent spatial isolation in the West, and a spatial disorientation in the East. For the protagonist, this sequence of losses does not result in trauma, though, but is rather addressed through another spatially framed response: the protagonist's new beginning in a new apartment in the East at the end of the novel.[56] Eckart (1997) summarizes the novel's conclusion as follows: "Der Text endet mit einer minutiösen Beschreibung dessen, was man sieht, wenn man mit der S-Bahn von Schönefeld bis zum Zoo fährt, und mit der Nachricht von einem neuen Umzug innerhalb Berlins" (321) [The text ends with the minute description of what you see if you ride the suburban train from Schönefeld to the Zoo,[57] and with the news of a new move within Berlin]. Through the depiction of this train ride the text demonstrates how the protagonist seeks and finds a way to experience the spatial unification of the city, which appears to out-balance the loss of love through the separation from the West German character. Once again, the narrator experiences the surrounding public/political space by moving in the neutral territory of the train through the charged space around her. The protagonist's perception details everything she sees and refrains from an embellished picture of Berlin's diverse society (174). Due to the missing influence of a lingering love affair, the protagonist experiences Berlin with open eyes and for the first time rather objectively. The contemplative space, thus, turns here into atmospheric space that encloses the protagonist: "The subject is situated at the centre of the space, experiences the space as enveloping and is imbued with his or her own mood" (Bronfen 49). By travelling through the enveloping space, the protagonist physically experiences the new spatial realities of the unifying Germany and appears to

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[56] For a discussion of traumatic post-1989 responses see for example: Scribner. *Requiem for Communism*. London: MIT Press, 2003. Lewis. "Unity Begins Together. Analyzing the Trauma of German Unification." *New German Critique* 64 (1995): 135-159.

[57] Schönefeld is a district of Berlin in the East, Zoo is a district in West Berlin.

embrace them. Thus, the text emphasizes that the affair's failure is ultimately an advantage for the protagonist and an initiator of renewal, since her open-minded approach to the space of the unifying Berlin is cast as dependent on her lover's absence. The novel's representation of a doomed East-West affair can hence be read less a pessimistic commentary on the contested unification project as a cautious warning that the successful merging of the two Germanys will require the long-term commitment of both parties. As the texts makes clear, the removal of the Berlin Wall does not suffice for actually sustaining a union of East and West Germany. Hence, the text employs the particular spatial circumstance of Berlin before and after the opening of the Berlin Wall to negotiate the larger social challenges of German unification. The East-West affair functions as narrative device to reflect and frame the historical transformation of 1989. While Liebmann's work focuses on the spatial experience of an East German character, Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr* details the impact of an East-West-German love affair on the West German protagonist residing in Berlin. I have previously addressed the texts' investment in narrating matrimonial tensions as representation of disparate spatial experiences and individual displacement. Now I shift the analytical focus to the particular spatial agenda surrounding the charged East-West-encounter that the text uses to frame the protagonist's experience in Berlin.

Doomed by Gender: Peter Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr*

In Schneider's *Eduard's Heimkehr*, an affair between protagonist Eduard and his East German colleague Marina from the former East German Institute for Molecular Biology accompany the marital dissonances that have been described above. Thus, the novel sustains the stereotypical gendering of post-1989 affairs (female East, male West), but in contrast to Liebmann's texts, presents the perspective of the West German male through the focalization of an external narrator. The spatial distance and sexual disharmony between Eduard and his wife Jenny precede and precipitate the affair with Marina, and it is especially Eduard's inability to bring Jenny to a sexual climax that the text presents as significant cause for his extra-marital relation with Marina. The narrative strand focused on the subject of sexual

satisfaction starts early in the novel with a newspaper headline that Eduard encounters while riding in a

streetcar:

> Eduards Blick wurde von einer Schlagzeile auf dem Titelblatt der Zeitung angezogen, die sein Nebenmann sich jetzt wie zum Schutz vor das Gesicht hielt. ‚Frauen in Ex-DDR orgasmusfreudiger', las er in riesigen Buchstaben. Unwillkürlich senkte er den Kopf, um die kleiner gesetzten Unterzeilen zu entziffern. ‚Experten fürchten um die Entfremdung des DDR-Sex', las er dort, ‚Orgasmusrate der Frauen in der ehemaligen DDR mit 37% deutlich höher als in Westdeutschland – 26%.' (25)

> [Eduard's eye was caught by a headline on the front page of the newspaper which his neighbor was now holding protectively in front of his face. "EXPERTS FEAR GDR SEX TAKEOVER," proclaimed in bold capitals. Involuntarily, he lowered his head so as to decipher the lines in small print below. "At 37%," he read, "female orgasm ratio in the former GDR is substantially greater then West Germany's 26%." (15)][58]

The quoted headline erotically charges the geographical opposition of East and West, heightening the

spatial difference with sexual distinctions. The text develops the two main female characters of the novel,

Jenny and Marina, alongside the stereotypes outlined in the newspaper article. Hence, Eduard and

Marina's extra-marital affair is represented as the sexual counterpart to Jenny and Eduard's orgasmic

struggles, which the description of their intercourse through Eduard's perception clearly demonstrates:

> Marina war launisch, kapriziös, händlerisch mit ihrer Gunst. Aber war sie einmal entzündet, war ihre Lust nicht mehr aufzuhalten. [...] Vom Anschub ihres ersten Orgasmus emporgehoben, löste sie sich von ihm und schoß in uneinholbare Fernen davon. Irgendwo dort, in ihrer eigenen Umlaufbahn, stöhnte und schrie sie ihren Jubel ins All [...] Was für ein Glück es war, einer Frau nichts schuldig zu bleiben. Sich nicht mehr zu schwer, zu ungeschickt, zu hastig oder zu spät zu fühlen. Sich nicht mehr mit der lächerlichsten aller Männerfragen beschäftigen zu müssen [...] Auch wenn er sich das nur einbildete, mit Jenny war es stets gewesen, als sende ihr Körper so etwas wie eine ständige Aufforderung aus, der er nicht Genüge tat. Es war diese Alarmbereitschaft seines Körpers, die Marina ihn vergessen ließ. Plötzlich war alles leicht, leicht der Körper, leicht das Gewissen. (256ff.)

> [She was moody, capricious, hard to please. Once aroused, however, her passions were unbridled. […] Borne away on the wings of her preliminary orgasm, she left him trailing and soared off into the blue. Somewhere out there in her own orbit she moaned and bellowed her exultation at the cosmos […] What bliss it was not to feel indebted to a woman. Not to feel too heavy, too clumsy, too hasty, too late. Not to have to entertain the most ludicrous of all male self-doubts […] Whether or not he imagined it, Jenny's body had always seemed to be transmitting a demand he failed to meet. It was this physical

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[58] The translation diverts significantly from the original. It neither includes the alienation of GDR sex feared by scientists nor the purported fact that GDR women orgasm easier.

> state of alert that Marina consigned to oblivion. Suddenly everything was light and buoyant, body and conscience alike. (189)]

Marina and Eduard's supposedly emotionally unhindered and mutually fulfilling sexual encounter accomplishes two things in the narrative: first, it implies that Jenny's inability to climax with Eduard cannot be attributed to him, since he is shown as clearly capable of sexually satisfying a woman. Through this, the text positions the non-German Jewish character Jenny in opposition to the Germans Eduard and Marina, which supports Mueller's (2008) previously cited argument that Schneider's text produces what she calls "gendered antisemitism [sic]." The bond between two Germans, as superficial and short-lived as it may be, is framed as sexually more successful than the union of the married partners. It is this opposition to a third, external party that allows Eduard and Marina to ignore, bridge and even embrace their internal German differences since these do not interfere with their ability for sexual satisfaction. Second, their sexual affair mirrors the gendered geographies that dominate representations of German unification, with the West as successful, giving male and the East as the liberated, yet receiving female.

Despite the sexual fulfillment that the affair provides to both characters, Eduard and Marina's romance comes to an end during a weekend trip to the Eastern German city of Weimar. Remaining true to female stereotyping, Marina gets emotionally attached to Eduard and thus forces them to face the forlornness of their uncommitted arrangement. While Eduard is shocked by this turn of events, their separation still features as yet another affirmation of him as man and lover: "Sie hatte ihm ja nicht den Laufpaß gegeben, weil sie genug von ihm hatte, sondern weil sie mehr von ihm wollte, als er zu geben bereit war" (345) ["She'd given him his marching orders not because she'd had enough of him, but because she wanted more of him than he was prepared to give" (260)]. Their personal East-West-unification ultimately fails because the emotional involvement of one party remains superficial and both partners are not equally committed.[59] I agree with Mueller (2008) who assesses Marina's function in this

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[59] This can be read as a comment on the ever-changing sentiments in post-1989 Germany, where the support for the unification project differs greatly based on one's personal economic situation. For a discussion of this development see: Glaab. "Deutsche Einheit in der Retrospektive. Befindlichkeiten in Ost und West." Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung an der LMU München. 4 Nov. 2009. Web. 14 March 2013.

novel as follows: "Marina only serves as the dummy for Eduard to temporarily escape his anxieties concerning his (German) masculinity. Once his German identity is rescued (he is no longer suspected to be the grandson of a Nazi), Eduard's masculinity no longer needs Marina's sexual affirmation" (248). The novel also emphasizes Marina's irrelevance for Eduard's truly pressing problems, namely the squatters in his inherited building and the accusations against himself and his grandfather of being Nazi supporters. Once he is able to clear both their names, Eduard is filled with new self-esteem that allows him to speak up against his wife and eventually to sexually satisfy her as well, which ultimately disposes of any need for Marina.

In the narrative depiction of the extra-marital affair, the spatial framework of their meetings is used to underscore the superficiality of Eduard and Marina's encounters. The intimate and private space in which they meet is not once described in detail. These spaces are therefore marked as what Katrin Dennerlein (2009) in her study *Narratologie des Raumes* calls *Leerstellen* (95) [blanks], referring to spatial information that have been omitted and cannot be unequivocally completed by the reader. *Leerstellen* are, according to Dennerlein, not obligatory for fully understanding the plot and hence signify information deemed unimportant to the narrative. Through marking the intimate and private spatial surroundings as irrelevant for Eduard and Marina's affair, the text implies the superficiality of their encounter, which is simultaneously represented as the cause for the affair's eventual failure. In contrast, the text describes the apartment that Eduard rents for his family in great detail and does so with the public (restaurant) and semi-public (hotel) spaces of Eduard and Marina's meetings. Thus, the narrative gaps indicate a conscious exclusion of the affair from the private and intimate spaces that appear to be reserved for depictions of the nuclear family. The characters' inability to bridge their respective geographic belongings to East and West (Berlin as well as Germany) is further supported by the location of Eduard's apartment in the district of Charlottenburg in West Berlin. Even though, the inner-city, inner-state border has been opened and despite Eduard's continuous crossing of this border on his way to work, during his dates with Marina or during their trip to Weimar, the text locates the protagonist's ultimate space of

belonging, of intimacy and family, in West Berlin. This in turn makes a long-term successful encounter with the East basically impossible.

Both Liebmann's and Schneider's novels describe the unification of characters from East and West Germany as volatile and superficial. As both texts emphasize, the interpersonal relations internalize the general social tensions that appear especially intense within the spatial framework of Berlin. The stakes of the debates about Berlin's and Germany's future are, hence, not only recorded in the vast construction sites that feature prominently in literary descriptions of Berlin, but are internalized and acted out through the affective dimension of extra-marital affairs imagined in the texts. As has been discussed for the literary construction of marriages and affairs above, post-1989 social tensions negatively impact this realm of the private and intimate. In the next section, it will therefore be of interest which substitutes the novels propose for filling the personal void left by failing marriages and superficial affairs and under which spatial conditions these alternatives develop.

Between Refuge and Retreat: Family Substitutes

As has been outlined in the past two sections, in the literary imagination of post-1989 German familial arrangements, particularly matrimony, are depicted as being under pressure. The texts highlight the struggle of spouses in finding a way to address the pervasive changes that approached quickly and often required fast action. The need to negotiate the fundamental alteration of one's own life as well as the impact on familial bonds is shown to strain family ties that have already been under pressure before 1989. As the previous analyses demonstrate, post-1989 novels foreground familial arrangements that are usually not included in the social construct of the nuclear family, such as the elective kinship relations between spouses or unmarried partners.[60] This literary trend intersects with social developments at the end of the 20th century, when families were under pressure everywhere in postindustrial societies. During this

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[60] For detailed information on these developments in society and their impact on the family, see for example: Beck/Beck-Gernsheim. *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Trans. M.Ritter, J.Wiebel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995. Or: Beck-Gernsheim. *Reinventing the Family. In Search of New Lifestyles.* Trans. P. Camiller. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002. Print.

time economic changes, the continuous pursuit for gender equality, the heightened mobility of people and other aspects of globalization and individualization were underway, changing societies and impacting families. As Lane (2000) emphasizes in his study about *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*, the current challenges that families face are just updated versions of century-old struggles between the private and public spheres:

> […] we are witnessing only the most recent phase of a centuries-old conflict between family and markets. In a sense, the long-delayed victory over feudalism was a victory over a familistic system (Ernst Bloch); the exploitation and reinforcement of individualism by markets were a blow against familism (Maine, Alan MacFarlane); the change in the form of wealth from land to money and personality liberated people from ties of kin as well as of place (Simmel); and the victory of factory organization in a commercial setting over cottage industry in the family setting (William Parker), together with the quasi-voluntary drift to factories (sometimes with their own regulated dormitories for women) from family and village surveillance of a more informal nature (Edward Shorter), may only have changed the form of indenture, but in the process it weakened families. (125)

In light of this, it is noteworthy that the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany is not exclusively interested in the depiction of matrimonial stress and the failing of traditional family arrangements as symptoms of historical crises, but is rather invested in constructing alternative family relations that are presented as placeholders or substitutes for the dissolving familial bonds between spouses or parents and children. Post-1989 literature positions these elective kinship relations not only in opposition to the socially contingent ideal of the nuclear family that had already been eroding in the GDR and FRG before 1989, but also represents them as counter-balance to the fleeting East-West-affairs. The elective familial arrangements are defined by affirmative affects that are normatively ascribed to traditional family relationships, such as love or unconditionally support, and hence they mimic family-like structures and attitudes. These similarities underscore the narrative and social role of these elective kinship arrangements of mostly filling the gap left by absent or abusive families. Post-1989 novels frame the occurrence of these familial relations as closely related to the specific social experiences of East Germans in the context of the unifying Germany, for example through sudden unemployment. If these elective familial arrangements have been in place before the opening of the wall and the onset of Germany's political

unification, their ties are significantly strengthened throughout this process, thus counterbalancing destabilizing developments in many families, at least for a limited period of time. The literary representations of Germany's post-1989 society are invested in showing that during this time the need and desire for a family did not vanish, but was rather outsourced to other affective social constellations.

A Community of Others: Helga Königsdorf's *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*

Published in 1993, Königsdorf's novel *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* was one of the first novels addressing the specific social conditions of the post-1989 context (Ledanff "Trauer und Melancholie" 9). The text emphasizes how the social and spatial experiences of the protagonists in the public sphere are counter-acted by the creation of a living community in the private sphere. Königsdorf belongs to the group of writers who turned to literature later in life (like Brigitte Burmeister or Monika Maron), after an already successful career as a mathematician. The sparse scholarship has mainly addressed her work with a focus on gender, being interested foremost in her as a female writer in the GDR as well as the generation of writers to which she belongs.[61] Scholarly contributions so far have focused neither on the importance of space nor on the function of family in Königsdorf's works, even though both concepts feature prominently in her first post-1989 novel.

Im Schatten des Regenbogens constructs the private/intimate space of an apartment in Berlin as a refuge for a semi-diverse group of people, who seek companionship in the social upheavals after 1989 and due to the absence of traditional family ties. The texts presents different reasons for the absence of parents, children or a spouse in each character's life: Ruth, the apartment owner and founder of the apartment sharing community, is an orphan (26) and never had a family on her own, which partly triggers the idea to offer the other residents a place to live (30).[62] Frau Franz divorced quickly after World War II

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[61] Ledanff. "Trauer und Melancholie: 'Weibliche' Wenderomane zwischen 1994 und 1994." *GDR Bulletin* 25 (1998): 7-20. Schmidt. "History Reflected in the Imaginary: Pre-Revolutionary Attitudes Towards the Process of History in Works by Christa Wolf, Helga Königsdorf, Angela Krauss und Irene Liebmann." *The Individual, Identity and Innovation. Signals from Contemporary Literature and the New Germany.* Eds. Williams/Parkes. Bern: Peter Lang, 1993. 165-181.
[62] All references refer to: Helga Königsdorf. *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. 2nd ed. Berlin: 1993. Print.

and while her daughter moved to the FRG and has not been in contact (53), her son cut any ties to her

after learning about her involvement with the Nazis before 1945 (114). Alice, another member of the

group, has a strained relationship to her over-achieving and intimidating parents (16). Throughout her life,

she was only involved in failing love affairs and also aborted her only pregnancy, all of which causes her

to remain without traditional family ties after 1989. The character called "der Alte," finally, lost both his

parents in the aftermath of 1945 and was separated from his brother shortly after, with both of them

growing up on different sides of the wall (31). Here, the novel employs the stereotypical metaphor of

family members separated by the external political forces, who are reunited after 1989. The private

unification in this specific example is more successful, though, than the unification that takes place on the

larger social scale. But before he can reunite with his brother, "der Alte" is in need of a place to live, since

his wife has left him (12).

The novel emphasizes that the personal circumstances described above, which leave each

protagonist without traditional familial bonds and their support, have been in place before the opening of

the wall in November 1989. But in the aftermath of November 9th, the characters' individual social

positions worsen and they experience their environment as increasingly hostile, which intensifies the need

and desire for a new form of belonging, especially since old ties, for example at work, cease to exist. This

post-1989 development is presented as the reason why they all end up in the same apartment, invited by

Ruth to share her private space. The narrative employs the spatial organization of the apartment as

reflection of the characters' relationships, which is why the outline of the apartment is described in much

detail:

> Inzwischen waren sie zu fünft in der Wohnung. Die Alice hatte das Angebot Ruth
> Makuleits, bei ihr einzuziehen, sofort angenommen. Ruth Makuleit hatte sich das
> Zimmer, das neben dem Bad lag, reserviert. Die Alice war in das Nebenzimmer gezogen.
> Dem Alten, der nach seiner Ehescheidung ohne Bleibe gewesen war, hatten sie das große
> Balkonzimmer gegeben, was dieser verlegen abwehren wollte, aber die beiden Frauen
> bestanden darauf. [...] Frau Franz wohnte im Eckzimmer und Herr Peteraut im
> Durchgangszimmer. Die Zimmer von Frau Franz und vom Alten erreichte man nur über
> das Durchgangszimmer. Ruth Makuleit hatte den Schlafbereich im Durchgangszimmer
> durch einen Vorhang abgeteilt. (12)

[Meanwhile there were five of them in the apartment. Alice had immediately accepted Ruth Makuleit's offer to move in with her. Ruth Makuleit had reserved the room next to the bath for herself. Alice moved into the room next door. The "Alte," who had been left without a place to stay after his divorce, had been given the big room with the balcony, which he tried to fend off bashfully, but both women insisted. […] Mrs. Franz lived in the corner room and Mr. Peteraut in the connecting room.[63] The room of Mrs. Franz and the "Alte" were only accessible through the connecting room. Ruth Makuleit had separated a sleeping area in the connecting room through a curtain.]

The floor plan of this private/intimate space is given in great detail, while specific interior decorations are only described later on and mainly for Frau Franz' room, since she enjoys setting up old-fashioned tea parties. The meticulous description above is part of a topological referential system that allows the reader to infer the relation between the individual rooms and consequently deduce the relationships between the roommates.[64] Despite this detailed description, the location of the kitchen remains unknown, even though throughout the novel it appears as the room where all of the characters meet on a regular basis. Furthermore, not all rooms can be located unequivocally on the floor plan. This missing information in the spatial organization of the text functions again as a *Leerstelle* according to Dennerlein's (2009) system, signaling irrelevant information. This supports the argument that the emphasis of the description is on revealing and highlighting relationships and less on giving an exact picture of the apartment.

Before comparing the living arrangements with the spatial situations that the characters encounter in the public sphere, I want to address the affective dimensions that are represented through the room distribution as well as on the text's syntagmatic axis.[65] The tenants of the apartment are presented in the order that indicates their closeness to the character of Ruth. The room they occupy also reveals their status

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[63] A Durchgangszimmer, sometimes also referred to as Berlin Room or *Berliner Zimmer*, is a room that connects to an adjunct room and that needs to be crossed through in order to get to that other room. There seems to be no English equivalent for this architectural feature, though, as I have been alerted to by Yasemin Yildiz, such rooms may exist, for instance, in so-called railroad apartments.

[64] Dennerlein (2009) defines this as follows: „Ein topologisches Referenzsystem umfasst die Beziehungen Inklusion, Kontakt und Nähe, die sprachlich zumeist durch die Präpositionen *in, an* oder *bei* ausgedrückt werden. Mithilfe topologischer Lokalisationen können Nachbarschafts- und Enthaltenseinsrelationen unabhängig vom Betrachterstandpunkt kommuniziert werden." (80) [A topological referential system comprises the relations inclusion, contact, and closeness that are often linguistically expressed by the prepositions *in*, *at* or *by*. By means of topological localisations, relations of neighboring or containedness can be expressed independently from the position of the observer.]

[65] According to Nünning (2009), the syntagmatic axis is one of three axes relevant for the analysis of literary representations of space. It offers information about the relation of various elements in the spatial representations focusing for example on their order, sequence, and selection.

within the living community. Ruth, as apartment owner, inhabits the room right next to the bathroom, which the text consequently frames as a privileged space that she deserves as the one who initiated the living community. Closest to her, and therefore mentioned first, lives Ruth's friend Alice. The text introduces them as former colleagues at the *Zahlographisches Institut* and thus suggests the public sphere of the workplace as the space where the friendship originated. As Berdahl ("(N)Ostalgie") has pointed out, "[i]n the GDR, the workplace was […] not only the center of everyday sociality, it was also a symbolic space of community and national belonging" (49). In the context of fast-paced modifications in the institutional landscape of the GDR after 1989, the *Zahlographische Institut* and its employees come under review by West German representatives, whose presence consequently turns the "symbolic space of community" into an alienating space governed by power asymmetries and moral judgment. Therefore, the narrative relocates the friendship between Ruth and Alice from the workplace to the private sphere of the apartment and Alice's immediate acceptance of Ruth's offer to join the living community can be understood in this light.

The character named "Der Alte" and his relationship with Ruth and Alice are also situated within this context, since he is introduced as their former superior, Ruth being his former secretary and Alice the show-off scientific genius in his institute. His previously higher status as institute director continues to be reflected in the relations between the three characters, even though their interactions are now exclusively located in the private sphere of the apartment. Here the sustained power imbalance is narratively symbolized by him inhabiting the room that the text describes as "big," while such a denotation is missing for Ruth's or Alice's room. Additionally, the room granted to him comes with a balcony, emphasizing a certain luxury that defines his living space. While Ruth and Alice appear to be more motivated by goodwill than by former status differences in offering him the largest room in the apartment, the text insinuates that the transfer of relations previously located in the public sphere of the workplace into the private sphere of the living community is not without problems. Whereas Ruth and Alice's already established a friendly bond before moving in with each other, the relationship with their former superior

has yet to undergo this transition. As the narrative indicates, "der Alte" assumes that his previously superior status at work is the cause for the room assignment and him fending it off abashedly ("verlegen abwehren") can be read as an attempt to level their positions as new roommates.

The other character that is placed in a more removed location from Ruth and Alice in the spatial organization of the apartment is Frau Franz. Through this the narrative insinuates a looser relationship between her and the other two female characters, which is further underscored by the fact that she is the only character that was not invited to join the living community, but rather approached Ruth herself. While "der Alte" and Alice are characters through which the text addresses alterations in the workplace after 1989 as well as their far-reaching impact on the individual employee outside of the working environment, Frau Franz represents the overwhelming effects of the new social reality in the uniting Germany. The text frames her request to move in with Ruth as the result of being repeatedly alienated from the public sphere: "Nachdem sie dreimal mit Blaulicht ins Krankenhaus gefahren war, um der Welt zu beweisen, daß es sie noch gab, als Person und nicht nur als Verwaltungsakt, und die Welt lediglich mit Rechnungen reagiert hatte, die ihr auf dem Postweg zugestellt wurden, hatte sie eines Tages Ruth Makuleit gefragt, ob sie zu ihr ziehen dürfte" (10) [After she had been taken to the hospital three times with flashing emergency signal, to prove to the world that she still existed, as a person and not only as a administrative deed, and the world had only reacted with a bill, send to her via mail, she had asked Ruth Makuleit one day, if she could move in with her]. Since she is actually the first character to move in with Ruth, spurring the idea for the living community, the text suggests that the desire to establish collective living arrangements originates in the experiences of the new and estranging social circumstances.

The fifth tenant, Mr. Peteraut, is located in the so-called *Durchgangszimmer,* the space that one needs to cross through in order to reach the rooms of Frau Franz and "der Alte." Thus, through the spatial organization of the apartment and the characters' position in it, the text represents Mr. Peteraut's outsider position within the living community. Him inhabiting the least attractive room in the apartment coincides with the fact that he does not have a previous connection to the other tenants, for example as neighbor or

colleague. The text casts his absence of a relationship prior to moving in as the reason for his continuously unstable position within the group, which in turn is underscored by the fact that he is just one of many other tenants who will occupy the *Durchgangszimmer* in the course of the story.

While the narrative emphasizes that the living community is not always free of struggles and tensions between the individual tenants, the privacy the characters share with each other is nonetheless constructed as a privileged and protective realm that helps them to cope with the challenges they encounter during the narrated present (probably 1990/91). This is particularly obvious in the narrative strand that focuses on the character "der Alte," who as former institute director experiences the greatest decline in his social status. As mentioned above, this protagonist inhabits one of the more spacious rooms in the apartment, which the text juxtaposes with the workspace he is now offered at his former institute: "Der Alte gehörte nun zu den WAP-Leuten im Parterre. Er hatte einen kläglichen Platz in einem Raum, den er mit fünf seiner ehemaligen Mitarbeiter teilte. Und das war schon ein Entgegenkommen. [...] Er hätte ohne weiteres auch zu Hause bleiben können. Niemand interessierte sich dafür, was er trieb. Und die Tage, an denen ihm dieser Platz noch zustand, waren gezählt" (43) [The „Alte" now belonged to the WAP-people on the ground floor. He had a piteous place in a room he shared with five of his former employees. And that was already a courtesy. […] He could have readily stayed home. Nobody was interested in what he was doing. And the days, when he was still entitled to this place, were numbered]. The text constructs an opposition between the characters' experiences of the public and the private sphere not only in the disparate organization of workspace ("piteous place") and apartment (big room with balcony), but also through the affective dimensions that govern each space. As the narrative highlights, Ruth and Alice have reached out to "der Alte" and asked him to join the living community, which is in stark opposition to his workplace that is construed as a symbol of the greater public sphere where the character is tolerated rather than wanted or even respected. The spatial arrangement of his new "office" levels previous differences in social status between him and his former employees and highlights the lost respect for his achievements due to modified academic, but mainly moral standards. While other novels

like Angela Krauss' *Der Dienst* (1990) or Kerstin Hensel's *Tanz am Kanal* (1994) have located the negotiation of this experience within nuclear family patterns, Königsdorf, in contrast, consciously moves away from the contingent imagination of the nuclear family to hybrid familial arrangements that equally function as social space where the interpersonal engagement with experiences of social devaluation can take place.

Ruth's offer to "der Alte" therefore stands in juxtaposition to the way he is treated in the unifying Germany, indicating the shifting power relations inside and outside of the workspace. His room in the apartment is moderate due to his own wishes, but his pitiful workspace has been assigned to him only out of sympathy, the only other option being immediate unemployment. This example, hence, indicates the opposition between public and private sphere that is repeatedly staged in the narrative and underscored by accompanying differences in the affective dimensions governing each space. Further, the text constructs the living community as crucial counterbalance to the alienating developments in the professional, public realms of the characters' lives, which is shown to not only have an economic impact, but more importantly affects them emotionally. In this light, it is especially noteworthy that at the end the text presents "der Alte" as the only character that is successful in accomplishing a new beginning, professionally and privately. The reunion with his brother is cast as prerequisite for his newly professional and private success, which suggests the novel's investment in normative ideals of traditional familial arrangement as sanctioned social space for productive approaches to the historic shifts in 1989 despite its narrative focus on elective kinship relations.

The communal constellation at the core of the text does not last. Rather, the narrative constructs the alternative familial arrangement as temporary by-product of extreme social changes that all the characters face in the immediate time after the GDR's demise. The shared apartment is presented as social opportunity for middle-aged adult characters, who are suddenly faced with the devaluation of the social structures and norms that defined their lives until the opening of the Berlin Wall. That the living arrangement can be read as a representation of the characters' declined or devalued social position is

underscored by the fact that this kind of domestic constellation is predominantly common among students and young adults. In being unemployed and supposedly without marketable skills the text insinuates similarities between the characters and high-school graduates before starting college, since both groups have yet to acquire the personal and professional skills privileged in the economic sphere of the unifying Germany in order to fully partake in the public sphere.

Despite the importance that the narrative places on the living community for negotiating the uncertainties of the immediate post-1989 years, the characters ultimately either return to some kind of traditional family setting or they vanish. The text addresses for example the reunion of Frau Franz with her daughter, thus indicating the possibility for reviving ruptured familial relations after 1989. As noted above, the reunion of "der Alte" with his brother is cast in a similar light. Additionally, the text locates the new beginning of their brotherhood at the brother's New Years party that also becomes the place where "der Alte" proposes to a former colleague, thus seeking to reestablish matrimony as yet another familial bond. Alice, in contrast, is a character that is not able to reconnect with her family. More problematic than the strained relationship with her parents, appears the destruction of a possible maternal bond through the abortion of her only pregnancy years ago. The text emphasizes the abortion as long-lasting impact on the character's self-perception and casts it as the main reason for her disappearance at the end of the story.

The novel, thus, represents only the return to established and normative social patterns and familial relations as assurance of a characters' productive engagement with post-1989 Germany. The only familial bonds that can be revived after the opening of the wall, are the ones that are traditionally situated within nuclear family arrangements, for example the relationship between mother and daughter, between siblings, and between spouses. In representing the demise of the GDR as prerequisite for the rekindling of these familial relations, the text insinuates the negative impact of an unrightfully separated Germany at least on traditional family arrangements, tapping into early representational metaphor of East and West German brothers and sisters. With regard to this narrative investment in the reconstituting influence of the opening of the wall on previously ruptured family ties, it is noteworthy that kinship relations that had

been in place during the GDR are shown to falter during the societal change after 1989. Further, despite the characters' shared desire to belong to somebody or somewhere, the notions of the living community as familial substitute are only viable for a limited time and are abandoned at the possibility to reunite with "actual" family members. Thus, the text implicitly reveals an ideological investment in the notion of family as sacred realm that is also apparent in the other novels discussed in this section. In Königsdorf's text, family arrangements that had been in place in the GDR are discontinued after 1989, whereas the notion of a re-union, a new beginning after 1989 appears as prerequisite for the affirmation of old family ties. While in the beginning the text marks the absence of family structures and constructs the living community as a social refuge, in the end it undermines the alternative it itself had put in place. Thus, the text's critical and insightful representation of the immediate post-1989 circumstances in the East does in the end not escape the cliché of the Western savior and the nuclear family as the normatively "correct" form of living together. This notion is also present in Burmeister's novel, in which a failing marriage is ultimately replaced by elective kinship relations that come to equal the bond of a marriage.

A Community Beyond Romance: Brigitte Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma*

In Burmeisters' novel *Unter dem Namen Norma*, the friendship between the character-bound narrator Marianne and Norma is presented as affective family-like relationship, which functions as a counterbalance to the mode of crisis through which the narrative imagines the marital relationship between Marianne and Johannes. As Harbers (2004) summarizes, the novel "ist auch die Geschichte vom Verlust einer Liebe und dem Gewinnen einer Freundschaft (oder auch Liebe). Beide sind eng mit der politischen Thematik und der Suche nach einer neuen Identität verbunden" (236) [is also the story about the loss of love and the gaining of a friendship (or also love). Both are closely connected to the political theme and the search for a new identity]. As Harbers suggests, the narrative construction of the relationship between Norma and Marianne extends the scope of their friendship into the sphere of love and possibly eroticism (Harbers 237). This overall supports the argument that the text casts the friendship

with Norma as the affective interpersonal constellation that takes the place of the marital (and

heterosexual) relationship, especially after staging Marianne's and Johanne's separation.

Emphasizing modes of renewal in relation to the historical transformation of 1989, the text

introduces Norma as divorced mother of two, who steps into Marianne's life in the night of November 9th,

1989 (Burmeister 23). Thus, this night is construed to not only finalize the GDR's fate and change world

history, but it also significantly shapes Marianne and Norma's private life. Throughout the text, the

affective valences of relationships are produced through particular representations of space. Marianne and

Norma's friendship is narratively connected to the realm of Berlin and, hence, positioned in opposition to

Mannheim, which is the geographical sphere where Johannes is located. For Berlin, the text constructs

Marianne's apartment in the private and a café in the public sphere as the two decisive spaces for the plot.

In contrast to the opposition between the public sphere as space of alienation and the private sphere as

presumable retreat in Königsdorf's text, here the realm of the private turns into the space of distress and

conflict, while reconciliation and unification take place in the public sphere. This can be explained with

the fact that the apartment remains the space that represents Marianne and Johanne's relationship,

whereas the public sphere is less emotionally charged through previously established personal ties.

The conflict that the narrative positions at the center of Norma's and Marianne's friendship is tied

to the same question that is also represented as the source of Johannes and Marianne's struggles: how to

negotiate the GDR's socialist past and more importantly the failure of the utopian project. Their

disagreement in this question is carried out through an argument about the rumored Stasi affiliation of

their former neighbor Margarete Bauer (58).[66] While Marianne represents a cautious position regarding

the rumors that start to spread after Margarete's suicide, Norma expresses her opinion about Margarete's

past, without "doubt or distance" ("Zweifel oder Abstand," 58). Thus, the text relocates one of the most

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[66] Ledanff (1998) suggest that the case of Margarete Bauer and the related conflict between Marianne and Norma
could be read as a comment on the ongoing debate at the time about Christa Wolf's involvement with the Stasi since
"Margarete" was also Wolf's code name and Margarete Bauer has a similar outer appearance as Christa Wolf
(Ledanff 18).

pressing issues of the immediate post-Wall period to the affective dimension of their friendship. According to their position on opposite sides of the debate, Marianne criticizes Norma's spreading of rumors, arguing that they have devastating effects for the people involved and warning her not to partake in the ongoing "public suspicions and denunciations" (ibid). Norma, in contrast, is outraged that her telling the truth is framed as denunciation. Their conversation is developed alongside the well-known arguments that were also privileged in the public sphere, particularly in the media, at the time, but in the end their fight takes a personal turn and causes a temporary break between them. At one point towards the end of the fight, Marianna asks Norma: "[…]wem würdest du im Zweifelsfall glauben, einer Aktennotiz oder dem Wort eines Menschen, dem du vertraust, nehmen wir zum Bespiel, denn der Verdacht kann jeden treffen, mich" (60). "[…] in case of doubt, whom would you believe, a note in a file or the word of a person you trust, for example, since anybody can be suspected, me.] After a short pause, Norma states: "Die Hand ins Feuer legen würde sie für niemanden" (ibid.) [She would not bet her life on anybody.] Marianne is hurt by this indirect expression of mistrust and they split without resolving the issue. As the narratives reveals, the contestation of the GDR past was not only an issue between East and West Germans but also created

heterogeneous positions among East Germans (Straughn 2007). In the text familial arrangements and elective kinship relations are constructed as the social space where media discourses about the Stasi involvement of East Germans resurface. As the text highlights, the social insecurity after the GDR's demise is heightened by people's questions regarding everybody else's involvement with the State Security (Miller 1999). The far-reaching impact of this doubt is represented in Norma's statement that she "would not vouch for anybody's past." By connecting the continuously surfacing news stories about family members spying on each other with the private uncertainties and suspicions, the novel amplifies the growing societal and individual insecurity and presents the Stasi-debates as one of its major causes.[67]

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[67] For example the case of author Hans Joachim Schädlich, who learned in 1992 while reading through his Stasi files that his brother had spied on him, his family, and acquaintances. Or the example of Vera Lengsfeld and Knud Wollenberger, who where a couple in which the husband spied on his wife.

Despite the gap that opens between Marianne and Norma during this conflict, they are able to move beyond this and reconcile. While their first encounter after the fight takes place in Marianne's apartment upon her return from visiting Johannes in Mannheim, the text situates the more important part of their reconciliation in the public realm. Hence, while their fight was located in the private sphere, the narrative positions their reconciliation in the public sphere. This spatial configuration of their relationship underscores the narrative opposition between elective kinship relations and matrimonial bonds, since the novel situates conflict and distress in the private sphere and modes of renewal in the public sphere. The text intersects spatial organization and emotional valence from the beginning, which is apparent in the fact that Marianne and Norma's first encounter takes place in the streets of Berlin on November 9th, 1989, and is continued in a café in West Berlin "gleich hinter dem ehemaligen Grenzübergang" (30) [right behind the former border crossing]. This choice of location suggests that when encountered together with Norma, the West German realm is not marked as foreign or strange, as is the case during Marianne's visit in Mannheim. Rather, Marianne and Norma together are represented as seizing the Western public space, or at least a part of it, by referring to the place as "our café" (ibid.). Even though this space does not reoccur throughout the story, Marianne's account suggests regular visits with Norma following their first evening "an dem wir einander ständig in die Sätze fielen, ich auch! sagten oder: mir ging es genauso" (ibid.) [when we constantly interrupted each other, saying me too! or: same here]. Since they are shown to truly embrace the new spatial opportunities of post-1989 Germany, without abandoning their spatial and emotional ties with the East, the text positions the new beginning of their friendship in the equally new space of West Berlin.

In line with this spatial organization of the narrative, the characters' reconciliation after the fight about Margarete Bauer is situated in the public sphere of East Berlin. It is noteworthy that despite their appreciation for the café in West Berlin, the text situates this crucial and substantial event of their friendship in the East. In doing so, the text might suggest a changed attitude towards West Germany based on Marianne's recent experiences in Mannheim. The café also functions as the public space where

the union between Norma and Marianne is transferred from a friendship into an officiated affective bond ("Freundschaft, sagte ich, geht von freier Wahl aus. Einmal geknüpft, soll sie durch eine feierliche Erklärung offiziell besiegelt werden" 278. [Friendship, I said, emanates from free choice. Once established, it shall be officially sealed by a festive declaration.]). Before Max' festive oration, the text presents Norma and Marianne's discussing the rules and privileges of their union. These strongly resemble the rights and duties of married partners, for example guardianship for orphaned children in case of one partner's death, and are extended by more heroic promises such as to fight side by side in case of war, an inspiration they adopt from Marianne's translation of the French revolutionary Saint-Juste. By exchanging "vows," Marianne and Norma construct a relationship that reflects the traditional parameters of matrimony, but simultaneously expands its traditional reach beyond the domestic (children) into the political (war) sphere. Since the text emphasizes the notion of equality in the vows as well as in Max' speech, any gender specific formulations that would highlight the uniqueness of their union are absent. Consequently, instead of developing a new and individual definition of their union, the novel highlights that the characters base the wording of their vows on traditionally heterosexual marital bonds, which is hence presented as the normalized, standardized, and social sanctioned sphere that binds the two together.

The political sphere features prominently during Max' short speech that finalizes their arrangement. He states: "Euer Bund fügt Ungleiche zusammen, zwei Unvollständigkeiten, möchte ich sagen, und eben darin liegt seine Chance. Freundschaft ist nicht die schlechteste Art, mitzuwirken an der gesellschaftlichen Vereinigung, diesem Knäuel aus Hoffnungen, Mängeln und Mißverständnissen, von den Sachzwängen ganz zu schweigen (283). [Your union unites unequals, two incompletes, I want to say, and therein lies its chance. Friendship is not the worst way to participate in the social unification, this bundle of hopes, shortcomings, and misconceptions, not to mention practical constraints.] Max' speech explicitly relates Norma and Marianne's union to the current social events and social circumstances by tying their unification as friends to the "gesellschaftliche Vereinigung" (social unification) taking place at the same time. Noteworthy is his judgment of friendship as "not the worst way to participate in the

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ongoing social unification," an implicit proposal reaching far beyond the two women that seems to be directed to the unifying German society as a whole. In contrast to the narrative trend of representing the German unification through a heterosexual couple (Lewis 2009), this text casts a friendship between two female characters as the social constellation through which the developments taking place on a larger social scale are negotiated. Hence, the text does not only question the ideological assumption of established familial bonds between East and West Germany, but also locates the representation of the unification in the affective social dimensions of a friendship instead of in a sexually charged romantic relationship. This connects with Marianne's earlier statement that friendship, in contrast to family, is based on free choice and thus might fare better in addressing the challenges of post-1989 Germany. By emphasizing the elective kinship structures, the text provides a critical commentary on the ideal of traditional familial arrangements, indicating that the assumed familial bonds between Germans from East and West might not suffice for uniting Germany, as stories from Marianne's neighbors prove.[68] Further, the novel emphasizes that a successful process of unification cannot depend on assumptions about presumably shared opinions and experiences, but rather has to consciously seek the alignment of similarities as well as the negotiation of its rules and norms. Thus, similar rendering the German unification through metaphors of matrimony and extra-marital affairs, the novel emphasizes the importance of voluntary participation in negotiating the historical transformation of 1989.

The narrative closely connects its spatial framework to the familial arrangements that are situated within a specific spatial context. The separation from Johannes in Mannheim is presented as prerequisite for Marianne and Norma's reconciliation in Berlin, suggesting that Norma is taking Johannes' place. The causality between the dissolution of the marriage and the new union between friends has been established in the scholarship, for example by Gebauer (1998), who asserts: "Mit der Trennung geht nach der Rückkehr Mariannes die Versöhnung mit Norma einher, die nun gleichsam den Platz des Ehemanns einnimmt [...]" (548) [The separation is after Marianne's return attended by the reconciliation with

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[68] For example, the encounter Marianne imagines between Frau Samuel and her sister on p.159f.

Norma, who takes the place of the husband]. Hence, the text presents the affective social constellation of Marianne and Norma's friendship as substitute for the traditional familial arrangements ascribed to matrimony. The space of their friendship is depicted as a retreat from personal and social disappointments. That their elective familial arrangement prevails in post-1989 German is narratively connected to their shared decision to remain in Berlin. As will be discussed in the Chapter 2, their union further serves as a contrast to the relationship between Marianne and the West German Corinna Kling, a female friendship that fails due to mutual mistrust and misconceptions.

The construction of elective kinship relations that function as family substitute is a representational approach in post-1989 literature that resurfaces in Meyer's novel *Als wir träumten*. Here a group of friends is represented as filling the emotional void left by violent and disengaged parents. While the text addresses of parent-child-relationships and suggests an intersection of power hierarchy and generational belonging, it foregrounds the social and affective dimension of friendship as crucial social constellation to address past and present challenges in the light of abusive familial arrangements associated with the immediate years after the historical transformation of 1989.

A Community of Losers: Clemens Meyer's *Als wir träumten*

Meyer's acclaimed 2006 debut *Als wir träumten*, while awarded the Clemens-Brentano Price in 2007 and discussed by critics on both sides of the Atlantic (for example Loeffler [2006] and Zimmermann [2008]), has not attracted a lot of scholarly attention. The novel, told by the character-bound narrator Daniel, connects the historical transformation of 1989 with the characters' biographical transformation from childhood to adolescence (Falcke "Auf hartem Boden"). It presents one of the darkest pictures of growing up in the immediate years after 1989 on the basis of a group of friends, who live in the Eastern part of Leipzig. The group assembles the ex-boxer and returning convict Rico, the sensitive drug addict Mark, the tough Stefan called Pitbull, who has ties to the Neo-Nazis in town, Walter, who is a pro in stealing cars, and Daniel, who partakes in the stealing, beating, and drug using, but appears to be mostly

guided and misguided by love. As Tincknell claims with regard to the literary representation of

adolescence:

> Representational strategies for the depiction of teenage experience and culture have been
> dominated by two crucial ideological positions, both of which identify adolescence as a
> period of intense, even epiphanous experience, and in which the site of this crisis is the
> family itself. The first, and older version, is the idea of the teenager and youth culture as a
> form of social deviance in which sexual desire, physical energy and resistance to parental
> pressures lead to criminality unless more fruitfully harnessed. The second draws on these
> models, but articulates a more positive version of the adolescent quest for meaningful
> identity in which the energy and passion of rebellion is a necessary part of social change.
> In both cases, however, the relationship of the adolescent to the family structure and
> parental authority has been crucial. (108)

Meyer's depiction of a group of social misfits echoes the first representational strategy, since the text

frames the characters' behavior as socially deviant. The gang is marked in various ways as a community

of losers: the text presents the characters as losers, in the sense of social outsiders who are displaced

within the regulated society of the GDR as well as within the free market society of the unifying

Germany. The term "losers" hence also describes the characters' disorientation in both societies they

experience.[69] They are presented as critical of the ideologies preached at school and suffer punishment for

their unwillingness to comply with the official rules of the GDR, but also struggle to participate in the less

regulated public sphere of post-1989 Germany. Finally, the characters' representation as "losers" is

insinuated through the multitude of losses they encounter throughout the story: they lose fights (Rico),

they lose friends (Mark dies by an overdose, Walter gets killed in a crash with a stolen car), they lose girl

friends (a theme prominent for Daniel, whose first love leaves the GDR for the West and whose second

love becomes a drug addicted prostitute and the girlfriend of the rival gang's leader), and most

importantly they lose their parents, through divorce, because of domestic abuse or because they are

unable to create an emotional connection with them. The text, hence, positions the elective kinship

structures of their friendship not only in opposition to the public sphere before and after 1989, but also

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[69] With this narrative focus on social outcasts, the text casts light on a similar social scene as some important
postcommunist films such as Michael Klier's *Ostkreuz* (1991) or Andreas Dresen's *Night Shapes* (2000) that, as
Pinkert (2008) describes, "draw attention to the underclass of urban outsiders and their perilous existence on the
fringes of society" (209).

portrays them as a substitute for the mainly abusive parental relationships. The text emphasizes that the uncertainties of the public sphere are recreated within unstable familial relationship and so critiques the ideal of the nuclear family as presumably stable social space in the GDR and post-1989 Germany alike.

The novel interweaves its imagination of familial decline with narrative constructions of the district's spatial demise. The setting in the Eastern part of Leipzig appears as scenery of demolition, vacancy, and devastation. In the narrative present of the 1990s everything from company buildings to movie theaters to apartment complexes is destroyed or run-down, as a description of Daniel's view from an urban railway reveals: "Fast alle Gebäude, die man von der S-Bahn aus sehen konnte, waren verfallen oder kaputt, und auch der Schnee machte es nicht besser, es sah aus, als hätten jede Mengen Typen mit Granatwerfern und Maschinengewehren eine S-Bahn-Spritztour durch Leipzig gemacht" (191)[70] [Nearly all the buildings visible from the streetcar where decayed and busted, and the snow did not help, it looked as if a bunch of guys had gone on a spree through Leipzig with grenade launchers and machine guns]. Daniel's description shows Leipzig as a city in pieces, looking like it merely survived a violent attack. Again, the character is positioned in the neutral territory of a streetcar that allows the contemplative space (Bronfen 51) to unfold in front of him, while he remains spatially and socially on the sidelines. Daniel appears clearly distanced to the public sphere around him that he experiences mainly as a dangerous spatial realm. In connecting the buildings' decrepit appearance to the destructive power of weapons the scene echoes the violence that Daniel and his friends experiences regularly within the private sphere of the family as well as on the streets of their neighborhood. Thus, the interactions between city and protagonist are multiply charged. Leipzig is represented as public sphere and as the stage of the friends' adventures and struggles. At the same time its post-1989 decay, especially in the outskirts of the city and hence at the social margins, echoes and accompanies the characters' fall from recalcitrant students to convicted felons.

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[70] All references refer to: Clemens Meyer. *Als wir träumten*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 3rd ed. 2010.

The novel's construction of familial arrangements has been judged differently in reviews and laudations. Loeffler (2006) describes the parental generation as mostly incompetent alcoholics, while Hensel (2007) argues that it is really only one kid who flees a torn home.[71] My readings of the text support Loeffler's assumption, since it appears that all characters have faced abusive parents at one point in their life. The characters' parents only differ in the degree to which they are violent towards their children and in the depth of their individual misery. Hensel correctly states that the character Stefan faces the worst domestic circumstances, with an abusive father, who hits Stefan as well as his mother. But Daniel experiences familial violence as well, not only when his mother slaps him several times after he gets in trouble with the police, but also when he has to come to terms with the ruptured familial arrangements due to his father's repeated imprisonment. Rico's kinship relations are presented as similarly strained, since his parents sent him to a home for difficult children and he is shown to live with his grandmother rather than his parents after his return. Mark and Walter are the only characters that do not seem to experience domestic violence, which does not decrease the emotional distance between them and their parents. As Hensel (2007) argues, the parent's ability and even their opportunities to intervene positively in their children's life is presented as disturbingly small: "[...] es fällt auf, dass die älteren Generationen, mithin die Eltern, auffällig abwesend, auffällig passiv und auffällig unbeteiligt sind. Dem Treiben ihrer Kinder sehen sie zu, gar nicht so, als falle ihnen nichts dazu ein, aber doch vielmehr so, als seien sie der festen Ansicht, dass sie dagegen nichts, aber auch gar nichts tun können" (6) [it stands out, that the older generation, hence the parents, are strikingly absent, strikingly passive and strikingly uninvolved. They watch their childrens' life, not as if they cannot relate, but rather with the stern conviction, that they cannot do anything, nothing at all about it]. This evaluation echoes Loeffler's (2006)

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[71] Loeffler (2006): "Sie kommen großteils aus kaputten Familien, die Väter sind Säufer oder abgehauen oder im Knast, die Mütter schwach und inkompetent." [They are mainly from broken families, the fathers are drunkards or have bunked or are in the joint, the mothers weak and incompetent.] Hensel (2007): "Auch wenn die Aufzählung der Personen aus Clemens Meyers Roman auf den ersten Blick anders klingt, tatsächlich aber entstammt nur einer aus Daniels Clique aus, sagen wir, zerrütteten Verhältnissen. Nur bei Stefan, genannt Pitbull, sind beide Eltern derart auf die schiefe Bahn gekommen, dass ihr Junge vor ihnen in den Keller geflüchtet ist" (5). [Even though the list of people in Clemens Meyer's novel sounds differently at first, actually only one from Daniel's clique comes from, let's say, a torn family. Only Stefan, called Pitbull, has parents who are so much on the slippery slope that their boy escapes them into the basement.]

statement about the parents incompetency, which is complemented in Zimmermann's (2008) review for

World Literature Today, in which he addresses the temporal impacts in the novel: "In this vacuum of

values and role models it is not surprising that these boys, twelve or thirteen at the time of the *Wende*,

after a rigid GDR childhood, now, just a few years later, explode into a particularly volatile testosterone-

fueled adolescence" (66). As I have stated in the beginning, the text connects historical and biographical

transformation, the latter being intensified by the historical circumstances that amplify the personal

uncertainties, which usually come to define adolescence and puberty. While the text highlights the

characters' negative experiences with state sanctions and school punishments in the GDR, it is equally

invested in narrating the impact of the post-1989 instabilities on the private sphere, emphasizing familial

tensions before and after the GDR's demise. The book itself refers to the historical transformation of 1989

twice: Once in the plot summary on the book's back cover where the novel is situated during the

"Nachwendejahre" and once right at the beginning of the book, when Daniel talks about his memories "an

die Zeit nach der großen Wende" (7) [about the time of the big turn].[72] Even though, the political events

related to the vanishing GDR and German unification remain at the margins of the narrative and the

characters' perception of their surroundings, the narrative underscores that the historical transformation of

1989 leaves a noticeable imprint on their biographies.

These specific temporal circumstances of the plot intersect with the spatial circumstance of the

characters' "hood" in East Leipzig. The neighborhood is constructed as charged space, where the

characters face the rival gangs in the public sphere of the streets and their abusive parents in the private

space of their apartment. At the same time, the neighborhood is presented as the place in Leipzig where

numerous positive childhood memories are situated as well as the location of their favorite meeting spot:

a shack in the basement of Pitbull's apartment building that he has turned into an actually inhabitable

room. The novel casts this space not only as Pitbulls' refuge from his abusive father, but rather imagines

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[72] Eberhard Falcke (2006) wonders in his review for the *Zeit* if this is a conscious reference to the marketable genre
of the *Wenderoman*.

it as secure private space where the characters' longing for a home concentrates. They gather here on a regular basis to drink, to chat, to listen to music, to consume drugs, and to talk about their love interests, their latest fights, and plans for the future. The harsh language they use, dominated by swearwords, profanities, and vulgarities, cannot mask their deep affection for each other. In the spatial configurations of the novel, the sparsely furnished basement shack takes the place of the family living room; a space where the characters can hang out away from the parents' demands and abuse. It is also constructed as their safe spot in the neighborhood, where numerous gangs engage in sometimes life-threatening fights. Further, the narrative indicates that the shack can be read as a continuation from the pirate ship the characters once constructed on a playground during their childhood (36) and that also functioned as a space where they would hide, plan, discuss and recover from their misdeeds.

While the text never offers a detailed description of the basement shack, the space features prominently in numerous episodes throughout the novel and is construed as the clique's epicenter. In the narrative it constitutes a counterbalance to the violence in the private sphere of the parents' apartment as well as the depressing surroundings of decaying buildings, closed down factories, and decrepit theaters. The shack is located in the basement of an apartment complex, away from the family apartments or the public space dominated by gang violence. It is consciously constructed as a space outside of the realms of parental or political influence and authority that the characters generally equate with physical dominance and violence. Following Pahl's (2000) argument that "friendship is the rejection of the idea of intervention or control by any third party" (153), the group of friends and their communal private/intimate space in the basement can be read as a counter-space to the violent private sphere of the families' apartments and their neighborhood. The group itself is cast as substitute for the torn familial arrangements, their male companionship outbalancing the absence of role models and parental support. Nonetheless, due to the self-destructive vein in nearly all characters, the elective familial relations appear simultaneously as productive and destructive social bonds. As Loeffler (2006) indicates: "Die Doktrin vom Kollektiv wird verhindern, dass einzelne Gang-Mitglieder sich den selbstzerstörerischen Gruppen-

Ritualen von Suff, Drogen, Schlägereien und Kleinkriminalität entziehen [...]" [The doctrine of the collective will prohibit that a single gang-member withdraws from the self-destructive group rituals of booze, drugs, brawls, and petty crime]. Thus, as much as the text imagines the group as a refuge from broken homes and presents the boys as united in their experiences of domestic abuse, violence, and the feeling of being a social outcast, it indicates at the same time that the group affiliation itself is upholding this status. The strong affective bonds between the male characters are cast as the main reason for their respective inability to successfully move away from old habits be it crime, involvement in fights or drugs. Since the group and its position at the margins of society remain the social space to which the characters always return after being arrested or incarcerated, none of them is successful in making the leap out of the affective realm of the group or the geographical space of the district and the city.

The text therefore emphasizes that the negative consequences associated with these bonds of friendship intensify the characters' unpreparedness for the challenges of the unifying Germany, which in turn are presented as even more detrimental. Due to the characters' societal outsider position, they are ill equipped for addressing these challenges and the narrative constructs this as the main cause for their inability to approach 1989 as a historic moment of possibilities. The text insinuates that because of the absence of any affirmative role models, due to the strained relationships with equally struggling parents and other authority figures, the characters are left without moral orientation. This vacuum of encouraging leadership translates in the narrative, on the one hand, into the characters' clear convictions regarding the things, ideas, and people they oppose, and on the other hand, into their failure to develop positive social relations outside of their group. Their lot and outlook on life, hence, remains relatively unchanged by the German unification that the text does not construct as positive impact, neither in their own nor their families' life, nor in their spatial environment. Even though Pitbull's shack in the basement and the clique is imagined in the text as filling the emotional void left by imprisoned and/or abusive fathers, incompetent and overwhelmed mothers, and failing authorities, it nonetheless does not create a positive presence that would support the characters in coming to terms with their dire situation. Their way out of Leipzig ends in

prison or in death. Thus, the characters are repeatedly represented as stuck at the bottom: of the apartment complex as much as of society. The only mark they leave on the unifying Germany is recorded in the memories of character-bound narrator Daniel, who recounts their friendship from what appears to be his prison cell. Since the characters' story is not one of redemption, the narrative casts their elective kinship relationships as rescue from a familial and societal environment that they perceive as hostile and as harmful influence in their lives simultaneously. Despite clearly demonstrating the negative impact that the male bonds have on the individual character, the text remains nonetheless invested in emphasizing the importance of the affirmative and affective dimension of this friendship in absence of parental relationships.

The text intersects these unsettling descriptions of ruptured familial arrangements with spatial configurations that foreground the decline of the Eastern part of Leipzig. The choice of location is especially noteworthy in the context of post-1989 novels, since Leipzig came to be a symbol for the so-called peaceful revolution in the fall of 1989 that is generally perceived as a key component in furthering the GDR's demise (Gray/Wilke 1996). The very first *Montagsdemonstrationen* took place in Leipzig, on September 4th, 1989 and started a mass movement all around the GDR. In contrast, the novel challenges and overwrites the positive valence of the city in the post-1989 discourse by casting it as the location of domestic abuse and gang violence, hence replacing the notion of peaceful protest with representations of hostility and aggression.

In line with the narratives' recasting of its spatial framework, the novel represents the fragmentation of the private sphere as a social process that already started in the GDR. Thus, 1989 is cast less as historic rupture than as intensifier of previously existing tensions that the novel imagines through absent parents and torn familial relations. Similar to the previously discussed *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* by Königsdorf, this text emphasizes that the bonds of friendship can only be sustained for a limited amount of time. The correlation between the reinstitution of traditional familial relationships and a characters' social integration in the unifying Germany suggested in Königsdorf's novel, is echoed in

Meyer's text. As shown for Königsdorf's novel, the protagonists have either reunited with their families, initiated a new family or have vanished from the scene. The fact that the first two options are not available to the characters in *Als wir träumten* explains why they vanish from society by death or imprisonment. The intersection of abusive parental relationships and the characters' struggle in post-1989 Germany indicate that "[t]he crisis in youth, then, is a crisis in family relations" (Tincknell 111). In highlighting the detrimental effects of the absence of caring and involved parents, the novel implicitly emphasizes familial relationships situated in the nuclear family as decisive social arena for the negotiation of the social and personal uncertainties related to the transformation of 1989. While elective kinship relations are presented as only temporary replacement of these familial relationships, they are nonetheless cast as crucial social constellation in the aftermath of 1989.

A Community Beyond Borders: Richard David Precht's *Die Kosmonauten*

The narrative trend of imagining the unifying Germany through elective kinship relations, such as friendships, is equally represented in Precht's novel debut *Die Kosmonauten* of 2003. Despite favorable reviews in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche*, and *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, the book has gone relatively unnoticed by literary critics and scholars, especially in comparison with Precht's writings on popular psychology. The work's exclusion from scholarly discussions despite its obvious and prominent relation to the varied field of *Wenderomane* might have to do with critics' categorization of it as "light fiction." Precht approaches the unification process from a significant temporal distance, which allows him to take recent developments and the current state of mind in the unifying Germany into account. His text is further one of the few works about the opening of the Berlin wall and the post-socialist transformation written from the perspective of a West German author and hence of particular value for this study.

The story told by an external narrator is divided into several chapters and interweaves two narrative strands. The main story line focuses on the relationship between Georg and Rosalie, a young couple from Cologne that moves to Berlin in the early 1990s shortly after their initial meeting, with their growing and developing relationship paralleling the city's struggles to grow into its new role as capital of

the unifying Germany. The second narrative strand consists of the prefaces to each chapter that tell the

story about the Russian astronaut Sergej. The story line of his space flight parallels the timeline of Georg

and Rosalie's story.[73] The novel subliminally interlinks Georg's and Sergej's experiences and struggles,

creating a spatial, temporal, and personal connection between the character from West Germany and the

character from the failing Soviet Union. Relationships between East and West feature prominently

throughout the narrative and the indirect connection between Georg and Sergej is complemented by the

friendship between Georg and the East German Leonhard, whom Rosalie and Georg meet at a party

(78).[74] While Rosalie and Leonhard meet first, the narrative foregrounds the affective relationship

between the two male characters that experience a moment of mutual recognition during their second

encounter, which manifests the depth of their developing friendship:

> Als Georg und Rosalie eintraten, empfing sie Leonhard im Bademantel. Sie umarmten sich herzlich wie alte Freunde. Leonhard hatte ein so angenehmes Wesen, dass gar nicht auffiel, wie eigenartig ihre Vertrautheit war. Georg hätte die Umarmung als unangenehm empfunden, hätte sie nur der kleinste Verdacht begleitet, berechnet zu sein. [...] Der Geruch in dem Zimmer erinnert ihn an seinen Opa, er hatte diesen Geruch geliebt, mehr als vieles andere in der Welt, und er hatte nie gedacht, dass ein anderer Mensch so riechen konnte. Es war, als hätte sich der Geruch des Opas nach seinem Tod freigesetzt, um jetzt in Leonhard weiterzuleben und seine Wohnung zu füllen. (82f.)

> [As Georg and Rosalie arrived, Leonhard welcomed them in a bathrobe. They hugged cordially like old friends. Leonhard was such a pleasant being that it struck none of them how strange their familiarity was. Georg would have thought the hug to be unpleasant, if it had been accompanied by the smallest suspicion to be calculating. […] The smell of the room reminded him of his grandfather, he had loved this smell, more than many things in the world and had never thought that another person could smell like this. It was as if his grandfather's smell had set free to continue living in Leonhard and filling his apartment.]

The text describes Leonhard's apartment, particularly its smell, from Georg's perspective. It linguistically

creates a link between friendship and family, by referring to an intimacy ("Vertrautheit," "familiarity")

that Georg experiences in Leonhard's private space. Even more so, the specific smell of Leonhard's

apartment triggers Georg's memory of his grandfather, echoing Proust's famous madeleine-moment of

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[73] The motif of (space) flight appears throughout various artistic representations of post-1989 Germany. See for example Angela Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin* (1995) or Wolfgang Becker's *Good-bye Lenin* (2003). The notion of flying presents the character with an option to establish a distance to the ongoing social changes as well as a way to move beyond geographically established boundaries.

[74] All citations refer to: Richard David Precht. *Die Kosmonauten*. München: Goldmann Verlag, 2009. Print.

involuntary memory. Thus, through the apartment's smell the narrative establishes a sensory connection

between Georg's familial relationships from the past and his present encounter with Leonhard, which

results in an affective connection that the text casts as the origin of their friendship. Further, the novel

from the beginning prefaces the friendship as familial relationship, which is underscored by the similar

biographies of both characters. As the text reveals later on, both characters are orphans. Georg grew up in

West Germany without his mother (27) and a father, who succumbed to alcohol after his wife's death and

who died recently (28). Leonhard, in contrast, grew up without his father, who died in 1961 during an

accident and had lost his mother just a few months after November 9th, 1989. Hence, the family

arrangements of the East German character as well as their ruptures are clearly marked by the

construction and the opening of the Berlin Wall. Both male characters are left without immediate family,

and Leonhard's relationship to an aunt and uncle is presented as rather distant. As the conversations

between the two characters reveal, their similar life experiences, despite the disparate ideological

framework, have turned them into similar people:

> Georg und Leonhard saßen und plauderten vertraut wie alte Freunde. [...] Leonhard saß ihm am Küchentisch gegenüber, noch immer im Bademantel. Er hatte sich zurückgelehnt und beobachtete Georg mit einer Aufmerksamkeit, die sehr warm war. Ab und zu nur streute er eine Bemerkung ein, und Georg erkannte sich sofort wieder, seine eigenen Beobachtungen, in den Kleinigkeiten und Abstrusitäten, die Leonhard dem Dasein ablauschte, den Menschen, der Art, wie sie ihr Leben mit sich herumtrugen. (86)

> [Georg and Leonhard set and chatted, close like old friends. […] Leonhard sat across from him at the kitchen table, still in the bathrobe. He had leaned back and observed Georg with an attentiveness that was very warm. Now and then he interspersed with a remark, and Georg immediately recognized himself, his own observations, in the small and abstruse things that Leonhard took from life, the people, the way in which they carried their life around with them.]

In the scene, the text emphasizes the moments of recognition and familiarity between Georg and

Leonhard. The narrative construction of the encounter centers on their shared outlook on life as well as

their similar perception of their surroundings. As in the previously discussed novels, their elective kinship

relations are represented as substitute for the familial void left by their dead parents.

The closeness of Georg and Leonhard's friendship is underscored by the spatial organization of the text: On the one hand, their East-West relationship is located in Berlin, the geographical symbol of the unifying Germany. The contested project of the German unifications is depicted as successful on the level of their friendship. Compared with the experience of parental loss, the characters' upbringing on different sides of the now vanished borders is presented as an insignificant parameter within their friendship. It is noteworthy, that the text bases their friendship on these moments of loss, a theme that was already apparent in Meyer's *Als wir träumten*. Thus, the experience of familial loss creates a shared personal and emotional knowledge that is presented as more powerful than any presumed ideological differences.

On the other hand, the text spatially frames the characters' friendship through domestic spaces. Their first intimate conversation is situated in Leonhard's kitchen and the text underscores notions of familiarity and emotional closeness through Leonhard remaining dressed in his bathrobe. From the beginning, the text hence positions the crucial meetings between Georg and Leonhard in the enclosed space of one of the characters' apartment and insinuates these private spaces as locations of emotional security. This narrative strategy is particularly apparent in comparison with the spatial framework of Leonhard and Rosalie's friendship, which is describe as less close, and their encounters are consequently mainly situated in the public sphere of Berlin. Thus, the novel upholds the normative dialectic of private and public sphere, with the first as the sphere of intimacy, familial relationships, and friendship, and the latter as the realm of fleetingness and superficiality.

The impact of the domestic framing on the closeness of Georg and Leonhard's friendship is further supported towards the end of the novel, when the friendship comes to a tragic end, sharing some of the same characteristics as the elective kinship relations constructed in Meyer's text. During an act of revenge, planned by Georg who seeks to retaliate the suicide of his superior at the East Berlin Tierpark, Leonhard is deadly injured in a sequence of unfortunate coincidences and dies before the ambulance arrives on scene. Thus, parallel to Meyer's story, the friendship based on loss ends in loss, which is intensified by the fact that the return to traditional familial arrangements is impossible for both characters.

Through Leonhard's death, the text underscores the emotional depth of his friendship with Georg, who is presented as devastated and socially isolated after the incident. Since his relationship with Rosalie has also come to an end, the text fails both elective kinship relations as durable familial arrangement. Georg as the character, whom the novel despite his West German background has spatially tied to East Berlin through his friendship with Leonhard and his work at the *Tierpark*, is at the end of the novel left alone and without familial connection of any kind. Rosalie, in contrast, has begun a new relationship with a successful West German architect and at the end of the text she is located in an airplane to America, where she plans on starting a new life with her new love. The text further states that she is pregnant with their first child, and in doing so the narrative shifts the relationship away from a mere romantic affair towards notions of the nuclear family.

As this section has shown, the literary imagination of 1989 engages critically with the normative ideal of the nuclear family and is simultaneously invested in portraying the importance of familial arrangements that are not included in this traditional understanding of family. Since the nuclear family as idealized and socially sanctioned sphere is approached by East and West German authors alike who seek to examine the historical rupture of 1989, the contested concept of the traditional family appears in the narratives as an indicator of social crisis and cultural uncertainty (Beise "Literarische Gattungen"). The texts emphasize that in the time of historic change, the human desire to belong and be part of a larger community appears to increase. The political and media discourses about new freedoms and opportunities in post-1989 Germany are counter-acted by the majority of the protagonists through a withdrawal into the personal and intimate space, mostly because the experiences in the public social sphere are cast as disappointing and alienating, instead of liberating. What stands out among all the examples in this section is the temporal limitation of elective kinship structures, may they be living communities as in Königsdorf's novel or friendships as in Meyer's and Precht's texts, that are presented as substitutes for ruptured or absent family relations normatively positioned within the nuclear family. The only exception is the friendship in Burmeister's *Norma*, but this relationship only pertains because the novel transfers

their relationship into the realm of matrimony and hence into normalized familial arrangements through the characters' exchange of vows at the end of the text. Their promises of shared responsibilities and care mimic the legal rights of married couples. Their union could, thus, even be seen as an early textual example of same-sex-relationships, especially due to the erotic undertones that accompany the depiction of the relationship throughout the book. Nonetheless, the text converts their friendship into a marital union, relocating their relationship to a more standardized living arrangement that is sanctioned through the recognition by a third party, in this case Max, in a public space. Thus, Norma and Marianne's friendship only prevails because it mirrors and continues traditional familial arrangements. Burmeister's text is therefore part of the larger narrative trend exemplified in the other novels of this section that emphasizes a protagonist's desire to recreate the ideal of the nuclear family setting if possible. This is best demonstrated in Königsdorf's novel with the dissolution of the living community after the characters "der Alte" and Frau Franz reconnect with their respective sibling or child. The significance of the family is, hence, not only implied by the fact that the family substitutes mirror family structures, from shared living to shared meals to shared responsibilities, but further supported by the existential consequences for protagonists, who cannot fall back unto biological kinship ties. This latter representational trend is apparent in the earlier texts, for example through Königsdorf's character Alice, whose displacement in post-1989 Germany is amplified by her vanishing towards the end of the novel, which the narrative in turn causally ties to the absence of any traditional familial relations, for example to her parents, a spouse, or a child. This narrative trend in the literary imagination of family continues in the later novels of the 2000s that paint an even darker picture, since the alienating effects of the social/political sphere in these texts extend into the private/intimate space. In Meyer's and Precht's novels a character's inability to return to the presumably safe realm of the family either leads to death, prison and/or isolation. Through this, both texts implicitly highlight the importance of traditional familial arrangements and suggest dire consequences of their absence. They continue to recreate the normative ideal of the nuclear family as save social realm and hence establish a representational construct for addressing postmodern social reality where the family is redefined and kinship ties loosened (Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

As Kort (2004) points out regarding the shifting meanings of spaces: "Social space can grant inclusion and direction, but it can also exclude and control. And intimate space can be a haven and a realm of freedom, but it can also become a prison and a place of lonely exile" (196f.). In all novels, the perceived nature of social and intimate spaces intersect, framing the protagonists' approaches to the challenges of post-1989 transformations. All the texts place an emphasis on the private/intimate space as a refuge or retreat and position it in opposition to the political/social space that is generally described as alienating and strange. It is therefore the private space and the familial arrangements situated here that the narratives construct as major impact on a protagonist's successful approach to 1989 as moment of possibilities. In Königsdorf's *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* all protagonists return to more traditional familial arrangements. The only exception, as discusses above, is Alice. In Burmeister's *Norma*, the text constructs Marianne's "replacement" of her failed relationship with Johannes through the new union with Norma as prerequisite for finding a private and emotional hold that seems to allow her a more positive outlook on an insecure future. This powerful corrective or affirmation of the private/intimate space loses its stability in the later texts. In Precht's *Kosmonauten*, the failure of Georg and Rosalie's relationship is at first outbalanced by Georg and Leonhard's close friendship. But after Leonhard's sudden death, the West German orphan Georg remains without familial ties isolated in his East German apartment. And in Meyer's dark novel *Als wir träumten* the text constructs the affective constellation of a clique and their basement shack not only as a societal retreat, but simultaneously as the road to the characters' destruction. The negative influences of peer pressure are intensified by the absence of involved parents, who could actually emotionally connect to their children. The generally remarkable absence of children in post-1989 intersects with two juxtaposed positions within the texts: on the one hand, the absence of children interestingly mirrors the instability of family arrangements that the narratives place at their center; on the other hand, this void within the family development undermines the texts' implicit reaffirmation of the nuclear family as social ideal. The absence of children can thus be read as a narrative representation of societal crisis, since familial relations stagnate once characters fail to negotiate the tensions of post-1989 German society.

A House is not a Home: The Absence of Children

The absence of children in the majority of the novels discussed for this chapter is noteworthy, since they create a *Leerstelle*, revealing that the narratives reproduce a rather traditional and normative understanding of the social constellations where children belong – with regard to familial arrangements as well as spatial circumstances. As has been discussed further above, the voids and absences in a story are crucial in analyzing a narrative, since they reflect the value of given information. Accordingly, Dennerlein (2009) distinguishes between *Unbestimmtheiten* and *Leerstellen*, with the former being omitted information that the reader can complete logically and the latter being missing information that have been deemed unimportant for the narrative and that the reader cannot complete unequivocally.

Examining the representations of children in post-1989 literature two noteworthy and somewhat contradicting trends appear: firstly, the narratives ultimately uphold the traditional assumption about the congruency between family and stability. As the novels seem to suggest, the majority of protagonists do not have children, because they are located in unstable social and spatial circumstances. Nonetheless, children appear throughout the novels and populate their backgrounds, belonging to seemingly spatially and emotionally stable relationships and framing the protagonists' quest for identity and stability that they face in the novels' post-1989 setting. Secondly, if protagonists have children, many of them raise them on their own as single mothers. Single mothers appear as main characters (Liebmann's protagonist, Burmeister's Norma) as well as in minor roles (for example Burmeister's Margarethe or the mother of Precht's Leonhard). This seems to contradict the narratives' preference for traditional familial arrangements but can be read as literary commentary on the pluralization of familial arrangements in the GDR.[75]

The existence or absence of children is further employed by narratives to signal problems in relationships, mainly in the newer texts of the 2000s. In Precht's *Kosmonauten*, for example, Georg and

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[75] See for example: Schuster/Taub. "Single Mothers in East Germany." *Reinventing Gender. Women in Eastern Germany since Unification*. Eds. Kolinsky/Nickel. London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2003. Print. 151-171.

Rosalie do not have a child, even though the narrative insinuates that they attempt to become pregnant. The text interlinks the characters' inability to reproduce with other interpersonal struggles they face in their relationship, which is supported by Rosalie's quick pregnancy in her new relationship with an architect from Hamburg. Their reproductive success seems to imply a compatibility that was not given between Georg and Rosalie and that might have led to their separation.

It is significant that the texts do not exclusively link the absence of children to the impacts of the post-socialist transformation. Many of the protagonists do not have children before the opening of the wall, on either side of the border. But since all the novels implicitly and explicitly stress the importance of family as presumably stable and secure socially constructed space to return to during the socially tumultuous time after 1989, it is noteworthy that the nuclear family is actually a rare existence in these texts. More common in the narratives than the nuclear family are formations that foreground one relational component from within this traditional familial arrangement: either the married couple that remains childless, the single mother, who raises a child without the father, or the elective familial relationships that mimic familial relations between siblings (clique) or extended relatives (living community).

Conclusion

Looking at the intersection of family and space in post-1989 writings, two representational trends are most noticeable. The first trend is the narrative opposition between public and private spheres that marks the former as alienating and hostile space, which causes a withdrawal into the private and intimate space. While the family has always been predominantly situated in the private sphere, this move back to the private is noteworthy since it counters the public engagement and uprising in the fall of 1989 that led to the demise of the GDR and paved the way for the German unification. The representational shift towards the private reconnects with the literary focus of pre-1989 writings that engage with the struggles within the private sphere arising from tensions with the public realm, such as Uwe Saeger's *Das Überschreiten einer Grenze bei Nacht* (1988), Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986) or Christa Wolf's

Sommerstück (1989). In all the novels discussed here, the protagonists struggle with experiences they make in political and social spaces, be it the devaluation at work, the disorientation due to architectural alterations of public places, the sudden violence between gangs or the inability to access the codes and modes of interaction in the Western social sphere. The sense of belonging and purpose that united people during the mass demonstration in the fall of 1989 have vanished, but the desire to belong has remained and is relocated from the public to the private sphere.

In the texts, the heterogeneous familial relationships situated in this private sphere are shown to be under pressure before and after 1989. The novels emphasize that characters not only have to negotiate the social impacts on themselves, but also on their respective familial relationships. While the novels privilege the private setting in contrast to the public sphere, the former is not represented as unequivocally good or safe. Rather the narratives' focus on the interpersonal relations within the limited spatial and relational universe of the family and among friends, underscores the fundamental impact of the public and political on the private and intimate sphere. The private sphere, hence, is construed as especially charged space in the post-1989 German context. In contrast to prominent writings from the early 20th century the effects of social changes are not illustrated through the example of the nuclear family, but the novels seem to be more invested either in the affective dimensions of the romantically involved couple or the larger group of platonic friends. Thus, the texts reflect on the postmodern social constellations that move beyond the nuclear family (Beck-Gernsheim 1998). Nonetheless, the narratives always return to the social sanctioned notion of family as the ideal, secure, and stable social space, since all social alternatives, be it living communities or cliques, ultimately fail. Post-1989 writings seem to acknowledge the new social reality of changing family structures that was already in place before the historical change of 1989, but they nonetheless continuously reinforce the importance of the family as decisive space in negotiating social tensions and changes. Even though the narratives address familial distress and rupture within traditional familial arrangements, in light of the fundamental social, political, and architectural changes of post-1989 Germany, the persistence of the nuclear family as socio-imaginary construct indicates a desire

for safety that in perpetuity can only be fulfilled within conventional kinship relations. This is particularly noteworthy, since the narratives do not present an actual example of these presumably stable familial constellation.

Nonetheless, the texts construe the realm of the family in post-1989 as the ideal location of *Heimat*, hence partaking in an ideologically charged descriptive discourse of belonging. While the private sphere in the GDR has been addressed as crucial social space where modes of belonging where negotiated (Betts 2010), I argue that the identification with the socialist utopian project of the GDR established a similar and significant notion of *Heimat* in the public sphere. The ever-changing public realm of post-1989 Germany that the narratives persistently construct as hostile and alienating does not allow for such feelings of belonging, which hence have to be relocated to the private sphere and here to notions of family. As von Moltke (2005) points out by referencing Applegate (1990) in his study of the German *Heimatfilm*: "Far from entering into crisis during moments of intense social transformation and increasing mobility, Heimat gains its cultural currency precisely at these junctures. For it is during these times that its function as 'an organized ideology for people quietly seeking a haven from the uncertainties of modern life' is most readily invoked" (232). These uncertainties of modern life are prevalent in the cultural imagination of family and space in post-1989 and are approached in the narratives through relocating the space of belonging from the public sphere as embodied by state and government to familial arrangements situated in the private sphere. Yet again, the stable realm of the family remains an imaginary for the majority of East German characters, leaving them spatially and emotionally displaced.

A second representational trend is the narrative focus on East-West encounters. Notions of "East" and "West" feature prominently in all of the novels, be it as actual geographic spaces that are (re)discovered and that exert a distinct influence on familial relationship; be it as epitome of generalized and stereotypical characteristics. In the novels concerned with the post-1989 German society, the valence of familial relations intersects with the spatial organization of the text, and a character's location and socialization is often connected to a particular approach to the German unification. The narratives employ

metaphors of romantic relationships, marriages, and affairs to represent the different ways in which East Germans decided to address the new social and political circumstance of the unification process and to demonstrate how characters' varying attitudes turn into interpersonal challenges. The following chapter approaches these attitudes with regard to the concept of agency. It will be of particular interest how families and familial relations impact protagonists' agency in positively and productively engaging with the all-encompassing moments of instability and insecurity in the aftermath of 1989.

Chapter 2: Performing Agency

In her 2009 study of gender and love in post-1989 literature, Alison Lewis states with regard to the power of stereotypes and clichés in the unifying German society that: "[m]an ist effektiv nur so frei, wie es die Stereotypen und Vorurteile über den Osten zulassen, womit die Freiheit, die eigene Existenz zu planen und nach eigenem Bedarf zurechtzuschneiden, für viele schnell zu einem neuartigen Zwang verkommt, sich entweder anzupassen oder seine Identität zu verleugnen, abzulegen bzw. zu fälschen" (86) [One is effectively only as free as the stereotypes and prejudices about the East allow, whereby the freedom to plan one's own existence and to tailor it to one's own needs degenerates for many into a novel compulsion to either adapt or renounce, discard or even fake one's identity]. Lewis' precise observation of this predominant behavior in post-1989 German society highlights two important points regarding the function of agency after 1989 that is at the center of this chapter's analyses. Firstly, Lewis offers an implicit and indirect definition of agency, namely as the freedom to plan one's own existence and establish a truthful identity. Secondly, she offers an insight into the specific pressures and constraints of German society post-1989, where the euphoric welcome of the "brothers and sisters from the East" quickly turned into suspicion of the rather distanced relatives and their past (Ahbe 13).

A definition of agency is complicated to come by, since many thinkers and theories touch upon the subject without explicitly defining the term itself. Poststructuralists have moved beyond the Hegelian understanding of agency as a subject's ability to choose his/her actions freely, which is the notion that Lewis stresses in the above quote. In contrast, the poststructural notions of agency have extended this basic definition by paying close attention to the interconnectedness between the subject and the power structures in its environment, which always limit free choice, for example by law, without automatically prohibiting the execution and development of agency. My readings of literary representations of agency are guided by Carrie Noland's (2009) definition of the term in her study *Agency and Embodiment. Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*: "Agency, it follows, is the power to alter [...] behaviors and

beliefs for purposes that may be reactive (resistant) or collaborative (innovative) in a kind" (9). Noland introduces two important notions of agency, reactive and collaborative, that allow for a more nuanced approach in analyzing the modes of agency portrayed in post-1989 literature. Further, her definition of agency incorporates actions that are based on intuitive and emotional responses and it hence adds an important element to the traditional understanding of agency as primarily rational behavior.

As a look at the public sphere of the GDR in the fall of 1989 demonstrates, both reactive, resistant agency and collaborative, innovative agency were executed in the famous protests that ultimately triggered the opening of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing unification. The gatherings in churches, the non-violent marches through inner cities, and finally the gatherings of thousands on market-squares were an uprising against the dominating power structures and thus an expression of reactive, resistant agency as well as an exhibition of collaborative and innovative agency in that these acts were based on the realization and acknowledgement of one's power and the power of unified action. These public forms of protest arising from many peoples' private disillusionment signal the importance of performance as another crucial concept for the understanding of literary constructions of agency in the post-1989 German context as well as its intersection with notions of family.

In the context of this study, performance is understood according to MacAloon's (1984) definition as "occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others" (1). Especially important for the following literary analysis is the notion that performance allows for social and self-reflection, "the presentation of alternative embodiments, and the possibility for conservation or transformation of both individuals and society" (McKenzie 727). These aspects of performance clearly came into play in the public sphere in the fall of 1989, when individuals united based on their shared dissatisfaction with the society they lived in and so started a movement that would ultimately transform not only their lives and the GDR, but both German states and the political order of the world.

The collaborative form of agency quickly faded once the unification of East and West Germany became the main aim of the political movement. At the latest the election results of March 18, 1990 separated the groups who had marched and fought together less than six months earlier.[76] The separation was not only caused by diverging visions for the future of both countries, but was rather closely connected to the similarly diverging evaluations of the GDR's past among GDR citizens (Straughn 2007). Judging the fallen state required a personal engagement with one's individual past, which in turn was a prerequisite for positioning oneself in the new society of the unifying Germany. The pace of the unification process – and related to this the pace of deep social and political changes in the East – did not allow for much meditation on the past. Dietrich Hohmann's (2001) fictionalized account of the fall of 1989 crystallizes this sentiment: "It all happened too fast […] He sees the danger that, in this flight forward, Germans can neither win the now necessary insight nor manage that quiet self-contemplation, that necessary grieving process, which psychology describes as vital. Many of his compatriots currently find themselves suddenly delivered without having arrived" (33). Many East Germans' inability to keep up with the pace of the unification process was accompanied by a quickly developing public narrative that offered a rather one-sided interpretation of history, presenting the victorious West as the realm of freedom for Easterners and interpreting German unification as East Germans' chance to emancipating themselves from the oppressive socialist regime. Within this unbalanced assimilation process that continues into the present, "many East Germans feel that they are being offered assimilation into a Western-defined 'German identity' rather than allowed an active role in creating a common founding mythology for the unified state" (Welsh et al. 33). In addition to the role of the passive, long oppressed victim, East Germans were quickly confronted with another external image of themselves: the Stasi-perpetrator.

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[76] On March 18, 1990, the so-called Alliance for Germany, representing the CDU and smaller affiliates, won 48 % of the votes, while the SPD won 21.9 %, the PDS (formerly SED) 16.4 % and other smaller parties, among them groups organized by former dissidents, won only 13.7 % of the votes. This result was seen as a clear support of Helmut Kohl's plan for a fast unification, which automatically ruled out the option of an independent and newly defined GDR.

The GDR's secret service, the Stasi, had already attracted attention and harsh criticism during the

preliminary talks and negotiation about a reformation of the GDR and possible unification with the FRG

at the so-called roundtables.[77] The GDR citizens' fury about the immense size of the secret service and

the extensiveness of its intrusion into their private sphere culminated in an act of public disobedience that

transcended the protest marches: the occupation of the Stasi's main offices in Berlin on January 15,

1990.[78] The exposure of the Stasi's misdeeds did not only shock GDR citizens, but also had a profound

impact on Westerners. It soon became known just how many people were involved with the secret service

and numerous media revelations indicated the cooperation of many who were believed to have been in

opposition to the GDR regime.[79] Thus, the Stasi turned into one of the major symbols for depicting life in

the GDR: "a metaphorical monster whose tentacles enveloped and indeed poisoned every aspect of East

German public and private life" (Bathrick 139). This in turn often tainted interactions between East and

West Germans as well as among East Germans, since the seemingly omnipresence of Stasi spies in the

GDR made East and West Germans alike question how one should evaluate a person's past in the GDR.

Huyssen (2001) describes the impact of these revelations on the ongoing unification process as follows:

> "[…] the West Germans use the Stasi revelations to make the East Germans 'other' yet
> one more time, with the added dimension of using the Stasi to compare the GDR to the
> Third Reich and thus writing yet another chapter of a displaced coping with the past. The
> East Germans in turn insist on their GDR identity more than ever and transfer their
> antagonism from the SED state, which they and not the Bonn government dismantled in
> the peaceful revolution, to the Bonn republic, democratic institutions, and
> Americanization. Indeed, one state, but two nations, a potential powder keg of conflicts
> and political instability."(328-9)

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[77] The round table meetings were initiated by various opposition groups like the New Forum, Democracy Now or
Democratic Awakening. The idea was to get together with members of the SED, members of the CDU as well as
liberals from the East and discuss a proposal for remaking the GDR together. Further, the round table initiated the
free national elections in May 1990 and demanded the dissolution of the Stasi. For more details see: Sarotte 92-95.
The round table was another expression of innovative and collaborative agency, an instance were people united to
take action and impact the future of their state.
[78] See Miller (1999) for details, especially pages 5-9.
[79] "Die Stasi wuchs sich in ihrer fast 40-jährigen Geschichte zu einer paranoiden Rieseninstitution aus, die zuletzt
ein Herr von ca. 90.000 'hauptamtlichen' und ca. 200.000 'inoffiziellen Mitarbeitern', also Spitzeln beschäftigte"
(Huberth 2). [The Stasi grew in its nearly 40-year-long history into a gigantic paranoid institution that in the end
employed an army of about 90.000 "full-time" and about 200.000 "unofficial employees", meaning spies.] Among
the famous dissidents that turned out to be involved with the Stasi were for example the writer and poet Sascha
Anderson, who belonged to the famous intellectual scene of the Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, and Joachim Tschirner, a
filmmaker who had spoken at the gathering on November 4, 1989 on the Alexander Platz in Berlin.

While many of disclosed details regarding the Stasi's work came as a surprise[80], information about its extended network of official and unofficial employees as well as its national and internal operations existed throughout the Cold War and occasionally caused headlines such as in the case of the Guillaume Affair.[81] Thus, the focus on the Stasi in the media discourses of the time as well as the continuously resurfacing of news reports about newly identified Stasi employees or victims suggest a political and medial investment in the redistribution of previous knowledge for the purpose of prolonging the fundamental power asymmetry inscribed in the German unification (cf. Glaeser 7).

Based on these discourses, I argue that for people from East Germany there were mainly two roles for readjusting their self-perception to the social reality of the unifying Germany: the (Stasi) victim or the (Stasi) perpetrator. This observation aligns with Adelson's (2005) analysis that "East/West, past/present, victim/perpetrator, self/other […] are the figural couples around which the rational narrative of historical development tends to resolve" (334). These polar models of identification excluded a variety of living experiences and social positionalities of people in the GDR that did not align either with the position of a victim or of a perpetrator. This polarized public discourse deeply impacted the experience and execution of agency post-1989. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) argues in *Touching Feeling*, "it is only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change" (13). While she refrains from explicitly defining these "middle ranges of agency," the context of her argument makes clear that they are situated in-between the narrow choices of "accepting and refusing […] this or that manifestation," as well as between "the extremes of compulsion and voluntary" (ibid.). With regard to the situation in post-1989 Germany, this means that the polarized public imagination of life in the GDR minimized and inhibited the East Germans' agency in negotiating identity positionalities that would result neither in self-denying or fake, as described in the quote by Lewis (2009) at the very beginning of this

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[80] For example, the Stasi's "involvement in extraordinary human rights violations, such as minutely planned destruction of personalities, torture, and even planned killings, which easterners claim they would have never thought possible in their own state" (Glaeser 277).

[81] Günter Guillaume was the personal assistant of West German chancellor Willy Brandt. In 1974, Guillaume was exposed as East German spy by the West German secret service, ultimately leading to Brandt's resignation on May 6 of the same year.

chapter. As the analyses of post-1989 literature show, questions of agency and suspicions about the involvement with the Stasi are narratively closely connected and intersect in interpersonal relations. The close readings of individual texts highlight that this contentious public discourse of prejudice and judgment is turned into the stage where alternative modes of engagement with the past and the renegotiating of history are played out. Through this, post-1989 literature forms what Fachinger (2001) has coined with reference to Richard Terdiman as "counterdiscourse," describing "the complex ways in which a dominant discourse might be challenged from the margins" (119). One central concept that has shaped my readings of the post-1989 works was Butler's (1997) concept of "linguistic vulnerability" (2) as described in *Excitable Speech,* since it connects the previously introduced idea of performance with J.L.Austin's concept of the performative speech act. Whereas Butler focuses her analysis on hate speech and other incidents of derogatory speech, this chapter is concerned with the phenomenon of stereotypes that post-1989 writings present as a crucial aspect of East-West-interactions in the unifying Germany. I do not equate post-1989 stereotypes about East and West Germans with the racist and homophobic hate speech that is Butler's focus, since they differ greatly in the degree of their insults and their existential consequences. Nonetheless, I believe that Butler's basic argument about language as an expression and a source of agency is worth exploring for the purpose of this study of agency in post-1989 literature. Especially intriguing is her claim that "by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence […] Thus the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response" (2). As I discuss in detail below, some of the post-1989 writings portray exactly such an unexpected, enabling and constructive reaction to the stereotyping that the East German protagonists experience while at the same time remaining reconnected with their past. A process that Welsh et al. (1997) describe as follows:

> [A] growing collective consciousness is better understood as an adaptation strategy to the problems and conflicts that have been created by unification. Eastern German identity is not necessarily embraced as a way of opting out of the new Germany, of celebrating cultural distinctiveness, or of waxing nostalgic about a paradise lost. From a functional point of view it may instead be a *constructive response*: an Eastern German self-consciousness does not question the rules of the game in any fundamental sense but

rather facilitates integration by empowering individuals and collective actors in the ongoing conflicts of interests, many of them along East-West lines. (135, emphasis mine)

This strategy is captured in post-1989 writings as well and highlights the connection between Butler's concept and the post-1989 German context.

As has been indicated above, agency is not only developed and performed within and with regard to the public sphere, but is also takes place and is profoundly impacted by the private sphere. Familial relationships are one of the social constructs where power operates, which consequently shapes the family members' understanding and development of agency. The political and social changes of the unification process understandably affected the different generations united in one family in different ways. For the younger generation, the public stereotyping was often meaningless since their age freed them from any kind of conscious collaboration with the now bedeviled former government. For those who were old enough to comprehend the historical change they were witnessing and who had consciously decided on a personal stand towards the regime the collapse of the socialist ideology presented as many opportunities as challenges, and "[t]he new everyday life of young people was dominated by concerns about economic development, changes of the school system, unemployment or leisure facilities" (Starke 163). The parental generation experienced the demise of the communist regime on a more existential level, facing lay-offs and scrutiny while finding new work as well as adapting to new and unknown social rules. For them "unification was a 'twilight of the god.' Their old world was breaking down with enormous speed while a new world was emerging which most of them knew only from hearsay. Not only did the state in which they lived change, but their economy was turned upside down, and their material culture changed down to the very bread they were eating and the detergent they were using to clean their apartment" (Glaeser 7f.). The multifaceted impact that the demise of the GDR and the establishing of a dominantly Western unification-narrative had on societal constructions of familial arrangements is also visible in the narrative imagination of family in post-1989 Germany that is invested in the social and representational

space of the family as crucial affective constellation for the negotiation of historical change.[82] As

Kolinsky (1998) confirms for the German society after 1989, "family has been most important in coping

with social transformation" (2). As the analyses of post-1989 literature indicates, family either features as

a presumably safe social space where characters can articulate fears, questions, and doubts; or family is

turned into a contested social space, for example because characters suddenly face familial memory

contests due to opposing interpretational approaches to the GDR past.[83] Regardless of the positive or

negative valence of familial bonds, in both instances, kinship relations function in the texts as primary

social constellation where an intergenerational discourse could take place and where discrepancies

between the public discourse and the private narratives could be renegotiated. The novels closely link

these negotiating processes to a character's agency that in the narrative is often developed against and in

spite of the family. Hence, post-1989 literature casts familial arrangements more as the source of reactive

and resistant rather than collaborative and innovative agency.

The question of how to address the fundamental changes connected to the GDR's demise and

German unification is at the core of all post-1989 writings. In the first part of this chapter, I focus on texts

whose protagonists establish a third way of engaging with the overpowering stereotypes, beyond the

options of an uncritical acceptance or self-denial that Lewis outlined in the quote discussed in the

beginning of this chapter. In post-1989 texts such as Sparschuh's *Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995) or

Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma* (1994), protagonists are shown to find a way to exploit the

stereotypes and clichés they face by creating a communicatively established space wherein they negotiate

identity positionalities in the aftermath of 1989 through a stance of agency. While their actions are mainly

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[82] There is a lack of sociological studies addressing not only the impact of the unification on East German families but also how they addressed this impact and negotiated the pressure based on different and diverging life experiences. Many of the immediate post-1989 studies either focus on family developments after 1989 (like Bertram's [1992] study *Die Familie in den neuen Bundesländern. Stabiliät und Wandel in der gesellschaftlichen Umbruchsituation*) without paying attention to the interactions in the family, on the impact that the unification hat specifically on women (for example Dölling's (1990) *Zwischen Hoffnung und Hilflosigkeit. Frauen nach der Wende in der DDR*) or embark on comparing socialization in the two Germanys (for example Büchner/Krüger (1991) *Aufwachsen hüben und drüben*). The forthcoming study by Hanna Haag about the ways in which East German families today negotiate their different life experience attempts to close this gap at least for the immediate past.
[83] The narrative construction of these memory contests is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this study.

cast as re-actions to their surroundings, they soon take on a value by themselves, generating an interesting mixture of resistant and innovative agency. These texts are accompanied by other works in which the protagonists rather subscribe to than challenge the stereotypes, falling into one of Lewis' categories of post-1989 behavior of either adapting to the expectations of the Western surroundings and denying one's identity or presenting a fake identity to the public. With regard to the struggles that the protagonists encounter in the society of the unifying Germany, their resistance to or adaptation of the external, stereotypical imagination of themselves is cast as decisive influence on how they approach these struggles. While all East German protagonists are at first overwhelmed by the new societal circumstances, the texts stress that their attitude regarding the surrounding stereotypes ultimately impacts the resolution of their conflicts. Both kinds of narratives underwrite the influential position of the family and post-1989 literature is invested in establishing a close connection between narrative constructions of family, agency, and their intersections with public discourses. Thus, the literary imagination of family and agency after 1989 partakes in the negotiating process concerned with the particular social/familial arrangements within which agency can be performed in the unifying Germany.

Agency Through Hybrid Identities

The novels discussed in this section prominently feature East-West-exchanges that take place outside of the private sphere and alongside familial negotiations of the historic transformation of 1989. As has been stated in Chapter 1, the texts construct an opposition between the private and the public spheres that characters can access. This disparity in the narrative representation of these spheres is underscored by the texts' imagination of platonic East-West encounters that are situated in the public sphere and provide the protagonist with a social constellation within which to address stereotypical imaginations of East and West Germans respectively. Since the stereotypical, often one-sided discourse about the GDR past is cast as crucial impact on the familial arrangements in the private sphere, the East-West encounters analyzed in this chapter establish a counter-part to the affectively charged East-West interactions, such as friendships or love affairs discussed in Chapter 1. In contrast to those familial arrangements, the texts situate these

East-West-exchanges in opposition to matrimonial, paternal or elective kinship relations. Nonetheless, the narratives insinuate intersections between the familial arrangements located in the private sphere and these East-West-encounters, since the latter is cast as exerting an influence on the former. Thus, even though familial arrangements feature only at the margins of the narrative imaginations of these conversations between East and West German characters, they provide an important component in understanding the literary representation of family in post-1989 literature.

The protagonist's usage of a communicative strategy that I call "hybrid life narratives" unites the two novels in the center of this section: Sparschuh's *Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995) and Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma* (1994). I am employing the term *hybrid* on the one hand as defining a combination of different elements, since these life narratives combine stereotypes and biographical facts in the protagonists effort to establish a coherent life story. On the other hand, I draw on Bhabha's understanding of hybridity as outlined in *Nation and Narration* (1990) as well as *The Location of Culture* (1994). While I do not equate post-1989 Germany with the colonial context of interest for Bhabha, I argue that his idea of mimicry and its potential for social or ideological opposition is valuable in the German post-1989 context. Glaeser (2000) argues convincingly along similar lines in his influential study *Divided in Unity* of interactions between East and West German police officers after the German unification:

> For westerners' othering of easterners is not radical in the sense of Said's (1978) 'orientalism,' or any form of racism or sexism. Westerners do not identify themselves and easterners as members of different, ontologically distinct categories without any bridges that facilitate the transfer from one category to the other. Rather, west Germans consistently displace east Germans into the past, more precisely into their own past. (183)

This temporal displacement, or allochronization, is just one of many stereotypical images regarding the respective East German other that are staged and reflected in post-1989 literature.

However, instead of adopting a passive stance in facing these stereotypes, hybrid life narratives are presented as communicative strategy that provides protagonists with the opportunity to remain connected to the significant part of their life that they spent in the GDR, and at the same time offers them the chance to assert themselves under the changing social and political circumstances in post-1989

Germany. While the texts' individual representations of this communicative strategy differ in detail, what they share is the method of merging biographical facts with stereotypes, clichés, and their interlocutor's expectations regarding their life, such as the collaboration with the Stasi, into one narrative that the characters exploit for the negotiation of their identity. These hybrid life narratives, combining the execution of resistant and innovative modes of agency as defined by Noland (2009) with a notion of performance, establish a particularly effective communicative strategy within the body of post-1989 literature. They create a discursive middle ground between the so-called *Ostalgie*, generally referring to a romanticization of the GDR, and the negation of any kind of positive experiences in the GDR that often coincides with an extreme

adaptation to the social standards and values of the FRG.

While the creation of hybrid life narratives mimics certain communicative patterns of lying, their ensuing narrative reaches beyond the definition of a lie. One commonality of lies and hybrid life narratives is that their respective recipient or audience must consider the narrative or lie to be a plausible version of the truth. But the construction of the hybrid life narrative goes further than that and requires the active cooperation of the audience that supplies central parts of the narrative and partakes significantly in the creation of the narrative. Despite differences between the individual hybrid life narratives that I will discuss further below, they share a similar structure as well as a specific set-up within the plot. The texts always situate these narratives in conversations between protagonists from the East and a character from the West. Their interaction is infused with stereotypical expectations and assumptions that the Westerner holds onto regarding the Easterner and the GDR. For a part of the plot, the reader is kept at the same knowledge level as the Western character regarding the Easterner's past. Subsequently, through an external or internal retroversion (Bal 89-90), the reader is then offered information and insights that expand his knowledge about the Eastern character compared with the perspective of the character from the West, which allows the reader to see through the stereotypes, understand the behavior of the East German protagonist, and recognize the modes in which stereotypes and prejudices have been exploited.

Thus, the hybrid life narrative serves two functions: on the diegetic level of the story, in the act of developing and implementing a hybrid life narrative, the protagonists execute agency and interpretative power regarding their autobiography. The act of narrating an identity via the hybrid life narrative establishes the middle ranges of agency to which Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) referred. On the extradiegetic level, the hybrid life narrative allows for a critical understanding of clichés and prejudices at work in post-1989 Germany. For the protagonists, the agency they develop during the limited amount of time that it takes to create a hybrid life narrative reaches far beyond this temporal framework and is presented as rather long-lasting impact on their lives. As the analyses of Sparschuh's and Burmeister's works show, this communicative strategy allows East-German protagonists to perform agency outside of the limited range of stereotypes that dominate the public discourse. Instead they undertake a productive and creative positioning of themselves within the society of the unifying Germany.

In a further twist, the third example addressed in this chapter, Thomas Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet* (2002), reveals that the deployment of stereotypes for one's advantage is not limited to characters from the East, but rather an opportunity that also Western characters turn to for their own benefit, highlighting the prevalence of stereotyping the "other" in post-1989 Germany. Thus, post-1989 literature mediates central conflicts arising throughout the unification process, especially with regard to questions of identity and identification. As it appears, literary representations highlight the overpowering impact of stereotypes and how these one-dimensional imaginations of the respective East or West German "other" undermine chances of creating a unified Germany.

The Power of Silence: Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*

As outlined in Chapter 1, Sparschuh's novel *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, published in 1995, belongs in the group of early post-1989 writings particularly focused on tensions in East-West interactions. Despite noteworthy commercial success, the book has not received extended scholarly attention beyond the analysis of the protagonist's picaresque character. The protagonist Hinrich Lobek is truly cast as an aggregation of post-1989 clichés of East Germans rather than an actual versatile character.

Immobile, inflexible, and moody, he is presented as the pitiful version of a bourgeois figure and at the same time the defining image of a German *Spiessbürger*. The protagonist's one-sided narrative construction aligns with the humoristic, even satirical tone of the entire novel that is set in Berlin during the early 1990s. Tanja Nause in her 2002 study about *Inszenierung von Naivität. Tendenzen und Ausprägungen einer Erzählstrategie der Nachwendeliteratur* that focuses on these kinds of characters in post-1989 writings argues that their stereotypical composition goes beyond the mere picaresque but rather represents a narrative strategy that she terms "inszenierte Naivität," staged naivety. While I approach Hinrich's character from a different angle, Nause's categorization is relevant since it implies that the text has equipped the protagonist with a certain amount of conscious decision over his words and actions, which is crucial for defining his agency.[84] Further, the notion of staged naivety alludes to the act of performance that is decisive in the development of the hybrid life narrative and the subject's ensuing agency.

At its outset, the novel introduces Hinrich as unemployed stay-at-home-husband, who has minimized his living environment to the apartment and immediate neighborhood, which he encounters on walks with the family dog. He has limited any kind of interaction with his surroundings to the bare necessities, which also affects conversations with his wife Julia, who is portrayed as coping well with the unifying Germany and who was not laid off after 1989. Despite these rather unfavorable social circumstances, Hinrich's character turns his luck around once he decides to apply for work, motivated by an encouraging horoscope. He even excels in his job as salesman for table top fountains, even though he only minimally adjust his communicative behavior and towards the end of the novel, he is even offered the position as sales manager of the company's East German division.

According to the narrative, the protagonist's success originates from two sources: firstly, his accidental invention of a table top fountain that turns into a huge commercial success in East Berlin;

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[84] As Eilan and Roessler (2003) state: "to be the agent of an action you need to exercise some degree of control over the action" (34).

secondly, his superior Boldinger's and his colleague Strüver's assumption that he is a former employee of the Stasi. It is noteworthy, that the characters' suspicions do not result in Hinrich's layoff and the manifestation of a social outsider position, as it has often been the case in the "real", extradiegetic post-1989 German society.[85] Instead the text emphasizes notions of empathy and understanding, even respect in Boldinger's and Strüver's reactions. Thus, the text casts their behavior in opposition to the public discourse and its condemnation of people, who were suspected to be involved in any cooperation with the Stasi.

While both Boldinger and Strüver are shown as self-assured regarding their image of Hinrich, the latter continuously attempts to illicit a definite statement from Hinrich about his past that could affirm his and Boldinger's assumptions. But the text emphasizes Hinrich's ignorance regarding Strüver's hints and questions, which it presents as the reason for why he refrains from correcting Strüver's false assumptions. Rather, by using phrases and words such as "incriminating files" [belastende Akten] that are tainted in post-1989 Germany through their connection to the work of the Stasi, Hinrich is shown to participate in the stereotypical imagination of him as former Stasi employee. The text further uses Hinrich's minimal utterances to not only set Strüver and Boldinger on the wrong track regarding his GDR past, but to also elicit doubt in the reader. Thus, through the majority of the novel the reader is put in the same position as Strüver, not knowing much about Hinrich's life before the unification and left speculating about a possible interpretation of his statements. For the longest time throughout the plot, not even the reader can rule out a collaboration between Hinrich and the Stasi.

This is nicely exemplified in the following scene, which represents the usual confusing interaction between Hinrich and Strüver, as described from Hinrich's perspective:

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[85] For details see Miller. *The Stasi Files Unveiled. Guilt and Compliance in a Unified Germany*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publisher, 1999 as well as Bathrick. "Language and Power." *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*. Ed. Geyer. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 138-159. As Glaeser (2000) describes with regard to the interaction between East and West German police officers after 1989: "Eastern officers are highly aware of the fact that many westerners think of Stasi contact as morally contaminating, a fact expressed in western exclamations like, 'I don't want to have any business with someone who had dealings with the Stasi,' which were especially frequent directly after unification" (271).

Er kam dann darauf zu sprechen, daß ‚der Alte' große Stücke auf mich hielte. In letzter Zeit hätte es etliche dankbare Kundenbriefe an die Firma gegeben. [...] Dann wollte er plötzlich wissen, wie ich eigentlich an die Kundenlisten herangekommen sei? Ihm sei es eigentlich egal, aber... „Von meiner alten Firma", sagte ich verwundert. „Aha", sagte er, „von der Firma." Er nickte. Dann schenkte er uns beiden nach und begann nun plötzlich von der Staatssicherheit zu sprechen. (Wahrscheinlich hatte er schon vorher etwas getrunken; er wechselte jedenfalls sehr abrupt von einem Thema zum anderen.) „Ja, Gott, Stasimitarbeit! Also, wenn du mich fragst: Wenn einer das Zeug dazu hat, Menschenskind, warum denn nicht!" (111f.)

[Then he started to talk about how "the boss" thought the world of me. Lately, there had been a number of thankful letters from customers sent to the company. […] Then he suddenly wanted to know how I did get a hold of the client lists? It would not matter to him, but… "From my old company," I said surprised. "Aha," he said, "from the company." He nodded. Then he topped off both of our glasses and suddenly started talking about the secret police. (He probably was already a little bit drunk from before hand; in any case he changed abruptly from one topic to another.) "Oh my, working for the secret police! Well, if you ask me: If somebody has what it takes, jiminy, why not!]

Strüver's questions refer to a comprehensive list that contains a multitude of information about every East Berlin tenant, which Hinrich had handed to him during their first meeting. The list includes, for example, information about occupation and age, which are a valuable resource in preparing a sales pitch. Strüver's assumptions that this list must be a remainder of Hinrich's work for the secret service is supposedly confirmed in one word: "Firma" (literally: company). This term does not only refer to a business or company, but has also come to represent the GDR's state security. While this chiffre was in use even before 1989, the revelations about the scope of the Stasi's work in the GDR after the German unification have charged the term with new meaning.

At this point in time the texts leaves it up for speculation if Hinrich either consciously ignores the ambivalent meaning of the word or is just ignorant about its other contemporary implications, which would explain his surprise about Strüver's supposedly sudden change of topic. During the exchange between the two colleagues, the reader is not able to know, why Hinrich does not follow Strüver's line of thought and if he might even actually allude to the firm that Strüver has in mind. But these insecurities are cleared up a few pages later, towards the end of the novel, when Hinrich reveals that he was employed by the communal residential administration, where he was responsible for managing the residential units, dealing with complaints, and organizing repairs (Sparschuh 136). This provides an explanation for how he

got hold of the lists as well as for his incomprehension of Strüver's communicative leap from the lists to the secret service.

As mentioned above, Strüver's understanding, even apologetic reaction to what he assumes to be Hinrich's confession of his Stasi involvement, stands in contrast to the public attitude towards Stasi employees, who are generally termed to be perpetrators. Where Strüver as character and the public discourse intersect, is his automatic assumption of Hinrich's affiliation with the secret service. Instead of broaching questions about the list's origin at the moment when Hinrich presents them to Strüver and instead of clarifying the name of the company Hinrich was working for, Strüver's character is not interested in further biographical details as long as Hinrich's few and short replies fit the picture he has already constructed. Hinrich's utterance including the tainted term "firm" is represented as synonymous with the actual act of collaborating with the Stasi und is sufficient confirmation for Strüver's suspicions.

The same communicative mechanisms are at play during the first encounter between Boldinger and Hinrich that takes place at a conference for tabletop fountain salesmen in Bad Sülz. Boldinger is presented as interested in connecting personally with Hinrich, the only East German invited, during the reception that precedes the conference's official opening remarks. Boldinger attempts to involve Hinrich in a conversation, unfortunately right when Hinrich is unable to speak. In expressing his appreciation for Hinrich's application, Boldinger states:

> "Und dunkle Punkte in Ihrer Vergangenheit gab es ja meines Wissens auch nicht?"Ich schüttelte den Kopf, wobei sich allerdings mein Schinkenkloß in Erinnerung brachte – er war ein Stück in den Hals hinabgerutscht. Mit einem kurzen, kräftigen Würger, ich mußte die Augen fest zusammenpressen, brachte ich ihn wieder, ehe es zu einem Erstickungsanfall kam, in die Ausgangslage...Boldinger sah mich forschend an. Ich atmete schwer. "Aber – wenigstens in der Partei, in der Partei waren Sie doch?" fragte Boldinger nun vorsichtig nach. Ich nickte zaghaft. Doch ehe ich den Mund aufbekam [...] hatte er mir schon fest und aufrichtig die Hand gedrückt. [...] In Boldingers Augen las ich ein stummes "Sag jetzt nichts, Hinrich!" Dafür sprach nun er auf mich ein, leise, beschwörend: "Sie wollten sich etwas schaffen, aber es war eben die falsche Gesellschaft, in die Sie hineingeraten waren. Nur – einfach so herumsitzen, die Hände in den Schoß zu legen: das war Ihre Sache nicht. Sie wollten...nein, Sie mußten was bewegen! – Das kann ich sehr, sehr gut verstehen, Herr Lobek. – (34)

["And there are also no dark spots in your past as far as I know?" I shook my head, which reminded me of the bite of ham – it had moved a little bit down my throat. With a short, forceful choke, I had to close my eyes tightly, I moved it back into its original position, avoiding suffocation…Boldinger looked at me inquisitorially. I breathed heavily. "But - at least in the party, you were in the party, right?" Boldinger now asked carefully. I nodded tentatively. But before I could open my mouth […] he had already forcefully and wholeheartedly shaken my hands. […] In Boldinger's eyes, I read a silent "Don't say anything now, Hinrich!" Instead, he started talking to me, quietly, adjuratory: "You wanted to accomplish something, but you ended up in the wrong society. But – just sitting around, twiddling your thumbs: that wasn't your thing. You wanted to….no, you needed to change something! – That I can understand very, very well, Mr. Lobek. –]

The interaction is constructed along the same communicative pattern as the exchange between Hinrich and Strüver. In both instances, the Western characters put words in Hinrich's mouth and he refrains from correcting them. The text remains ambivalent if Hinrich's presumed compliance with this typecasting is either due to his inability to understand Boldinger's or Strüver's allusions to a past involvement with the Stasi, because he decides to remain ignorant about their hints or because certain obstacles – here in the form of a ball of ham – keep him from setting the record straight. Through Boldinger's statements the text reveals him as a man who has already formed a specific picture of his new employee from the East that is connected to certain hopes regarding his persona. His expression that Hinrich was "at least" affiliated with the party, if there are already "no dark spots," meaning an employment with the Stasi, represents his stereotypical assumptions about an the East German biography. Boldinger mistakes Hinrich's heavy breathing, squeezed eyes, and silence for nervousness as well as confirmation of his statements. While his words of encouragement could be read as well intentioned, they cannot mask the fact that he is not willing to listen, but is rather interested in sharing his vision of a life in the East, seeking confirmation. Hinrich again fulfills the expectations of his Western questioner solely by remaining silent and not challenging any of Boldinger's statements. This is what renders the communication ultimately successful, at least from the perspective of the Western character. In both instances, the Western perspective of East Germany and its inhabitants remains unchallenged, and Strüver as well as Boldinger display satisfaction upon the affirmation of their stereotypical assumptions about life in the GDR. Throughout the interaction their worldview remains intact, which the novel ultimately presents as the prerequisite for their empathic and understanding reaction to Hinrich's alleged involvement with the secret service. The text emphasizes

the business aspect of their connection with Hinrich as another reason for their sympathetic reaction. While the text repeatedly highlights the protagonist's communicative inaptitude, the Western salesmen remain blind to this and rather perceive Hinrich as the key to East Germany and its lucrative market, since he is their only employee on site who is also knowledgeable about the local specificities. Further, the understanding attitude towards Hinrichs originates in the need of the West German characters to morally justify the continued friendly interaction with a presumed former Stasi spy. Excusing "his" past not only removes any stains of guilt from Hinrich's biography, but automatically also defends their opposition to the public condemnation of any kind of Stasi involvement and rationalizes his ascension in the company. The text with its satirical emplotment alludes through these interactions to a discourse regarding potential Stasi involvement that counters the official narrative about Stasi perpetrators with an equally one-dimensional and unconstructive engagement, thus mediating the necessity for a more balanced engagement with the topic.

Hinrich is portrayed as ignorant of Boldinger's and Strüver's allusions and references, or at least to the social implications of a collaboration with the Stasi. While the text leaves it up for speculation how much of his behavior is based on conscious decision making, I agree with Nause's notion of staged or performed naivety, which implies a certain amount of control and reflection over his own actions. It is exactly Hinrich's denial to adjust his vocabulary, to change his behavior, and to partake in the guilt focused contemplation about his past that provides him with agency. He executes what Noland (2009) has defined as resistant agency in actually not conceding to the pressure exerted by Boldinger and Strüver. His adaptation to the stereotypical image of East Germans exists only in Boldinger's and Strüver's perception, while Hinrich himself actually remains unchanged as the quirky character, who is constructed more as the image of the German *Spießbürger* than the stereotypical *Ossi*. Nonetheless, it is his seemingly unquestioned acceptance of his employers' "othering" that leaves their perspective of the East intact, which ultimately provides him with the chance to be considered as sales manager for the East German division. Boldinger's announcement of this opportunity signals a new quality of Hinrich's social position

in the unifying Germany through his ascension from unemployed outsider to a socially acknowledged position of leadership.

Whereas the text clearly marks the source of agency in the interaction between Hinrich and the character's from West Germany, the impact of the family is more difficult to ascertain in the case of this novel mainly because the relationship between spouses does not take center stage, but rather comes into play on the sidelines of the plot. Nonetheless, the text constructs the character of Hinrich's wife Julia as a decisive impact on his performance of agency, if not in a positive and constructive way. Julia has taken a different approach to the social changes that accompany the unification process and has remained employed throughout the demise of the GDR. She is shown to suffer from Hinrich's social seclusion and the differences in their daily lives as well in their judgment of the unification take their toll.[86] Even though things seem to improve when Hinrich is successful in getting the job as a salesman, they ultimately remain estranged from each other, mainly because of Hinrich's inability to communicate his true thoughts and feelings to his wife.[87] Instead of addressing their disagreements, he, as in the interactions with other, remains silent and Julia is left to draw her own conclusions without receiving any corrections of her obviously false assumptions about his emotional withdrawal. Only after Julia has moved out, does Hinrich realize that his marriage might actually be at stake and decides to win her back, unfortunately without success. Thus, the realm of the family imagined in this text is neither conducive to encouraging agency – Hinrich instead remains in a passive-aggressive opposition towards Julia – nor a space where the agency acquired in the interactions with Boldinger and Strüver can be successfully implemented. Despite his professional success, the protagonist's private life remains on a steady downward spiral. While Julia appears to at least motivate Hinrich's job search and while her moving out causes him to reflect on their relationship and his contribution to its dire state, in the end Hinrich remains ultimately unable to change his behavior and to reconnect with Julia. The text, thus, constructs the familial relationship between the

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[86] "Julia fiel das auf: Mit mir könne man nicht mehr reden, ihr fehle der Austausch mit mir. Da könnte sie sich gleich vor ein Aquarium setzen." (15) [Julia realized that: One couldn't talk to me anymore, she was missing to converse with me. She could just sit in front of an aquarium and it would be the same.]
[87] See detail analysis of this relationship in Chapter 1.

two characters from the East based on a different pattern than the interactions between the figures from East and West. The negotiation of the past, the biographical fissures resulting from the demise of the GDR and the German unification process, as well as the judgment of the ongoing social and political changes are ultimately at the core of each of the conversations.[88] But since the success of the East-West interactions is mainly based on the fact that Western stereotypes and assumptions remain unchallenged, the diverging opinions and attitudes towards the unification that are apparent within the East German couple must inevitably result in dissent. As the text has it, Hinrich's essential character trait is that he refuses to adjust his behavior to the expectations of his surroundings. Thus, the same characteristic that causes the conversations with Boldinger and Strüver to be advantageous for the character's professional success is also cast as the reason why he fails in his private life. Whereas silence that is taken for agreement in conversation with Westerners translates into success, in the private realm this silence finally causes Julia's extreme frustration and disappointment, resulting in Julia and Hinrich's separation. The agency that the protagonist attains professionally does not transcend to the private sphere. Through this, the novel emphasizes the irreconcilability between the private and the public sphere in post-1989 Germany. Further, in its oversimplified characters and their equally simplistic behavior the text ridicules the one-dimensional nature of the contemporary national discourse about the GDR and its legacy. The stereotypical assumptions about an East German's collaboration with the Stasi as exhibit by the West German characters in the novel highlight the counterproductive impact of these identifications with regard to successful East-West interactions. At the same time, the text constructs the realm of the family as equally contested, since different strategies in negotiating the historic rupture of 1989 cannot always be successfully balanced between family members. Aligning with the social transformations of the unifying Germany, including soaring divorce and stagnating birth rates (Kolinsky/Nickel 2003), the failure of private relationships is one of the core themes of post-1989 literature, but not all narratives leave the protagonist without a resort.

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[88] With the important difference that Julia does not suspect Hinrich to be a Stasi collaborator.

Knowledge is Power: Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma*

Unter den Namen Norma, published in 1994, belongs like Sparschuh's novel in the early group of writings that represented immediate reactions to the unification in the form of fictionalized accounts. Burmeister's novel has been categorized as one of the first examples of the complex *Wenderoman* genre and attracted scholarly attention mainly for its strong female protagonist Marianne, the crisis she encounters post-1989 in negotiating a new identity (Gebauer 1998), and the specific mode of self-reflexive narration employed by Burmeister (Harbers 2004). Lewis (2009) pays the closest attention to the relationship between Marianne and her partner Johannes in her study focusing on the depictions of love and gender in post-1989 literature.

The scene of interest for this chapter is related to the foci of previous research on Burmeister and most closely aligned with Lewis' detailed analysis. The scene focuses on a conversation between the protagonist Marianne and the West German character Corinna Kling at a garden party that Johannes has organized to create an environment in which Marianne can meet his new colleagues and friends. The conversation between Marianne and Corinna marks a crucial moment within the plotline of the story and functions not only as the turning point during Marianne's visit to Mannheim, where her husband Johannes took up work shortly after the unification, but also as the turning point in the entire story line resulting in the dissolution of matrimonial bonds through Marianne and Johannes' separation, which ultimately prepares the new elective familial arrangement between Marianne and Norma at the end of the novel (as discussed in detail in Chapter 1). Corinna, the wife of one of the colleagues, is introduced as the personification of the West German housewife, who gave up her profession to stay home and take care of her twins ("Das Ende einer Karriere, der Anfang eines neuen Lebens." 219; The end of a career, the beginning of a new life.) and whose ambitions are subsequently limited to the domestic sphere. She attracts Marianne's attention already upon her arrival because of her perfectly matched appearance: "Der Schmuck passte zu ihrem Namen, der Name zu ihrem Aussehen, das Aussehen, die Bewegungen passten zu ihrem früheren Beruf." [The jewelry matched her name, her name matched her appearance, the

appearance, the movements matched her former profession.] Throughout their interactions, both Marianne

and Corinna are framed by the text as rather stereotypical representations of their respective East and

West German heritage: Marianne as the childless, seemingly independent, working woman; Corinna as

the housewife and mother. This opposition between both characters defines the limited opportunities of

both characters to actually get to know each other and highlights the risks of remaining caught in the

stereotypical social imagination of the other. Their interactions, thus, exemplify a process of mutual

othering.[89]

At the gathering of her husband's new colleagues, Marianne is shown as seeking a place to sit

apart from the other guests, hoping that Corinna will follow her and continue their previous conversation.

The text demonstrates the character's conscious creation of a secluded space for the exchange to follow,

which functions as the framework for the development of her hybrid life narrative in cooperation with

Corinna, about whose attitude towards East Germany Marianne has already learned during their short,

earlier exchange. The text frames this exchange as catalyst for Marianne's decision to initiate and stage

their private chat away from the others, which marks this as the first moment of the character's resistant

agency as defined by Noland (2009).

Marianne's plan is successful and Corinna joins her. After a momentous prelude, stating "it is

time that you learn the truth about me" (224), the text shows Marianne involved in narrating the story of a

life in the GDR filled with all kinds of clichés and stereotypes, presenting it as her own biography. The

invented life account integrates nearly every single prejudice that has been introduced in the public

discourses about life in the East and, thus, it is not surprising that the story about material scarcity and an

overpowering socialist ideology ends with Marianne's alter ego as a member of the secret service under

the cover name Norma (explaining the novel's title). Aiming for an outrageous climax of the story,

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[89] As explained in the introduction of this chapter, it is not my aim to equate the (post)colonial context with the post-1989 German context, concepts established in the postcolonial framework to analyze and define the interaction between the two unequal parties in the colonial setting as well as its long-lasting implications, like othering (Spivak 1985), offer an excellent starting point for the analysis of East-West interactions that display a similar power imbalance.

Marianne goes on to fabricate an affair between her invented self and her case officer. Marianne does not have a clear narrative outline for "her" life in mind, but rather invents situations and events in the very act of narrating her fictional biography.[90] As Harbers (2004) rightly points out, the story Marianne presents is "eine klassisch einfache, geschlossene Geschichte ohne Leerstellen […], das absolute Gegenteil des offenen und fragmentarischen Erzählens des weiteren Romans" (234) [a classic simple, closed story without gaps […], the complete opposite to the open and fragmentary narration in the rest of the novel]. The biographical elements that are included in the story are presented as dependent on the input and reactions of the attentive interlocutor, Corinna. After finishing the plot point of the unhappy affair with the case officer, Marinna states: "Dann kam es, wie es kommen mußte" (241) [Then the inevitable happened], which initiates the following response from Corinna:

> Corinna sah mich an, hellwach, und sagte: Sie wurden schwanger, nicht wahr? –Ja, genau das. Zum ersten und zum letzten Mal in meinem Leben. Ich bemerkte die Schwangerschaft frühzeitig. Den Rest können Sie sich denken. – Er hat Sie zur Abtreibung gezwungen, nicht wahr? Sie wollten das Kind, aber nicht ohne den Mann, Sie hofften, daß Ihre Schwangerschaft alles zum Guten wenden und dieser Georg Ohmann nun zu Ihnen stehen würde. Doch er stellte Sie vor die Wahl, entsetzlich, was Männer so als Wahl bezeichnen, und drohte damit, aus Ihrem Leben zu verschwinden und dafür zu sorgen, daß Sie gebrandmarkt wären als Stasihure, entschuldigen Sie den Ausdruck. Ich denke, genau das hat er zu Ihnen gesagt, und Sie in Ihrer Verzweiflung wußten nicht, wohin, waren furchtbar allein gelassen, noch schlimmer dran als andere Frauen in solch einer Situation, und gaben nach. Wenn ich vorhin gesagt habe, aktives Opfer, möchte ich das jetzt zurücknehmen, sagte Corinna. Für mich sind Sie ein tragisches Opfer, dort verwundet, wo Frauen am verletzlichsten sind. Diesem Männerbetrieb der Staatssicherheit waren Sie wehrlos ausgeliefert. (241f.)

> [Corinna looked at me, wide awake, and said: You got pregnant, right? – Yes, exactly. For the first and last time in my life. I realized it early on. You can imagine the rest. – He forced you to get an abortion, right? You wanted the child, but not without the man, you hoped the pregnancy would turn everything to the better and that this Georg Ohmann would finally stand by you. But he gave you the choice, despicable what men call choice, he threatened to get out of your life and to make sure that you would be branded a Stasi whore, please excuse the expression. I think that is exactly what he said to you, and you in your distress did not know where to turn to, incredibly alone, even worse than other women in such a situation, and you gave in. If I said earlier, active victim, I would want to take that back now, said Corinna. For me, you are a tragic victim, wounded where

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[90] By offering a fabricated account of the past, Burmeister inverts the often used plot twist of needing to give an account after witnessing or the need to talk to somebody, like an analyst, for cathartic release.

woman are the most vulnerable. You were defenseless at the merci of the male
establishment of the secret service.]

The scene clearly exemplifies the collaboration of both women in fabricating a fictional East German

biography. Especially the beginning of the scene highlights the impact that Corinna's reactions have on

the story, as Marianne turns them into clues for the plot. Twice she actively seeks Corinna's input: once

when she states "Then the inevitable happened." and later on with her cliffhanger-like "You can imagine

the rest." Both times, Marianne finishes her communicative turn with a statement that explicitly elicits

Corinna's input, after whose responses Marianne adjusts the story line to include Corinna's ideas about

her past. The narrative shows both characters working hand in hand in developing this fictional biography

and both of them employ stereotypes to create a GDR life narrative that is believable according to

Western standards. As Bhabha (1986) outlines in his foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: "[…]

the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling

prophecy – it is always the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in

assuming that image" (xvi). Corinna's and Marianne's exchange highlights how both of them participate

in creating the image of Marianne's identity. Their reciprocal investment in narrating the details of this

biography indicates that Marianne is not the passive recipient of Corinna's othering. Rather, she is

portrayed as consciously and actively developing this stereotypical version of life in the GDR in order to

remain an agent in the definition of herself and to ridicule the limited and naïve perception of East

Germans among West Germans.

Corinna's character appears as emotionally invested in Marianne's story and the above scene

contains her longest contribution to the fictional life account. Her ability and willingness to continue the

story line with such enthusiasm and detail indicates that she believes the biography Marianne has told up

to that point, which in turn demonstrates that Marianne's artful employment of stereotypes results in a

story that does not challenge Corinna in her interpretation of it and exhibits verisimilitude. As Jerome

Bruner (1991) has outlined in "The Narrative Construction of Reality," both are essential aspects in

creating a narrative that is assumed to be truthful. Further, the genre of autobiography that Marianne's

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character employs in her hybrid life narrative implies that the presented information reference actual events. Marianne's introductory phrase "it is time that you learn the truth about me" (224) adds to this staging of reality and practically urges Corinna to subscribe to the clichés and stereotypes presented in the public discourse about the GDR. Marianne actively employs these same stereotypes to play into Corinna's beliefs and assumptions and elicit her active participation. As Lewis (2009) puts it: "Das Geniale an Mariannes Strategie – und auch die Provokation ihres Aktes – liegt darin, sich gegen die verzerrten Kollektivbilder zur Wehr zu setzen, indem sie die Fremdbilder auf raffinierte Weise parodiert" (106). [The genius part of Marianne's strategy – as well as the provocation of her action – lies in the fact that she strikes back at the distorted collective images by cleverly parodying the perception by the (Western) other.] It is this notion of parody that shows the productive employment of stereotypes and again interlinks Marianne's execution of agency with the notion of performance as an opportunity to negotiate disparate notions of one's self.[91]

Corinna does not only become so emotionally involved in Marianne's story, because it aligns with her expectations, but also because in the above scene her input moves the narrative towards the themes of pregnancy and abortion, topics that are close to her own life as a mother of twins. Beyond the power of stereotypes, Corinna's contribution to Marianne's story, thus, also clearly reveals the value system on which her judgments and interpretations are based. Her statement "You wanted the child, but not without the man." can be seen as a textual reflection on the outsider status of single mothers in West Germany at the time, which Corinna automatically projects unto the GDR. Further, her polarized depiction of Marianne as loving, desperate, and depending on a man's help on the one side of the equation, and the dominant, influential, and decisive case officer on the other side, ascribes a stereotypical understanding of gender to Corinna that shapes her self-perception and, hence, influences her perspective of Marianne and her past. Corinna's strong conviction about the accuracy of her GDR image and its inner

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[91] The notion of performance appears to be prevalent in Burmeister's novel. The name of her fictitious alter ego and best friend in the novel, Norma, is also an anagram of the word "Roman," meaning novel. Thus, the fictional biography is not only told under the cover of Marianne's best friend but implicitly hints at its fictional origins in the novel.

workings is exemplified through the phrase "I think that is *exactly* what he said to you". This is yet another proof of her emotional involvement in telling the story as well as of its perfect alignment with her previous beliefs and assumption. Her uncritical approach towards the stereotypical East German biography further highlights the one-dimensional narrative construction of her character that is as based on stereotypes as Corinna's approach towards the East. As the later discussion of another interaction between Marianne and Corinna will show, the text frames both characters as caught in their prejudices that undermine their chances for an honest interpersonal relationship.

It is Corinna's depiction of Marianne as a helpless victim of male domination – an aspect that exclusively originates from her input in the story – that causes and at the same time justifies her understanding and emphatic reaction. She even changes her previous judgment of Marianne as "active victim" to "tragic victim," implicitly reducing Marianne's agency and, thus, guilt regarding her involvement with the Stasi. From Corinna's perspective, everything that insinuates Marianne's guilt is the result of actions rooted in love. This attitude is shown as prerequisite for her excuse of Marianne's behavior that Marianne herself clearly tried to portray as immoral. As with Boldinger and Strüver in Sparschuh's *Zimmerspringbrunnen*, the judgment and reaction guiding private interactions are in opposition to the public discourse. Corinna has created a version of Marianne that allows for empathy and does not require harsh moral condemnation, which is the condition for the continuation of their conversation. It is noteworthy that later on Marianne takes back the agency that Corinna negated with her categorization of Marianne as "tragic victim." In stating "Und außerdem haben Sie ein falsches Bild von mir" (242) [Besides, you have a wrong impression of me], Marianne reclaims the ultimate privilege of interpreting "her" biography and passing on the final judgment about "her" past. The texts excludes any further reflection on Marianne's part regarding the fact that she herself is responsible for the "wrong impression" that Corinna created about her. It is noteworthy that while Marianne consciously aims at producing a false autobiography in order to ridicule Corinna's naïve and limited perspective on East

Germans, she still seeks the final interpretative power over the collectively produced narrative, which highlights that she wants to secure the agency that she develops through the hybrid life narrative.

Seeking an in-depth understanding of the communicative strategies involved in this conversation and in the development of the hybrid life narrative as well as the motivation for Marianne's behavior, which comes as a surprise to the reader and is not self-evident, it is important to pay attention to two additional scenes in the novel. Both scenes provide further examples for the mutual othering that does not only take place between Marianne and Corinna, but also between Marianne and Johannes. The first scene takes place before Marianne and Corinna's private conversation discussed above. It is a short exchange they have at the dinner table with everybody else around and follows a similar communicative strategy as their shared construction of Marianne's fictional biography. Coming to sit next to each other, they start up a superficial conversation about the food and how some of the salad reminds Corinna of her grandparents' vegetable garden. She starts talking about arugula as a plant actually native to Germany and laments how people nowadays do not know the indigenous plants anymore, to which Marianne replies that she as well has never heard of arugula.

> – Und ich dachte, sagte Corinna, bei Ihnen im Osten hätten sich die alten Eßgewohnheiten erhalten, wo doch alles rückständiger war. Nicht immer ein Mangel. Zum Beispiel die wundervollen –
> – Alleen, sagte ich.
> – Genau. Die habe ich selbst gesehen, bei einer Autofahrt durch Mecklenburg, im Sommer nach der Wende. Ein Ausflug in die fünfziger Jahre. Traumhaft, zumindest aus Touristenperspektive. Für die Einheimischen war es gewiß ganz anders. Hart. Da gebe ich mich keinen Illusionen hin und will mir auch kein Urteil anmaßen. Halten Sie mich nicht -, ich verabscheue das arrogante Auftreten all dieser –
> – Besserwessis, sagte ich.
> – Sie sagen es. Die Ratschläge von oben herab, derart peinlich. Und die Vorurteile. (219)
>
> [–And I thought, said Corinna, you in the East had preserved the old eating habits, since everything was more backward. Not always a shortcoming. For example the wonderful –
> – Avenues, I said.
> – Exactly. I saw them myself during a drive through Mecklenburg, during the summer after the unification. A trip into the 50s. Magical, at least from a tourist's perspective. For the locals it was probably completely different. Tough. I don't have any illusions about it and will not assume that I can judge. Don't think of me as-, I detest the arrogant demeanor of all these –
> – Know-it-all-Westerners, I said.
> – You said it. The condescending advice, absolutely embarrassing. And the prejudices.]

The scene possesses a humorous notion in its construction of Corinna's inability for self-reflection. The text presents her as ignorant of the fact that Marianne's ability to complete her sentences indicates how she herself is tapping into the stereotypes and prejudice she claims to detest. At the same time, the scene highlights Marianne's equally stereotypical expectations regarding the exchange with a West German housewife, emphasizing the mutual othering to which both characters subscribe. The description of the backward East, stuck in the immediate post-war era of the 50s, with the wonderful and picturesque avenues that embody the untouched nature mirrors the action that Glaeser (2001) defines as allochronization, describing the temporal displacement of East Germans through West Germans (183). As Glaeser discusses with reference to Fabian (1983) and Bakhtin (1984), this allochronization has far reaching consequences with regard to the success of personal interactions:

> Fabian (1983) insists that dialogue must be based on an open encounter, potentially leading to a self-transformatory experience (cf. Bakhtin 1984a). This is only possible however, if the other is not merely *encountered* at the same time (i.e., is synchronous), but is also *treated* as an inhabitant of the same time (i.e., is contemporaneous). Fabian uses the term *allochronism* to describe the denial of coevalness, that is, the transposition of the other into another time. In the terminology of this study, allochronism is then a form of oppositional temporal identification which connects at least two sets of human beings and their worlds with disjunct periods of time. (146, italics in the original)

Corinna's allusions to the East's continued backwardness, the unchanged nature, and even the usage of the term "Einheimische" – which refers to locals as well as to natives – indicate that she does not only perceive Marianne to be from a place different than her own homey environment, but rather that she situates this place and its inhabitants, including Marianne, in a different time that has not caught up with the standardized time of West Germany. Their inability to encounter and perceive each other contemporaneously thus determines the failure of their exchange from the outset. Through this the text emphasizes a central issue that the strained East-West encounters fail to negotiate.

Communicatively, the structure of this exchange foreshadows the lengthy conversation later on, where the characters exchange roles and Corinna is the one that finishes Marianne's communicative turns and thoughts. In both instances, the turn taking is possible and successful because, as the narrative suggests, Marianne is keenly aware of the stereotypical frame of reference that Corinna employs for her

description and understanding of the East, which is in turn an equally stereotypical expectation on Marianne's part. It appears to be this short exchange that triggers Marianne's decision to involve Corinna in a more private conversation and to find a productive way to exploit the stereotypes and clichés with which she is confronted in this situation. As Lewis (2009) describes it: "Der kommunikative Anlass des Erzählens ist die gegenseitige Fremdheit zwischen Deutschen aus Ost und West, die so wenig voneinander wissen, dass sie zwischen Wahrheit und Lüge nicht unterscheiden können" (105) [The communicative motive for recounting is the mutual foreignness between Germans from East and West, who know so little about one another that they cannot distinguish between truth and lie]. Their mutual foreignness and the absence of any kind of real knowledge about the other as well as any interest in testing or reevaluating one's own stereotypical imagery of the other creates the foundation for the successful mutual othering that leaves stereotypes on both sides unchallenged. While Marianne eagerly works on parodying Corinna's clichés of East Germans and deploy it for her own benefit, she never exhibits any kind of reflexivity regarding her own stereotypes of West Germany. Both characters fulfill each other's expectations; Marianne even consciously aims at conforming to the stereotypes in order to establish her hybrid life narrative. It is obvious from this initial contact, that Marianne's and Corinna's conversations do not entail the chance for a self-transformatory experience, but rather function to reinforce old divisions and estrangements.

The other scene providing a key to understanding Marianne and Corinna's collaborative work in fabricating the fictionalized GDR biography takes place on the day after the garden party. Despite Marianne's request for Corinna to keep the story a secret between the two them, Corinna shares her knowledge with her husband, who then confronts his colleague and friend Johannes. Thus, Marianne is faced with the situation she attempted to prevent the previous day and has to negotiate her actions within the matrimonial relationship with Johannes, who expects an explanation for her behavior. Despite the fact that Marianne claims that she is not able to give reasons for her actions, she describes her motivation as follows:

Daß ich es schon lange satt hatte, als Abladeplatz für Mitleid und Belehrungen zu dienen, daß es mir zum Hals heraushing, eine Vertreterin des Typischen zu sein oder eine Randerscheinung, daß mir dieser Musterkoffer gestohlen bleiben könnte, den ich, je nachdem, gegen einen neuen eintauschen oder um alles in der Welt behalten soll. [...] Anstatt mich dem Verdacht auszusetzen, [...], daß ich unterschlage und beschönige, wenn ich erzähle, wie dies und das gewesen ist, habe ich von vornherein gelogen. Und mir wurde geglaubt! Ich wette, alle deine Gäste hätten so reagiert wie Corinna, allesamt wissen sie immer schon Bescheid, diese aufgeblasenen Originale, für die der Osten bevölkert ist von Stereotypen. (251f.)

[That I was fed up with serving as the dumping ground of pity and instructions, that I was sick and tired of being a representative of the typical or an exception, that I couldn't care less about the sample case, which I should exchange for a new one or keep under any circumstance. […] Instead of subjecting myself to the suspicion […] that I was lying and sugarcoating when I say how this and that has been, I just lied from the start. And she believed me! I bet that all of your guests would have reacted the same way Corinna did, all of them are always already in the know, those pompous originals, for whom the East is populated by stereotypes.]

Marianne's explanation reveals the agency she performed and experienced while telling her fictionalized biography. She exhibits a combination of resistant and innovative agency, on the one hand standing up against the readymade images with which the Western other confronts her; on the other hand developing a productive way to create a communicative space in which she is able to control and navigate the stereotypes for her advantage. During her conversation with Corinna, Marianne was able to distance herself from the pity and the advices she usually encounters in the public sphere, and rather presents a life story that her interlocutor for once did not critically dissect or judge. It is interestingly the story element of the Stasi collaboration – an action that is negatively charged and tainted by and within the public discourse[92] – that sets her free: "Durch die selbstgewählte Geschichte einer Stasi-Täterin ist Marianne bemüht, sich aus der Position eines passiven Opfers des sozialistischen Paternalismus, sei es Opfer der Stasi, Opfer des DDR-Staats oder des globalen Patriarchats, zu befreien und *agency* (Handlungsmöglichkeiten) für sich zu beanspruchen. Und *agency* kann paradoxerweise in diesem Fall nur mit dem Stigma der Stasi erkauft werden" (Lewis 115; italics in the original) [Through the self-chosen story about a Stasi perpetrator Marianne attempts to free herself from the position of a passive victim of socialist paternalism, be it the victim of the Stasi, the victim of the GDR state or of the global patriarchy,

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[92] See Miller (1999).

and to claim *agency* (opportunities to act) for herself. And paradoxically, *agency* can in this case only be

bought through the stigma of the Stasi]. What Lewis points to is that agency under these circumstances

depends on Marianne adopting the stereotypical expectations of her Western listener, employing them to

develop and present a life story that aligns with the Western prejudices about life in East Germany before

and after 1989. The crucial step in this strategy, establishing the difference between solely adapting to

stereotypes and negating one's identity on the one side and executing agency on the other, is that

Marianne does not remain caught within these stereotypes, but rather finds a way to playfully engage with

them and to successfully portray and perform an entirely invented biography as her own. Corinna's

collaboration in the story indicates the success of Marianne's performance, which in turn helps her to

maintain the agency experienced in that moment. Nonetheless, through Marianne's emotional defense of

her immoral deception the text also draws attention to the immense pressure exerted by the dominant

Western narrative. Marianne herself uses the term "pompous originals" [aufgeblasene Originale] to refer

to West Germans and contrasts them with the stereotypes that populate the East. It is noteworthy that she

connects the term "original" with the West, subconsciously framing it as the identification model that is

governing the questions of belonging in post-1989 Germany. As Glaeser (2000) states with regard to the

impact of the unification process on the individual East-West encounters:

> […] the organizational form of German unification has become the predominant root
> metaphor, especially for the ways in which west Germans relate to east Germans. The
> main characteristic of this root metaphor is the identification of western persons, things,
> and ways as models to which eastern persons, things, and ways should conform.
> Unification is thus identified as a unilateral process of assimilation through which
> easterners are helped to raise themselves to western standards. (121)

Since Marianne is neither able to fill out the framework of the original model nor willing to actually

participate in this unilateral process of assimilation, she describes the only option left to her as "the

sample case" [Musterkoffer] of stereotypes, which highlights her struggle to negotiate her self-

understanding and the projections from outside. The text, thus, is invested in mediating the public

discourse as outlined by Glaeser and exemplifies the counterproductivity of the stereotypical engagement

with the German "other" through the failing encounters between Marianne and Corinna. Despite the

overall negativity of Marianne's stay in Mannheim, as the story proceeds she starts to exhibit more self-reliance and assurance about her position in the unifying Germany, which she has been contemplating throughout the novel. Nonetheless, this newly established and secured identification depends on her extremely critical stance towards West Germany as well as her own stereotypical imaginations of the West German "other."

Throughout the novel, the text positions Johannes and Marianne as two East German characters in opposition to each other. Therefore, it is not surprising that Johannes, as the embodiment of the quickly adjusted Easterner, does not share Marianne's perspective on his colleagues. He has long ago decided to adapt to the "original" Western way of life and Marianne's lie threatens his new existence and carefully built reputation in the West. His adaptation to the Western belief system even makes him wonder if Marianne's story is truly a lie or if she was not in fact involved with the secret service: "Jetzt endlich habe ich begriffen. Du tust, als müsstest du dich für deine Lügen rechtfertigen. Sie sind unwichtig, bloße Verpackung. Im Kern steck die Wahrheit, die ich nie erfahren sollte. Denn was du Corinna erzählt hast, ist deine Geschichte. Du warst IM –" (253). [Now I finally understand. You act as if you have to apologize for you lies. They are unimportant, mere packaging. At the core is the truth I was never supposed to know. Because what you have told Corinna is your story. You were IM[93] -] Johannes' accusation is the culmination of their disagreements and emotional disparities. While their judgment of the GDR and their modes of engagement with the social changes in post-1989 Germany have continuously differed throughout the story, causing first an emotional and then a spatial distance between them, this fight exhibits a new quality. With Johannes clearly taking a stand against Marianne, not believing her that she invented the story but rather interpreting it as a final confession of a long held secret, he has crossed a line in two ways: firstly, his accusation is a personal defamation, offensive and, thus, he has crossed a line in their relationship; secondly, his ability to take Marianne's invented story at

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[93] IM being the abbreviation for *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*, literally an unofficial employee, signifying the secret service's undercover agents.

face value positions him with Corinna and the other Westerners, who Marianne attempted to defy with her actions. Thus, he has now completely crossed the line into the West with regard to their assumptions about the East.[94] Under these circumstances and with Johannes' accusation as the pinnacle of the couple's emotional alienation, their final separation is presented as the only solution for both of them.

Even though the text invests in the construction of the protagonist's return to Berlin as moment of emotional crisis, the events in Mannheim have a long-lasting positive effect on her approach to the historical transformation of 1989, which I have addressed in more detail in Chapter 1. The text emphasizes that Marianne's experiences with Corinna have resulted in a new self-confidence and the discussion with Johannes aids Marianne's efforts to gain clarity about her future. As in Sparschuh's *Zimmerpsringbrunnen*, the narrative imagination of family in the text is limited to the relationship of a couple and the agency of one partner develops in spite of and against the behavior of the other partner. The text had already foreshadowed Johannes and Marianne's final separation through their increasing emotional and spatial distance, with her firmly rooted in Berlin and him moving to Mannheim. Johannes' character exhibits a decisive influence on Marianne's engagement with the GDR past and the future in the unifying Germany, since he embodies the kind of behavior that she wants to avoid. Familial arrangements, particularly matrimonial ties, remain the major social realm where past, present, and future are negotiated, which in this instance results in the irrevocable rupture of traditional familial relations. As discussed in Chapter 1, the void left by the failing nuclear family is filled through elective kinship relations between Marianne and Norma. The narrative of Marianne's experiences does not only provide a commentary on social and textual imaginations of family in post-1989 Germany, but also on the multifarious East-East and East-West interactions. In the end, it is the absence of trust that is largely responsible for the failure of Marianne and Corinna's relationship as well as the one between Marianne and Johannes. In turn, trust is represented as the affective dimension that is at the core of the union

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[94] Johannes' outrage is somewhat understandable since he is assuming he has been lied to by wife/partner and embarrassed in front of his colleagues. As the example of Vera Lengsfeld and Knud Wollenberger shows, there were actually couples, in which one partner spied on the other.

between Marianne and Norma. As stated in the title of Luhmann's (1973) classic sociological study, "trust functions as a mechanism for the reduction of social complexity."[95] This explains why trust is presented as even more important in the post-1989 German context, where the complexity of social life increased immensely to an extent that people in East Germany could not overlook or understand right away. As discussed before, the numerous Stasi revelations that dominated the contemporary public discourses further diminished the trust among East Germans, especially when it was revealed that family members and friends had spied on each other (Miller 1999, Jamieson "The Spy in My Bed").

As both Sparschuh's and Burmeister's novels demonstrate, protagonists develop and perform agency within the tensions that arise between the need to trust and the confrontation with stereotypes and clichés that simultaneously undermine that trust. The novels insinuate that the performance of agency reaches far beyond the moment in which the hybrid life narrative is developed, but rather has long-lasting effects on the protagonist's self-perception, on their approach to 1989 and on positioning themselves in the society of the unifying Germany. Within this context, the narratives imagine familial arrangements as social constellations that challenge a character's performance of agency. In the texts, familial relations, especially matrimony, have to negotiate different modes of agency, with one spouse actively participating in the economic and social sphere of the unifying Germany and the other spouse gaining a stance of agency through questioning and contesting the unification narrative of the victorious West, particularly the stereotypical images of East Germans and life in the GDR. Hence, the hybrid life narrative aids the characters in negotiating a self-image that opposes the pressures of the public discourse and critically engages with its dominant stereotypes and clichés. On the diegetic level of the story, the development of the hybrid life narrative is ultimately only aimed at the protagonists themselves, they do not have a pedagogical intention to correct the stereotypes of their Western counterparts. There is never a direct confrontation, where the East German protagonists challenge the West German characters, creating a communicative space for a discussion about the origins and validity of the stereotypes. This also keeps

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[95] Luhmann. *Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*. 1973.

the East German characters in a relatively safe space, where their own stereotypes about West Germany remain unchallenged and they do not display any interest in refining their superficial image of the West German "other." As has been shown in detail, it would be wrong to assume that stereotyping the German "other" is a one-sided process, limited to West German characters targeting the East. Thus, the next example demonstrates how East German characters exhibit the same stereotypical approach towards the West and how West German characters find ways to capitalize on these clichéd assumptions.

Pretension is Power: Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet*

Thomas Brussig counts for many as one of the most important voices in post-1989 literature. Thus, it came as no surprise that readers and critics alike expected his 2004 novel of epic length, *Wie es leuchtet*, to be the *Wenderoman* the feuilleton had been looking for. The multi-perspectival narrative with the humorous tone typical for Brussig's work attracted mixed reviews and some scholarly attention, addressing its depiction of contemporary history (Gebauer 2007) and East German identity (Malchow 2010) as well as the relevance of photography (Widmann 2008). Due to its temporal distance to the epochal change of 1989, Brussig strikes a different tone and chooses a different perspective than Sparschuh and Burmeister. Their immediate post-1989 writings are more concerned with a direct response to the unification process and its impact on the society of East Germany, whereas Brussig aims more for a multifarious reflection. While he also addresses the temporal frame of the early 1990s and, thus, the same time that Burmeister and Sparschuh write about, Bilz (2009) states: "Das Buch erschien 15 Jahre nach der deutschen Einheit – eine Zeitspanne, die erste Reflexionen zu diesem Ereignis zulassen sollte, da sie gerade ausreichenden historischen Abstand verschafft" (307) [The book was published 15 years after the German unification – a time span that should allow for first reflections about this event, since it creates a sufficient historical distance]. This shift from "reaction" to "reflection" is visible in the formal arrangement of the book, told from the perspective of various East and West German characters. In contrast to the earlier novels, in *Wie es leuchtet* Brussig attempts a meditation on the society of the unifying Germany as a whole, even though these reflections are based, as in Sparschuh and Burmeister's

writing, on the analysis of individual human interactions. The aim to include as many different

encounters, interactions, and conversation between East and West Germans might also explain Brussig's

choice of Berlin as his main stage.[96]

The figure of interest for this chapter is Werner Schniedel. His last name reveals Brussig's

humorous approach to his characters, since it refers to a German colloquialism for male genitalia. This

puts Werner in the same group with Leo Lattke, whose last names carries a similar connotation. In

contrast to Lattke, though, Werner does not exhibits a strong male presence, looking 15-years-old despite

being 19, a circumstance that is even increased by the fact that he is an Albino. His outer appearance

marks him as an outsider, whose liminal social position is unique in the story. Klocke (2007), whose

analysis focuses on the body representations in the novel, states "the GDR is linked to sick and mutilated

bodies as the effects of power relations" (Klocke "Lost in Transition"). Thus, Werner Schniedel, a West

German, is crossing the lines with his marred and physically imperfect body. Werner is well aware that he

challenges normative assumptions about and expectations regarding beauty, but refuses to adapt to these

outside pressures by wearing contact lenses or dying his white hair. Instead he attempts to turn his general

outsider position into an advantage: "Er legte es nicht darauf an, von der Welt geliebt zu werden, und

mußte sie seinerseits nicht lieben. Es reichte, daß er als etwas Besonderes wahrgenommen wurde, eine

Klasse für sich. [...] Das, was er darstellen wollte, kam an – und darum würde niemand daran zweifeln,

daß er der war, für den er sich ausgab" (287)[97] [He did not set out to be loved by the world, and did not

have to love it on his part. It was enough that he was perceived as something special, a class of his own.

[…] That, which he wanted to represent, was accepted – and therefore, nobody would doubt that he was

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[96] As Langer (2002) has argued in his study *Kein Ort. Überall. Die Einschreibung von "Berlin" in die deutsche Literatur der neunziger Jahre* with regard to Berlin's role in post-1989 Germany: "Die Stadt avancierte nach der Wiedervereinigung recht schnell und generationsübergreifend zur Projektionsfläche verschiedenster Sehnsüchte, Hoffnungen und Wünsche, wurde als der ultimative Ort des gegenwärtigen Lebens in Deutschland am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts wahrgenommen" (7). [After the reunification, the city advanced rather quickly and across generations to the projection screen for miscellaneous longings, hopes, and wishes, and was perceived as the ultimate place of contemporaneous life in Germany at the end of the 20th century.]

[97] All references refer to: Thomas Brussig. *Wie es leuchtet*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2010.

whom he pretended to be]. Werner exhibits an independence from his surrounding and has consciously

freed himself from the need for approval. The text, hence, establishes this character's agency through his

embrace of an outsider status. This agency is ultimately initiated by an incident in school, where Werner

is assumed to be the son of Volkswagen's CEO, since they share the same last name. Despite his

correction of their assumptions, the other students continue to believe that he is just trying to cover up his

powerful connections, but are nonetheless mad when it turns out for sure that the two Schniedel are not

related. His fellow students argue that Werner misguided them on purpose and that he acted on false

pretense, refusing to see that it was them who established the facts they decided to believe in. Werner's

abuse by the other students becomes so intense that he has to leave the school, but even after this event,

he refuses to give in, but rather embraces his lot. The text underscores his agency through an episode that

takes place right after Werner has to leave his school. Instead of battling the unfairness of the situation, he

decides to at least give the others an actually reason for their accusations:

> Und er tat es. Er fuhr in die VW-Zentrale, sagte an der Wache seinen Namen, legte den Ausweis vor und wurde sofort, ohne weitere Formalitäten, eingelassen. Er erkundigte sich in einem der Büros, wo eigentlich Dienstreisen abgerechnet werden und wo denn die schönen Visitenkarten herkommen. Einem Schniedel verweigert niemand die Auskunft. Und so rief er auch gleich in der Druckerei an und bestellte einhundert Visitenkarten, die mit der Prägung und dem echten Blau. (288)

> [And so he did. He drove to VW's main quarters, told the guard his name, presented his ID, and was immediately let through, without further formalities. In one of the offices he asked where travel expenses were claimed and where one could get those nice business cards. Nobody refuses to answer to a Schniedel. And so he immediately called the printing press and ordered one-hundred business cards, the ones with the embossment and the real blue.]

His first attempt of pretending to be the CEO's son is successful, through which the text provides an

interesting comment on the stereotypical (West) German blind belief in authority. Instead of questioning

Werner's identity, since nobody has ever seen or heard of him before, they accept his authority purely

based on him pretending to embody it. As in the previously discussed instances, the West German Werner

remains unchallenged by his surroundings since he plays his role convincingly and offers no target for

anybody in doubt. Now in the possession of another powerful proof of his invented identity, Werner takes

off to travel through Germany, staying in luxury hotels and sending the bills to the VW office for travel

expenses. Even though VW quickly catches on to the unaccounted bills and even figures out that an

impostor is traveling around Germany using their name for hotel reservations, they refrain from taking

action and filing a lawsuit, since they are not the aggrieved party.

After a while, rumors about Werner's person as impostor are starting to circulate among the

luxury hotels in the West. With the opening of the Berlin Wall, his travel space luckily increases and he

decides to go to Berlin and stay in the famous *Palasthotel*. There, the hotel's director, Alfred Bunzuweit

(another speaking name referring to his corpulent figure), is presented as a rather desperate East German,

looking for a chance to prove his value and continued qualification as hotel director. The *Palasthotel*, a

few months after the opening of the wall, is frequented by bankers and business people looking to seize

the opportunities of the new East German market and Alfred Bunzuweit is seeking an opportunity to

remain in contact with the powerful elite of the future in order to secure his own. This is framed as his

incentive for developing a special interest in Werner Schniedel, who has checked in the hotel as a "special

delegate" from VW:

> Werner Schniedel, Sonderbevollmächtiger, VW. Name, Titel, Symbol der Firma. Keine Adresse, keine Telefon- oder Faxnummer. Doch die Marke, dieses schlichte Zeichen aus zwei Buchstaben, einer, etwas verkleinert, auf den anderen gestellt, war Auftritt genug. […] Was für Vollmachten der wohl hat? Neunzehn ist er, seltsam wirkt er. Dieses weiße Haar. Ein halbes Hemd, picklig, und immer mit Sonnenbrille. Wenn der nicht der Sohn vom Ernst Schniedel wäre, dem Vorstandsvorsitzenden von VW, würde er den Kleinen kaum ernst nehmen. (243)

> [Werner Schniedel, special agent, VW. Name, title, company's symbol. No address, no telephone or fax number. But the brand, this simple sign out of two letters, one a little smaller, set on top of the other, was appearance enough. […] What kind of authorization he might have? He is nineteen, seems strange. This white hair. A kid, pimpled, and always with sunglasses. If he were not Ernst Schniedel's son, VW's CEO, he would barely take this little one seriously.]

The scene critically highlights an East German's willingness to believe and blindly accept the power of a

(Western) brand. Despite the fact that Werner Schniedel's appearance triggers Bunzuweit's doubts about

his social and professional status, which ultimately determines his worthiness of attention, he readily

forgoes these doubts based on the business card that Schniedel presented upon his arrival. In German,

Schniedel's business card states *Sonderbevollmächtigter* as his title, a word that more than its English

translations eludes to the notion of power (German: *Macht*) that comes with this title and that plays a

crucial part in establishing Schniedel's status as well as his importance for Bunzuweit. Besides that, it is

Schniedel's supposed closeness to even more power, to the CEO of one of the biggest German car

manufacturers, which ultimately tips the scale and convinces Bunzuweit to abandon his concerns. It is

noteworthy that the text portrays Schniedel's strategy as also successful in the West. The uncritical

acceptance of status based on nothing else but a business card displaying the symbol of a powerful brand

is, thus, not cast as a typical East German weakness or solely based on Eastern naivety, but rather appears

as a trait of capitalism, where a person's authority and influence increase by its association with power

and money. Schniedel as supposed special agent for VW and son of its CEO exhibits both of these traits,

which establishes his value for Bunzuweit. It is solely because of his professional status that Bunzuweit

decides to strike up a friendship with Werner Schniedel, since among the hotel guests he appears as one

of the most immediate connections to authority and power.

Their first encounter reveals Bunzuweit's inability to read his counterpart correctly, which is

mainly based on his inferiority complex:

> Werner Schniedel schaute noch immer erschrocken. Alfred Bunzuweit ärgerte sich über sein mangelndes Feingefühl; der hier war eben nicht der Vater, war ein Sensibelchen, ein Ängstlicher, und darauf hätte er sich einstellen müssen. "Herr Schniedel, trinken wir einen?" "Warum nicht", sagte Schniedel ohne Schwung. Alfred Bunzuweit imponierte diese Zurückhaltung. Der weiß sich die Zeit einzuteilen. Der verplempert sie nicht wie diese Bankfritzen mit stundenlangem Gejammer über das falsche Hotel. Nicht mal ein Lächeln hatte Schniedel ihm geschenkt. "Wie geht's denn Ihrem Herrn Vater?" fragte Alfred Bunzuweit, als sie in der Kaminbar Platz genommen hatten. Schniedel bestellte einen Whisky, was Alfred Bunzuweit als eine stilvolle, den Klassenunterschied zu ihm, dem Koch und Biertrinker, wahrende Bestellung zur Kenntnis nahm. (244)

> [Werner Schniedel still looked scared. Alfred Bunzuweit was upset about his lacking tactfulness; this one was just not the father, was a sensitive one, a scared one, and he should have prepared for that. "Herr Schniedel, should we get a drink?" "Why not," said Schniedel without verve. Alfred Bunzuweit was impressed by this kind of restraint. He knows how to distribute his time. He doesn't waste it like those bankers with their hour-long whining about the wrong hotel. Schniedel had not even given him a smile. "How is your father doing?" asked Alfred Bunzuweit once they took a seat at the fireplace bar.

Schniedel ordered a Whisky, which Alfred Bunzuweit registered as a classy order that preserved the class difference to him, the cook and beer drinker.]

This scene describes the beginning of Schniedel and Bunzuweit's first exchange and exhibits similar qualities as the previously discussed interactions between characters from East and West. This time, it is predominantly the East German character, though, who is solely guided by his stereotypes in his interaction with the West. Bunzuweit interprets each aspect of Werner Schniedel's behavior as an expression of his assumed superior status. The text explains this not only with Bunzuweit's personal insecurities which it attributes to the fast-paced social changes that have uprooted his stable social categorizations, but also by the fact that "when unification became available as a historical option, the superior-to-inferior relationship between West and East was a foregone conclusion to almost all West Germans and a majority of East Germans" (Glaeser 141). While in the beginning Werner appears scared because he usually avoids any kind of conversations fearing to blow his cover, Bunzuweit sees this as an expression of Werner's sensitive nature. His hesitation in accepting Bunzuweit's invitation, based on the same fear that his lie will be or already has been exposed, is read as the restraint of a busy and important man. Bunzuweit's self-perception is revealed in the last sentence and his reflection about the men's different choice of drinks. He construes Werner's choice of drink as the manifestation of the class difference between them, automatically subscribing the higher, superior class to the 19-year-old Albino, despite the fact that he is the established hotel director of one of the most important hotels in the GDR. But the text suggests that the demise of the country undermines his merits as well as his self-esteem. In his comparison with Werner Schniedel, Bunzuweit does not perceive himself as hotel director, but merely as cook. Further, his drink of choice, beer, is the drink of the average men, while Schniedel's Whisky is interpreted as symbol of superiority and cosmopolitanism. Still in the grip of old ideologies, Bunzuweit even uses the term *Klassenunterschied* (class difference), alluding to the Marxist interpretation of society as divided into different classes with the capitalists (as embodied by Werner Schniedel as representative of VW and thus the owner of the means of production) on one side and the proletariat (as embodied by Alfred Bunzuweit the cook) on the other side. Intimidated by a social behavior that he cannot decode and,

thus, missing the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) that would allow for a more self-confident approach towards their differences, Bunzuweit takes any puzzling aspects of Schniedel's behavior for an expression of superior status. Since he had already accredited Schniedel with this status before their conversation solely based on the business card, Bunzuweit is in no position to see through Schniedel's stereotypical demeanor. While it would not be in Bunzuweit's interest to challenge Schniedel, since he tries to win him over as a friend, Bunzuweit even fails to establish himself as a worthy partner on par with Schniedel. After all, both of them (supposedly) represent a currently successful business. But Bunzuweit's low self-esteem as well as his approach that everything and everybody from the West is of superior status inhibits any kind of agency. By taking an uncritical stance towards Schniedel, Bunzuweit is shown to basically rob himself of the ability to question the other one's actions and, further, to act based on his own choices. In completely assimilating to the values exhibit by Schniedel, Bunzuweit abandons any stance of agency.[98] Thus, from this conversation on, Bunzuweit blindly follows Schniedel's lead and supports any of his endeavors. While this has clear advantages for him and the hotel, for example when Schniedel manages to organize an election party at the hotel and even brings around the newly elected prime ministers, it also makes Bunzuweit blind towards any kind of warnings about his new friend that he receives from colleagues, especially regarding the enormous bill Schniedel has racked up during his long-term stay. Interestingly, the text demonstrates that Bunzuweit has no problems executing his authority and agency in other areas of his profession and when not in direct interaction with Schniedel, which is indicated by his resolute rejections of all objections against letting him reside for longer without making a down payment. Thus, Bunzuweit is not a character without agency per se, but the novel clearly relates his lack of agency to interactions with figures of (presumed) authority, especially if they are from West Germany. For the protagonists in Sparschuh's and Burmeister's works, it was exactly the ability to see through their counterpart and the stereotypes they employed that established their agency. Bunzuweit is

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[98] For an example of the negative impact of assimilation on the development of agency within the postcolonial context see Fanon. "On National Culture." *The Wretched of the Earth.* Tran. Constance Farrington. Ed. Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove Press, 1963. 206-248.

missing or abandoning his critical eye and his doubts in favor of a relationship with Schniedel, whose supposed superior status he needs to elevate his own and establish a stable position in the unifying Germany.

Alas, Bunzuweit's hopes are disappointed. Later in the novel, Werner Schniedel is exposed as impostor, owing the Palasthotel 24 670 DM, and arrested. Alfred Bunzuweit loses his job (Brussig 559) and, thus, the character's social status in the unified Germany is lowered. The trial against Werner Schniedel includes two remarkable moments through which the text highlights the implication of the East German character in his own demise as well as the crucial influence of familial arrangements in post-1989 Germany. Schniedel's defense lawyer decides to file for an acquittal, with the justification that "sein Mandant […] denen, die sich jetzt als geschädigt darstellen, nur gegeben [habe], was sie von ihm wollten" (494). [his client had given those, who now portrayed themselves as the aggrieved, what they wanted from him.] As the lawyer's statement suggests, Werner Schniedel is guilty as an impostor, but his charade's success is dependent on the other's willingness to believe him. Alfred Bunzuweit quickly became a willing follower and enabler of Schniedel's action, boldly ignoring his own and his colleague's doubts and warnings in the light of Schniedel's association with power as well as his convincing performance. Similar to the instances previously discussed for Sparschuh and Burmeister, both characters from East and West are collaborating in establishing a myth, employing all available social stereotypes. As before, one of the characters involved is aware of the truth and finds a successful way to play with the other one's expectations for his advantage. Schniedel acts the same way as Hinrich and Marianne, revealing the overpowering and crucial influence of stereotypes in post-1989 Germany. His innovative agency, springing from the experience of resentment and the urge to resist his stereotyping as a loser, is similar to Hinrich and Marianne's way of engaging with external and clichéd imaginations of their biography.

Another parallel between the three narratives is the role of familial relations, which are constructed as a social and affective constellation that excludes or even negates the agency established in

the public sphere. As in the other novels, the text focuses on familial bonds between two characters, in this case Werner and his paternal grandmother. As the text explains, after his parents' divorce, Werner stayed with his mother, her new husband and his two daughters, but refrains to become a full member of the family, which is exemplified by his refusal to take his stepfather's last name. His biological father is not interested in upholding contact and so it is the grandmother who becomes the person closest to Werner: "Nichts zu müssen, alles zu dürfen und trotzdem in einer Obhut sein – das hatte Werner Schniedel bei seiner Großmutter" (328) [Not having to do anything, being allowed to do everything, and still feeling cared for – that's what Werner Schniedel had with his grandmother]. This feeling of belonging and unconditional love is in stark contrast to Schniedel's usual experience in the world and clearly impacts his attitude towards her, which is visible in his reaction to her sudden appearance in the court room: "Der Angeklagte wurde knallrot, schaute zu Boden, wäre am liebsten gar nicht dagewesen. Den ganzen Prozeß über tat er unbekümmert, begrüßte munter die Zeugen, lachte, grinste. Nur jetzt, wo mal jemand was für ihn tat, wurde er kleinlaut, schaute betreten drein, zeigte Reue" (493) [The defendant turned beet red, stared at his feet, and wished he had not been present. Throughout the whole process, he had acted lightheartedly, blithely welcoming the witnesses, laughing, smirking. Only now that somebody did something for him, he became meek, looked sheepish, showed remorse]. Werner's changing behavior is due to his grandmother appearing in front of the judge and paying the 24 670 DM he owes the Palasthotel. She had just recently earned that money through a real estate sale of a house in East Berlin and decided to put it to use for Werner, hoping that bailing him out would bring him back on the right track. Since all the costs are covered, Werner is acquitted and returns home with his grandmother. In contrast to the examples from Sparschuh and Burmeister, the West German familial arrangement is shown to strive in the moment of crisis. This follows a pattern that has already been established in Chapter 1 for the example of Eduard's family in Peter Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr*. As Lewis (2009) summarizes this phenomenon with regard to marital crises in the East: "So hat das Scheitern der Paarbeziehung für Figuren aus dem Osten Symbolcharakter und steht für den allgemeinen Verlust an Identität und Geborgenheit. Die auffällige Zahl der zerrütteten Ehen in diesen Romanen ist somit Zeugnis

eines überwältigenden Eindrucks des Ausgeliefertseins an die neue Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsordnung nach 1990, den diese Paare wahrnehmen" (32) [Thus, the failing couple relationships of figures from the East have symbolic character and stand for the general loss of identity and security. The noteworthy number of torn marriages in these novels is, therefore, evidence for the overwhelming impression of being at the mercy of the new social and economic order after 1990 that these couples observe]. Lewis' description of marital relations post-1989 can be adopted for familial arrangements beyond matrimony that have to negotiate the loss of established identity markers and social uncertainties. Post-1989 literature emphasizes the existential notion of these experiences that appear to be most prevalent for East German characters. While Werner Schniedel's nuclear family relations have dissolved, they fell apart before 1989 and due to circumstances unrelated to the social upheaval of 1989. Even though all examples challenge social constructions of the nuclear family, in Werner Schniedel's case the relationship between grandmother and grandson is shown to ultimately create an affective and social framework to which Werner can return after his misdeeds. Further, whereas the previously discussed novels present the unification as catalyst for Marianne and Hinrich's marital problems, here the transformation of 1989 is more positively charged, since it constitutes the circumstances that allow Schniedel's grandmother is to bail him out. Only because of the opening of the Berlin Wall can she access the house in East Berlin that was once owned by her deceased husband (Brussig 330) and that is now returned into her possession. Since the house is located in the famous Friedrichstraße, Werner's grandmother has no problem selling it at a very good price, which in the end covers Werner's debt. The three examples, thus, highlight the different impact of the unification on East and West German families. The story of Werner Schniedel's character in Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet* further indicates an interrelation between agency and trust that was already suggested by the previously discussed examples. From the Western perspective, this connection gets an interesting twist, since the agency of the Western character in this example is based on the overwhelming trust that the East German characters are willing to provide in advance without any other reasons than the West German's (supposed) superior social status and the mere fact that he or she are West German. Werner provides all the right "proofs" of his superior status

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and clearly plays with the authority of brands and titles established in the Western culture as well as with the East German's naivety and low self-esteem. In his case, agency is as well limited to the public sphere and does not extend into the private sphere, where he depends on his grandmother to save him. Thus, all three novels appear to be invested in upholding the disparity between public and private spheres and in all of them resistant and innovative agency is limited to the realm of the public.

Further, all examples broach the issue of trust, specifically the lack of it in post-1989 Germany. In contrast to agency, this absence of trust is presented as a decisive influence in the interpersonal relations, no matter if they are located in the public or the private sphere. Luhmann (1973) defines trust as the "generalized expectation that the other will handle his freedom, his disturbing potential for diverse action, in keeping with his personality - or, rather, in keeping with the personality which he has presented and made socially visible. He who stands by what he has allowed to be known about himself, whether consciously or unconsciously, is worthy of trust" (39). The texts hence base the absence of trust between the East and West German characters as well as among East Germans on the fact that neither reveals their true sense of self to the other. Instead East and West German characters alike appear to be caught in the limited, stereotypical versions of themselves. Interestingly, the only interactions between East and West that are framed as communicatively successful by the texts depend on one side not revealing the truth about him- or herself.[99] The absence of open conflict is accompanied by the absence of actual engagement with each other, since one of the characters involved is always concerned with playing into the expectations and projections of stereotypes of the other. In these exchanges, no worldview or stereotype is questioned, but rather clichés and stereotypes are appropriated in order to negotiate an identity that remains unchallenged by the other and that fits into the expectations of the public discourse in the unifying German society. Of course, all novels include other examples of East-West encounters that are not based on the active deception on the East German part, such as Johannes' successful move to

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[99] "Communicatively successful" refers to a spoken interaction that does not end in conflict or the break down of the exchange, with both partners involved reaching their respective goal of the communication.

Mannheim in Burmeister's novel or the love story between Lena and Leo in Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet*. Nonetheless, the questions of how much to adjust to the other's stereotypical image is in most cases only ascribed to the East German characters: "Das Unverständnis ist zwar gegenseitig, doch nur die Ostdeutschen stehen bezüglich ihrer Vergangenheit unter einem Rechtfertigungszwang: Nur eine ostdeutsche Biografie muss genannt und erklärt werden" (Lewis 105) [While the incomprehension is mutual, only the East Germans are under the pressure to justify their past: only an East German biography has to be mentioned and explained]. Lewis' (2009) analysis touches upon all the examples discussed in this section and offers an explanation why the West Germans consistently remain unchallenged in regard to their biography, but also in regard to their stereotypical perception of East Germany. Interestingly, the East German authors appear to be complicit with this process, since the works of Burmeiser, Sparschuh, and Brussig all indulge in this stereotyping, not only highlighting the othering of East Germans through the Western master-narrative regarding the typical East German character, but also the equally limited and stereotypical imagination of West Germany and its inhabitants by East Germans.

Nonethless, as Hodgin (2011) emphasizes in his study *Screening the East. Heimat, Memory, and Nostalgia in German Film since 1989*, "[t]he east German depiction of the west Germans as the arrogant exponents of a shallow, consumerist culture abound, but such generalizations have less of an impact upon their targets. Partly this impact is minimized by the fact that it was precisely this culture that many GDR citizens had aspired to, as evidenced by the frenzied accumulation of western consumer goods during the early stages of the Wende and the blanket support for Kohl" (21). This might explain that despite the process of mutual othering that in all of the novels discussed in this section mediates the contemporary social tensions of the unifying Germany, the texts go beyond lamenting the continued inequality and alienation between East and West. Rather, focusing on the East German protagonist, they emphasize the opportunities that exist even in this seemingly narrow frame of self-identification.

This is indicated by the fact that the protagonists in Burmeister's and Sparschuh's texts appropriate the usually constraining stereotypes for their advantage. Interpreting Hinrich's ignorance

towards his surroundings as "staged naivety" and so as a social performance, he and Marianne develop

agency in similar ways. Through the act of creating a hybrid life narrative, they execute and develop

agency and an understanding of themselves that reaches beyond the moment when they construct the

hybrid life narrative in collaboration with their West German interlocutors. Hence, the process of creating

the narrative is presented as having a positive long-term effect for their positioning in the society of the

unifying Germany. As the figure of Werner Schniedel exemplifies, this strategy of employing stereotypes

for one's advantage is not limited to East German characters, but can be as successfully used by

characters from West Germany, which emphasizes the predominance of stereotypes in interactions

between East and West. As all examples illustrate, in the post-1989 literary imagination the space to

define one's agency and withstand the stereotype-infused public discourse is always located outside of

familial arrangements, which nonetheless are repeatedly represented as the decisive imaginary space

where a subject's agency in the society of the unifying Germany is questioned and ultimately has to be

renegotiated. Familial relations are also framed as a decisive impact on a character's coming to terms with

the past in the example discussed in the following section. Here, the significance of familial relations is

underscored by the protagonist's failure to perform agency in the face of overpowering stereotypes due to

a ruptured bond with his parents.

The Absence of Agency

As I have discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the development and performance of

agency has been presented as challenge in the post-1989 German society, which made it a central issue

many post-1989 writings seek to negotiate. There are many East German characters that struggle to

address the societal uncertainties during the immediate post-socialist, post-Wende period. The novel

discussed in this section is especially noteworthy in this regard, since a first impression marks its main

characters as one of the few successful East German protagonists. The focus of this section is on Jan

Landers, the protagonist of Alexander Osang's first novel *Die Nachrichten*, published in 2000 and turned

into a movie starring Jan Josef Liefers in 2005. While the movie adaptation was successful and received

numerous prestigious German film awards, the novel attracted plenty of media attention in all the popular German speaking newspapers, including *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, but the reviews where mixed.

Osang, born in the GDR in 1962, belongs to the same generation as Brussig, which is echoed in the similar narrative approaches of their writings. He started his career as a journalist and worked for the influential German daily *Berliner Zeitung* before joining the staff at the prestigious weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. He quickly advanced to become one of the most important reporters covering the impact of the unification process on East Germany and is currently the United States correspondent for the *Spiegel*.

The news world is also at the center of *Die Nachrichten*, which as Burmeister, Sparschuh, and Brussig's texts is situated in Berlin, also during the same time, the middle of the 1990s. Jan Landers is introduced in the novel as the only East German news anchor for the most prominent German newscast *Die Tagesschau*, airing every day at 8:00pm, attracting an audience of around five million viewers. An external narrator, who provides insight into the thoughts and feelings of all characters, tells Landers' story. The only exception are chapters written in a diary style by an unnamed employee of a local branch of the Federal Commission for the Stasi Archives, a federal agency that preserves the archives of the GDR's secret service and investigates citizens' involvements with the Stasi.

The story line of the novel is presented from five different perspectives, with the main focus on Jan Landers and his rise in the West to one of the best known faces of television, a status that becomes endangered when Landers is confronted with allegations about his collaboration with the Stasi and struggles to come to terms with his past. This narrative strand is framed on the one hand by the aforementioned diary entries that contain not only reflections about the work at the Federal Commission for the Stasi Archives, but also chronicle the social challenges of an East German in post-1989 Germany. On the other hand, there is the story line of a character named Zelewski, who turns out to be Landers' case officer as well as the brother of the unnamed diary writer. The novel further includes two narrative strands related to two reporters, both born in the East, who are trying to cover the Stasi allegations about

Landers for their respective employers. One of them is Thomas Raschke, who reports for the regional

newspaper in the East German city Neubrandenburg; the other one is Doris Theyssen, who is a well-

known journalist writing for the *Spiegel.*

The realm of the family, while featured in detail relatively late in the novel, is ultimately framed

as the central motivation for Landers' behavior. His aim to assimilate himself as much as possible to the

Western codes of interpersonal interaction and the related social value system, requires him to strip

himself completely of anything that could be remotely connected to the stereotypical image of the *Ossi*. In

connection with his job in Hamburg he has left his wife and child, experiencing a growing alienation from

the space and people in the East:

> Aber je länger er im Western arbeitete, desto langweiliger fand er die Gespräche im
> Osten. Er hatte immer mehr das Gefühl, sich zurückzubewegen, wenn er abends nach
> Hause fuhr. Die Dünkel der Ostler gegenüber dem Westen schienen ihm unbegründeter
> zu sein als die Arroganz der Westler gegenüber dem Osten. Seine Ehe riss. Er konnte
> Kathrin nicht mehr zuhören. Sie zerrte an seinen Nerven. [...] Sie sah ihn an wie einen
> Verräter, wenn er ein neues Hemd trug, sie reagierte hysterisch, als er den Tagesspiegel
> bestellen wollte. [...] Als er das Angebot von der Hamburger Aktuell-Redaktion bekam,
> überlegte er nur eine Nacht, obwohl er wusste, dass es ihre Trennung bedeutete. (94)[100]
>
> [But the longer he worked in the West, the more he was bored by the conversations in the
> East. More and more he felt like moving backwards when he drove home at night. The
> East German's conceit towards the West appeared to him more unjustified than the West
> German's arrogance towards the East. His marriage broke. He couldn't listen to Kathrin
> anymore. She annoyed him. […] She looked at him like a traitor whenever he wore a new
> shirt; she reacted hysterically when he wanted to subscribe to the Tagesspiegel. […]
> When he received the offer from the Aktuell-office in Hamburg he contemplated only
> one night, even though he knew it would cause their separation.]

As I will discuss in more detail later on, Landers engages in the same temporal displacement of the East

that Glaeser (2000) has described as typical for West Germans (183). The feeling of "moving backwards"

whenever traveling towards the East can be seen as one representational manifestation of this method of

allochronization. Since Landers seeks to distance himself entirely from his past and the people associated

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[100] All references refer to: Alexander Osang. *Die Nachrichten.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag,
2002.

with it, the relationships to his parents, sister, and ex-wife are strained, which will ultimately determine his (in)ability to develop agency in facing the allegations about his Stasi involvement.

Agency plays a central role in the story about Landers, who is presented as a character dominated by fears of not fitting in with his Western colleagues. His position as anchorman is for him clearly defined through the absence of agency:

> Manchmal fürchtete er, mitten in den Meldungen auf seinem lehnenlosen Drehschemel zusammenzubrechen. Er wollte keine Lachnummer für Jahresrückblicke werden. Er warf einen Blick auf die dunkel schimmernde, rechteckige Glaswand, hinter der sich die Regie, die Beleuchter, Tonassistenten, Wortredakteure, Bildredakteure und einige andere wichtige Leute verschanzt hatten. Er hing an ihren Fäden wie eine Marionette. (15)

> [Sometimes he feared he would break down in the middle of a message on his back-rest-less stool. He did not want to be a joke for the annual retrospectives. He glanced at the dark shimmering, rectangular glass wall behind which the direction, the lighting technician, the audio assistants, news editors, image editors and other important people had entrenched themselves. He hung on their threads like a string puppet.]

This insight into the protagonist's thoughts while preparing to read the news does not only express his fear, but rather emphasizes its origin as the overpowering other that, echoing aspects of the Foucault's panopticum, remains hidden behind a glass wall, which Landers cannot penetrate, neither with his glance nor on a more abstract level where the glass wall symbolizes the invisible social barriers still in place between East and West. Power and agency, and by relation knowledge, are associated and located with the anonymous assembly of people in the glass cubical whose walls represent the literal and figurative "glass ceiling" that Landers cannot breach. Their dominance as well as the inferiority that Landers experiences is revealed in the word "entrenched" (verschanzt) that usually refers to a battle situation and highlights the framework in which Landers perceives the opposition between him and the others as well as in the comparison of him to a string puppet. While he is the one reading the news, he is only the visible representation of a distanced power located outside of his body. What he says, how he looks when he says it and in front of what backdrop he reads the news is besides his influence and, with regard to the last two points, beyond his knowledge.

Nonetheless, the scene above also reveals Landers ability to reflect upon his circumstances. Surprisingly, he is aware of his lack of agency, if even unable or unwilling to change this set-up. Further, as the next scene reveals, the text constructs him also as being aware of the mechanisms at work in the public discourse that mark East Germans as the foreign other in the unifying Germany. At numerous instances, the text allows insight into Landers' thoughts, for example after reading the obituary for Erwin Strittmatter, whom the newscasts presents as an author from East Germany despite the supposed end of the German separation:

> Er hatte *ostdeutsch* gesagt, laut und deutlich. *Ost* nicht *Sst.* Vorhin, als er sich die stramplerfarbenen Blätter aus dem Großraum des Sendeteams Wort geholt hatte, als er getroffen worden war von der Nachricht, die er zum ersten Mal las, hatte er kurz gestutzt, als er dieses *ostdeutsch* gelesen hatte. Das Gefühl des Verlustes, den die anderen hier nicht empfinden würden, hatte ihn aufmüpfig gemacht. Martin Walser war ja auch nur deutsch. (23; italics in the original)

> [He had said *East German*, loud and clear. *East* not *Sst.* Earlier, as he had picked up the romper-suit-colored sheets from the main office of the word editors, as he was hit by the news that he read for the first time, he had paused for a moment upon reading this *East German*. The feeling of loss that the others here would not sense had made him recalcitrant. Martin Walser was also only German after all.]

Even though Landers is able to realize and reflect upon the inequality of the geographic addition that remains to be reserved for *East* Germans while the West Germans continue to represent Germany as a whole, thus highlighting the fundamental power asymmetry of German unification (Glaeser 7), he struggles to move beyond the point of mere noticing. Despite the fact that he would have the power to change the words in the last moment without anybody behind the glass wall being able to stop him, the hierarchy of his workplace is deeply engrained in his self-perception. Marcel (2003) defines agency as "a sense of oneself as an actor or a sense that actions are one's own" (54). Landers' lack of agency therefore also insinuates that he does not perceive himself as in a position to act or to govern his actions, since they ultimately emanate from the untouchable and anonymous body of power behind the glass wall. The text, thus, constructs him as somebody who is ultimately not willing to risk his job by acting against the rule that the anchorman is not allowed to change any wording of the carefully scripted news items, but rather

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acts against his gut and his sense of fairness. Landers only silently questions this power system, whereas the actions he performs align with the expectations and the rules of his colleagues.[101]

As has been demonstrated for the East German characters analyzed in the previous section, agency arises through the ability to see through the social mechanisms and stereotypes at work in the interaction between East and West. Further, a clear understanding of how the society of the unifying Germany works and what possesses social value (power, money, brands, status) is presented as crucial insight for a character's negotiation of new positionalities and successfully employing new values and stereotypes for his or her own advantage. Landers' struggles are framed by the text as based on the fact that his understanding of the West German media world, as the part of society where not only his work environment but also his private sphere is located, is limited to a purely superficial understanding: "Er war jetzt vierunddreißig Jahre alt. Er lebte seit zweieinhalb Jahren in Hamburg. Er hatte einige Regeln begriffen. Er hatte mitbekommen, was man tat. Was man hatte. Warum man es tat und besaß, war ihm nicht immer so klar" (90). [He was now thirty-four years old. He had lived in Hamburg for two and a half years. He had understood some of the rules. He had picked up on what to do. What to own. Why you did and owned these things was not always as clear to him.] This indicates that Landers is successful in mimicking or copying his surroundings, but he does not have an in-depth understanding of how his environment actually functions and what social mechanisms are at play. Thus, while he is able to display the material manifestations of the necessary cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), he is missing an exact understanding of what is at the core of this cultural capital; an insight that the characters in the previous examples have established as the key to agency.

As Boyer (2006) states: "Landers is drawn to the West for reasons he does not entirely understand. Yet he is quickly seduced by its luxury and vitality and comes gradually to see East Germany as dark place in opposition to the bright thrills of the West. […] But he never really 'arrives' in the West,

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[101] Ironically, his behavior displays the trait of a supposedly typical behavior of East Germans, who kept their critique and disagreement with the GDR government to themselves and publicly acted in agreement with the official rules and expectations.

remaining painfully aware at every turn of his foreignness (his last name itself suggests this rather bluntly: 'Landers' plays on *anderes Land* or 'other country')" (378f.). Whereas the protagonist cannot exactly pinpoint the reason for his attraction to the West and also struggles to establish a secure position within his professional and private surroundings, he has a strong and pronounced dislike for East Germany. Thus, being unable to establish a secure social space for himself in the West and distancing himself from his origins in the East, he ends up being displaced in the society of the unifying Germany. This absence of a stable social connection as well as a clear understanding of his identity is decisive when Landers is confronted with the rumors about his collaboration with the Stasi. As Butler (1997) has argued: "To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are" (4). Since Landers is already displaced before facing the Stasi allegations, they have an even bigger destabilizing impact with regard to his self-identification and positioning in the unifying Germany. Due to the distance he has established between himself and his past, he is unable to access this part of his life and, thus, is unable to remember his life in the GDR. Ultimately, this means that he cannot effectively defend himself against the accusation and is presented to be at the mercy of outside powers and influences.

When confronted for the first time with the accusations by the editor in chief, the text portrays Landers as being struck with disbelief: "Es gab einen Verdacht. Er hatte keine Vorstellung, wie er entstanden war, woher er kam, weshalb er auch keine Idee hatte, wie man ihn aus der Welt räumen konnte" (228) [There was a suspicion. He had no idea how it came to be, where it came from, which is why he had also no idea, how to get rid of it]. The scene emphasizes Landers inability to react and to develop agency to save himself, while highlighting the interconnectedness between agency and memory. The latter appears to be of specific importance in the post-1989 German context and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 that focuses on the function of familial memory contests in the literary imagination of the unifying Germany. Instead of flat out denying the charges, he remains silent, flabbergasted, as well as physically and mentally immobile. Landers is only able to access the present moment, but incapable of either invoking memories of his past that would aid his defense or coming up with a future plan of action.

He rather immediately surrenders to the outside pressures that are again represented by people of superior status, on the one hand his direct superior the chief editor, and on the other hand the Chief Commissioner of the Stasi Archives, who had alarmed the chief editor about the rumors regarding Landers.[102]

It is noteworthy that the discrepancy between public discourse and private judgment that has been commented upon in the previous sections also comes into play in the conversation between Landers and his superior during their first conversation about the allegations. In contrast to Landers, the chief editor has a very clear plan of action, which he presents as follows: "'Wir nehmen Sie vom Sender, bis die Vorwürfe geklärt sind. Ich geh davon aus, dass da nichts dran ist. Der Intendant sieht das ebenfalls so. Aber Sie müssen das verstehen. Wir sind öffentlich-rechtliches Fernsehen.[103] Die Opfer würden sich beschweren.' 'Opfer? Welche Opfer? Meine Opfer?' (231) ['We are taking you off the broadcast until the case has been resolved. I assume that there is nothing to it. The director agrees. But you have to understand. We are public television. The victims would complain.' 'Victims? What victims? My victims?']. The decision to take Landers of the news and thus to remove him as a publicly visible figure associated with the TV station, is not based on the conviction that he is actually guilty of collaborating with the Stasis, but rather based on the apprehensions of the public opinion as represented by the public discourse. Especially interesting is the term 'victim' in this context. The usage of the term here echoes my earlier description of the two dominant roles of victim and perpetrator that the public discourse ascribed to East Germans after 1989 and also connects this conversation to the crucial exchange between Marianne and Corinna in Burmeister's *Norma*. The notion of victimization through the Stasi is a powerful and dominant narrative of the post-1989 public discourse.[104] While this discourse represented actual events

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[102] The Chief Commissioner in turn has no professional interest in Landers in that he wants to protect potential victims and expose his past, but is rather motivated by his amorous feelings for the reporter Doris Theyssen, from whom he learned about the allegations against Landers and whose work he tries to support.

[103] "Öffentlich-rechtliches Fernsehen" means that the broadcasting is public, financed through required fees paid by owners of television sets. The broadcasting agencies are governed by councils whose members represent so-called socially relevant groups.

[104] The public discourse as represented by the media, politics, and art and culture. For detailed analyses of the role of the Stasi in this public discourse see for example Miller (1999), Huberth (2003), or Cooke/Plowmann, eds.

and actions that took place during the GDR's existence, this narrative of passivity and incrimination also channeled the GDR image of the broader public in the unifying Germany. In public representations

> [t]he Stasi does get demonized, almost in keeping with its own myth of itself, and relations of individuals to the Stasi get fetishized; that is, the complexities and intricacies of their lives do get reduced to this one aspect. The sheer presence of millions of document pages with their promise to prove wrongdoing and therefore to justify the moralization of the GDR past seems to galvanize most westerner's minds, to the degree that they care at all. The Stasi therefore allows westerners an incredible economy of judgment in a grandiose synecdochical swoop. (Glaeser 283)

Thus, East Germans were quickly reduced to either a Stasi victim or a Stasi perpetrator, but this status did not only depend on their actual relationship with the Stasi. Rather it was based on their judgment of the GDR as a whole. After 1989, a binary notion of the GDR and the kind of life people had spent quickly developed and left little communicative space for balanced accounts that reflected the nuanced versions of real life.

In Burmeister's *Norma*, Corinna ascribes to Marianne the status of a "tragic victim," adjusting her previous judgment of her as "active victim," which appears to be a mixture of the perpetrator and victim role. With this classification Corinna takes into account Marianne's supposed suffering caused by a broken heart and an abortion, but also creates a status that morally allows her to feel empathy for Marianne, which would not be possible if she were to perceive her as a perpetrator. A role outside of these two categories is not imaginable for Corinna, despite the fact that she has to bend them at first to make them fit Marianne's story. For the chief editor in Landers' case, the victims represent a powerful group whose assumed reaction ("The victims *would* complain.") influences the decisions made for public television. The victims exhibit a strong impact and execute agency even in their absence, even though none of the accusations have been proven so far. The rumors of Landers' collaboration are enough to validate his preliminary suspension from TV. In addition to shining a light on the public discourse, the editor's use of "victims" positions Landers in opposition to them, thus, automatically putting him on the

German writers and the Politics of Culture. Dealing with the Stasi. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

side of the perpetrators, which equals a prejudgment of him as actually being guilty. Despite the lack of any substantial evidence beyond the call of the Chief Commissioner, Landers has been put in the position of the defendant.

As the text emphasizes, Landers remains incapable of taking action for the next couple of days after his initial confrontation with the accusations. Instead of developing a plan of action, he gets drunk in his apartment, unable to communicate with his environment and to think of the necessary steps to take. Again, he is forced by another person, his girlfriend Margarethe, into actively addressing his situation. As soon as she hears about the accusations, she has a clear idea of what to do and sets up a meeting with the family lawyer, who agrees over a shared dinner to defend Landers, especially after learning that Landers had never signed any official statement regarding his GDR past.[105] Interestingly, in this example as well as in Sparschuh's work, the private reaction differs greatly from the public judgment. Aside from the public realm, post-1989 writings seem to carve out an alternative space anchored in the private sphere, were personal judgments nonetheless are based on rather subjective calculations. As in the case of Boldinger and Strüver in Sparschuh's *Zimmerspringbrunnen*, Margarethe is interested in upholding her relationship with Landers and therefore invested in quickly finding a solution for his problem. Margarethe is ultimately not interested in solving the question if Landers is guilty or not, but rather seeks a solution that can counter his semi-public condemnation through his employer. Thus, she never asks Landers if he was actually involved with the Stasi and neither does the family lawyer. For the latter, the only thing that matters is if he can win the case.

The text constructs the dinner, which seems to solve all of Landers' problems, as a narrative turning point. Landers realizes that the lawyer's defense would not clear the accusations brought forward against him, but rather defend his right to return to the newscast since he never gave an official statement denying a collaboration with the Stasi. Ultimately, the accusations would remain unchallenged, which

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[105] These statements where mandatory for anybody employed by the state or a public institution. Since Landers is not employed on a permanent contract, but rather as freelancer, he was not required to sign the statement.

seems to initiate Landers' decision to finally take things in his own hands and reconnect with his past, hoping it will enable him to remember who he was in the GDR and address the charges with a clear understanding of what he did or did not do before 1989. His engagement with the past is not only necessary to clear himself of the Stasi allegations, but it is simultaneously framed as the decisive step in coming to terms with his identity and in defining a stable position in the unifying Germany. As he writes in a letter to Margarethe explaining why he left the morning after the dinner for Berlin: "Ich will auch wirklich wissen, was ich für einer war, damals in der DDR. Es klingt jetzt eigenartig, aber ich habe es vergessen. Ich war so sehr damit beschäftigt, hier zurechtzukommen, dass ich es vergessen habe. [...] ihr könnt mir doch gar nicht helfen. Also muss ich auf eigene Faust versuchen, etwas rauszubekommen" (282) [I really want to know what kind of person I was, back then in the GDR. It sounds strange, but I have forgotten. I was so busy to manage here, that I forgot. […] you cannot really help me. Therefore, I have to try on my own to find something out]. The moment, in which the protagonist decides to reconnect with his past, is thus presented as the first moment in the story when Landers becomes active on his own and finally exhibits some kind of agency, ultimately emphasizing the importance of the family with regard to negotiating the historical turn of 1989.

The text emphasizes familial arrangements, particularly the relationship between parents and children, as a key factor in negotiating the historical transformation of 1989. In Landers' case, he needs to reconnect with his parents in order to gain an understanding who he was in the GDR, which is a know-ledge void he needs to fill in order to address the Stasi accusations. Under these circumstances, the fact that he has grown apart from his family since the demise of the GDR presents new challenges. The relationship between Landers and his parents is distanced and superficial, the main connection between them being just their social status as family. Landers' critical and condescending perspective on the GDR and East Germany automatically extends to his family, especially his parents. He has not visited them for a couple of years and their first encounter in the apartment they once shared is dominated by mutual alienation, as Landers' perception of his father, who greets him first, indicates:

Sein Vater trug lila Trainingshosen, Plastepantoffeln und ein kariertes Hemd mit großem Kragen. Er war unrasiert, seine Augen schwammen wie große alte Fische hinter den Brillengläsern. Friedfische. [...] Seine Hand war groß und rau. Sie zog ihn in die Wohnung. Es roch nach Medizin, bitter, so wie es früher bei seinen Großeltern gerochen hatte. Irgendwann würde es auch bei ihm so riechen. [...] Die Gegen schmetterte ihn nieder, es gab nur alte Leute und die, die nach den Alten kamen, waren arm. Es gab zu viel Beton hier, zu viele Arbeitslose, zu viel Alte. (296)

[His father wore purple track pants, plastic slippers and a checkered shirt with a big collar. He was unshaven; his eyes swam like big old fish behind the eyeglass lenses. Non-predatory fish. […] His hand was big and rough. It pulled him into the apartment. It smelled like medicine, bitter, just like it had smelled at his grandparents'. Someday it would smell like this at his place. […] The neighborhood devastated him, there were only old people and those, who came after the elderly were poor. There was too much concrete, too many unemployed, too many elderly.]

This scene unfolding upon Landers' arrival at his parents' apartment highlights the distance between the worlds they inhabit but also hints at the conflicting emotions that Landers experiences. On the one hand, he is obviously appalled by his father's sad appearance that seems to mirror the equally miserable neighborhood. On the other hand, Landers cannot completely exempt himself from the family lineage, which is indicated by the olfactory sensation of bitter medicine smell. This smell existed in his grandparents' apartment, is now present at his parents' place and will someday appear in his own four walls. While underscoring a certain consistency and connection that cannot be undermined by Landers continued attempts to distance himself from the family, the scene also points to the fleetingness of life. His grandparents have already passed away and his parents, who have taken on that elderly smell, will follow. What seems to appall Landers beyond this olfactory sensation and the memories it triggers, is the stark contrast between his parents' apartment as well as the circumstances of their life, which it represents, and his own professional and personal aims. The emphasis on the old and elderly in his perception exemplifies the mode of allochronisation (Glaeser 146) that the protagonist employs in engaging with his former home. In placing the space and the people in a time disjunct from his own, he undermines the chances for a successful encounter from the start. Landers has strived to achieve wealth through a well-paying job that comes with star status, but back at "home" he faces poverty and unemployment, which feature dominantly in his perceptions. As the novel demonstrates, Landers has put noticeable efforts into imitating the Western way of live in order to distance himself from this

stereotypical image of East Germany and now is confronted with it again in extreme closeness to his family. The alienation between him and his parents taints their entire interaction and ultimately causes him to fail in his endeavor to approach his past in the GDR.

Instead of learning about himself, Landers is confronted with revelation about his extended family as his parents reveal to him that his sister's husband, Jochen, had worked as IM Fidel for the secret service and had spied on the family (Osang 300), which could explain how Landers name ended up in the Stasi's database. As it turns out, the parents have known about this for a while and have forgiven their son-in-law, which Landers cannot understand and criticizes. In the end, Landers has to leave his parents without learning anything new about his life in the GDR that could help him address the accusations about his own collaboration with the Stasi. Rather, he realizes the deep disconnect between himself and his parents, who both accuse him of arrogance and are completely alienated by his post-1989 behavior. They harshly criticize his divorce and his now distance relationship with his daughter (Osang 303f.). Further, they strongly oppose Landers judgment of his sister, Kerstin, and her husband, Jochen, arguing: "'Hälst du dich für perfekt oder was? Jochen ist es ganz bestimmt nicht, wir sind es nicht, Kerstin auch nicht. Aber sie ernähren ihre Kinder, sie arbeiten, sie haben sich ein Haus gebaut. Sie halten in guten wie in schlechten Zeiten zusammen. Wer gibt dir das Recht, so über sie zu reden?' 'Für mich ist das kein Leben', sagte Landers" (ibid.) ['Do you think you are perfect or what? Jochen for sure isn't perfect, neither are we, and Kerstin isn't as well. But they feed their children, they work, they've built a house. They stick together in good and in bad times. Who gives you the right to talk like this about them?' 'For me this is no life,' said Landers"].

Through the fight the text reveals the disparate value systems that govern their lives. While his parents value work, supporting one's family, and working through hard times, Landers perceives this more like settling for less than one can aim for as his response at the end of the confrontation with his father indicates. Hence, their definitions of what a worthy life is, differ greatly. With defending his daughter and son-in-law, Landers' father implicitly defends himself and his wife against Landers'

perceived arrogance and condescending judgment. They see and reject the pricy gifts that Landers has brought along as a conscious expression of his superior status, emphasizing that the material values are not able to fill the void of his consistent physical absence.

The characters' disparate definitions of life values cannot be negotiated and ultimately they do not find a way to bridge the gap that has developed between them since German unification. Again, the text represents the absence of trust within the family as the reason that prevents a successful solution of the conflict. Both parties judge each other, the way they dress and behave, eventually perceiving the *other* as representation of the group of people they oppose. For his parents, Landers exhibits the typical qualities of a "Wessi" with his arrogant, judgmental behavior and his condescending generosity. For Landers, his parents are the embodiment of everything he tries so hard not to be: poorly dressed, old, unsuccessful in the new society, stereotypical East German. The text, thus, creates a dire opposition between family members, who all fail to see through the superficial level of identity performance at play. As Glaeser's (2000) aptly assesses: "What characterizes action as performance is the fact that it is addressed, that it is done to be seen or to be known by others for reasons which may be quite different from its purported intention" (204). Clearly, Landers' and his parents' interpretations of the respective other's identity performance does not align with the purported intentions. His parents are alienated from Landers, who seems to embody all the despicable aspects of the "other" Germany that they have come to detest. The family bond is not strong enough to bridge this emotional distance and it does not appear as if the parents are even interested in reconnecting with their son. Landers is similarly alienated from his parents and bewildered by their rejection of his person, especially in regard to their acceptance and forgiveness towards their son-in-law, who has abused their trust. The text constructs the "real" East Germans as in favor of hard work and family values and opposes them to Landers as someone somewhat shallow and in constant need of external reaffirmation. Thus, the text reinforces the stereotypical East-West-divide, but relocates the conflict from the public sphere to the private realm of the East German family. On the one hand, the novel thus echoes a central theme in post-unification literature regarding the

conundrum of Eastern assimilation post-1989 that Orth (2010) summarizes as follows: "Je angepasster, desto erfolgreicher" (113) [The more adapted, the more successful]. Successful in this context means the degree of inclusion in the unified Germany, for example through employment and chances to partake in the new social opportunities of capitalism.[106] On the other hand, this novel as well frames the realm of the family as decisive space, in which the historical rupture of 1989 has to be negotiated.

In the end, Landers has to leave his parents not only with the realization that they will not be of any help in his current situation, but also with the insight that the split between them is irrevocable: "Er hatte keine Ahnung von ihrem Leben. Er wusste nichts, aber das Schlimme war, er wollte auch nichts wissen. Er wollte nichts über ihre Bedürfnisse, Wünsche, Hoffnungen wissen. Er wollte ihnen nicht nahe kommen.[...] Er konnte nicht offen mit ihnen sprechen. Sie waren Fremde. Alte Wesen aus einer untergegangenen Welt" (Osang 307) [He did not have a clue about their life. He knew nothing, but the worst was, he did not want to know anything. He did not want to know about their needs, wishes, hopes. He did not want to be close with them. […] He could not talk openly with them. They were strangers. Old creatures from a lost world]. The text constructs their belonging to two different worlds as the ultimate reason for their alienation. Whereas Landers has quickly moved on after 1989 to establish a position in the new world of the unifying Germany, his parents have remained connected with the values of the meanwhile lost GDR. Their emotional distance can be traced to the notion of allochronism (Glaeser 146), meaning that they do not encounter each other contemporaneously, but are rather represented as inhabiting and embodying two different historical eras. In absence of any desire to reconnect with his parents and take their perspective on life into account, there are no chances for the family members to reunite and negotiate their differences and bridge these "oppositional temporal identification" (ibid). Instead they remain strangers to each other. Since Landers strives to embody and represent the Western values, the family conflict mirrors the social confrontation between East and West Germans in post-1989

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[106] This theme of post-1989 writings has also been exemplified by Johannes in Burmeister's *Norma*.

Germany. In approaching their differences, Landers and his parents exhibit the same judgmental attitude that has been analyzed in the previous interactions between East and West and that undermines any real conciliation and unification. It must be emphasized that this focus on failed East-West-interactions is mediated in all the novels discussed in this chapter, independent from when they have been published, thus, hinting at an ongoing thematic investment in the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany.[107]

After failing to resolve his problem in Berlin, Landers decides to travel to the East German city of Neubrandenburg, where he had served his mandatory service in the military. Together with Raschke, the regional reporter on site, he visits the military base where he had been stationed. Being confronted with the space triggers Landers memories and, as the reader learns later on from Raschke's perspective, Lander confessed to have shared lyrics of the English songs he played as a DJ and their translation with Stasi officers. Interestingly, aside from a short mentioning on the local radio station, the news about Landers collaboration with the Stasi never attracts wider public attention. This is not explained by his minor involvement with the secret service that did not include spying on other people, but rather by the two journalists, who had covered the story. Raschke's story in the regional newspaper is not published, because it does not fit the political discourse of the time. The state parliament is about to vote on the regional Commissioner for the Stasi Archives and Raschke's story including details about an employee who smuggled files out of the archives and prevents the distribution of essential information would undermine the authority of the Commissioner (Osang 394, 425). Therefore, the chief editor of the newspaper is alarmed and Raschke's story taken out of the edition. Doris Theyssen, who was also

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[107] See for example Glaeser's (2000) explanation of the phenomenon: "The unification of Germany has effectively divided the country. Until 1989 Germans in East and West could nourish the idea that division was merely political, superimposed on Germany by historical circumstances, by powers outside of Germany's control. […] Political unification was a moment of truth, however. Not Germans on both sides of the former Iron curtain were asked to live their unity. […] Ever since, a closer look at the Germans from the respective other side seems to confirm and reconfirm every day that easterners and westerners are quite different, that they are other, even foreign. Overcoming the reality of political division made the intensive experience of a cultural division possible. It became apparent to Germans from East and West that forty years of separate histories, of increasingly divergent biographic experiences within a set of diverging institutions, and participation in fundamentally different discourses had indeed made a difference" (323-324).

working on the case for the *Spiegel*, decides not to publish any of the accusations because she has found

the suicide note of Landers' case officer (Osang 412f.) in which he states that Landers is not guilty

(Osang 431) after obviously realizing the ridiculousness of Landers' deeds and the Stasi's aspirations in

this case.

In the end, Landers is again saved by circumstances beyond his reach. He has succeeded in

remembering his past, in realizing that he had collaborated with the Stasi, but these realizations do not

have a lasting effect on him, in that they change his outlook on and aim in life. He is allowed to return to

his position as anchor man and despite a short affair with his colleague Ilona during his stay in Berlin,

returns to Margarethe, even though he already did not feel any connection with her anymore, as his

feelings after a short phone conversation reveal: "Er hatte nichts mehr gespürt, keinen Zusammenhalt, sie

lebten in verschiedenen Welten" (424). [He had not felt anything anymore, no solidarity, they lived in

different worlds.] This description of alienation resembles the estrangement from his parents, specifically

in the feeling of living in different worlds. Incapable of feeling a sense of belonging in neither world,

Landers remains stranded in a precarious in-between that undermines a self-confident positioning in the

unifying Germany. As Boyer (2006) summarizes:

> Osang's novel is an East German tale insofar as it revolves around Lander's sense of
> estrangement from both the GDR and unified Germany and around his anxious search to
> stabilize a meaningful relationship to the past that does not circumscribe and distort his
> present life. At some level, all that Osang's East German protagonist wishes in the end is
> to have some sense of mastery over both his past and future. But Landers, like many of
> my eastern interlocutors, finds that the contemporary politics of the future in Germany
> make it difficult to escape the role of embodied pastness he and they have been assigned.
> (379)

While I agree with Osang's observation that the public discourse prescribes a limited array of identity

options or roles to East Germans, I would argue that Landers is successful in escaping the assigned "role

of embodied pastness" but with the result that his choice of complete assimilation has left him without

connection to his past, which ultimately destabilizes his social positioning in the present. For East

German characters in post-1989 literature, "[T]he 'new' life in the unified Germany cannot be separated

from the 'old' life in the GDR" (Orth 118). Landers' desperate attempt to leave his past behind

undermines his ability to act self-determined and, therefore, his overall agency. Despite his estrangement

from Margarethe, he continues their relationship, because he is convinces that she is the woman that a

man in his position should date. When the novel comes to a close the couple is expecting a child and the

text casts the pregnancy not only as indicator of a new beginning, but also suggests Landers' social

integration through the normative institution of the nuclear family. Nonetheless, the narrative indicates

that the protagonist's social inclusion is not positively affecting Landers' self-perception. Rather, he

remains unchanged by this episode, which the text exemplifies through the return of his old anxieties and

Landers inability to perform agency in the final scene of the novel:

> Landers schaltete mit dem Fuß auf den Kontrollmonitor, um sich ein letztes Mal anzuschauen. Es war der linke der beiden Monitore vor ihm. Der rechte zeigte die laufenden Bilder aus Bangladesch. Er trat leicht auf das Pedal unter seinem Tisch, aber der Kontrollmonitor blieb schwarz. Er sah sich nicht. [...] Landers starrte auf den Kontrollmonitor, er war nicht zu sehen. Er war weg. [...] Er trat noch mal auf das Pedal und schaute dann direkt in die Kamera. Einen Augenblick lang sahen zwölf Millionen Zuschauer seine Angst. Dann glättete sich sein Gesicht. (446f.)

> [Landers switched with his foot to the control monitor to see himself one last time. It was the left one of the two monitors in front of him. The right one showed the ongoing images from Bangladesh. He lightly stepped on the pedal below his table, but the control monitor remained black. He did not see himself. […] Landers starred at the control monitor, he was invisible. He was gone. […] He stepped again on the pedal and then looked directly into the camera. One moment long twelve million viewers saw his fear. Then his face straightened.]

This scene of the novel reconnects with the first scene in which Landers is present and where he also

experiments with the control monitor to check on his appearance. Further, the glass wall from the first

scene is here replaced by the glass screen of the monitor, both of which remain black and represent a

superior power that Landers cannot access or control. Noteworthy is the connection between seeing and

existing that is established in the quote. Since Landers is not able to see his representation, his image on

the screen, his existence vanishes: "He was gone." His inability to see himself also echoes Landers failure

to negotiate the positionalities of his identity. The absence of seeing equals the lack of knowledge. This is

why Landers has to rely on an outside force for reassurance and why he panics when this force takes on a

life of its own, not responding to his step on the pedal. Landers' fear over the absence of an image on the

screen further indicates his dependency on his public status. Without existing on a screen – either of the control monitor or of the television sets all over the country – he does not exist at all, again basing his existence on an external force that he cannot control. As stated before, "to be the agent of an action you need to exercise some degree of control over the action" (Roessler/Eilan 34). With no control over his action as exemplified throughout the novel, Landers remains a character without agency, focused foremost on fulfilling the expectations of his West German environment without completely understanding the social mechanisms at works. He remains stuck in the status of copying his surroundings, unable to use the outside pressures and dominating stereotypes for his own advantage like the characters Marianne, Hinrich, or Werner Schniedel. Landers example, thus, proves once again that the inability to see through the stereotypes dominating the public discourse and impacting interactions on an individual level inhibits the development of agency.

Similar to the protagonists in Burmeister's and Sparschuh's novels, Landers experiences a deep alienation in his family. Once again, the text constructs family as the socio-imaginary realm where the far-reaching social changes of 1989 and the German unification have to be negotiated. Even though, Marianne's and Hinrich's marital relationships are strained and ultimately fail, the familial arrangements are construed as significant affective constellation where notions of agency are challenged and renegotiated. Landers, in contrast, fails to develop a stance of agency, since his ruptured relationship with his parents prevents him from reconnecting with important aspects of his biography, which ultimately not only keeps him from contesting the stereotypes he faces in the workplace, but also makes him an indifferent participant in the newly created familial relations with Margarete. In its construction of a weak East German protagonist who, despite his professional and monetary success, remains unhappy and displaced in the unifying Germany, nearly 20 years after the official unification of Germany, the text highlights the importance of an East German identity that takes the past into account. This is in agreement with Welsh's et. al (1997) finding that a distinct East German identity post-1989 does not have to be perceived as an attempt of exclusion from the unifying Germany,

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> [R]ather, a growing [East German] collective consciousness is better understood as an adaptation strategy to the problems and conflicts that have been created by unification. Eastern German identity is not necessarily embraced as a way of opting out of the new Germany, of celebrating cultural distinctiveness, or of waxing nostalgic about a paradise lost. From a functional point of view it may instead be a constructive response: an Eastern German self-consciousness does not question the rules of the game in any fundamental sense but rather facilitates integration by empowering individuals and collective actors in the ongoing conflicts of interests, many of them along East-West lines. (135)

Landers' character in his inability and unwillingness to accept his East German past, disconnects himself from a crucial source for establishing a more stable social position in the unifying Germany and for negotiating an identity that is not solely based on assumed external expectations. In relocating the "ongoing conflicts of interest" from the public sphere and the East-West opposition to the private realm of the East German family, the novel highlights the significance of family in negotiating the conflicting identity narratives arising after 1989.

Conclusion

Postmodern conceptions of identity emphasize it "as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall "Cultural Identity" 222). Post-1989 writings invest in this concept of a fluid, multifaceted identity with its dependency on performance and representation. Throughout the literary analyses of these texts it became visible that the development of agency – especially in terms of self-determination and positioning in the unified Germany – is constructed as closely related to the awareness of identity formation as a performance process dependent on the subject as much as on its social context.

Within the post-1989 texts, a characters' development of agency is framed by three essential themes. A first theme is the importance of familial relationships. The socially imagined and constructed space of family is in the narratives continuously established as the decisive constellation to negotiate the historical rupture of 1989 and the ensuing unification process. The family's impact as constructed in the novels can be described as two-dimensional. On the one hand, familial arrangements are presented as the key to a character's socialization. This access to the past is cast as crucial in negotiating one's identity in

the present. As Glaeser (2000) argues with reference to Heidegger: "Present interpretations are based on past experiences and interpretative frameworks learned in the past. If the present is to be understood at all, it is on the basis of the past" (178). This holds true for the post-1989 German context, even though the applicability and access to past experiences and frameworks is highly contested by the unification's "fundamental asymmetry" (ibid. 7). In highlighting the importance of the past for constructive self-identifications in the present while simultaneously mediating the dominance and importance of the public discourse that remains often ignorant and dismissive of this past (cf. Welsh et al. 1997), post-1989 writings emphasize the contemporary challenges that resurface within familial arrangements. These challenges result, on the other hand, in the dissolution of nuclear family relationships in many of the examples discussed in this chapter. "By depicting ways in which our individual and collective schemes falter and fail, literary narratives help make it possible to articulate the intuitions and concepts that enable us to say more explicitly what precisely has gone wrong in such cases" (Livingston 85). Therefore, it is particularly through the failure of family members to negotiate the tensions arising from the social challenges that post-1989 Germany literature emphasizes the importance of the private sphere. All texts discussed distinguish clearly between East German and West German families, with the latter remaining less challenged by the contemporary social developments. That the ideal of the nuclear family is contested in all novels can be read as an attempt to mediate the historic rupture of 1989 through the critical engagement with normative notions of family and to reflect the social constructedness of family as well as the pluralization of familial arrangements.

The clear distinction between East and West German families indicates the act of stereotyping as a theme that dominates post-1989 writing. As the theme of family, stereotyping is narratively developed on two levels. Firstly, stereotyping is mediated with regard to a character's ability to see through the social mechanisms at work in this process, which is ultimately crucial for his or her positioning in the unifying Germany. Through this, the novels justify a critical approach to the public discourse and emphasize a divide between the public and the private spheres as exemplified through the engagement

with Stasi accusations in the texts. In all of the novels discussed for this chapter, the private reactions of Westerners when faced with the supposed involvement of an East German character with the Stasi are rather sympathetic and understanding. In contrast to the public discourse, there is no moral condemnation of the alleged Stasi perpetrator. Instead West German characters develop mechanisms to frame the alleged involvement with the Stasi in a way that is excusable, thus simultaneously refusing to question Stasi accusations and to engage with the more complex positioning of East Germans in post-socialist Germany. Hence, post-1989 writings display a counter-discourse to the public social branding and exclusion of alleged Stasi employees, firmly locating it in the private realm, in the individual interactions between East and West.

This superficial demonstration of good will and understanding regarding the East German past, though, does not imply a successful fraternization of East and West Germans. The second narrative level in representing the relationships between East and West German characters focuses on the equal involvement of both sides in stereotyping their respective German other (as in Burmeister and Brussig), which also extends to the interaction between East German characters (as in Osang). Here, post-1989 literature mediates the prevalence of stereotypes in social interactions as well as the damaging effects of this mutual othering. As the texts outline on multiple occasions, stereotyping undermines the development of an actual discourse *between* East and West, instead of *about* each other. Further, the dominance of stereotypes hinders the potential development of trust or even erodes previously established forms of trust, which causes relationships to stall or fail.

Despite this emphasis on the negative impact of stereotypes, post-1989 writings do not focus exclusively on the notions of trauma and loss that have been prevalent in the scholarship so far, but rather accentuate more constructive and reflective modes of East German characters' engagement with the past. This third theme of the narratives is connected to the argument for a distinct East German identity that the post-1989 texts put forward. It is through their engagement with the past and their life before 1989 that East German characters are faced with opportunities to renegotiate positionalities, to actively partake in

the imagination of life in the GDR, and to attempt a self-representation beyond the limited and polar social roles of (Stasi) victim or perpetrator. As Butler (1990) states: "For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary […] Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible" (147). Here findings indicate that the contingent processes of renegotiating an identity after 1989 ultimately also contains the chance for East Germans to redefine their position and agency in the society of post-1989 Germany. Since a character's engagement with the past is repeatedly framed as crucial component for approaching 1989 as moment of historic possibilities, Chapter 3 focuses on the analysis of memory contests that define family relations in post-1989 literature.

Chapter 3: Memory Contests

On December 13, 2011, the funeral of author Christa Wolf in Berlin commemorated not only the life of one of the most important German post-war authors, but also displayed the still existing divide within post-1989 German society. On the evening of that day, journalist Arno Widmann on the website of the daily newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* remarked upon the absence of any members of the local or national government as well as of some representatives of the German cultural scene, stating:

> Die Beerdigung von Christa Wolf war kein gesellschaftliches Ereignis. Man mag das begrüßen, aber es war ein Ereignis, das einem wieder einmal klarmachte, dass es keine Gesellschaft gibt in Deutschland. Es gibt jede Menge Parallelgesellschaften, und nicht einmal die Beerdigung einer der bedeutendsten Autorinnen des Landes wird von diesen Parallelgesellschaften genutzt, einmal eine oder zwei Stunden einander in die Augen zu blicken und zu begreifen, dass sie erst alle zusammen die Gesellschaft bilden, in der wir alle leben.

> [Christa Wolf's funeral was not a social event. One could appreciate this, but it was an event that once again made one aware that there is no society in Germany. There are plenty of parallel societies and the funeral of one of the most distinguished authors of the country is not even used just this once for one or two hours to look into each other's eyes and to realize that only all of them together create the society, in which we all live.]

Widmann's disillusionment and disappointment is palpable in his comment on the day's somber events and hints at the social issues the funeral exemplified that reach far beyond Christa Wolf and her role in the unified Germany. One of the various dividing lines between the parallel societies that Widmann claimed to detect in post-1989 Germany was also visible within the numerous obituaries for Wolf, whose authors had to decide which facet of Wolf's life that spanned nearly the entire 20th century and its multifarious history they wanted to emphasize in their retrospective of her life and work. Wolf did not really fit in any of the clear-cut categories used to define life under socialism from the outside: she was one of the most famous and important authors of the GDR, who firmly believed in socialism, but was critical of the GDR government and not afraid to voice her disagreement, which earned her the label of

"loyal dissident" (Hell 2002, Magenau 2009) or "state dissident" (Pinkert 2003).[108] As it emerged in

1992, she had also written three reports for the Stasi as "IM Margarete" before becoming the target of a

meticulous Stasi-observation that lasted years. The operation codenamed "Doppelzüngler" is recorded in

42 volumes of Stasi reports.[109] Both of her relationships with the Stasi are highlighted in every obituary,

which all struggle with the fact that Christa Wolf was impossible to fit in the victim-perpetrator grid

dominating the public discourse about the GDR after 1989. The scrutiny of her existence and work in the

GDR already defined her life right after the opening of the Berlin Wall and culminated in the so-called

Literaturstreit in 1991, which questioned not only her own artistic achievements, but those of many GDR

writers as well. Retrospectively, Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Hermann Kant, for example, were all

criticized for their closeness to GDR authorities, the privileges they enjoyed in the GDR, and their alleged

lack of critical engagement with the GDR government.[110]

A few days after Wolf's funeral, on December 16, 2011, the author Irina Liebmann – also of the

Berliner Zeitung – published a reaction to Widmann's disillusioned account of Wolf's funeral, in which

she attempts an investigation into the reasons for the existence of parallel societies in contemporary

Germany. She provides a personal hypothesis about why the division and trenches between East and West

continue to undermine an actual unification of Germany and since her perspective on the issue highlights

several issues central to the exploration of memory in post-1989 Germany, it is quoted here at some

length:

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[108] The term "loyal dissident" was also echoed in many obituaries. See for example. Binder/Weber. "Christa Wolf dies at 82: Wrote of the Germanys." http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/02/arts/christa-wolf-dies-at-82-wrote-of-the-germanys.html?pagewanted=all. For a detailed discussion of Wolf's struggle as "socialist and humanist" writer in the GDR see: Stamp Miller. *The Cultural Politics of the German Democratic Republic: The Voices of Wolf Biermann, Christa Wolf, and Heiner Müller*. Boca Raton: Brown Walker Press, 2004.

[109] For a detailed account of Wolf's relationship with the Stasi and its public treatment in the early 1990s in the unified Germany see: Kuhn. "'Eine Königin köpfen ist effektiver als einen König köpfen' The Gender Politics of the Christa Wolf Controversy" *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*. Eds. Boa/Wharton. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994. 200-2015.

[110] The standard book for a multi-faceted perspective on the *Literaturstreit* is: Anz (eds). "*Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf*." *Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*. München: Spangenberg, 1991. See also: Wittek. *Der Literaturstreit im sich vereinigenden Deutschland. Eine Analyse des Streits um Christa Wolf und die deutsch-deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*. Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1997.

Die Gemeinsamkeit unseres Lebens, unserer Geschichte, sie wird nicht empfunden. Wie aber auch, wenn seit 20 Jahren „Aufarbeitung" der DDR ausschließlich der Unterdrük-kungsapparat erkannt wird, vom Leben im Osten. Damit ich nicht missverstanden werde: Eine kommunistische Parteidiktatur und die Brutalität ihres Sicherheitsapparats zu entlarven, völlig aufzuklären und für die Zukunft unwiederholbar zu machen, ist unverzichtbar bei einer Geschichte wie der deutschen. Es jedoch in solcher Ausschließlichkeit zu tun, dass alles andere, was zum Leben gehörte, dahinter verschwindet, heißt auslöschen und missverstehen. Aber das geschieht, und so hören wir immer weiter von den Guten, den Bösen, den Richtigen, den Falschen und am Ende kann es auch noch passieren, dass mancher Erzähler sich einbildet, er gehöre nicht dazugehört [sic] – zu unser aller Geschichte.

[The commonality of our life, our history, is not felt. How should it be, when through 20 years of "rehabilitation" of the GDR solely the mechanisms of oppression are recognized about life in the East. Just to be clear: To unmask, to comprehensively elucidate a communist party dictatorship as well as the brutality of its secret service and to make it unrepeatable for the future, is indispensable given a history such as that of Germany. But to do it with such exclusiveness that everything else that was part of life disappears behind it means to erase and to misunderstand. But that is happening and so we continue to hear about the good ones, the bad ones, the right ones, the wrong ones, and in the end it could even happen that some narrator imagines himself not to be a part – of all of our history.]

Liebman aptly describes the public discourse in post-unification Germany. On the one hand this discourse is dominated by the question of how to deal with the 40-year existence of the GDR and the German division as well as of how to integrate these eras into Germany's history. Paradigmatic for these struggles are the reoccurring debates about the GDR's categorization as a so-called *Unrechtsstaat*, and subsequently an extension of the oppressive National-socialist dictatorship. On the other hand, through the increasing temporal distance to the fall of the Wall and the German unification, debates about the GDR start to include reflections on the unification process, its success and problems and are in turn influenced by the insights that have been gained over the past 20 years. Past and present visibly intermingle in the attempts to unify Germany socially. The different voices of the public discourse arising in the media, arts, and politics are indicative of the "parallel societies" criticized by Wiedmann. At the same time, these different voices represent disparate memory communities (*Erinnerungsgemeinschaften*, Nünning/Erll 2006) that are defined by their respective relationships with the past. These communities create a multi-layered memory landscape that impacts the interactions between private and public sphere as well as within each individual sphere itself.

The omnipresence of opposing attitudes regarding the GDR and the unification make them such an influential and decisive aspect of the memory culture in contemporary Germany that researchers have come to describe the current situation in Germany as "memory contests" (Fuchs/Cosgrove 2006), stating that "the term tries to capture the highly dynamic and often emotionally charged quality of recent public engagements with Germany's past" (164). In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the memory contests represented and constructed in post-1989 literature and of their textual configurations within familial arrangements. I argue that these memory contests are not limited to "public engagements," but are rather repeatedly staged within the family, particularly across generations. The participants of these debates that are centered on the disparate historical experiences actively partake in the negotiation and interpretation of contemporary history. As Fuchs and Cosgrove state: "[…] the term 'memory contests' puts emphasis on a pluralistic memory culture which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the idea that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves that forge their changing sense of identity" (ibid.). The literary texts discussed in this chapter demonstrate that within familial relationships pluralistic memory narratives are less embraced than perceived as a challenge in mediating the communicative memory of the family. The narratives foreground the negotiation of memories as pivotal for the characters' engagement with the historic transition of 1989 and exemplify the modes in which competing narratives about the past are edited in the attempt to integrate them into publicly or privately established memory communities. Ultimately, the texts indicate a shifting focus in the textual representation of memory contests: Whereas texts by authors born in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Monika Maron and Jürgen Becker, focus on the disparities and memory contests defining the interactions between East and West Germans, authors born in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Ingo Schulze and Eugen Ruge, are more concerned with the differences among East Germans themselves, especially with the memory contests that are carried out across generations within a family. Hence, with regard to memory nuclear family constellations move more and more into the representational foreground of post-1989 writings and recent publications, such as Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, employ a multi-generational family setting as main organizing element of the plot.

While all of the novels discussed here are published after 1989, the ways in which textual imaginations of family intersect with the staging of memory contests is dependent on the author's generational belonging as well as the specific historical circumstances of each publication. What all texts have in common is the central position of childhood as an imaginary narrative space, in which intergenerational conflicts and memory contests crystallize. The texts further suggest a connection between familial memory disputes, ruptured kinship connections, and a characters' struggle in coping with the historic transformation of 1989. Similar to the novels discussed in Chapter 2, the texts in this chapter tie successful individual renegotiations of identity formations in the aftermath of a suddenly collapsed socialist state to the productive intergenerational collaborations in creating a communicative memory of the family. This process is especially challenging in post-1989 Germany, since the sudden demise of ideologies that characterizes 20th century Germany history has "shaped people's lives in that from one day to another they turned a lived present into an invalid past, thus contradicting the notion of an evolutionary pattern of growth and decay" (Arnold-de Simini *Memory Traces* 16). This phenomenon of fragmented and invalid pasts is paradigmatic for the unifying Germany. It is heightened by the discord between memory narratives within familial arrangements, for example between parents and children or among spouses. In post-1989 Germany these familial memory contests are further intensified by competing historic interpretations in the public sphere. With regard to the GDR, the public remembrance culture in the unifying Germany was soon defined by a

> split between what is considered everyday (n)ostalgia, on the one hand, and remembrance of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* (illegitimate state) and dictatorship, on the other hand, [it] tends to rely on the assumption that concern with everyday life in the GDR is at best a naïve sentimentalizing and at worst an intentional banalising of the GDR past. The focus on the Wall, the Stasi and the repressive character of the state, however, is seen to form the basis for a critical and intellectual viable approach. This simplified distinction does not take into account the fact that both approaches have ideological implications, and it chooses to ignore the premise that 'the personal is always political.' (Arnold-de-Simini/Radstone 27-28)

In addition, post-1989 narratives emphasize that in the GDR as well as in the unifying Germany, the political is also always personal and familial memory contests are hence doubly charged: firstly, as

post-1989 texts underscore, family appears as the social configuration where the memory strands involved in the public competition over interpretative authority regarding the GDR intersect. Due to the family's position at the intersection of public and private sphere, family members are forced to address the public memory discourses, either by subscribing to them, ignoring, or challenging them. Thus, the public remembrance culture exerts a keen influence on the private recollections of the past, which proves to be especially challenging in the instances when public and private memory narratives are in discord. Secondly, memory "forms social relations (Confino/Fritzsche 5), has a significant "impact on individual and group behaviours and decision-making" (Hogwood 35), and consequently on individual identity constructions. The familial memory contests staged in post-1989 narratives emphasize the tensions and conflicts that arise during the process of negotiating individual and familial memories that are equally connected to perceptions of the self. Through this, the texts simultaneously emphasize the importance of family or family-like arrangements in coming to terms with the GDR past and the present of the unifying Germany. This is consistent with sociological research on the issue, which suggests that while "[m]any young Germans gain their perspectives on the GDR from sources including books, films, museums, and the media, […] the impact of the familial memory transmission should not be underestimated (Hodgin/Pearce 14). As indicated above, the importance of family in addressing this topic is also demonstrated by the rising popularity of the family novel, focusing on nuclear family relationships and the interactions between immediate kin, within the contested genre of the *Wenderoman*.[111]

Within textual representations of family, intergenerational memory transfers and debates are positioned at the core of negotiating recent German history. This can be attributed to a modification of memory sources that Fuchs and Cosgrove describe as follows: "What we are beginning to witness is a shift of paradigm from communicative memory to what Marianne Hirsch has called 'postmemory'. The concept of generation is central to the concept of postmemory. Present memory contests seem to be

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[111] See for example: Tellkamp. *Der Turm*. (2008) or Ruge. *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*. (2011), which both also received wide critical acclaim.

driven by an intergenerational dynamic, which can involve actors from four generations" (166).[112] The

novels discussed in this chapter exemplify this development in that all of them include extensive

reflections on protagonists' childhood, especially the intergenerational relationship with their parents.

Conflicts between characters of the same gender, for example between mother and daughter or father and

son, appear to be especially charged, indicating that gender configurations are an important component of

postmodern memory transfers and identity constructions respectively. While the concept of postmemory

has been influential in Holocaust studies, the impact of intergenerational memory processes is becoming

more popular in the field of GDR and post-1989 studies. As Hodgin (2011) argues: "successive

generations with no direct experience of the GDR will certainly be influenced by their parents' and local

communities' (variously mediated and often contradictory) experiences" (193). Even though, Hirsch's

definition of postmemory highlights the traumatic valence of transmitted memories, I would argue with

Hodgin that within the memory contests after 1989 even non-traumatic memories can be included in the

sharing of memories across generations. As Hodgin indicates, the family, especially the parents, are the

crucial source for autobiographical memories that can be employed to create a familial memory and

position it with regard to public memory narratives.

In addition to the family, cultural representations ranging from literature to photography and film

are an essential source of postmemory and at the same time a significant mediator of public and private

memory contests. As Birke (2008) argues in the introduction to her seminal study *Memory's Fragile

Power. Crises of Memory, Identity and Narrative in Contemporary British Novels*: "Literature has

manifold ways of taking up and transforming ideas and problems that are part of contemporary culture. In

particular, literary works offer a genuine contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms of

memory's role in identity formation. They grant insight into processes that are hard to observe otherwise:

the workings of the human mind" (3). The novels discussed in this chapter are hence approached as an

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[112] "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." (Hirsch 103)

invaluable source for accessing and understanding the memory contests in post-1989 Germany and their negotiation within family relationships.

It was the scholarly engagement with cultural representations of the Holocaust that highlighted literature as possible, if limited, access point to memory and also triggered a more interdisciplinary approach to memory studies as well as in the field of German studies.[113] With regard to the issues in representing the unprecedented experience of mass murder, research emphasized the alteration of memories that takes place through their narrative representation as well as the dependency of memory on the social context of its recall (Rothberg 2010). This aligns with a common position within memory studies that memories are not a precise recollection of a previous experience, but that memories are impacted by factors and circumstances of their recall in the present. As Westbury and Dennett (2000) put it: "What we recall is not what we actually experienced, but rather a reconstruction of what we experienced that is consistent with our current goals and our knowledge of the world" (19). Hence, familial arrangements as prime mediator of societal values and beliefs significantly shape the environment for memory recall and consequently impact the memory re-constructions of individuals as well as the family as a whole. This social component of public and private memory has been previously established by the groundbreaking theories of memory of Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg (cf. Nünning/Erll 11) and continues to receive support in recent research on the biological and sociological aspects of memory (e.g. Schacter/Scarry 2000, Schacter et al. 2012).

Even though 1989 has been perceived and treated as a caesura in recent German history that validates a revisiting of scholarly terminology, a great deal of scholarship in German studies continues either to focus on writings that engage with Germany's national-socialist past or to foreground the categories of trauma, nostalgia, and loss, which have been dominant in the memory scholarship about the Holocaust, even in discussions of cultural representations of post-1989 that explicitly focus on the time

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[113] For an in-depth overview over the development of memory studies see Birke (2008), especially Chapter 1 and 2, as well as the introduction in Nünning/Gymnich/Sommer. *Literature and Memory. Theoretical Paradigms – Genres – Functions*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag. 2006.

after the Holocaust (Hell 1997, Pinkert 2008). In recent years, the scholarly contributions that engage with 1989 as a trigger for an investigation of the multifarious aspects of remembering in the unifying Germany (e.g. Arnold-de Simine 2005, Eigler *Gedächtnis und Geschichte* 2005) have been complimented with research that focuses on contemporary literature dealing with the GDR and the German unification process and highlight the ongoing memory contests (e.g. Cooke 2005, Hodgin/Pearce 2011, Rechtien/Tate 2011). Both scholarly approaches foreground the varied memory landscape of contemporary Germany and repeatedly refer to the crucial role of literature as an access point to public and private memory narratives.

I argue in this chapter that within literary representations the family takes a crucial place in this memory landscape of post-1989. As Cohen-Pfister (2009) points out, the family "fungiert als ‚Erinnerungsraum,' als Ort, wo mit und um Erinnerung gerungen wird" (244) [functions as 'memory space,' as place, where there is competition for and about memories]. Post-1989 texts hence construct family as a representational space through which the discourses defining collective memory are mediated. By placing intergenerational memory negotiations within familial relationships, instead of in the public sphere, post-1989 novels establish a close connection between individual autobiographical memories and familial memory narratives. They emphasize how these different configurations of memory intersect and compete with each other. It is within familial arrangements that the fragmentary, subjective, and episodic (Assmann *Der lange Schatten* 24) memories of individual family members intersect with each other and are negotiated and mediated in order to create a social and communicative memory. Both memory manifestations are temporally limited and dependent on continuous storage and transfer within the memory community, thus repeatedly creating opportunities to account for new memories and altered social environment. Familial memory narratives are hence ever changing and provide an account of the historical circumstances that impact their recall and construction equally.

In addition to "participating in the processes of shaping collective memories," post-1989 texts and their representations of the family specifically partake in "subversively undermining culturally dominant

memories by establishing counter-memories (Nünning/Gymnich/Sommer 3).[114] As Geier (2011) points out in "Mediating Immediacy" with regard to the self-reflexivity of post-1989 novels: "What they are doing is confronting the question of *how* literature can assume the function of an archive while contributing to the construction of Germany's contemporary memory culture. […] the narrative processes employed in these novels aim to supplement the ongoing memory archive by means of vividly recreating the past, and also to correct this archive where necessary" (102). Therefore, by expending Geier's argument, in this chapter I wish to make the case that post-1989 texts, in addition to partaking in the narrative restructuring of the past, develop a counter-discourse adjacent to the often one-sided public discourses. Thus, in recreating the past these texts simultaneously question or even undermine an already existing version of this past. By establishing an archive that records selected familial memories of the life in the GDR and the experiences of the historic transformation in 1989, the texts at the same time challenge existing archives as well as the power of archives in general. The texts' self-reflexivity lingers between irony and direct critique and results in an overall skeptical attitude towards narrative and social authorities. Post-1989 novels refrain from a claim for truth or objectivity, but rather question if history can ever be truthfully represented. As Christa Wolf has written in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*: "Wie man es erzählen kann, so ist es nicht gewesen" [It did not happen the way you can tell it.], which highlights the tradition in which the post-1989 writings include themselves. The novels reflect on and partake in the public imagination of the past, adding essential components to the public discourse by introducing aspects from the communicative memory created within families that are often missing in the dominant commemorative narrative of Germany, thus creating a counter-discourse or counter-memories.

In order to foreground the ways in which the texts represent memory processes within familial constellations, I will follow Birke's (2008) narratological approach, drawing on her argument that the staging of memory can be detected through certain narrative techniques, for example shifts in time levels

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[114] For the processes involved in development of counter-discourses, see Warner. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14(1): 49–90.

and focalization (57) or through inconsistencies in the plot structure (89). Birke's analyses of contemporary British novels resulted in the insight that the crises of memory mediated in the novels was accompanied by or connected to crises of narrative, referring to the absence or disintegration of typical characteristics of narratives.[115] As my analysis indicates, crises of memory are staged in all novels discussed in this chapter. In German post-1989 novels, these crises further intersect with familial crises, thus implicitly emphasizing the significance of kinship relations for the transfer and construction of memory. The narrative instabilities that Birke indicates as result of memory crises are post-1989 especially prevalent in texts by authors born in the 1930s and 1940s. These narrative crises are equally connected to ruptured family relationships, especially to an absent or alienating maternal signifier. I will discuss Monika Maron's *Animal Triste* (1996) and Jürgen Becker's *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen* (1999) as examples for novels that establish an interrelation between the crises in narrative, memory, and familial arrangements. While the sudden collapse of socialism is framed as a historic event with significant impact on the private sphere in all of the novels discussed in this study, in the texts by Maron and Becker the ideological collapse triggers the equally sudden reemergence of childhood memories that are located in post-war Germany before its separation. Both protagonists face struggles in recalling and organizing their memories, which is mirrored on the textual level and the ruptured selves reappear in the fragmented narrative structures that are characterized by blended temporal layers and uncertain narrators.

The second set of texts I want to discuss are Ingo Schulze's *Neue Leben* (2005) and Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011). These texts exemplify the author generation born in the 1950s and 60s and while childhood memories still feature prominently, they are now located in the GDR. The novels further indicate a shift in the representational focus from problematic maternal relations to strained paternal interactions. This development appears to intersect with the move of the GDR into the

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[115] Birke draws on Werner Wolf (2002) and his definition of five aspects, "which enhance 'narrativity': texts are seen as more narrative (1) if they feature external and 'spectacular' action, (2) if they deal with specific characters instead of a collective body, (3) if the story they tell is set in the narrative 'past' and, from the point of view of the narrative 'present', has already been concluded, (4) if they are coherent and feature clear causal relations instead of ambiguities and blanks, and (5) if they allow the production and maintenance of illusion" (Wolf 52, Birke 58).

fore of the narrative and the related textual reflections of power hierarchies on the level of the state and the family. These novels' return to more traditional familial arrangements is echoed in the at first sight conventional narratological arrangements that appear as important narrative device to organize overwhelming experiences and related memories. In contrast to the texts by the previous generations, these texts replace reflections of memory processes with performances of memory, shifting the task of questioning the narrative's authority unto the reader.

Overall, the novels in this chapter stage familial arrangements as central social constructs for the negotiation of memory contests, while simultaneously developing these memory contests as defining influence on familial interactions before and after the historic shift of 1989. While familial tensions arising from non-negotiated memory contests result at times in families falling apart, I argue that the historic transformation of 1989 is ultimately cast as opportunity for developing reflective modes focused on renewal in approaching recent and past familial ruptures.

Reflections of Memory: Stable Pasts Within Unstable Presents

As mentioned above, Monika Maron's *Animal Triste* (1996) and Jürgen Becker's *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen* (1999) establish a close connection between familial, memory, and narrative crises. Despite the fact that Maron (born in 1941) is nine years Becker's junior (born in 1932), the narrative strategies of their novels as well as what I would like to refer to as the "memory structures" established in both texts are similar, especially with regard to the function of family within these memory structures. In both texts the imaginary sphere of the protagonist's childhood, especially the relationship between parents and children, is framed as decisive impact on memory and identity constructions in the post-1989 present. As I discuss in more detail below, the focal point of Maron's story is the protagonist's retelling of her affair with a West German shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Nonetheless, in connecting the immediate past of the affair with the narrative present, her past before 1949 and right after 1989, the protagonist also reflects on the relationship with her mother and father as well as with her daughter, assuming a generational middle-position as daughter on the one and mother on the other hand.

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The focus of the story told by Becker's protagonist Jörn is on his childhood and, thus, on the relationship with his parents, while his current family life is barely addressed and his wife Lena is only mentioned once in passing (Becker 34).[116] For Jörn, the demise of the GDR and the opening of the German-German borders give him a reason to revisit the place of his mother's suicide shortly after World War II. In telling his life story, especially his coming-of-age during the Third Reich, Jörn remembers his parents' divorce and reflects on how growing up in a divided country had already been preceded by growing up in a divided family.

The protagonists' acts of narrating memories are presented as essential component of the characters' attempts to access their past. Their memory narratives in addition to organizing past experiences also provide mental scaffolding to address unsettling events in the present. Similar to the experiences of the East German protagonists discussed in previous chapters, for Maron's and Becker's protagonists the present is destabilizing, challenging, uncertain, whereas the past functions as stable point of reference that guides and also secures reflections of the present. These similarities indicate that both authors belong to the same "memory community" (*Erinnerungsgemeinschaft*, Erll/Nünning 2006) or even "memory generation," which is especially noteworthy since authors and protagonists alike are from East Germany and West Germany respectively.

The term "generation" appears to be particularly adequate if one assumes that generation is defined as "a group within a society that is characterized by its members having grown up in the same particularly formative historical era. Often, such a generational identity exists throughout its members' lives due to their having experienced times of radical upheaval and new beginnings (primarily in adolescence) and as a result sharing a specific habitus (the 'imprint hypothesis')" (Reulecke 119). Despite the respective differences between the protagonists with regard to gender (Maron: female, Becker: male),

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[116] All references refer to: Jürgen Becker. *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1999.

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age (Maron: between 50 and 90. Becker: mid-60s), and their main residence or spatial anchoring[117] in the unifying Germany (Maron: East Germany, Becker: West Germany), the post-war experience before the founding of both German states in 1949 is in both texts presented as powerful and generationally unifying frame of reference in communications between East and West Germans. In both novels, this time frame encapsulates the protagonists' childhood and their repeated references to this time in their life is cast to be motivated by three main assumptions: They are firstly and mainly used to establish a connection between East and West German characters, who both attempt to relate to each other through the German history that took place before the German division and is thus shared history. Focusing on the protagonists' respective experiences as children secondly allows the texts to present the war and post-war years through the innocence of childhood and adolescence, thus foregrounding the personal and intimate experiences and subsequently discussing issues of guilt, the behavior of bystanders and perpetrators through those lenses. Since both protagonists seek to connect to one or more fellow German from the "other" Germany, these charged and challenging aspects of German history – which are still contested today – are foregone for private anecdotes about divorcing parents (Becker), playing among the war rubble (Becker, Maron) or about the attempts of building a relationship with an estranged father returning from the battlefield (Maron). The narratives' foregrounding of post-war childhood appear hence as a result of their "traumatic consequences that could only be articulated in recent years" and are simultaneously challenged by scholarly assumptions that "the German discourse about the so-called 'Kriegskinder' […] had more to do with contemporary media attention-politics than with genuine experiences of war" (Möckel "War-children in the Post-War"). Thus, Becker's and Maron's texts are part of a larger body of texts by a memory community that is constituted by

> an age group that has recently begun, in their self-biographization or retrospective
> reconstruction of the course of their own lives, to position themselves generationally and
> speak as a generational unit, one that until this point had drawn little attention to itself:

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[117] I refrain from using the term Heimat or location here, because both protagonists are not necessarily at home where they are from and in case of Becker's protagonist Jörn have strong ties to the East, so that I have decided to foreground the place where the protagonist mainly resides, even though parts or the majority of the story may play in a different location.

the war babies. Born in the late 1930s and early 1940s and now reaching retirement age, they are calling to memory their early childhood experiences – or these are 'catching up' with them – of the bombing war, expulsion, the loss of their fathers, etc. (Reulecke 122)

Even though both texts are marked as novels, there are significant parallels between author and protagonist that would allow defining each text if not as autobiography at least as one component of the author's self-biographization, thus underscoring generational experiences as narrative impetus.[118]

Beyond highlighting the history shared by East and West Germans, the retelling of childhood experiences made during and after the war is thirdly also an attempt to create an access point for the negotiation of post-1989 history and thus for the present currently encountered by protagonists and the fellow Germans to whom they seek to relate. The references to the post-war era lend a stable historic and narrative framework for the reflections of the unstable, immediate past, since the shared German past before the German separation in 1949 provides scaffolding for negotiating the historic events of the present. In both texts, familial arrangements in post-war Germany have a clear impact on the protagonists' post-1989 efforts to construct a coherent biographical narrative. In contrast, the German separation from 1949 to 1989 constitutes a narrative gap in both novels, which both only superficially refer to this time, mainly through insinuations, references to places or by providing specific dates for events that took place during this time frame. Often, the protagonists only allude to this time if it is in some way causally connected to the present or to their family history: for example Jörn in Becker's novel remembers the day when the Berlin Wall fell because this experience is the prerequisite for him to revisit significant places of his childhood in the narrative present; for Maron's nameless protagonist the fall of the Wall exists purely as the prerequisite for the fateful encounter with her lover, who does not only replace the previous familial arrangements of the nuclear family but is also the trigger for the protagonist's resurfacing childhood memories.

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[118] See for example, Eigler (2002) with regard to Maron: "Auf unterschiedliche Weise sind alle diese Texte in der Grauzone zwischen Autobiografie und Fiktion angesiedelt" (159). [All these texts are in various ways located in the grey area between autobiography and fiction.]

As indicated above, ruptured kinship relations and related unstable, porous memory structures are echoed in similarly destabilizing narrative devices that undermine the narrative itself. To this effect, the narratives often integrate meta-reflections on the act of remembering, especially on the ways in which memories can be manipulated. Significant in both texts are the many instances of incoherent or confusing narration that create an unreliable narrator, whose perspective and position in the text is not always clearly definable. This uncertainty extends to the level of the protagonists, since it is at times difficult to discern whose voice and perspective is presented to the reader. As Neumann points out:

> The concept of unreliable narration is based on the readers' recognition of textual or normative inconsistency. Particularly in contemporary fictions of memory, narrative instances often actively interpret, re-interpret, and continually re-create the individual past and the identity built on this past in the act of narration. […] It shows that any autobiographical narrative is bound to be fictionalized through processes of selection, appropriation, and evaluation, thus accentuating that remembering primarily means the identity-creating constructions of a 'usable past.' (338)[119]

Neumann's observation aligns with the above-mentioned selection of historical reference points that is based on the protagonists' desire to create an autobiographical narrative that can be understood in the present and therefore requires re-interpretation and re-creation as well as the elimination of 'unusable' experiences from the past. In Maron's and Becker's case the near omission of the GDR in their novels could also be explained with the temporal closeness to the state's existence, which left authors still searching for the adequate vocabulary to represent this country after its demise. In Maron's texts, for example, this insecurity about how to denote past occurrences and situations that in hindsight appear relatively bizarre is palpable in her protagonists' usage of the word "Gangsterbande" (*Gang of Gangsters)* to refer to the GDR government (Maron 30). As the following detailed analyses of each novel shows, the voids in the autobiographical narratives seem to mirror ruptured familial constellations. Interestingly, the return to strained post-war kinship relations that appears only to be possible after 1989 causes a narrative shunning of the German separation and hence places the existence of the GDR in a narrative void.

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[119] For more on the purpose of unreliable narration especially with regard to narrating Germany's national-socialist past see Beßlich. "Unzuverlässiges Erzählen im Dienst der Erinnerung. Perspektiven auf den Nationalsozialismus bei Maxim Biller, Marcel Beyer und Martin Walser." *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989*. Eds. Beßlich/Grätz/Hildebrand. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag. 2006. 35-52.

Maron's *Animal Triste*, published in 1996, is written as a stream of consciousness of the nameless, female, character-bound narrator, who, presumably in preparing to die (238), decides to face and recount a bygone era of her existence that started with the "most valuable moment of her life" (27). The narrator's narrative composition of this time in her life suggests that she is solely focused on retelling her affair with a West German, whom she names Franz retrospectively. Nonetheless, her oscillation between the affair, her childhood in post-war Germany and the intermittent reflections in the unknown narrative present suggest that the narrative functions as a coming-to-terms with her life and the part of the 20th century it encompasses. Further, the near complete absence of her life in the GDR – and hence the majority of her life - as well as the partial memories of her family within her self-narrativization indicate that the most impactful event of her life might not be, as she proclaims, her encounter with Franz, but rather the demise of the GDR, since the collapse of socialism proves to have a lasting and destabilizing impact on her familial arrangements as well as her self-perception. Her inability to realize and consequently reflect this impact and her transference of the life-altering power of 1989 unto Franz hints at the traumatic traces that the end of the GDR has left in her recollection.

The narrator's retelling of her life is constructed as a monologue that seems to directly address an unknown, external interlocutor. The story is defined by "vielfachen Unbestimmtheiten" (multiple indeterminations) (Geier "Paradoxien" 105) that mainly pertain to the narrator's life before her affair with Franz. This time before Franz coincides with the protagonist's life in the GDR and is in passing referenced as the time when her country was ruled by a "als internationale[r] Freiheitsbewegung getarnten Gangsterbande" (30) (gang of gangsters in disguise of an international liberation movement) and she was still living "mit den anderen Menschen" (14) (with the other people).[120] Her family is included in this amorphous mass of "other people," with her husband and daughter relegated to superficial mentions in

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[120] All references refer to: Maron, Monika. *Animal Triste*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997.

brief and uncertain comments. Her references to both the GDR and her family are defined by linguistic imprecision, for example by not mentioning either one by name, that insinuate an emotional indifference and hint at a possible explanation for their absence in the text.

The protagonist's emotional indifference appears to be connected to the experience of physical trauma that alters her life and takes place shortly after the opening of the Berlin Wall and before her encounter with Franz. The protagonist describes that one day she felt a numbness spreading from her tongue to the rest of her senses after which she fainted and lost consciousness for about three minutes (21). The most traumatic aspect of this experience is the fact that the protagonist has no memory of her own about this physical breakdown, but rather has to depend on the account of a stranger who helped her. According to this woman, the protagonist remained in a semi-unconscious state, even after opening her eyes again: "Nachdem ich aus einer etwa dreiminütigen tiefen Ohnmacht erwacht war, soll ich mich weitere fünfzehn Minuten lang in einem Zustand schrecklicher Verwirrung befunden haben. […] ich hätte mitleiderregend verängstigt gewirkt bis zu einem bestimmten Augenblick, in dem sich mein Gesicht plötzlich entspannt hätte und ich vernünftig, wenn auch erschöpft gefragt hätte, was geschehen sei" (ibid) [After awaking from being unconscious for about three minutes, I was in a state of terrible confusion for fifteen more minutes […] I had appeared pitifully scared up to a certain moment when my face suddenly relaxed and I had asked, reasonably albeit exhaustedly, what had happened]. Adding to the traumatic nature of this experience is the fact that the protagonist does not receive a satisfying medical explanation of what has happened to her and why (22). In her efforts to make sense of this event, she therefore entirely depends on the third-party account of her helper as well as on her own observations about physical and mental changes that she discovers in the weeks after the incident: "Noch Wochen später hatte ich zuweilen den Eindruck, etwas in meinem Kopf funktioniere anders als vor dem Anfall, seitenverkehrt, als hätte jemand die Pole umgesteckt" (22) [Even weeks later I at times had the impression that something in my head functioned differently than before the seizure, side-inverted, as if somebody had switched the poles]. These switched poles could explain the unusual workings of her memory and the

amalgamation of precise and blurry memories in her narration that exclude or minimize the longest parts

of her life (life as adult in GDR, marriage, having a child) and instead emphasize its shorter episodes.

Hence, the memory narrative presented in the text connects her earliest and most recent memories namely

her early childhood in post-war Germany and her affair with Franz in post-1989 Germany. Her

breakdown has, thus, physical, and more importantly mental and psychological consequences (and

possibly even triggers) and its general inexplicability by medical authorities as well as herself give the

incident an uncanny[121] aura: "Trotzdem wurden mir der Anfall und seine Folgen unheimlicher, je länger

ich darüber nachdachte" (22) [Nonetheless, the seizure and its consequences started to feel more uncanny

the longer I thought about it]. Therefore, in order to better cope with this frightening experience and to

find a way to arrange herself with the changed, strange workings of her brain, the narrator decides to

frame the incident as a wake-up call to rethink her life:

> Die Beunruhigung, in die der Anfall mich gestürzt hatte, ließ sich nur ertragen, indem ich das Geschehen nachträglich mit Sinn erfüllte und das Zeichen deutete. Vielleicht hatte ich aber auch nur auf ein Zeichen gewartet, um die eine Frage zu stellen und mir darauf die eine Antwort zu geben: Wäre der Anfall nicht die Simulation meines Todes gewesen, sondern wäre ich an diesem Abend wirklich gestorben, was hätte ich versäumt? Man kann im Leben nichts versäumen als die Liebe. Das war die Antwort, ich muß sie, lange bevor ich den Satz endlich aussprach, gekannt haben. (23)

> [The anxiety that the seizure had caused was only bearable by belatedly filling the event with meaning and by interpreting the sign. Maybe I had only waited for sign to ask this one question and give myself this one answer: If the seizure had not been a simulation of my death, but rather had I really died that evening, what would I have missed? You cannot miss anything in life but love. That was the answer. I must have know it, long before I finally uttered the sentence.]

This description of the protagonist's coping process is crucial in understanding the relevance of the

seizure, its long-lasting effects as well as one of its likely causes. In explaining her *belated* sense making,

the protagonist indirectly categorizes her inexplicable experience as trauma as defined by Caruth (1995)

in her seminal edited volume *Trauma. Explorations of Memory* where she states: "[…] the event is not

assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who

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[121] For examples of reading the uncanny see Camilletti et. al. Introduction. *Image & Narrative* 11.3 (2010): 1-6, as well as Johnson. *Aesthetic Anxiety. Uncanny Symptoms in German Literature and Culture.* Amsterdam: Rodopi Verlag, 2010.

experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4-5, italics in original). In order to rid herself of this possession, the protagonist frames the seizure as a chance to re-evaluate her life, which leads her to the realization that love is its only meaningful aspect. Her remark that she must have been aware of this long before admitting it to herself could hint at the fact that love is one thing she has been missing in her life, and hence suggest matrimonial discontent. Here the historic context of the seizure comes into play, indicating that external circumstances and internal inclination might have come together in triggering the protagonist's psychological and subsequently emotional "fainting." As Kai Erikson (1995) describes in Caruth's volume, "The experience of trauma, at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logics by which humankind lives, in the ways of nature itself, and often in God" (198). While the traumatic breakdown has caused the protagonist to critically reflect on her life and possibly question her marital relationship, thus exhibiting the above-mentioned loss of confidence in the significance of family ties, her own comments indicate that she had been questioning her personal life at least subconsciously already before the seizure. The described "switching of the poles in her head" after fainting seems to have opened the mental floodgates that have held back this realization of personal or marital unhappiness before 1989. With regard to the historical context, it is noteworthy that the protagonist's breakdown shares important qualities with the fall of the Berlin Wall, beyond the obvious action of falling or tumbling to the ground. Both incidents further happened surprisingly, result in a fundamental reevaluation of previous actions and beliefs, and most importantly both can only be understood belatedly.[122] The historical trauma of 1989 seems to have been absorbed and repeated through the protagonist's physical trauma and both deeply impact her family relationships as well as her memory and processes of remembering.

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[122] Katrin Schmitt's *Du stirbst nicht* (2009) provides a similar account of narratively connecting physical and historical collapse.

The love affair with Franz that begins one year after her seizure can hence be read as yet another narrative appropriation of the historical events of 1989 and 1990. Even more so, the affair is construed as the reason for the surprising absence of the family in the story, since Franz' presence in the protagonist's life causes her to abandon her previous familial arrangements and even impacts her ability to remember their existence at all. Her narrative is primarily focused on recounting her time with Franz, including detailed repetitions of their conversations. The shared remembering of their childhood is an important part of these conversations and in the process of recounting her time with Franz the memories they shared in the past are integrated in the memory narrative about their affair constructed in the narrative present. This merging of memories indicates that their relationship heavily impacts and ultimately limits the narrative the protagonist can create about her life without Franz, since she seems able only to recall those parts of her life without Franz that she has also shared in conversations with him. This in turn could explain the remarkable absence of the GDR and her marriage in her story, since she likely chose to exclude these aspects of her life from her conversations with Franz.

Lewis (1998) finds another explanation for the protagonist's behavior and argues that "[h]er meeting with Franz thus inaugurates a mysterious forgetting of her past identity. She claims to have forgotten decisions and possible acts of agency, such as leaving her husband and daughter, thus abrogating all responsibility for her past actions" (33). I agree with Lewis' reading that the protagonist more likely "claims to have forgotten" these aspects of her life, rather than actually having forgotten them. Nonetheless, I argue that the voids she consciously places in the narrative about her affair with Franz, which is simultaneously a partial autobiography, highlight the aspects of her life and the past that she considers worthy of remembering. Or as Geier (2002) puts it: "Unsichere Angaben betreffen auch ihre eigene Person sowie die Erzählzeit und signalisieren, dass der Erzählerin allein die Qualität der Beziehung erinnerswert ist" (95) [Uncertain information also pertains to herself as well as the narrative time and signals that, for the narrator, only the quality of the relationship is worth remembering]. The narrative exclusion of her family and her life in the GDR, therefore, indicate that because of her encounter

with Franz they have lost their significance and value to her. This devaluation is not limited to people and aspects outside of herself, but rather also targets the protagonist, who considers only the aspects of her life that she shared with Franz in one way or another usable and worthy aspects of her biography. In a conflation of history and biography, the text then indicates that the love affair with Franz does not only take over the physical place of the protagonist's nuclear family, but it also overwrites their existence in her memories. The love affair appears to be charged in multiple ways by the text, since it has a destructive impact on the existing East German family relationships while at the same time taking the place of the family as the social construct through which the narrator attempts to negotiate her experiences of 1989.

This negotiation is heavily influenced by the fact that the protagonist's and Franz' relationship is defined by the power dynamics between East and West Germans in the public sphere, since it takes place in both the public/political and the private social arena. Before they become romantically involved, their power-asymmetry is established by the fact that "Franz […] zu einer Kommission gehört, die über den Fortbestand oder die Auflösung unseres Museums zu entscheiden hat […]" (110) [Franz belonged to a committee that was supposed to decide the survival or liquidation of our museum]. This character constellation of the novel supports my assumption that despite the narrative focus on their affair and consequently the private sphere, the protagonist's reflections of the past are also aimed at including the historical developments in the public sphere of post-1989 Germany and at emphasizing the interrelation of both social arenas.

The intensity with which history in general and the specific East German – West German constellation in particular influences their relationship is also apparent in the protagonist's perception about how differently Franz and she are impacted by the historical events of 1989 and 1990, which she describes as follows:

> Eigentlich weiß ich bis heute nicht, warum in Franz' Leben alles bleiben konnte, wie es war, während mein Leben weggespült wurde wie ein unverputztes Lehmhaus vom Wolkenbruch. Selbst wenn ich versucht hätte, es hier und da zu schützen, mit Planen oder mit den bloßen Händen, was ich nicht tat, hätte ich es nicht retten können. Es muß auch

an dem Wandel der Zeit gelegen haben, der nur mich betraf und nicht Franz, der ja aus Ulm kam. (79)

[Actually, I still don't know today why in Franz' life everything could remain as it was, while my life was washed away like a raw clay house by a downpour. Even if I had tried to protect it here and there with tarp or bare hands, which I did not do, I could not have saved it. It must have also had to do with the change of time that only concerned me and not Franz, since he was from Ulm[123].]

Statements like this indicate that at least retrospectively the protagonist is keenly aware of the events that were taking place around her during the time of the affair with Franz and that she realizes, possibly only belatedly, how much their relationship was impacted by the social circumstances of post-1989 Germany. The implication of existing in different temporal modes runs like a leitmotif through the protagonist's reflections, who states early on in her life retrospective that "Franz hat in einer anderen Zeit gelebt als ich; er kommt aus Ulm" (40) [Franz lived in a different time than I am; he is from Ulm], thereby collapsing the temporal and spatial coordinates of their lives. Her description echoes another common component of the public discourse accompanying Germany's separation as well as its unification: the GDR's backwardness or its being stuck in the past.[124] During Germany's division, this argument was often presented with regard to customer goods in order to highlight West Germany's fast economic recovery after 1945.[125] After the unification, it was continuously repeated and extended to other areas of social life from fashion to knowledge and qualifications. Everything was deemed outdated and in need of Western modernization. These perceptions are apparent in the protagonist's narrative in that time becomes an essential linguistic marker that she employs to reflect about the differences between her and Franz.

Despite her efforts to exclude what separates them from their relationship, the protagonist and Franz remain heavily influenced by their differences. This is emphasized by two exchanges that focus on

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[123] City in the federal German state Baden-Württemberg, located in West Germany.
[124] See Glaeser (2000) and his concept of "allochronisation" that I have discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
[125] For the importance of consumption for defining East-West differences as well as for East German attempting to enter the West German society see Berdahl. "Consumer Rites: The Politics of Consumption in Re-Unified Germany." *On the Social Life of Postsocialism. Memory, Consumption, Germany.* Ed. Bunzl. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. Print. 33-47.

disparities in cultural heritage that ultimately amount to differing cultural memories and separate the

frame of reference available to each of them for their self-representation. The first instance takes place

one evening, when the characters begin singing songs of their youth with and to each other. While they

sing several songs that are familiar to both of them and that, thus, establish a connection through shared

memories, there are also songs that are particular to their growing up in East or West Germany

respectively. At some point, the narrator performs *Stalin's Hymn* in Russian (104), which functions like a

spotlight on their different pasts. The protagonist describes the scene as follows: "Schon während ich

sang, hatte ich das Gefühl, daß in Franz, obwohl er sich vergnügt gab, etwas aufglomm, das verächtlich

zu nennen wohl übertrieben, befremdlich aber zu geringfügig wäre. Vielleicht hat er von mir mehr Scham

erwartet für meinen fehlgeleiteten Glauben" (105) [Already while I was singing, I had the feeling that,

even though he was acting amused, something arose in Franz. To call it contempt would be an

exaggeration, but to just call it embarrassment would be too insignificant. Perhaps he had expected more

shame from me for my misdirected belief]. The protagonist's retrospect description of this scene

highlights the various memory layers involved in the construction of her story. The first and obvious layer

is the memory of the event itself, of her singing *Stalin's Hymn* in Russian in front of Franz. Implicitly

included in this moment is the memory of the time when she used to sing this song in the GDR, which

establishes the second memory layer. Finally, what also plays out in her description of this moment from

the point of view of the narrative present is the amount of time that has past since as well as her

reflections and subsequently alterations of her memory.[126] Based on this, it is possible that her

interpretation of Franz' mimic expression as well as her assumptions about his expectation of "more

shame" for her "misdirected belief" are a mechanism of integrating her perception of the public discourse

at the time. Many East Germans felt judged by West Germans for their lives in the GDR and many have

attested to feelings of alienation towards their German counterpart (Cooke 112, Glaeser 5). The affair

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[126] See Westbury/Dennet. "Mining the Past to Construct the Future: Memory and Belief as Forms of Knowledge." *Memory, Brain, and Belief.* Eds. Schacter/Scarry. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press. 2000. 11-32 for a discussion of how memories are altered during recall.

described in the novel mirrors the "asymmetrical power relations" (Berdahl "(N)Ostalgie" 57) pervading the interactions between East and West Germans in the public sphere, mainly in the political arena or in commerce and the economy, and highlights how the public at times not only invades the private sphere, but also exhibits an influence on how events that were located in this sphere are remembered and interpreted in hindsight.

The perception of inequality is not reserved for the protagonist, but is also part of Franz' assessment of their relationship. As in the above scene, the differences between East and West Germany are framed in historical and cultural terms through the reinvigoration of established cultural tokens. In the following instance, the classic conflict between Romans and Barbarians is used to reflect upon the issues that separate East and West as well as on possible options for bridging the divide:

> Bin ich eine Barbarin?
> Ich weiß nicht, vielleicht, sagt Franz.
> Sind alle Nichtrömer Barbaren?
> Für alle Römer sind alle Nichtrömer Barbaren.
> Und du bist Römer?
> Ja freilich.
> Und ich nicht?
> Ich weiß nicht, Halbrömerin vielleicht.
> Franz weiß nicht, ob man als Römer vom Vater oder von der Mutter abstammt, meint aber, um ein Römer zu sein, genüge es, wie ein Römer zu sein. (183)
>
> [Am I a Barbarian?
> I don't know, maybe, says Franz.
> Are all Non-Romans Barbarians?
> For all Romans all Non-Romans are Barbarians.
> And you are Roman?
> Of course.
> And I am not?
> I don't know, Half-Roman maybe.
> Franz does not know if Romans descend from the father or from the mother, but believes, in order to be Roman it suffices to be like a Roman.]

The exchange is a sequel to a conversation that takes place between the protagonist and Franz while he is traveling along Hadrian's Wall with his wife. It demonstrates that the text constructs the love affair as a narrative space for a meta-discourse on the challenges of German unification as well as for questions of German identity in post-1989 Germany that deeply impact the parameters of their relationship. As Lewis

(1998) summarizes: "[I]n the same way that the new Germany is haunted by the specter of the GDR as its 'precivilized,' archaic prehistory, the happiness of the two lovers is punctuated and finally destroyed by the return of the repressed in the irreconcilable legacies from their radically different pasts" (30). The love relationship is hence created as the social constellation where the meanings of 1989 are negotiated, a process that is intensified through their belonging to seemingly "opposing" groups within the German society struggling to unify.

Two of Franz' statements are especially noteworthy in this context. In the historical framework of the German unification, his claim that "[f]or all Romans all Non-Romans are Barbarians" highlights on the one hand the perception of the German "other" as indeed different and on the other hand denotes a certain sense of condescension towards this "otherness." In this scenario, West-Germans would "of course" take the place of the supposedly superior Romans, while East German as Non-West Germans are automatically Barbarians, a highly charged term due to its pejorative connotation. The exchange about Romans and Barbarians therefore inserts a screen in the novel on which the judgmental attitude that many West Germans exhibited towards East German, their life in the GDR and their achievements, is projected and can subsequently be reviewed and reflected by the reader.[127]

More noteworthy than the emphasis of their differences is Franz suggestion about how to bridge this kind of separation found at the end of their conversation. In stating that being Roman is not a question of lineage or descent, but rather a question of behavior ("be like a Roman"), he describes the solution for East-West differences through assimilation. Independently of biographic background, it is through the acquisition of (Western) cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and the assumption of Roman's/West German's values that anybody can be accepted as a "real" Roman/(West) German.

As with every aspect of the narrative, it is impossible to gauge if this exchange has actually taken place or if it is a mere reflection about the public discourse in post-1989 Germany that the protagonist has

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[127] See Berdahl ("Consumer Rites"), who describes "a general (and often systematic) devaluation of the East German past by dominant West German legal and discursive practices" (43).

retrospectively included in the description of her affair with Franz in light of its ending. Regardless if the dialogue actually took place or is an imagined exchange that the protagonist has constructed belatedly, both instances reveal the interconnectedness of the public and private sphere in that the discourse of devaluation of East German life becomes either a decisive component between lovers and/or impacts and burdens the memory of this relationship. Interpreting the affair between Franz and the protagonist as a mirror image of the unification between East and West Germany, Lewis (2008) subsequently points out that "[o]n this account, German unification is not only a grotesque marriage of opposites, it is a marriage of different temporalities, of different evolutionary stages, of different systems of organization and of different principles of survival" (Lewis 22). Given that in the narrative present the protagonist is aware of how this "marriage" has ended, it is possible that she decides to include or construct this dialogue to create a moment of foreshadowing the failing affair and failing unification that she has meanwhile witnessed.

The conscious creation and alteration of memories is a topic that regularly surfaces in the narrative and is interwoven with the representations of memories. Maron's novel, thus, belongs to what Neumann (2008) in *Literary Representations of Memory* has termed "fictions of meta-memory," describing narratives that "combine personally engaged memories with critically reflective perspectives on the functioning of memory, thus rendering the question of how we remember the central content of remembering" (337). When the protagonist states that "[w]ir haben Zeit, unsere Erinnerung so lange zu feilen und zu schleifen, bis die Versatzstücke am Ende zu einer halbwegs plausiblen Biografie verschraubt werden können […]" (145) [We have time to file and polish our memories until the individual components can be bolted together to a halfway plausible biography], she reflects not only on the workings of memory, but rather also highlights the ways in which she uses memories in her attempt to create a "usable past" (Neumann 338) for her present needs. The erasure of memories pertaining to the GDR and her family life before 1989 can in this light be understood as an obliteration of biographical facts that she deems irrelevant or even disadvantageous for the project of constructing a "usable past" in

post-1989 Germany. Given her ability to manipulate the life narrative she presents through selective remembering, it is surprising that she nonetheless fails in assembling a coherent self-narrativization. Instead of creating a "plausible biography," the protagonist's constructed life story contains multiple instances in which she undermines her own narration through linguistic tokens of insecurity. Further, through the reflections about the workings of memory, she continuously highlights reasons why memories should be mistrusted, which in turn questions her own memory narrative. Nonetheless, the protagonist emphasizes the enormous power that memories exhibit on the creation of the self when she describes her engagement with the past as "sinnsuchende[s] Erinnern" (107) [sense-searching remembering].

The reason that his search for meaning through the process of remembering is ultimately deemed unsuccessful is, according to the narrator, related to the end of her affair with Franz:

> Es fällt mir schwer, das Mögliche zu unterscheiden vom Geschehenen. Während der vielen Jahre habe ich alles Mögliche mit allem Geschehenen vermischt und kombiniert, Gedachtes mit Gesprochenem, Zukünftiges mit nie Vergessenem, Erhofftes mit Befürchtetem, und es ist doch immer dieselbe Geschichte geblieben. Das Ende ist eindeutig und entscheidet alles, das Ende ist nicht korrigierbar. Darum habe ich es vergessen. (232)
>
> [I have difficulties to distinguish the possible from what has actually happened. Over many years, I have mixed and combined all sorts of possible things with everything that happened, things that were thought with things that were said, things of the future with those never forgotten, hopes with worries, and it has always remained the same story. The end is unambiguous and decides everything, the end is not correctible. This is why I have forgotten it.]

While the narrator seems to be focused on explaining her love affair, her reflections are once more relatable to the affair's historical circumstances. Just as Franz' accidental death, which might have been caused by the protagonist, taints their entire relationship, the collapse of socialism turned into the sole indicator for measuring the GDR's utopian project and its failure appears to automatically disqualify any contemplations about alternative social configurations beyond capitalism (Verdery 1996, Sarotte 2009).

Beyond the obvious applicability to the specific historical context, in the above quote the protagonist points to the manipulation of memories that can occur through multiple recall, while

simultaneously reaffirming the power of the narrative, which can only be changed and altered to a certain degree.[128] The meta-discourse about memory processes interwoven into her self-narrativization hence especially focuses on memory's susceptibility to "failure" through their alterations and adaptation to the (social and historical) context of their recall. The fact that memories of her family and of the GDR are continuously overlapping in the narrative and are equally erased from her biographical retrospective indicates their contested valence in post-1989 Germany. In light of these narrative voids, it is then noteworthy that the memories of the protagonist's childhood in the immediate post-war period are presented as a suitable narrative reference, not only during her affair with Franz, but also in the narrative present of the unifying Germany. The prevalence and narrative reoccurrence of these memories can thus be explained with their function as tool to connect with Franz, their social acceptance in the unifying Germany, as well as with their lasting effect on the protagonist's life before and after 1989.

The protagonists' remembrance of her childhood is defined by her memories of her parents, which in turn intersect with her memories of Franz. While the conversations with Franz trigger memories about the alienation from her father, the memories of her mother are closely connected with contemplations about her body and take place in Franz' absence. The memories of her parents are thus located in different communicative spheres: memories about her father take place in interpersonal exchanges with Franz, whereas contemplations about her mother are mainly introversive. These differences continue in the main aspects that are remembered about each of them. While the memory of her mother is focused on physical rejection and even disgust, the memories of her father are defined by emotional estrangement and perpetual indifference.

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[128] "Every time you remember an event from the past, your brain networks change in ways that can alter the later recall of the event. Thus, the next time you remember it, you might recall not the original event but what you remembered the previous time" (Paul "Your Memory is like the Telephone Game").

As the narrator's contemplations indicate, her self-perception is highly impacted by the contested relationship with her mother. This becomes palpable in her rejection of her own body that echoes her dislike of her mother's physical appearance:

> Ich ekelte mich vor Weiberfleisch, auch vor meinem eigenen. […] Aber als die Zeit gekommen war, mußte ich erdulden, wie mein geschlechtslos magerer Körper die genetische Botschaft meiner Mutter erfüllte: er wurde weiblich, was mich vermutlich weniger auch auch gar nicht gestört hätte, wäre weiblich etwas anderes gewesen als meine Mutter. […] Mein nackter Körper in seiner eindeutigen Bestimmung war mir widerwärtig. (74)

> [I was sickened by female flesh, by my own as well. […] But as the time had come, I had to suffer as my sexless skinny body fulfilled my mother's genetic message: it became feminine, which probably would have bothered me less or even not at all, if feminine would have been something different than my mother. […] My naked body in its unambiguous determination was repulsive to me.]

It appears that the disdain for her own body is an extension and transference of the protagonist's dislike for her mother. The negative feelings towards the female other are turned against herself and her body, which she experiences as sickening and repulsive due to her condescension for her mother's expressions of femininity. Lewis (1998) points out in her Freudian reading of Maron's novel that the protagonist's "hostility towards both parents, but more significantly her disappointment with her mother, ultimately mean that neither parental position represents a satisfactory point of identification and the issue of lack of castration is unresolved" (38). The defective maternal bond appears as result of the historical rupture in the aftermath of World War II. Interestingly, the protagonist appears to reproduce these tensions in the relationship with her daughter, at least after 1989. Similar to the protagonist's husband, her daughter is only mentioned in passing and the protagonist is not in contact with her anymore. Thus, the flawed and ultimately failing parental bond between the protagonist and her parents has a lasting impact on her ability to negotiate the uncertainties after the historical transformation of 1989, which leave her family destroyed and dispersed.

As Lewis indicates, the relationship to the protagonist's father is equally strained, but even more importantly, his return from war is framed as the reason for the ruptured bond between the protagonist and her mother. The protagonist describes her disbelief and doubts when her father came home that

created tension between them from the start: "[…] ich konnte einfach nicht glauben, daß er mein Vater war, weil mir gar nichts an ihm gefiel […]" (63) [I just could not believe that he was my father, because I did not like a single thing about him]. The real issue, though, lies not in her inability to relate to the father or even recognize him as that, but rather arises because in the presence of her veteran husband, the protagonist's mother abandons herself in order to strengthen his confidence:

> Am wenigsten verstand ich damals, warum meine Mutter ständig behauptete, für die einfachsten Verrichtungen zu ungeschickt zu sein, obwohl ich genau wußte, daß es nicht stimmte. […] Sie juchzte, als wäre sie zu Tode erschrocken, wenn es in der Wohnung plötzlich dunkel wurde. Dabei hatten wir jahrelang mit Verdunklung und Stromsperren gelebt. Zu einer Freundin hörte ich sie einmal sagen, man müsse den Männern wieder zu Selbstvertrauen verhelfen. Damals, glaube ich, sagte ich zu Hansi Petzke zum ersten Mal: meine Mutter ist doof und Hansi sagte: meine auch. (70)

> [What I understood the least back then was why my mother constantly claimed to be too clumsy for the easiest tasks, even though I knew for sure that that was not true. […] She cried as if to be scared to death when the apartment suddenly turned dark, even though we had lived with black-outs and power cut-offs for years. Once, I heard her saying to a friend that one had to restore the men's confidence. Back then, I think, I said for the first time to Hansi Petzke: My mother is stupid and Hansi said: mine as well.]

Her mother's incomprehensible behavior is not only irritating and puzzling for the protagonist, but results in the loss of a positive female role model. The long-lasting impact of this void that develops after the mother loses her status as positive example is not only visible in the protagonist's disdain for the kind of femininity she considers the cause for her mother's behavior and that is the foundation for the self-loathing with which she addresses her physical existence. Her submissive behavior towards Franz appears to be a consequence of this childhood experience as well. Despite the stark criticism she puts forward with regard to her mother and the ways she renounces herself and her accomplishments in the face of her husband, who is changed and marred by the war, the protagonist is either unable to realize the parallels between her mother's behavior and the way she acts post-1989 or deliberately chooses to ignore the similarities and to exclude any commentaries on the subject from her narrative. In light of her description of the affair, it seems more likely that she is unaware of repeating her mother's mistakes, since she does not even try to veil her passiveness and deliberately admits: "Ich kann mich nicht erinnern, in der Sache mit Franz auch nur das Geringste entschieden zu haben […] weil von der ersten Minute an schon alles

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entschieden war" (29) [I cannot remember to have ever decided anything regarding the thing with Franz […] since everything had already been decided from the first minute on]. While the phrase that "everything had already been decided" aligns with her opinion that the meeting with Franz was faith and intended by a higher power, the passiveness that results from this perception returns her into a childlike-state. As Konze (2002) argues: "Die schicksalhafte Liebe zu Franz ist der Versuch, den Urzustand der Kindheit künstlich wiederherzustellen […]" (188) [The fateful love of Franz is the attempt to artificially restore the primitive state of childhood]. This suggests that the protagonist's behavior is at the same time mimicking her mother's perceived passiveness – that was ultimately grounded in a conscious if even questionable decision – and allowing her to return to the realm of her childhood when she was similarly at the mercy of history and people, who remain foreign despite their intimate relation to her. The protagonist herself remains unable to connect her familial past and her post-1989 actions at least retrospectively. She is too occupied scrutinizing her mother's behavior upon her father's return from war that she misses to realize how much her demeanor around Franz mirrors her mother's action. This once again highlights the protagonist's consistent and ultimately failing aim to create a coherent narrative that describes a "useable past." Further, the text consciously draws a parallel between the coping mechanisms in place in the historical contexts of post-1945 and post-1989, which both seem to require women to return to traditional gender roles and the corresponding behavior. Interestingly, both women are motivated to renounce themselves by their goal to preserve their relationship. The only, but important difference is, that the mother's behavior allows her to save and restore the unit of the nuclear family (leaving all existing tensions between daughter and parents aside), while the protagonist's actions in the post-1989 context cause not only the destruction of her nuclear family, but they ultimately also aim at damaging Franz' marriage as well. The observation in previous chapters regarding the different developments of East and West German families can also be affirmed for this text: while the East German family fails and falls

apart, the West German family manages to successfully negotiate matrimonial disloyalty and remains intact.[129]

The narrative construction of the West German family in post-1989 literature is hence defined by a noteworthy tension: On the one hand, West German fathers and husbands are portrayed as willing, even eager to engage in extramarital affairs with East German women, which on an abstract level reiterates discourses about male's supposed disposition for promiscuity. On the other hand, the mainly traditional West German familial arrangements remain unquestioned by matrimonial infidelity. The straying male is allowed back into the realm of the nuclear family and also not interested in abandoning this socially sanctioned sphere for his affair. Within the specific context of post-1989 Germany, the narrative construction of East-West-encounters as fleeting and ultimately failing affairs can thus be seen as a critical commentary on the historic project of the German unification, since the crisis in the individual East-West-relationships appear to foreshadow the continuing social dis-unification of Germany.

Returning once more to the similarities between the protagonist's and her mother's behavior, it becomes clear that the text aims at establishing a historical consistency with regard to Germany after World War II and post-socialist Germany. In this narrative construction, the GDR's 40 years of existence appear as a historical "slip-up" that has presumably left no significant social imprint as suggested by the similarities in female role constructions. The fact that the affair between the protagonist and Franz explicitly and obviously undermines this suggestion of post-1989 and pre-1949 consistencies, since it repeatedly highlights the continuing differences between East and West Germans, creates a narrative tension that the reader has to resolve. It also demonstrates that Maron is successful in constructing a post-

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[129] See also the discussion of Schneider's *Eduards Heimkehr* in Chapter 1 and Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet* in Chapter 2. Interestingly, for romantic affairs the gender roles are always cast in the same way with the West German male embarking on an affair with an East German female. It has to be mentioned though that the despite being in the narrative focus of post-1989 writings, the failing East German family appears to be the social exception, since the novels regularly indicate that in the time of sudden social change the private sphere became the only controllable arena for many and therefore functions as space of reassurance and consistency. Maron's protagonist states with regard to the behavior of couples post-1989: "Die meisten Menschen verkrallten sich ängstlich in Vertrautem, das dem allgemeinen Wandel nicht unterlag und das nicht über Nacht einfach aufgelöst oder umbenannt werden konnte" (90). [The most people anxiously clung to what was familiar, which was not subject to the general change and which could not just be dissolved or renamed over night.]

1989 narrative that refrains from adhering to the simplistic depictions that have been prevalent in the public arena. As Lewis (1998) aptly puts it: "Maron not only succeeds in blurring the issues of responsibility and blame, remembering and forgetting, but also any clear boundaries between victims and culprits, the winners and losers of unification. She succeeds, moreover, in giving the highly charged questions to do with public and private processes of remembrance and repression the sensitive and differentiated treatment they deserve" (41). This treatment on the one hand foregrounds the malleability of memories and the manipulative character of acts of remembrance that highly depend on the political and social circumstances as well as personal preferences. On the other hand it highlights that a past can only be altered to a certain degree and that it will ultimately catch up with the remembering individual, as is in the protagonist's case embodied in the shadow that the strained relationship with her mother casts over her entire life.

Maron further succeeds in presenting a narrative that voices criticism of the GDR not only through a few derogatory remarks targeting its government, but rather by presenting a protagonist, who is not able to constructively cope with neither her past nor her present circumstances. In this regard, Maron's protagonist is one of the few in post-1989 literature who exhibits mainly destructive coping mechanisms when it comes to dealing not only with the German unification, but with life in the GDR as well. In this regard the character displays a similar behavior as Jan Landers in Osang's *Nachrichten* that I discussed in Chapter 2. Like him, her inability to find a positive and productive approach to handling the sudden historical changes seems to be grounded in her strained relationship with the past, which is predominantly overshadowed by her strained relationship with her parents and reaffirmed by the absence of her own family in the narrative present. The tensions of her life are visible in her selective remembering and partial amnesia with regard to the GDR. Based on her reflections about memory processes, it remains open if these memory voids are actually due to the memories' traumatic valence or if they were deliberately left out. As stated before, Franz as the embodiment of West Germany appears to have a major impact on what she remembers and is willing to make part of her narrative, since the

majority of memories included are the ones she has previously shared with him. Within the historical framework of the story, this sheds light on the West German dominance in the East German process of coming to terms with the past and developing a narrative on their own of what had happened during the 40 years of German separation. By being robbed the chance to reflect on possible mistakes, East Germans as embodied by the protagonist were often preoccupied with developing a "useable past" that would allow them to connect with West Germans and establish a bond with them, which ultimately was the prerequisite for social integration on a larger level. As the protagonist's example shows this superficial working through the past comes back to haunt her and in the end she is forced to face the bitter end of her story that she cannot change, no matter how much she mixes reality and hopes in her narrative. In constructing this message, Maron's text expresses equal criticism of the GDR and the unification process and shows that these two major discourses are not mutually exclusive, but can rather be conducted simultaneously without undermining the critical stance of each. By creating the "differentiated treatment" of the post-1989 circumstances, Maron's novel provides a commentary on the ongoing unification struggles, while at the same time suggesting a possible solution, which the reader has to deduct from the protagonist's failure to develop a constructive coping mechanism. Since the protagonist's struggle in and with the present can be connected to her inability to make peace with her past, specifically with her parents, the texts similarly to those discussed in Chapter 2 reaffirms the importance of family in negotiating historical change by outlining the detrimental effects of a failing family unit in the imaginary and social realm. As Becker's *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen* highlights, West German characters are equally impacted by ruptured kinship relations located in the shared history of World War II and the immediate post-war years. However, the resilience of the West German family to social upheavals appears as central metaphor of post-1989 German society and culture.

Jürgen Becker *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen*

Until the publication of his first novel *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen* in 1999, Jürgen Becker was mainly known for his poetry, which is still tangible in the dense prose of this text and in the

metonymic chains that pervade the pages. The numerous stylistic and narratological similarities between Maron's and Becker's text with regard to depictions of family relationships and processes of remembering indicate a shared approach to addressing and narrating the past. This approach then appears to be anchored in a shared generational experience, since Maron (from East Germany) and Becker (from West Germany) select similar memory structures and even story components. Both of their protagonists attempt to cope with a challenging war/post-war childhood that was deeply impacted by strained family relationships that additionally came under pressure by the contemporary historical circumstances. Consequently, the struggle of both protagonists with the present is framed as the result of unsettled family issues from their past.

Becker's novel was widely acclaimed and praised, being, for example, described as "der vermutlich eindringlichste, vermutlich auch utopischste, und mit Sicherheit der ästhetisch radikalste literarische Text zur Wiedervereinigung und zur Geschichte der deutschen Teilung" (März "Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen") [the presumably most striking, presumably also the most utopian and for sure the aesthetically most radical literary text about the reunification and the history of the German division]. At first sight, it is not apparent why critics included Becker's novel in the feuilleton-made genre of the *Wenderoman*, since it is mainly concerned with narrating a German childhood in the 1930s and 40s. But as the main protagonist, Jörn, states: "[…] so viel, was ich gesehen habe, fällt mir jetzt erst wieder ein" (182) [so much that I have seen only recurs to me now]. This "now" is post-1989 Germany and it is not the time itself, but the historical change this moment represents that function as triggers for the resurfacing childhood memories from the Third Reich and post-war Germany.

Similar to Maron's text, the life story is mainly framed as a stream-of-consciousness, even though Becker's text provides more precise temporal anchors and further employs two male, character-bound narrators (Bal 22) as textual distancing device. The first narrator is Jörn, who is also the main protagonist and the focal point of the story. The second is the main character's friend, who remains unnamed and who describes his conversations with Jörn in a style that appears verbatim. Both Baier (1999) and Fromm

(2001) describe this narratological structure as a way to establish distance between Jörn and its own story that is necessary "um die persönlichen und politischen Trennungen vorsichtig in den Blick zu nehmen, denn die Einschnitte, von denen der Roman erzählt sind gewaltig gewesen" ("Erinnerungsarbeit") [to carefully consider the personal and political separations, because the insections that the novel narrates have been immense]. The conversation between the two characters is arranged like a talking cure (Fromm 178) and interweaves three thematic strands: first Jörn's childhood, second Jörn's travel to the East Germany on the night of November 9th 1989 as well as his subsequent travels to important spaces of his childhood that were located in the East, and third reflections about the current state of German-German relations as well as the country's presumable future. These different temporal layers are interconnected and at points run into each other when one image in the present triggers an image of the past as well as a related memory. For the protagonist, memories are often spatially anchored and charged and his physical travels through East Germany are paralleled by mental travels to revisit important life events.

The novel presents the separation of Jörn's parents during World War II as well as his mother's suicide shortly after the war as the two central events of his life before the opening of the Berlin Wall. It is mainly his mother's death that has left traumatic traces in his life, which he approaches under the altered historical circumstances of post-1989 Germany. It appears that the fall of the Wall has ended a state of repression regarding Jörn's memories about his mother. Hence, the text suggests that the events that took place before Germany's separation, for example the mother's suicide, can only be addressed and subsequently negotiated after this separation has come to an end in 1989. Similar to Maron, Becker's text seeks to construct a historical coherence between post-45 and post-1989 Germany, in which the existence of the GDR appears as unnatural rupture. Given that both Maron's and Becker's texts at the same time highlight the continuing estrangement between East and West Germans after 1989, they emphasize the challenges of coming to terms with the past in the unifying Germany.

In his attempt to address his past, specifically his mother's death, the main protagonist decides to visit the area of the Fläming in south-west Brandenburg where her suicide took place: "Es war vor fünfzig

Jahren, als an diesem Tag, in der Frühe um sechs, seine Mutter ein Zelt am Ufer verlassen hatte und hinaus in den See gegangen war zum Schwimmen. So hatte man es ihm gesagt. Aber Jörn wußte, daß seine Mutter gar nicht schwimmen konnte" (14) [It was fifty years ago that on this day at six in the morning his mother had left a tent on the shore and had gone out to the lake to swim. That's what he had been told. But Jörn knew that his mother could not swim at all]. Even as a child, Jörn sensed that something was suspicious about the explanation he had been given and on the anniversary of his mother's death he revisits the lake where her suicide had occurred years before. Jörn appears to be looking for closure with regard to this traumatic event, which is why Fromm (2000) claims that "[i]n gewisser Weise fängt der Roman ein Trauma in der Form seiner Bewältigung auf" (178) [In a way, the novel detects a trauma in the state of its completion]. As is revealed later in the story, at the time of the mother's death, his parents had already been divorced for several years and Jörn was living with his father and stepmother in the newly founded West Germany, while his mother had remained in the East. Despite the fact that Jörn spent his childhood in Erfurt, the mother's death casts a shadow over East Germany that continues to exist as a haunting void in Jörn's life, but that he can only revisit – physically as well as in his memories – after the open of the Berlin Wall. As his anonymous interlocutor reports: "Mit dem Rücken zum Gestern dachte er viele Jahre lang, die Jahre der Kindheit verlassen zu haben wie ein Land, in das man nicht mehr zurückkehrt, nicht einmal in der Erinnerung, und mit Heimweh schon gar nicht" (216) [With his back to yesterday he had thought for many years to have left his childhood years behind like a country to which one did not return, not even in memory, and especially not with nostalgia]. This description highlights how the text conflates the imaginary space of the childhood with the actual geographical space of East Germany. At the same time it demonstrates that the protagonist in the narrative present approaches his family's history and the history of Germany through his charged childhood memories. This time of his life is defined by external and internal conflicts, being deeply impacted by the historical ruptures of World War II as well as the tensions in his family that are represented as of equally existential proportions as the war.

Leaving Erfurt for West Germany after the war caused a disjuncture between his childhood memories and the city space to which they were seemingly intrinsically tied. In post-1989 Germany, the main protagonist can access this space again, allowing the memories to return and creating a desire to talk about and through his past. The fact that he did not chose to revisit the spaces of his childhood before the opening of the Wall, which would have been less of a hassle for him as a West German, indicates the lasting spell that the mother's assumed suicide has cast over this geographical area. Since he travels to Erfurt before visiting the Fläming and the place of his mother's death, it appears that Jörn attempts to work through his past in a linear fashion, approaching the haunted space of his mother's passing after revisiting the positively charged spaces of his childhood, which overlap with the cityscape that is also connected to his parents' separation. Even though the loss of his mother clearly impacts his engagement with the past, the mainly chronological order of each thematic strand in the narrative indicates that he has found a productive approach to the traumatic family past and attempts to construct a cohesive self-narrativization. The lingering traumatic traces of familial ruptures that Jörn tries to absorb in his narrative, continue to be visible in the texts formal structure, for example in the repeated temporal jumps as well as the overlaying of post-1945 and post-1989 history.

This amalgamation of temporal levels is highlighted by the multiple references to the semantic field of aviation that features as decisive element in Jörn's memory processes. According to März (1999), the aviation references represent the ease and upbeat that Jörn experiences in coming to terms with his past:

> Die Levitation, die Jörn in den Wendejahren 89/90 und bei seinen anschließenden biographischen Erkundungsreisen durch den deutschen Osten erfahren hat, drückt sich im Text durch ein dichtes Metaphernnetz der Luftfahrt aus. Flugplätze, Flugzeuge, Drachenflieger, Fallschirmspringer, Vögel und Segelflieger, alles, was am Himmelszelt herumkreuzt, spielt eine bedeutsame symbolische Rolle. Sogar der Menschheitstraum des Ikarus kommt am Rande zur Sprache. Aber ebenso die Tatsache, daß ein heute harmloser Sportflughafen in der Vergangenheit militärischer Stützpunkt war und daß Jörns Überaufmerksamkeit für die Erscheinungen des Luftverkehrs auf die Urszene der Jagdbomber zurückgeht, die über das Hausdach dröhnten und in Sichtweite des Kindes ihre eiförmige Fracht ausklinkten. ("Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen")

[The levitation that Jörn experienced in the years of 89/90 and during his subsequent biographical expeditions through the German East finds its expression in the text through a dense metaphorical net of aviation. Airfields, airplanes, hang gliders, parachutists, birds and gliders, everything that crosses through the firmament plays an important symbolical role. Even Icarus' dream is marginally mentioned. But also the fact that a currently innocent airfield for sports planes had been a military base in the past and that Jörn's heightened attention to the phenomenon of air traffic trace back to the primal scene of fighter bombers that whirred across the roof and that disengaged an egg-shaped cargo within the child's eye sight.]

While I agree with März' interpretation that the imaginary space of childhood provides the basis of the interpretative and linguistic framework for approaching the present, I do not think that the aviation references exemplify ease or upbeat. Rather, I read them as the traumatic traces that remain splattered around Jörn's life and narrative. His keen interest in aviation that at times borders on obsession is simultaneously tied to his fascination with military planes as a boy and his later frightening experience of their destructive force during the air raids. The plane models that he assembled and collected ultimately turn into real and existential threats whose appearance mark the end of his childhood and leave a pronounced mark on his life. As the anonymous interlocutor reports, the air raids still haunt the main protagonist until today: "Bis heute, sagte Jörn, kommt Drohendes aus der Luft noch immer in den Träumen vor. Sie wiederholen sich, ohne Anlaß, ohne Kriegsbilder im Fernsehen, plötzlich dröhnen Bomber heran, in schwarzen Himmeln springt Feuerschein auf, schon fahre ich im Bett hoch, will hinausspringen…" (207-8) [Threats out of the air, said Jörn, appear in dreams until today. They repeat themselves, without cause, without war images on TV, suddenly bombers approach blusteringly, flares of fire burst in dark skies, I immediately startle in bed, want to jump out…]. Despite his awareness of the recurring threatening memories that he can clearly connect to the war, Jörn does not recognize his enthusiastic interest for everything related to aviation as yet another expression of this trauma and possible as the actual trigger for the returning memories that supposedly arise "without cause." His obsession with aviation that finds its expression in continuously recurring observations about planes, gliders, or birds as well in him frequenting the nearby airfield for sport planes is a double-edge sword, since it is coping mechanism and trigger of traumatic memories at once. The resulting viscous cycle remains unbroken due to Jörn's lack of reflection. The continuous impact of the air raids and the

protagonist's unfading obsession can further be understood as a channel for relocating and absorbing his

other traumatic childhood experiences. By emphasizing the "threats out of the air," Jörn simultaneously

replaces the internal disruptions in his family with the external forces of destruction that were equally

beyond his influence. In post-1989 Germany, his engagement with everything related to aviation is

therefore on the one hand a mechanism of traumatic compensation, and can on the other hand be

explained with Jörn's attraction to spaces "mit denen ihn biografisch überhaupt nichts verbindet, an denen

er aber eine ihn fesselnde Überlagerung von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart entdeckt" (Baier "Aus der

Geschichte der Trennungen") [to which he is in no way biographically connect, but where he discovers an

interaction between past and present that is enthralling for him]. This interaction or overlay of past and

present is embodied by the East German airfield Jörn likes to frequent and also at the core of his travels

through East Germany, where the present space allows him to address and reconnect with his past.

Of similar importance in representing this temporal overlap are photographs or the act of taking

pictures respectively. The most important of these images, is a photograph that embodies the biggest loss

of Jörn's childhood and that haunts his childhood memories ever since:

> Als mein Vater wortlos mir ein Foto weitergab, das einem Brief vom Pfarrer Stief aus
> Cottbus beigelegen hatte, da spürte ich, daß alles Vergessen nur ein vorläufiges war
> …der Anblick von Grab und Grabstein, der mit dem Namen der Mutter die Daten ihrer
> Geburt und ihres Todes verzeichnete, hatte das Gedächtnis aus seinem Schlaf gerissen.
> Indem es für alle Zeit wach blieb, versah es jeden Moment meines Lebens mit Herkunft
> und Hintergrund, hielt es die Zusammenhänge offen, in denen ich mich aufhielt…aber
> dieses ganze Netzwerk began sich erst zu verknüpfen als ich nach Leipzig fuhr und ein
> Jahr später eine Woche lang durch Erfurt lief. (218)

> [When my father wordlessly handed me a photograph that had been included in a letter
> from pastor Stief from Cottbus, I felt that any kind of forgetting was only temporary…the
> sight of grave and gravestone that recorded with my mother's name the dates of her birth
> and her death, had jolted the memory out of its sleep. By remaining awake for all times, it
> furnished every moment of my life with origin and background, kept the connections
> open in which I lingered…but this entire network only started to connect when I traveled
> to Leipzig and a year later walked through Erfurt for a week.][130]

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[130] It is noteworthy that this intimate and personal account is presented in Jörn's voice and through his perspective,
whereas the previously description of his dreams about "threats from the sky" had been reported by the anonymous

This description provides an insight into the narrator's memory processes and emphasizes their interconnectedness with imaginations of childhood, familial feelings, and photography. The photograph of the mother's grave appears as the quintessential embodiment of Barthes' (1981) claim that "Death is the *eidos* [essence, R.C.] of the Photograph" (15). Just as Barthes argues in *Camera Lucinda*, the book mourning his mother's death, the photograph presented to Jörn on the one hand reaffirms the mother's existence, since "every photograph is a certificate of presence" (87), while simultaneously manifesting her passing and the void she leaves in Jörn's life. The picture of her grave literally represents Barthes' assertion that "the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (4). The viewing of the photograph has a traumatic quality for Jörn and leaves an imprint on his memory that is "suddenly awakened," a phrase that hints at the retrospective evaluation of this scene during the recall in the narrative present after Jörn had revisited his childhood city Erfurt. Only then does he fully realize the void that has been basically a placeholder for the "open connections" that are related to his family history. Now that Jörn is willing to reconnect with his past in a direct, explicit, and physical manner through traveling to the places of his childhood and his mother's passing, the loose ends of his family history start to come together and form a network on which he can rely to piece together his life story and make peace with his mother's death.

The traumatic experiences of Jörn's life – starting with the parents' separation, continuing with the war bombings, and ending with the mother's suicide – are all connected to the space of East Germany. Nonetheless, after the end of Germany's political separation, Jörn immediately seeks to reconnect with these childhood spaces and establish a relationship with the "other" Germans in East Germany. While revisiting the lake in which his mother has drowned 50 years ago, Jörn faces the geographical and spatial equivalent of her grave's photograph, both of which are placeholders that manifest her absence. However, Jörn's longing to reconnect with these traumatic landscapes seems to be motivated by a reflective

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narrator. A precise analysis when the distancing devise of reported speech is employed in the text is not possible within the parameters of this dissertation, but would be worthwhile.

nostalgia (Boym 2002). Reflective nostalgia in contrast to restorative nostalgia is not longing "to rebuild the lost home" (41), but rather embraces the ruins and is aware of the past's irrevocability. When Jörn is traveling to the places of his childhood he is not motivated by the desire to fill memory voids or negate his mother's irreplaceable absence. Rather, he seeks to establish connections, build relationships and develop a personal and narrative network that allow him to accept and even embrace these voids and absences. Making peace with his past, including his uncritical support of the Nazis, requires firstly to engage with his family history, secondly the physically repossession of East German spaces, and thirdly the narration of his stories of separations and their integration into his family's communicative memory. The text highlights the importance of Jörn's coming to terms with his mother's death in order to move on in the present and face the changes and challenges that accompany the historic transformation of 1989 constructively. In reconciling himself with the fact that his mother was without any close family member when she decided to take her life and accepting that this situation was ultimately beyond his influence, Jörn is able to mend the ruptured family structures and turn his concern from the content of his memories instead to the processes of memory, thus exhibiting another characteristic of Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia (41).

These recurring instances of reflective nostalgia provide one reason why Becker's text can be described as "fiction of meta-memory […] thus rendering the questions of how we remember the central content of remembering" (Neumann 337). Early on in the text, Jörn as reported by the anonymous narrator outlines the ways in which he experiences the workings of memory. This concept of memory functions like scaffolding for the stories told afterwards and due to its importance in understanding the memory concepts at work in the narrative and the role of the family in them that I claim to be universal for this generation of authors, Jörn's reflections are quoted in length below:

> Er hatte angefangen zu erzählen, und je weiter er dabei in die Vergangenheit vordrang, desto näher kam er, wie er sagte, den weißen Flecken in seinem Gedächtnis. Indem er sich erinnerte, versucht er, das Erinnerte als Gegenwart wahrzunehmen, nur kam es nie wie gerufen. Seine Erinnerung begann erst zu arbeiten, wenn er ein paar alte Dinge im Haus fand, ein Bild an der Wand hängen sah, draußen in der Nacht ein Geräusch hörte, am Radioknopf spielte. Dann konnte es passieren, daß ihn ein Impuls berührte und sein

zögernd beginnendes Sprechen Vergessenes wiederentdeckte, daß er mit seinen Wörtern, so schien es jedenfalls, Eingänge in Vergangenes öffnete, die er wortlos ohne sein Sprechen, gar nicht gefunden hätte. Das Gedächtnis, so dozierte er, lebt ja erst auf, wenn es Wörter und Sätze gibt, die es aus seinem Schlaf rufen. Nur ging das nicht auf Bestellung. Jörn saß dann wieder lange stumm am Tisch. Fetzen, Einzelteile, sie fügten sich nicht zu einem kompletten Bild; da fehlten ihm immer Reste, sah er die Leerstellen, über die keine Erfindung hinweghalf. Natürlich erzählte er manchmal wie im Konjunktiv, wie etwas hätte gewesen sein können, und dabei zitierte er gewissermaßen Erfahrungen, die vielleicht typisch für Leute seiner Generation waren. Es ist ja oft so, sagte er, daß ich gar nicht mehr weiß, ob ich beispielsweise die Jahre im Krieg erlebt habe, wie sie in meiner Erinnerung sind – oder ob sich in meine Erinnerung nicht alle die Geschichten hineingemischt haben, die Eltern und Verwandte, die vielen anderen Leute erzählt haben, die wir als Zeitgenossen, Zeitzeugen kennen.

[He had started to talk and the more he advanced into the past the closer he got, as he said, to the blank areas in his memory. In remembering he attempted to perceive the remembered as present, but it never came right on cue. His memory only started to work when he found a couple old things around the house, saw a picture hanging on the wall, heard a noise outside in the night, played with the knob on the radio. Then it could happen that an impulse touched him and his hesitantly starting speech rediscovered what he had forgotten, that with his words so it seemed at least he opened doorways into what had past, which he had not even found wordless without his speech. Memory, so he lectured, comes alive, when there are words and sentences that call it out of its sleep. But that did not happen on order. Jörn again sat silently at the table for a long time. Shreds, individual pieces, they did not connect to a complete picture; he was always missing some scraps, saw the gaps that no inventions could help to bridge. Of course he sometimes talked like in the subjunctive, how something could have been and then effectively quoted experiences that might be typical for people of his generation. It is often, he said, that I don't even know if I have experienced the war year, for example, the way they are in my memory – or if not all the stories have been mixed into my memory that parents and relatives, the many other people have told who we know as contemporaries and contemporary witnesses.]

Jörn's reflections highlight the multiple challenges connected to the complicated processes of remembering the past. First of all, he has to face the blank areas, the white spots that populate his memory and that remain unchanged by the act of narration and invention, both of which appear closely connected in the act of remembering. Similar to Maron's protagonist, Jörn has to accept that narration can only go so far in accessing as well as altering the past. Nonetheless, narration, the active act of approaching the past through words, is presented as the most important mechanism for turning latent memories into actually accessible representations of the past. Language is portrayed as the tool that re-activates images of the past and integrates them into the present. Hence, while the photograph, as discussed above, is able to record the traumatic reality of the mother's death, Jörn's verbal engagement with the image is the

prerequisite for its inclusions in the communicative construction of the self that slowly undermines the pictures traumatic valence.

Despite memories dependency on words and narration for its inclusion into the communicative memory, the intersection of verbal and iconic memory representations is palpable in the concept of the "dormant memory" that has to be awoken by words. While language provides an access point or entrance to approximate memories, it is the photograph that "had jolted the memory out of its sleep" initially, indicating that the narrative integration of memory is induced by a sensory experience such as an image or sound that cannot be governed. In describing the memory process as ultimately beyond the individual's control, Jörn echoes Proust's notion of involuntary memory, with "old things,' "a picture," "a noise in the night," and "noises from the radio" taking the place of the famous madeleine.

In the instances when memory gaps keep Jörn from constructing a complete picture, he admits to rely on "second-hand information" by other members of his generation. This in turn can be seen as an expression of establishing a memory community that is united by a time in history they collectively experienced during the same time of their life. The notion of generation that Jörn invokes in his description is a decisive specification of the idea of a memory community that is inherent in such concepts as communicative or collective memory. Halbwachs (1952 [1992]) introduced the concept of collective memory to highlight the social character of memory that depends on and is influenced by the social circumstances of its retrieval. Jan and Aleida Assmann's have added to Halbwachs groundwork about the social framework of memory by developing the concepts of communicative and cultural memory that "illustrate[s] the difference between social and cultural frames" (Jan Assmann 112) respectively. Halbwachs as well as Jan and Aleida Assmann emphasize the social constructedness of memory as well as it dependency on social networks. As Jörn's reflections about his memory processes show, the qualities of memories differ with regard to the character of these social networks, which affirms their importance while simultaneously casting a critical light on them. Jörn relies on members of his generation to fill the blank areas in his memories, indicating that he perceives their memories as

trustworthy. In contrast, the inclusion of information from members of a different generation, like parents or other relatives, has the opposite effect and destabilizes his memories. This causes a perpetual insecurity with regard to his own memories, since he wonders if they have not been mixed up with the stories of contemporary witnesses, which would be typical for childhood memories. Instead of seeing it as beneficial that his childhood perspective has been complemented by the observations of people who might have experienced this time more consciously and reflected, he considers the possibility of their stories being mixed with his own ultimately as destabilizing force. Sharing a historical experience is thus, at least for Jörn, not as essential in creating a memory community as is sharing the experience during the same time in one's life. This subsequently affirms the familial tensions that have found their expression in the *Väterliteratur* not only for the generation of 1968, but also for those who have experienced the society of the "Third Reich" first hand.[131]

In both Maron's and Becker's novel, the family in post-1945 Germany appears therefore more as the place of tension and struggle than as a site for constructive communications about the past. That both character-bound narrators, who face familial loss and disappointment after the war also struggle to negotiate the German division and its beginning unification after 1989, supports my claim about the importance of family in coming to terms with historical upheaval. In the absence of sound family arrangements, particularly parent-child-relationships that would enable an intergenerational engagement with the past, the protagonists are left on their own in their attempts to make sense of their childhood and the encompassing history. The absence of productive intergenerational exchanges is especially critical, since strong intragenerational networks only partly outbalance them. Both novels represent the strong impact that familial tensions have on childhood memories and subsequently on their recall in the narrative present. The absence and rupture experienced with regard to the parents during childhood marks the memories that have been stored since. While memories are always fragmentary, the blank areas in the protagonists' memories appear to be more haunting and exhibit a traumatic notion than is warranted by

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[131] See the entry for "Väterliteratur" in Fischer/Lorenz (2007) for a detailed definition.

the usual amount of forgetting that is a prerequisite of any kind of remembering (Aleida Assmann 2006). Similarly to the voids that Huyssen (1997) discovers in the cityscape of Berlin post-1989 and describes as ghosts of the past, the family disputes of the past haunt the protagonists and their memories in the present. In order to develop a reflective and constructive approach towards this past, the protagonists need to find a way to address parental absences, especially ruptured maternal bonds.

Despite the fact that coping with the events of the immediate past (fall of the wall, German unification) is hindered by the difficulties to come to terms with the remote past (World War II), the demise of the GDR and the beginning unification is presented as the condition under which the protagonists can at last start to address both the experiences of their childhood as well as the social circumstances of post-1989 Germany. The novels thus frame the unification of Germany as historical prerequisite of addressing the shared German war and post-war past. Interestingly, even though the GDR is in both novels represented as narrative void, therefore suggesting its traumatic valence, it appears that the trauma both protagonists attempt to negotiate is not caused by the German separation in 1949, but rather situated in the "Third Reich" and the post-war period respectively. The 40 years of German division are cast as a repressive force with regard to memories of World War II and its aftermath. Both novels indicate that the caesura of 1989 not only offers the possibility to revisit interpretations of the German past, but rather make the renegotiation of history a prerequisite for the unification of Germany in the present.[132]

Hence, the novels do not emphasize the end of the GDR as ideological collapse, but rather cast it in a more affirmative light as a new beginning and an opportunity for the renewal of kinship relations. As Fromm (2001) states with regard to Becker: "Beckers Roman zeigt die Wende nicht als das Ende des DDR-Systems, sondern als Beginn einer Erinnerungsbewegung, die durch die Wiedervereinigung

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[132] This trend is further evidenced by the wave of literary representations by mainly West German authors, who after 1989 reengage with World War II and the Holocaust within the narrative framework of family stories or childhood imaginations. See for example: Dückers. *Himmelskörper* (2003), Grass. *Im Krebsgang* (2002), Timm. *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Walser. *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998).

ermöglicht wird." (179) [Becker's novel shows the *Wende* not as the end of the GDR-system, but as the beginning of a memory movement that is enabled by the reunification]. The same can be said for Maron's protagonist, even though the "memory movements" established in both novels are not equally successful. While Jörn at least partially manages to find a constructive approach to his past through initiating the talking cure with his anonymous interlocutor, Maron's protagonist appears to be overwhelmed by past and present equally. This could be explained by the fact that she lives withdrawn from the public, has cut all her family ties, and refrains from any social contact. Jörn in contrast is married and seeks to connect to the people in the Fläming as a way to bridge the 40 years of the German separation. Even though this communication is not free of tensions, both sides at least try to establish a "gangbaren Weg aus der fremden Vertrautheit miteinander" (Fromm "Erinnerungsarbeit) [viable path out of the strange familiarity with each other]. Thus, communication not about but with each other is presented as one option to bring both East and West if not together than at least closer to each other. It is noteworthy in this context that in Becker's novel the protagonist from West Germany is the one initiating the dialogue. The fact that he as the West German (with an East German past) is more successful in coping with the past and is also part of a familial arrangement (which remains mainly unaddressed) in the present, whereas Maron's protagonist from East Germany remains alone and unable to come to the terms with her past, can be seen as yet another variation of the differences in East and West German family arrangements after 1989. It is consistently the East German family that struggles, often to the point that it cannot sustain itself, and the West German family that manages to endure in times of crises. This in turn not only exemplifies a literary investment in the heavier burdens East German families had to carry after 1989, but further implies that family structures in the East were already under pressure before the opening of the wall.

The struggles that the protagonists face in the social sphere of the unifying Germany and that are closely related to their childhood experiences are also apparent in the narratives. In both novels, the stream of consciousness is used to relate the protagonists' memories as directly and unmediated as possible. Simultaneously, the narratives employ distancing devices that undermine the initial intimacy of

the text and that consistently provide a doubting commentary on the stories they themselves present. This narrative manufacturing of doubt is closely connected to the meta-reflections about memory that are core elements of both texts. These reflections foreground the uncertainty and malleability of memories and thus implicitly question the memories at the core of the story. Through this, the narrative itself is undermined in the same moment as it is empowered, since both novels present it as the sole tool to re-activate dormant memories and make them accessible for the protagonists. But as both protagonists admit, the power of the narrative has its limitation and can only allow access to the past up to a certain degree. In both novels the existence of the GDR cannot be grasped in the narrative, but rather haunts the stories through its absence, similar to the traumatic family memories. As the discussion of Ingo Schulze's and Eugen Ruge's novels shows, the next generation of protagonist and authors faces a different set of struggles in attempting an examination of the GDR within the framework of post-socialist Germany. Since the childhood of both the authors and the protagonists is anchored in the GDR, they cannot negotiate this time of their lives through the narrative construction of a void, but rather try to get a hold of this time through stricter narrative compositions.

Performance of Memory: Stable Frames for Unstable Pasts

Ingo Schulze (born in 1962) and Eugen Ruge (born in 1954) are part of the author generation whose members have spent a formative time of their lives in the GDR. This could explain why the GDR features prominently in their writings, which evolve around the question of how to negotiate the experience of life in the GDR in post-socialist Germany (cf. Twark "New Eastern German Satire" 75). Similar to Maron's and Becker's texts, childhood memories feature prominently in Schulze's and Ruge's novels as well, even though the characters' respective stories go beyond that time of their lives. The texts interconnect their protagonists' biography with the existence of the GDR, in which family is imagined as the social space where disparate historical experiences and political positions intersect. The subsequent conflicts play out between parents and children. While they are less existential in Schulze's picaresque account of a strained mother-son-relationship, Ruge's texts provides, among depictions of a variety of

kinship relations, a more serious engagement with a father-son-relationship that is impacted by the son's simultaneous opposition against state power and his father's political standpoint. In choosing to incorporate different family members into the plot, the texts seek to include a multitude of standpoints and perspectives, behaviors and attitudes that exist during the demise of the GDR and the unification of Germany, thus combating prejudices about a homogenous GDR society and emphasizing familial tensions as well as social pluralization before 1989. This panoramic perspective appears to be more common in this generation of writers as can also be seen in such texts as Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet* (2004) or Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* (2007) in which important events of German history are revisited from the perspectives of multiple characters. This in turn indicates that the more constricted and traditional narrative framework of these novels provides the necessary scaffolding to absorb the panoramic representations of individual lives that have been caught in historic upheavals.

The texts' adaptation of more traditional narrative frameworks hence appears as an attempt to supply reliable and stable narrative scaffolding for approaching a still overwhelming past. Schulze in *Neue Leben* (2005) combines the framework of an epistolary novel with a protagonist that is likened to the heroes of the picaresque tradition to present his take on the final years of the GDR and the immediate post-unification years. Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011) follows a strict organization in chapters, thus allowing each of the characters a clearly defined and limited narrative frame in which to present his or her perspective on history. Both texts emphasize the constructedness of narratives, providing a meta-reflection about the narration process. Whereas *Animal Triste* and *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen* have been categorized as fictions of meta-memory foregrounding reflections about the process and structure of memory, Schulze's and Ruge's writings can be described as performances of memory. This means that the texts employ fewer narrative distancing devices, but rather they expose a character in the process of remembering. Memories' malleability has to be decoded by the reader and is insinuated, for example, by diverging descriptions of the same event. The family is here not only a crucial memory space, where remembering and the exchange or negotiation of memories is initiated. Kinship

relations are simultaneously at the core of the memories that partake in the social and textual imagination of family.

Ingo Schulze's *Neue Leben*

Schulze's opus magnum, the English translation of whish was published in 2009[133], is not only written in the epistolary style, but also features a baroque-like title[134] while presenting a protagonist out of the picaresque tradition implicated in a Faust-like plot.[135] As Twark (2009) discusses in detail, there are also various other canonical and contemporary literary works that can be deducted as textual influence (77) and as she claims the novel can be read as a parody of the *Bekenntnisliteratur* genre and even Social Realism (84). The depth of this intertextual reference system has caused mixed reviews for the novel, which nonetheless received the award of the annual book fair in Leipzig (Preis der Leipziger Buchmesse). That the text despite its density and above-average length became quite popular can be explained by its unique depiction of the GDR's demise that the review in Publishers Weekly summarizes as follows: "Schulze captures something ephemeral but critical about how the idealism that brought down the Wall also brought down itself" (45). Thus, the text despite its satirical and ironic tone highlights an issue that became palpable right after the fall of the wall, was first apparent in the election results of March 1990 that basically shunned the parties founded by the oppositional forces of the GDR from the political arena, but that remained largely unaddressed until after 2000.[136]

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[133] All English references refer to: Ingo Schulze. *New Lives. The Youth of Enrico Türmer in Letters and Prose. Edited and with Commentary and Foreword by Ingo Schulze*. Transl. John E. Woods. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. Print.

[134] All references refer to: Ingo Schulze. *Neue Leben. Die Jugend Enrico Türmers in Briefen und Prosa. Herausgegeben, kommentiert und mit einem Vorwort versehen von Ingo Schulze.* München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007. Print.

[135] For more details on parallels between the novel and the Faust story, see Twark. "New Eastern German Satire : Ingo Schulze's "Neue Leben" as a "Novel of Complexity"' *Gegenwartsliteratur* 8 (2009): 67-89. esp. p. 68.

[136] For a detailed discussion of the fate of the GDR opposition after 1989 see for example: Pollack. "Was ist aus den Bürgerbewegungen und Oppositionsgruppen der DDR geworden?" *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 40/41 (1995): 34-

[45] Miethe. "Die übersehene Generation oder: Die 89er als 68er des Ostens?" *Die demokratische Revolution 1989 in der DDR*. Eds. Conze/Gadjukowa/Koch-Baumgarten. Köln et. al.: Böhlau Verlag, 2009. 121-137.

As mentioned above the strict and formalized narrative structure provides the organization for the multifarious perspectives that are represented in the text. The formal structure of the text betrays the at times competing narrative levels that are constituted by the author of the letters, Enrico Türmer, and Ingo Schulze. The latter is introduced as editor of the book and author of the foreword, who also annotated the letter he claims to have found while researching materials about German businessmen. These letters describe Türmer's childhood and adolescence in the GDR as well as his rise and fall as newspaper publisher. When Schulze comes across his letters, Türmer is nowhere to be found, reportedly having fled the region before prosecutors could get a hold of him for tax evasion (7). Schulze's footnotes offer explanations as well as background information he considers necessary in order to make Türmer's letters more accessible for the contemporary reader in the unifying Germany, whom he does not expect to have an in-depth understanding of the GDR. At times, the footnotes also have a judgmental tone, despite the fact that Schulze claims that it is not his aim to judge Türmer. As it turns out, Türmer is no stranger to the editor, with whom he went to school, if only in parallel classes (7). This results in Schulze's rather personal involvement with the letters, which Cosentino (2006) describes as follows:

> So ist der fiktive Herausgeber Ingo Schulze im Textgefüge der Türmerschen Briefe auf aufdringliche Weise überall und immer anwesend; trauen kann man ihm jedoch wegen seines Übereifers und seiner Vorurteile wenig. Sein ständiges Sich-Einmischen verwirrt den Leser, blendet ihn, kann sogar den Gedanken auslösen, daß man es nicht mit einem fiktiven Herausgeber, sondern eher mit dem fiktiven Verfasser der Briefe selbst zu tun hat. (glossen 24)

> [Like this, the fictive editor Ingo Schulze is in an intrusive way everywhere and constantly present within the textual arrangement of Türmer's letters; but due to his overzealousness and his prejudice he can hardly be trusted. His constant interferences confuse the reader, blinds him, can even provoke the thought that one does not face a fictitious editor, but rather the fictitious author of the letters himself.]

The letters and footnotes, therefore, enter a dialogue of sorts that is similar to the conversation between character-bound narrator Jörn and the anonymous interlocutor in Becker's text. But while those two were jointly engaged in telling Jörn's story, author and editor in Schulze's textual construction appear to be in competition with each other, fighting for the prerogative of historical interpretation and representation. This dialogic construction exemplifies how the constricted, traditional formal structure of the epistolary

novel is used in an innovative fashion. Neither author nor editor leave their respective formal realms, but are nonetheless depicted as in interaction with each other. Thus, the novel manages to provide a poly-perspectival account of the GDR and of post-1989 Germany that "auf eine Dimension gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit aufmerksam [macht], die in den historiografischen Darstellungen der Wende oft vernachlässigt wird" (Sieg 164) [calls attention to a dimension of societal reality that is often neglected in historiographic accounts of the *Wende*].

The letters at the core of the text are composed for three addressees and represent two of the novel's overall three temporal layers: One set of letters is addressed to Joachim Ziehlke, Enrico's friend whom he has known since high-school. These letters discuss the events in the narrative present, spanning from January to July 1990, and describing Enrico's support for a newly founded weekly newspaper, which he later leaves behind for a more profitable advertisement magazine that prints ads from local business. The other set of letters that is also mainly concerned with present-day events are the ones written to his sister Vera Barakat-Türmer. In addition to information about the events at the newspaper, Enrico includes more personal contemplations about his relationship with his girlfriend Michaela and frequently addresses his encounters with their mother. The subject of family and its condition in the aftermath of the GDR's demise are hence mostly discussed with his sister. Türmer's relationship to his family is, based on the descriptions in his letters, ambiguous. As I will discuss in more detail below, the relationship with his sister Vera and with his mother are on the one hand characterized by a surprising intimacy. At the same time, both relationships are defined by moments of acute distance. While the distance between him and Vera is mainly spatial due to her move first to West Berlin and later to Beirut, the relationship with his mother grows more and more distant due to their differing attitudes towards the collapsing GDR and the unifying Germany.

The intimate personal relationships beyond his immediate family are equally caught in this tension between closeness and distance. This tension is manifested in his letters to Nicoletta, the addressee of the third set of letters, which nearly exclusively focus on the retelling of Türmer's childhood

in the GDR and thus establish the second temporal layer of the novel. Nicoletta is a photographer, presumably from West Germany, who accompanied a journalist to the region and becomes the target of Enrico's many infatuations. He starts writing letters to her revealing his feelings shortly after their first meeting and continues to do so, even though she only seldomly replies and does not seem to reciprocate his affection. Thus, while she keeps her distance and leaves the majority of Enrico's letters unanswered, he desperately strives to create closeness between them by sharing his life story with her.

A similar tension defines the struggling relationship between Michaela and Türmer from its beginning as Enrico describes in yet another letter to Nicoletta, in which he recalls his thoughts during a first and rare moment of familial peace with Michaela and her son Robert: "Ich habe eine Familie, dachte ich da zum ersten Mal, eine Familie, und wußte nicht, ob sich ein Traum erfüllt hatte oder ob ich in der Falle saß" (412) ["It was then that it first struck me: I have a family – a family! And I didn't know if it was a dream come true or if I was caught in a trap" (294)]. The protagonist's conflicting emotions are an expression of his continuously reappearing desire for intimacy and closeness on the one hand, and the simultaneous experience or construction of distance on the other hand. Michaela's and Enrico's familial arrangement, mimicking the structure of the nuclear family, is thus not only destabilized from within through Enrico's uncertainty, but further becomes pressured externally during the final months of the GDR. Michaela, an actress at the same theater that also employs Enrico, considers this a time of action and is involved in organizing demonstrations in their town. For this reason, she is disappointed with Enrico's claim to an apolitical stance that causes conflict and ultimately their separation. As the reader learns through the editor's preface, Nicoletta and Enrico get engaged at some point in time after the letters have ended, but Nicoletta already ended their relationship in 1995.

In his letters to Nicolette, Enrico chronicles his life from the 1970s to the 1990s, describing his childhood and adolescence in the GDR. These letters have been written on the backside of older literary manuscript that present fictionalized accounts of Enrico's life and that are reprinted in the back of the book. Finally, the introductory remarks and footnotes by the editor Ingo Schulze constitute the third

temporal layer, since it can be assumed that they have been added shortly before the publication in 2005

and, thus, in significant temporal distance to the time when the letters were written. By interweaving these

individual temporal layers, the novel manages to intersect reflections about the life in the GDR with

descriptions and contemplations about the immediate years after the German unification. This results in

the juxtaposition of the perception of the 1990s with insights and opinions that have developed since and

that find their expression in the footnotes. Even though, pre- and post-1989 events are discussed in

separate letters and do not intersect, the text at times integrates GDR history in the story line adressing

developments in the present. The GDR as narrative void that had dominated Becker's and Maron's texts

has been filled in this text with childhood memories and tales of coming to age. In contrast to those earlier

texts, here the major family conflicts are not situated in the post-war era, but rather take place towards the

end of the GDR or right after its demise. While the letters do not veil the ruptures that East Germans

experienced during the upheavals of 1989 and 1990, the text overall treats them less as historical caesura,

but rather insinuates continuity especially with regard to family arrangements in the GDR and in post-

socialist Germany. This is further emphasized by the circular structure of the narrative as described by

Cosentino (2006):

> Zeitlich und thematisch blendet der letzte Brief in den allerersten ein, was dem
> Romangefüge die Form eines Kreises gibt. Und diese ist von Bedeutung, denn sie führt
> zum Ausgangspunkt der Handlung zurück und spiegelt in der Kontrastierung zweier
> inhaltlich ähnlicher Briefe fortwährende oder veränderte Verhaltensweisen wider. Der
> Kreis beleuchtet Fehlentscheidungen und Irrtümer einzelner Figuren; in ihm
> eingeschlossen sind die geraden und krummen Wege, Irrwege, Kreuzwege und
> Scheidewege, auf denen sich der Handlungsträger befindet. (glossen 24)
>
> [With regard to time and theme, the last letter fades into the very first one, which gives
> the structure of the novel the shape of a circle. And this structure is of importance,
> because it leads back to the starting point of the plot and in contrasting two content-wise
> similar letters it reflects continuous and changed modes of behavior. The circle
> illuminates wrong decisions and mistakes of individual characters; it includes straight and
> twisted paths, meanders, and crossroads on which the character moves.]

The narrative, hence, establishes two different modes of representing time. On the one hand, the letters

are reprinted in the order they have been written, which establishes a chronology that allows the reader to

deduct the development of events and also to connect individual letters and references therein to actual

historical events. On the other hand, the content of the letters moves between the narrative present of the 1990s and the GDR past. And even events taking place in 1990s are at times discussed in a different light depending on the addressee. This highlights the ways in which Enrico adjusts his stories to his respective audience, providing a prime example for the dependency of memory on its narrative expression as well as its circumstances of recall. As Arnold-de-Simini (2005) points out in following Halbwachs' central argument: "Remembering is a creative process and memories can only be transmitted as narratives. These narratives are not so much concerned with the truthful reconstruction of the past, but constitute a collective interpretation of past events according to the necessities of the community in regard to its present social and historical context" (10). Enrico is careful to compose his narratives with the respective addressee as well as their social context in mind, which is, for example, visible in some extended explanations about the GDR in his letters to the West German Nicoletta. According to Twark (2009) the oscillation of the text between different temporal layers should be seen as a reflection about the instabilities in post-1989 East Germany, stating that "[t]his frequent compulsory reorientation manipulates the reader's experience: she must adjust to each new letter like East Germans had to adjust to each new post-Wall day" (71). This supposed imitation of daily experiences of insecurity post-1989 can also be attributed to the differing accounts of the same event represented in individual letters that challenge the reader to compare each individual depiction and based on these options create a description of the event that she would consider accurate or believable. Through this, the reader is implicitly coerced to confront the main protagonist and narrator critically and ultimately forced to question their credibility.

Türmer's questionable authority combined with the regular inferences from the editor Schulze continuously undermines the stabilizing function of the epistolary novel's formal framework. Pietsch (2008) points out that Türmer's respective adjustments to his already subjective accounts of events can also be explained by his emotional relationship to each addressee, which further destabilizes the letters as reliable source. She states: "Bei Türmer liegt zudem die prekäre Situation vor, dass er zu jeder bzw. jedem der drei Briefempfänger eine erotische Beziehung entweder intendiert oder bereits durchlebt hat"

(Pietsch 334). [For Türmer there exists further the precarious situation that he either intends or has already experienced an erotic relationship with each of the three addressees.] This situation is especially noteworthy with regard to his sister Vera. While Türmer openly confesses their incestuous relationship as teenagers in a letter from July 1990 and also declares his continuous love for his sister, their unusual intimacy is apparent to the reader in the very first letter of the book (cf. Twark 80). This letter – establishing the novel's beginning and end – closes on a remarkably emotional note: "Wie leicht alles wird, wenn ich an Dich denken kann. In Liebe, Dein Heinrich" (15) [How easy everything is when I can think of you. Love, Your Heinrich (4)]. The editor points out in a footnote that Enrico used the Germanic version of his name in correspondences with his sister, which can also be read as another intertextual reference to Goethe's *Faust* (cf. Twark). Türmer's unusually deep emotionally connection with his sister could be explained by the fact that Vera had left the GDR years earlier and the opening of the Wall now awards the siblings the chance to reunite. But given his later admission of an actual amorous relationship during their childhood, it is more likely that his expressions of love extend beyond the realm of affection between siblings. The exclusiveness of his feelings as expressed in statements such as "Außer Dir habe ich niemanden, auf den ich zählen kann" (20) ["There is no one else who I can count on" (8)] has to be understood in the context of his eroding relationship with Michaela and the fact that Nicoletta, his future fiancée, has yet to enter his life. Consequently, his longing for a loving female influence in his life is less surprising than the fact that he elects his sister to play this part. The unusual intimacy paired with an oscillation between distance and remarkable closeness is also characteristic of Türmer's relationship with his mother, which the text constructs as a prime example for the impact of the historical transformation of 1989 on the private sphere.[137] Their relationship as described by Türmer is defined by the tension between his child-like craving for her physical closeness and his simultaneous experience of differing political

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[137] The other example in the text is Türmer's relationship with Michaela that according to Enrico's descriptions falls apart because of their different opinions regarding the political transformation in the GDR and its subsequent demise. If Enrico's account of events is accurate, it is even more surprising that Michaela enters a relationship with his rather suspicious business partner from West Germany, who does not seem to see eye to eye with her politically either.

opinions that cause emotional distance between them. His desire for an intimate relationship is apparent in one of his letters in which he writes about a surprise visit to her apartment during which he did not find her home. After roaming the town and visiting with friends, he returns to her still empty apartment. He goes on: "Wie früher, wenn ich allein war, legte ich mich ins Bett meiner Mutter und schlief mit ihrem Nachthemd unterm Kopfkissen ein" (463) ["As always when I was home alone, I lay down on my mother's bed and feel asleep with her nightgown tucked under the pillow" (330)]. As the editor remarks, this statement is certainly strange with regard to its inclusion in a letter to Nicolette, a woman whom he tries to woo at the time. At the same time, this indicates that Türmer does not seem to consider his actions embarrassing or unusual, which is further supported by the naïve tone of his descriptions. As he states, he repeats an action from his childhood, in which his repossession of his mother's space – her bed – is aimed at negating her absence.[138] The use of her nightgown provides an additional placeholder for her missing physical closeness, with her smell functioning as a substitute for her body.

Interestingly, Enrico only seems to crave this kind of closeness whenever it is basically unattainable. In contrast, whenever his mother is actually present, they rather encounter each other with reservation. The main reason for this distance appears to be their different experiences and evaluations of the GDR's demise. Enrico mourns the end of the state, not because he considers its ideals and visions actually worthwhile, but rather because he realizes that the vanishing of the GDR consequently robs him of the material for the novel he wants so desperately to publish. In his perception, his existence as a writer depends causally on the existence of the GDR: "Was sollte ich, ein Schriftsteller, ohne Mauer?" (447) ["What was I, as a writer, going to do without a wall?" (319)]. Hence, even though Türmer does not support the GDR, he has very egotistical reasons to hope for its continued existence. In contrast, his mother takes a very critical stance towards the GDR after she has been arrested and abused by the police who picked her up in the vicinity of a demonstration in Dresden in the fall of 1989. She does not discuss

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[138] The fact that a Freudian interpretation of this action as expression of Oedipal desires seems so obvious, suggest that this scene is constructed as ironic statement, especially since it only serves the purpose of embarrassing Türmer.

this experience in detail, at least not with her son, but Enrico discovers a change in her that he described

in a letter to Vera as follows:

> Erst in ihren vier Wänden merkt man, wie sehr sich Mamus verändert hat. Ich war froh über jede Geste, die ich kannte […]. Plötzlich macht Mamus überall den Untertanengeist aus und entdeckt den 'grenzenlosen Opportunismus' ihrer Kolleginnen. Ich frage sie, warum sie dann nie an Ausreise gedacht habe. Ich hätte das doch nicht gewollt, erwiderte sie, ohne mich anzusehen. (52)

> [It's only when you see her there inside her own four walls that you realize how much Mamus has changed. I was happy to spot any gesture I recognized […] Mamus has suddenly begun to spot people toadying everywhere and sees her fellow nurses as 'pure opportunists." I asked her why she herself had never thought of leaving. I wouldn't have wanted to, she replied, without looking directly at me. (31)]

Enrico's perception of his mother is marked by moments of alienation and estrangement, whose extent

and destabilizing impact on their relationship is most visible in the statement: "I was happy to spot *any*

gesture I recognized." Interestingly, in his description of his changed mother, Türmer links physical

expressions (gesture) with expressed opinions, suggesting that the estranging quality of his mother's

political remarks have an altering quality on her entire persona. Her comments target conforming

behavior of fellow East Germans and are explicitly connected to the context of post-1989 Germany. The

fact that they surprise and unsettle Enrico indicates that she has not expressed similar opinions before the

opening of the Wall, but the demise of the GDR combined with the traumatic experience of being

detained by the police solely for being in the vicinity of a demonstration have deeply impacted her

perception of the state. Linguistically noteworthy is her ambiguous answer to Enrico's inquiry, why she

has never contemplated leaving the GDR; a questions that implies leaving as logical solution for her

discontent with the GDR state and society. Her reply that "I wouldn't have wanted to" could on the one

hand mean that she herself did not actually have such an intention, which would undermine her criticism

of "toadying people" (31) and suggest that her outspoken disapproval is not only based on her experiences

in the East but also linked to the devaluation of the GDR put forward in post-1989 Germany. One the

other hand, it could be read as an accusation against Enrico, implying that he did not want her to leave

and presenting her responsibilities as a mother as the sole reason for her remaining in the GDR. This in

turn would highlight that the sphere of the family had already been under pressure before 1989, having to negotiate different attitudes toward the GDR. Given their current alienation the latter reading appears to be the more likely one, but the fact that she avoids any eye contact with him allows for both interpretations. Overall, the incestuous sibling relationship as well as the at times sensual relationship with his mother, indicate that the family arrangements are out of balance. This could be explained by the absence of paternal influence, since Enrico's and Vera's father has died in 1968 (53). The coinciding of the father's death with the height of the student protests in West Germany that, among other things, questioned the involvement of the parental generation in the atrocities of World War II and their failed rehabilitation in the Federal Republic, can be seen as another intertextual nod in the novels dense network of references.[139] With regard to the representation of family in the GDR, the texts foregrounding of sexually charged familial relationships suggest a disruption of the normative forces that usually govern these interpersonal connections and strictly limit sexual desires to the parental relationship.

Hence, the absence of the father creates specific tensions within the mother-son-relationship, which are also visible in a later letter to Nicolette in which Enrico recalls a favorite childhood memory. This passage is noteworthy not only because it highlights Enrico's strong desire for motherly approval, which consequently would explain his continued longing for physical closeness as expressed in the nightgown episode discussed above, but because it also indicates the painful impact of their current estrangement. Further, the scene is significant, because it shows how *Neue Leben* can be read as a performance of memory, in which processes of remembering are not reflected, but rather the instabilities of recalled memories as well as their malleability is instead performed by the text itself, leaving the reflections up to the reader. As has already been indicated in the analysis of Maron's novel, the ruptured family structures here as well coincide with unstable memories, which are in turn echoed in the

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[139] For a discussion about the representation of 1968 in literature see: Rinner. "From Student Movement to the Generation of 1968: Generational Conflicts in the German Novels from 1970s and the 1990s." *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture*. Eds. Laurel Cohen-Pfister, Susanne Vees-Gulani. Rochester: Camden House, 2010. 139-159.

uncertainties of memories. In describing his family life to Nicoletta, Türmer includes the following

account:

> Eines der wenigen Rituale, die bei uns zu Hause gepflegt wurden, war das Wiederbeleben frühester Erinnerungen. Das Ziel war erreicht, wenn meine Mutter rief: "Unmöglich! Da warst du erst zwei!" oder: "Mit anderthalb – das ist ausgeschlossen!" Noch bei der fünften Wiederholung gelang ihr diese Fassungslosigkeit überzeugend. Meine Erinnerungen bestätigt zu finden befriedigte mich zutiefst. Schüttelte meine Mutter ungläubig den Kopf, fühlte ich mich als eine Art Wunderkind. (132)

> One of the few rituals observed in our family occurred whenever I tried to revive my earliest memories. I had achieved my goal whenever my mother would exclaim, "Impossible! You were barely two!" – or, "At eighteen months, out of the question!" She would successfully manage a good five such exclamations of astonishment. It gave me a deep satisfaction to find my memories confirmed. Each incredulous shake of my mother's head made me feel like some sort of wunderkind. (89)

Aside from presenting an insight into the relationship between Enrico and his mother, the passage also

constructs a double-layered memory performance. On the one hand, it describes a childhood ritual in

which Enrico showcased his talents in recalling events from very early in his life; an ability that his

mother deems impressive. The aim of this exercise, though, is not the recollection of the past, but the act

of remembering is rather a tool for Enrico's desire to stun his mother and earn her approval, which – if

received – makes him feel extraordinary, like a "wunderkind." On the other hand, the story is a memory

on its own, included in the text as introduction to following presentations of childhood memories. The

inclusion of this ritual can hence be interpreted as Türmer's attempt to establish credibility. Preening

himself with his remarkable memory as a child, Enrico exhibits his present desire to impress Nicoletta,

who in the narrative present takes the place of his mother, and to bolster his reliability as narrator of his

own life.

Türmer's efforts to provide evidence for his narrative integrity in the content of his letters are

undermined by their formal appearance that is uncovered and remarked upon by editor Schulze. In a

footnote to the letter from May 10, 1990, also addressed to Nicoletta, Schulze records: "Dieser Brief zählt

zu den unleserlichsten, was vor allem an den vielen Streichungen und Einfügungen liegt, vor allem im

letzten Drittel" (372). ["This letter is among the most illegible, due primarily to cross-outs and insertions,

especially in the final third (265).] Schulze connects this footnote to Türmer's statement in the letter that "[a]s I write to you about all of this, it seems to me as if this were the first time I've ever recalled those hours" (265) ["Während ich Ihnen das schreibe, kommt es mir so vor, als erinnere ich mich jetzt zum ersten Mal an diese Stunden"]. The original handwritten text, thus, discloses the instability of recalled and narrated memories that Türmer attempts to mask in the earlier presentation of his outstanding memory, thus casting the letters as a component of Türmers "*Erinnerungspraxis*" (Sieg 166). The "cross-outs and insertions" that Schulze discovers in the original make Türmer's struggles in creating a coherent narrative of the past even visible and show how he strives to find the right words for representing his experience. The cause for his struggles appears to be two-fold: firstly, he addresses a moment of familial trauma caused by Vera's decision to leave the GDR. In describing the final hours before her departure he revisits a moment that deeply ruptured the familial arrangement. Intensified by their close relationship, their spatial separation had a lasting impact on Enrico and made the political separation of Germany felt in the private sphere of the family. The lasting emotional impact of the spatially divided family is thus constructed as one reason for Enrico's struggle to create a coherent narrative of this event. Secondly, Enrico claims that the description enclosed in the letter feels as if it were the first time he recalls this moment of his life. Even though this does not turn out to be true, the editorial footnote links this assertion to the initial incoherence of the account as visible in the multiple revisions in the original, suggesting that the absence of a previously established memory narrative that can be repeated here explains Enrico's struggles.[140] Hence, the text ultimately highlights similar issues with regard to memory and the processes of the remembering as faced and discussed by the protagonists in Becker's and Maron's novels. Similar to them, Türmer's memories are defined by their adjustability to the contexts of recall as well as the interlocutor with whom they are shared. In contrast to the earlier texts, Türmer does not appear to be aware or willing to reflect on these issues, but is limited to performing them, leaving the critical

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[140] Later in the same letter he describes how he tells Johann about the events of that afternoon and judges his account to be "eine schöne Erzählung" (377) ["a great story" (269)].

contemplations to the reader. Nonetheless, similarly to Maron's and Becker's texts, the act of

remembering is deeply affected by familial ruptures that Türmer can only address in post-1989 Germany.

The instability of interpersonal relationships, before and after 1989, extends beyond the sphere of

the family, and is also exhibited in Türmer's friendships and relationships to colleagues. Nonetheless,

Türmer is presented as one of the few East German protagonists in the novels discussed here who is able

to find at least temporarily a stable footing in the society of the unifying Germany. In contrast to the

protagonists in Sparschuh's and Burmeister's novel discussed in Chapter 2, Türmer's successful

integration in the society of post-1989 Germany is not based on the establishment of a hybrid life

narrative, but rather on an unquestioning assimilation to the necessities of capitalism. Due to its greater

temporal distance to the historical transformation of 1989, the novel is able to reflect on the development

of an individual in German society after the demise of socialism. While earlier texts, e.g. Sparschuh's,

Burmeister's, Maron's, presented protagonists and coping strategies during the earliest phase after the fall

of the wall, *Neue Leben* is able to complement the description of initial disbelief, disapproval, and

struggle, which Türmer clearly experiences, with the subsequent strategies of adjustment and

assimilation. Since the novel combines the depiction of Türmer's economical rise with his ultimate

downfall, as indicated in the foreword by him fleeing tax collectors, and with the dissolution of his family

ties, it indirectly provides a critical commentary on one possible life development after 1989.

Enrico's surprisingly fast changing career path from depressed artist to ambitious newspaper

founder to greedy publisher of an ultimately failing advertising paper is accompanied in the private sphere

by estrangement and separation from Michaela, alienation from his mother, and a short-lived and

ultimately failing engagement with Nicoletta. The status of his relationship with his sister Vera remains

unknown. Thus, more distinctly than earlier novels, *Neue Leben* casts a critical light on fast post-1989

assimilation, especially with regard to the economic sphere and its negative impacts on familial

arrangements. In contrast to previously discussed protagonists, Enrico does not struggle to address his

past, since he does so excessively in his letters to Nicoletta, despite his unstable and tense family

relationships. Nonetheless, it remains dubious that his ability to connect and even narratively present his past provides him with insights and strategies to address the present in a way that would offer the chance for a continuously stable position in the society of the unifying Germany. The fact that he ends up fleeing the law can be read as a critique of Türmer's quick assimilation to the values and principles governing (economical) interactions in the unifying Germany as well as of these values per se.

Türmer's social and private failure is noteworthy since it sheds light on the possible downsides of foregrounding renewal in coping with the historical transformation of 1989. Further, more explicitly than the previously discussed novels, the text highlights that the private sphere and with it the family were already under immense pressures in the GDR (Harsch 2007). As exemplified Michaela and Enrico's relationship as well as the ruptured family constellation of Enrico, Vera, and their mother, these pressures appear to be mainly connected to diverging political convictions. In both instances, opposing political views undermine existing familial bonds, not only by positioning lovers against each other, but also by forcing family members to leave the GDR and thus their family behind. The situation in post-1989 Germany where the family is constructed as the social constellation in which the recent historical shift and the ensuing diverging developments in public and private discourses can be negotiated, is thus defined by a continuation of tensions and challenges that had already been in place in the GDR.

Schulze's novel hence displays an approach to 1989 that complements the temporal focal point on the time immediately after the opening of the wall, which has characterized Maron's, Becker's, Burmeister's, and Sparschuh's novels. Especially noteworthy are the extended descriptions of the GDR and the family life that takes place here, since both topics were erased by a narrative void in the earlier texts. In locating the origin of struggles within family arrangements already in the GDR, the text offers a possible explanation as to why West German families in post-1989 Germany manage to address moments of crises more successfully than their East German counterparts. This is especially noteworthy, since in the literary representation of family, familial arrangements in East and West Germany are subject to similar struggles, such as marital infidelity or political disagreement. This notion appears also in Eugen

Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, which presents episodes circling around a protagonist who belongs to the same generation as Türmer and, hence, faces comparable issues in the family and in society.

Eugen Ruge *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*

Published in 2011, Ruge's debut *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* was received to wide acclaim and honored with the German Book Prize (*Deutscher Buchpreis*). While the book has been reviewed by every major German newspaper and is scheduled to hit the English-speaking market in the summer of 2013, the newest addition to the genre of the *Wenderoman* has yet to be integrated in the scholarly discussion about post-1989 German literature. Among the texts selected for this dissertation, Ruge's novel is the only one that could be qualified as a so-called family novel. It has been classified as such in several reviews and was even compared with the classical German family novel: Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (see Radisch 2011). As such, Ruge is part of a broader representational trend among recent post-1989 texts that approach the GDR by narrating its history through generational experiences located within traditional familial arrangements.[141] As I will discuss in detail below, especially noteworthy is the reemergence of the "paternal narrative" (Hell *Post-Fascist Fantasies* 106). While Hell describes this trend for early post-1989 writings, it vanished around the turn of the century, presumably to be replaced by love relationships (Brüns 203). The so-called German *Popliteratur* of the 1990s was defined by a remarkable disinterest in anything related to the family. Anz (2004) remarks upon the „bemerkenswertes Desinteresse an Familien- und Vaterkonflikten. Da leidet keine der Figuren mehr am Vater, weder an einem übermächtigen noch an einem schwachen oder fernen Vater. Es hat den Anschein, als habe die Literatur dieser jungen Generation sich am Ende des Jahrhunderts doch noch von den Mystifikationen des Vaters befreien können" (200) [remarkable disinterest in family and father conflicts. No character suffers anymore from the father, neither from the overpowering nor from the weak and distant father. It appears as if the literature of this young generation at the end of the century was able to free itself from the

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[141] See Tellkamp *Der Turm* (2008), Meinhardt *Brüder und Schwestern* (2013).

mystifications of the father]. The return of the problematic father figure in recent post-1989 writings appears to be motivated by two intersecting developments. Firstly, while previous texts have focused on the time after 1989, recent writings and especially post-1989 family novels have moved the GDR itself to the fore of the narrative. The return of paternal narratives exemplifies the texts' critical engagement with the GDR's founding myths, especially with the concept of the "antifascist hero" that functioned as "mastersignifier" (Hell *Post-Fascist Fantasies* 254), in order to reflect upon their involvement in the failed utopian project. Secondly, post-1989 family novels appear to target fathers as the quintessential metaphor for state power, equating not only family to state structures (Geier "Engagierte Befragung" 118), but more specifically paternal signifiers with the execution of state sanctioned powers (Anz/Kanz 41). Thus, the paternal narrative and, related to this, the strained father-son-relationship appears to be the defining familial constellation for the textual rehabilitation of the GDR.

While the conflicts between fathers and sons is emphasized in the novel, its overall narrative anchoring in an intergenerational framework that includes a multitude of kinship arrangements is evidenced by the fact that its characters come from four generations and thus combine a multitude of historical experiences, political opinions, and consequently memories that repeatedly clash within the family. In contrast to earlier texts, such as Maron's or Becker's writings, the novel is organized in clearly temporally marked chapters that each represent selected events from the past as experienced by one character and that are narrated by an external narrator with varying focalizations.[142] Interwoven with chronologically ordered chapters ranging from 1952 to 1995 are chapters that revisit two dates multiple times: The year 2001 is the most current date and the time when the protagonist Alexander is diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin-Lymphoma, an incurable form of cancer. Subsequently, he decides to travel to Mexico, the place of his grandparents' exile in an attempt to distance himself from his family, particularly his father. His travels ultimately turn into a physical and mental engagement with his family history. Hence, this narrative thread functions as a commentary on the events that are depicted in the other

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[142] Birke (2008) defines shifts in focalization as one narrative technique typical for the staging of memory (57).

chapters. The protagonist's reflections about his family's past all take place in the shadow of the inexplicable events of September 11, 2001, which underscores the fragility of historically established power structures and dynamics that have shaped the life of Alexander's family.

The other reappearing date is October 1, 1989, which is the 90th birthday of Wilhelm Powileit, the struggling patriarch and eldest male character in the family. While the various events narrated by different characters in individual chapters often intersect and so create a connected plot line, the multifarious depictions of the birthday party appear as the novel's common thread. By describing the event from six different perspectives the text stages the processes of memory, highlighting their subjectivity as well as their dependency on the individual circumstances of recall. The birthday party, taking place roughly five weeks before the opening of the wall, functions as a symbol for the failing family as well as the nearing end of the GDR: the former is represented by Alexander leaving the GDR for West Germany on this day, Wilhelm's death at the end of his birthday, and the beginning alcoholism of Alexander's mother Irina. The GDR's impending demise is foreshadowed by the close-mindedness and hypocrisy of the GDR's political elite as represented by the party guests, who appear to be unaware of the necessity for political transformation as well as the fundamental consequences of their blindness. Discussing 2001 and 1989 as the novel's temporal framework, Janina Fleischer states in her review for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung:* "So markieren ausgerechnet die zeitlichen Verankerungen Momente der Auflösung, der Umbrüche und Verunsicherungen" [Thus, of all things, the spatial anchors mark the moments of dissolution, upheaval, and uncertainty"]. This suggests that the text playfully undermines the stable narrative framework established through clearly structured and dated chapters by connecting it to moments of immense historical transformation and upheaval that have a lasting impact on the characters. Through its montage of different voices the novel moves beyond a mere generational panorama of a German family in post-war, post-wall Germany and the GDR, but rather creates a dialogical format that allows different generational and gendered voices to articulate and represent their view on German history in the 20th

century.[143] This impression of an ongoing *Dialogizitaet* is supported by the distinct voice in which each character narrates their story, often through a stream of consciousness.

Whereas the intersecting descriptions of similar events establish a narrative coherence as well as connection between chapters and characters, the family relationships within and across generations alike are overall ruptured and tense. In a similar vein as Schulze and Maron, Ruge's text therefore constructs the family as unstable social constellation that continues to be "reworked, recast, renegotiated" (Ticknell 159) throughout the narrative, before and after 1989. The text then continues a reflection about the intersections of public and private sphere and the various ways in which they challenge and impact each other, a discourse that had already begun in the GDR with texts such as Uwe Saeger's *Das Überschreiten einer Grenze bei Nacht* (1988). While tensions define all family relationships in the text, there are noticeable differences in their intensity, which appear to be tied to the character's gender, since conflicts between characters of the same gender across generations, for example between father and son or mother/mother-in-law and daughter/daughter-in-law, are most intense. Intragenerational struggles, in contrast, appear to be most powerful between different genders, especially between husband and wives. Even though these conflicts are often verbalized and textually represented by fierce discussions and fights, they are just as often defined by the absence of conversations and communications. I argue that the resulting moments of silence lingering in the text can be read as signifiers of the inter- and intragenerational disconnect emphasized in the text. The fact that these silences pervade relationships within each generation as well as across generations suggest a decline of kinship connections and foreshadows the looming disintegration of the family through deaths, alienation, and sickness.

The novel bases the alienation among family members on opposing political stances, thus insinuating an interconnectedness between the decline of familial arrangements and the failure of the GDR's socialist experiment. It is noteworthy that intergenerational conflicts are predominant between

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[143] Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Holquist. Trans. Emerson/Holquist. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, [1930s] 1981. Print.

neighboring generations (father-son), whereas relationships that skip one generation (grandfather-grandson) are often less strained and sometimes even loving, as seen for example in the brief interactions between Markus and his grandfather Kurt (281). This echoes Cohen-Pfister's (2009) findings for contemporary German novels addressing World War II. She argues: „Bemerkenswert [...] ist der außerordentliche Einfluss der Großelterngeneration auf die Enkelgeneration. So entsteht eine direkte Verbindung zwischen der Generation, die den Zweiten Weltkrieg erlebt hat und der dritten Generation, die den Krieg ausschließlich aus Erzählungen kennt. Auf diese Art wird die zweite Generation, die der Eltern, in der Vermittlung des Familiengedächtnisses übergangen" (255) [Noteworthy ... is the extraordinary influence of the grandparents' generation on the generation of grandchildren. Through this develops a direct connection between generations, who experienced World War II and the third generation, who knows the war exclusively from stories. The second generation of the parents is in this way omitted from the mediation of the familial memory]. A similar trend can be detected in recent post-1989 texts that counter-balance strained relationships between fathers and sons with positively defined relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Remarkably, in Ruge's texts the interpersonal relationships that actually mediate the familial memory take place exclusively between grandmothers and grandsons, for example between Alexander and Charlotte as well as Markus and Irina. These family relations, then, provide ultimately the space for reparative modes of engaging with the past and each other. While the intergenerational exchange between grandmothers and grandsons aims at creating joined ownership of the family's past, the memory contests between fathers and sons are rooted in opposing interpretations of the past and are defined by a competition about the ownership of the present. This could explain why Alexander decides to travel to Mexico, the place of his grandparents' exile, instead of to Russia, the place of his parents' exile and his place of birth or why Markus has a mainly curious attitude towards his great-grandparents that is completely different from the disdain he feels for his father.

In the following, I want to focus on two intergenerational conflicts that highlight the specific generational investments in the GDR's utopian project, while simultaneously representing distinct

approaches to memory and its negotiation within the family. The first familial constellation of interest is the relationship between Kurt and his mother Charlotte. The tensions between them are caused by their shared experience of loss and their opposing coping mechanisms. Kurt's brother, Werner, did not survive his detention in the Gulag, and the text emphasizes that Kurt is still plagued by survivor's guilt:

> Und wie so oft in diesen Momenten, wenn er es kaum fassen konnte, dass er tatsächlich lebte, dachte er zugleich daran, dass Werner *nicht* mehr lebte: sein großer kleiner Bruder, der Stärkere, immer, der Schönere von beiden [...] Was ihn schmerzte, war nicht so sehr der Tod, sondern das ungelebte Leben Werners. Zugleich aber empfand er es plötzlich als Trost, dass er an Werner denken, sich an ihn erinnern konnte, dass sein Bruder, solange er, Kurt, lebte, nicht völlig verschwunden war, dass er – im Gegensatz zu seiner Mutter, die sie die Ohren zuhielt, wenn man von Werner sprach! – seinen Bruder in sich bewahrte, ihn vor der endgültigen Vernichtung bewahrte [...]. (185-186)[144]

> [And as often in these moments when he could nearly not believe that he was really alive, he thought at the same time that Werner was *not* alive anymore: his big little brother, the stronger one, always the more beautiful one […] What hurt him was not so much Werner's death but rather his unlived life. At the same time, he was suddenly consoled that he could think of Werner, remember him, that his brother as long as he, Kurt, was alive, was not completely gone, that he – in contrast to his mother, who covered her ears when one spoke of Werner! – treasured his brother, kept him from final annihilation]

While the loss of his brother is presented as a defining experience in Kurt's life, the stream of consciousness foregrounds his reflective and constructive way to cope with this traumatic experience. The memories of Werner function as a substitute for his actual existence in Kurt's life, who seeks to keep his brother from "final annihilation" by remembering him. He sees his approach to facing this loss as entirely opposed to his mother's behavior, who cannot bear to talk about her dead son. As a dispute taking place in 1961 indicates, their coping mechanisms and approaches to the past are keenly tied to their political stance in the present that in turn defines the ways in which they are willing to think about the past.

Their argument is related to a review Charlotte has written about Wolfgang Koeppen's novel *Mexikanische Nacht* in which she criticizes that the book "eignet sich nicht, um den Glauben an den Fortschritt der Menschen und an den Sieg des Sozialismus zu fördern" (127) [does not qualify to promote the believe in the progress of the people and the victory of socialism]. During a weekend outing with

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[144] All references refer to: Eugen Ruge. *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts.* Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2011.

Alexander and his wife Irina, Charlotte, hoping for Kurt's praise and approval, seeks his opinion regarding their review. She is taken aback upon his less than enthusiastic response, turning their conversation into an argument:

> – Es geht nicht um dieses Buch.
> – Mir geht es um dieses Buch.
> – Nein, sagte Kurt. Es geht hier um Richtungskämpfe. Es geht hier um Reform oder Stillstand. Demokratisierung oder Rückkehr zum Stalinismus.
> Charlotte griff sich entnervt an die Schläfen.
> – Stalinismus ... Auf einmal reden alle von Stalinismus.
> – Ich verstehe dich nicht, sagte Kurt, und obwohl er gedämpft sprach, klang seine Stimme scharf, und er betonte jedes Wort, als er sagte: Dein Sohn ist in Workuta ermordet worden.
> Charlotte sprang auf, bedeutete Kurt mit der Hand, zu schweigen.
> – Ich möchte nicht, dass du so etwas sagst, Kurt, ich möchte nicht, dass du so etwas sagst! [...]
> Kurt schwieg. Charlotte schwieg ebenfalls. (136)

> [– It's not about this book.
> – For me, it's about this book.
> – No, Kurt said. This is about factional disputes. This is about reform or standstill. Democratization or return to Stalinism.
> Charlotte annoyed grabbed her temples.
> – Stalinism … Suddenly everybody talks about Stalinism!
> – I don't understand you, Kurt said, and even though he talked quietly his voice sounded sharp, and he emphasized every word when he said: Your son was killed in Workuta.
> Charlotte leaped up, signaling Kurt with her hand to be silent.
> – I don't want you to say something like this, Kurt, I don't want you to say something like this! […]
> Kurt was silent. Charlotte was silent as well.]

Their argument exemplifies the "blur(red) boundaries between the personal and the political, the private and the public" (Fox 361) that are typical for the West German *Väterliteratur* of the 1960s and 70s as well as for the foundational narratives of the GDR (ibid.) Similar to those texts, the silence lingering at the end of this conversation suggests the family's general inability to negotiate their memory contests that have a "highly dynamic and often emotionally charged quality" (Fuchs/Cosgrove 164). Charlotte signals verbally and physically that Kurt has overstepped a boundary in mentioning not only her son's death, but also describing it as murder in the labor camp of Workuta. By staging the conflicting emotions and coping mechanisms at play in approaching a family members' death, the text emphasizes the disparate generational experiences that have resulted in differing social and political investments in the present. In

juxtaposing Kurt's traumatic experiences in the Soviet labor camps with Charlotte's romantic recounts of a nearly bourgeois life in the Mexican exile, the novel illustrates the plurality of the supposedly uniform GDR society, especially of its founding generation. While unified in their general support of the socialist project, Charlotte and Kurt symbolize the varied political standpoints within the GDR. Further, their argument highlights the problematic politics of silence that outcast experiences like Kurt's time in the Gulag or Werner's death there, not only on the national stage, but subsequently also from the communicative memory of the family. Werner's death is hence not only traumatic for Charlotte as a mother, but also as political subject, who could not uphold her ideological conviction if she were to mourn the circumstances of her son's death, since they have been eliminated from the official historical narrative. The fact that this argument, centering on the question of historical guilt, is located in the "1961" chapter of the novel provides an additional frame of reference that can only be accessed from the narrative present, in which the results of the decision between political reform or standstill that Kurt foresees to be necessary is already known.

The second conflict I want to discuss takes place between Kurt and his son Alexander. Whereas Kurt's and Charlotte's argument was constructed as one about the interpretation of socialism and its manifestations, the dispute between Alex and Kurt, in contrast, circle more around the general value of socialism as utopian ideal. Hence, their arguments represent competing discourses that arose in the private sphere of the GDR before finding their public expression in the mass protests of 1989. While the text stages three significant interactions between Kurt and Alex that are all tied to their opposing attitudes with regard to the GDR, I want to focus on their final dispute taking place during Christmas of 1991. Their argument exemplifies their continuing political disagreement that situated in the social circumstances of post-1989 Germany takes on a new existential notion. In contrast to previous arguments that had been depicted from Kurt's perspective, this fight is narrated by Irina from the perspective of an onlooker, who is for most of the conversation not even in the same room. At the time of the visit, Sascha, who left the GDR on Wilhelm's 90th birthday on October 1, 1989, has started to work at a theater in Moers, in West

Germany. At the core of his dispute with Kurt are once more their different perspectives on the GDR and

its socialist project. While they have challenged each other's political stance throughout their relationship,

in post-1989 Germany the discussion is especially charged, since their balance of power has shifted

significantly. On the one hand, Alexander and Kurt face each other as equals now that the former is an

adult. On the other hand, the power has shifted in Alexander's favor, who appears to be happily integrated

in the West German society, whereas Kurt still grapples with the sudden demise of the GDR. Once again,

the political and the personal are deeply interwoven, causing the final dispute for the time being:

> – Aha, sagte Kurt, darf man jetzt also nicht mehr über Alternativen zum Kapitalismus
> nachdenken! Wunderbar, das ist also eure Demokratie.
> – Na, Gott sei Dank, dass du in deinem Scheißsozialismus über Alternativen nachdenken
> durftest.
> – Du bist ja wirklich schon vollkommen korrumpiert, sagte Kurt.
> – Korrumpiert? Ich bin korrumpiert? Du hast vierzig Jahre lang geschwiegen, schrie
> Sascha. Vierzig Jahre lang hast du es nicht gewagt, über deine großartige sowjetischen
> Erfahrungen zu berichten.
> – Das mache ich schon noch ...
> – Ja, jetzt, wo es keinen mehr interessiert!
> – Was hast *du* denn getan! – Jetzt schrie auch Kurt: Wo waren denn *deine* Heldentaten!
> – Scheiße, schrie Sascha zurück. Scheiß auf eine Gesellschaft, die Helden braucht! (367)
>
> [– Aha, Klaus said, so one is not allowed anymore to think about alternatives to
> capitalism! Great, so this is your democracy.
> – Well, thank God that you were allowed to think about alternatives in your shitty
> socialism.
> – You are actually already completely corrupted, Kurt said.
> – Corrupted? I am corrupted? You were silent for forty years, Sascha yelled. For forty
> years you did not dare to report on your amazing soviet experiences.
> – I am still going to do that…
> – Yes, now that nobody cares anymore!
> – What did *you* do! – Now Kurt was yelling as well: Where were *your* heroic deeds?
> – Shit, Sascha yelled back. I shit on a society that needs heroes!]

The argument between Kurt and Alexander is not only staged as a recurring intergenerational struggle

about the prerogative of interpreting history, but also mirrors the discourses about interpreting the GDR's

existence that defined post-1989 society and continue to linger until today (Arnold-de Simine/Radstone

28). The character's personal investment in the debate is highlighted by the usage of personal pronouns

that are employed by the text to situate each of them on opposing sides of the ideological and

interpretative battlefield of post-1989 Germany. Kurt's reference to West Germany as "your democracy"

indicates that he conflates Sascha with the political system that he still questions. Sascha performs a similar act of integration through dissociation when he refers to "your shitty socialism." The attack of the GDR's political system is through the usage of the personal pronoun simultaneously an attack on Kurt as paternal signifier and embodiment of state power simultaneously. Their argument revisits accusations from previous fights that always centered on negotiating the dialectic that appears as defining characteristic of life in the GDR. As becomes clear, the trade-offs and constraints that Kurt was still willing to accept in support of the overall aim of creating a socialist society are inacceptable for Alexander and a symptom for the failing system. Given their long history of familial conflicts, the preliminary ruptures of the family bonds during Sascha's Christmas visit appear less as a result of the uncertainties related to the historical transformation of 1989 than as a logical consequence of the numerous years of failing communication and unresolved disagreement in the GDR. While Alexander leaving the GDR in 1989 was a manifestation of his disregard for the state, him leaving his family in 1991 can be read as a symbol for the division that separates not only East and West Germans, but East Germans themselves. As Straughn (2007) discusses in his analysis of "The Fragmentation of Memory in Eastern Germany," ""[…] memory and identity in eastern Germany after reunification have remained fragmented among incommensurable interpretations of citizenship, past and present, to national identity" (103). Alexander and Kurt's dispute over the significance of the GDR post-1989 is simultaneously an evaluation of projected life achievements as indicated by Kurt's question "What did *you* do?," which is a reaction to Alexander's challenge of Kurt's actions under socialism that he deems overall too uncritical. His attack on Kurt can therefore be read as an attack on the East German mastersignifier of the "antifascist hero" (Hell *Post-Fascist Fantasies* 254), who, similar to the GDR, has lost its final credibility in the immediate post-1989 years, after already being in doubt before the GDR's collapse. In this, the text echoes the critical intergenerational stance of the West German *Väterliteratur*.

In light of the deep rift between the two protagonists after the conflict in 1991 and the rupture of kinship relations that had intensified over several years, it comes as a surprise that in 2001 Alex and Kurt

are depicted in yet another living arrangement that has once more redefined their relationship. While the familial constellation in the narrative present is still impacted by years of mistrust and conflict, it now is defined by an entirely different power dynamic due to Kurt's struggle with dementia. It is noteworthy that Kurt faces the same disease as Wilhelm, just years later in the unified Germany, symbolizing a similar irrelevance of his point of view within the new German society. After being a Gulag-detainee and a renowned historian, Kurt's final role in his life is limited to a needy old man, whose main concern has shifted from politics to food. In being reduced to his basic human needs by the disease, Kurt unconsciously recalls the life lessons learned through the traumatic experiences from the Gulag (11). Through his disease, Kurt is diminished to his bodily functions and needs, turning him into a child-like adult who is fixated on fulfilling his existential needs. Hence, the power relationship between him and Alexander has shifted even more, putting Alexander in the position of the (unwilling) caretaker and Kurt in the role of helpless dependent. The narrative foregrounds the continuing emotional distance between father and son that by now has turned into a near-violent disregard for Kurt: "Alexander überkam der starke Dran, Kurt wehzutun ... irgendwann war ihm der Gedanke gekommen: Kurt umzubringen. Mehr als nur der Gedanke. Er hatte Varianten durchgespielt" (12). [Alexander was overwhelmed by the strong urge to hurt Kurt…one day it had occurred to him: to kill Kurt. More than just a thought. He had run through scenarios.] The scene provides another example for Alex' attempts to rid himself of Kurt's overpowering influence and hence with the ideology of the GDR. As Fox (2010) points out for earlier post-1989 texts: "Post-Wall authors found their post-fascist fantasies metamorphosing into post-communist ones; the admiration, gratitude, deference, and guilt regarding the generation of the fathers, a central aspect of the foundation novels and their successors, yielded to fantasies of revolt, castration, and murder" (347). The reappearance of these fantasies indicates that these generational struggles have not been resolved and continue to haunt the post-1989 family novels. Nonetheless, in presenting Alex as Kurt's caretaker, despite his strong emotional rejection of his father, the text insinuates a familial bond and a sense of responsibility that only vanishes when Alexander faces his own, untimely death.

Towards the end of the novel, it is this familial bond that provides Alexander with the opportunity to readdress the strained relationship with his father. While politics and the public sphere were cast as the defining elements in Kurt and Alexander's deteriorating relationship, memories and the private sphere are staged as the medium of familial reconciliation. Upon leaving for Mexico, Alexander finds numerous letters and notes by Kurt that he shoves into an old chess-game box, made by a former fellow Gulag inmate, which he plans on selling later on for additional travel money, displaying a distinct disregard for its emotional or even historical value. In taking Kurt's handwritten accounts with him, Alexander implicitly weakens his eagerness to separate from his father's sphere of influence. As becomes clear later on, these letters allow Alexander access to information that by now had become inaccessibly caught in Kurt's dementia-stricken mind and provide the chance for an intergenerational dialogue of sorts that could only take place in the realm of old notes and letters. By entering into an imaginary conversation with Kurt, both Alexander and him partake in the creation of a communicative memory that after the stories of his grandmother, finally also includes the parental generation in the mediation of family history (Cohen-Pfister 255).

At the beginning of his travels, though, Alexander's behavior is still deeply impacted by the image of the overpowering father of whom he tries to rid himself, as is exemplified by an episode in which Alexander, upon arriving in Mexico, debates whether to purchase a hat or not: "Er kauft den Hut, um gegen die ihm anerzogenen Prinzipien zu verstoßen. Er kauft ihn, um gegen seinen Vater zu verstoßen. Er kauft ihn, um gegen sein ganzes Leben zu verstoßen, in dem er *keinen* Hut trug. Warum eigentlich?" (100) [He buys the hat to transgress the principals instilled in him. He buys it, to outrage his father. He buys it, to break with his entire life, in which he did *not* wear a hat. Why actually?]. The scene demonstrates Alexander's desperate attempt to consolidate the emotional disconnect between himself and his father through a material marker. The accessory as a component of material culture (Hall 1997) is charged with identity-defining powers and becomes the symbol for Alexander's effort to break with his

past.[145] Ironically, in purchasing the hat, he repeats a fashion statement of his grandfather Wilhelm, who donned a hat "zu jeder Jahreszeit" (123) [in every season]. Thus, unknowingly or subconsciously Alexander replicates a component of Wilhelm's personality, which ultimately aligns with his efforts to trace his grandparents' life in Mexico. In light of his impending death, Alexander aims to reconnect with the least tainted part of his family history that simultaneously coincides with the safe realm of his childhood memories, since his image of Mexico has been shaped by the stories that his grandmother Charlotte told him. Even though his attempts to repossess the space that he knows from photographs and anecdotes fails, they ultimately provide him with a reason to leave the big cities behind for a quiet hut at the beach where he can seek out his father's notes.

At first, reading Kurt's handwriting transfers "noch einmal all das Fordernde, Raumgreifende, Beherrschende […], das Kurt für ihn einmal bedeutet hat" (421) [once again all that demanding, expansive, controlling […] that Kurt had once meant to him] into Alexander's Mexican exile. But Alexander is able to put these feelings to rest and approach his father's account with curiosity, which quickly allows him to detect distinct differences in the memories Kurt recorded of events that Alexander remembers as well: "Es gibt auch Notizen, in denen Alexander vorkommt, wobei Kurts Erinnerungen von dem, was er selbst erinnert, erstaunlich stark abweichen" (422) [There are also notes that feature Alexander, and Kurt's memories deviate remarkably from that which he remembered himself]. This is one of the few examples in the text, when memory is not only staged but also reflected. With the history of their relationship in mind, it does not come as a surprise that Alexander notices the differences between his own memories and the ones that Kurt recorded. But in contrast to previous situations, in this instance the differences are not causing distance and discord, but rather open an entryway for Alexander into a part of his father's life that he has not known until now. Thus, through his letters the previously distant and

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[145] A discussion of clothes as component of identity negotiations/performance can be found in Butler. *Gender Trouble.* London: Routledge, 1990.

inapproachable father[146] turns for the first time into an actual human being and more than just a stand-in for a political ideology. The silence that has existed between them so often during their lives is now filled with Kurt's words that he would not be able to express himself anymore. And instead of arguing, Alexander is willing and able to "listen" to the words and to begin a conversation that they could never have before. Parallel to Scribner's (2003) claim that "it is not the securing of the material world that activates remembrance, but rather our collective displacement and reassessment of these things" (43) the text intersects two forms of displacement as triggers for Alexander's memory: firstly his literal spatial displacement that takes him from Germany to Mexico; and secondly the displacement of the GDR past into the present. Both the physical and the ideological, historical alterations are presented as a prerequisite for the engagement and ultimately reassessment of the family's past.

Despite the geographical relocation and the solitude of Alexander's mediation of family memories, it is within the family and through shared memories that the ruptured family structures can be – at least minimally – mended. With this narrative move, the text ultimately re-imagines the family that is constructed not only as the interpersonal constellation where societal conflicts crystallize and public discourses turn into ruptured kinships, but also as the social arena where – if an intergenerational dialogue is initiated – these ruptures, including their historical and ideological triggers can be negotiated. Despite the uncertain ending of the novel that leaves it open if Alexander will survive and even return to Germany, the text does not gloss over the tensions and ruptures that have defined the family arrangements in the past, but in pointing to the different memories that are based on differing perceptions in the moment it insinuates likely reasons for the struggling relationships. Eigler's (2005) claim that she has made in *Writing the New Germany* for a different set of post-1989 texts, is, hence, also a fitting characterization of Ruge's novel: "While most of these recent novels thus lack an explicit political or critical stance, they display an acute awareness for the ways in which ideologies turned into authoritarian and repressive

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[146] This is comparable to Mitscherlich's concept of the "invisible father" as described in Mitscherlich. "The Invisible Father." *German Essays on Psychology.* Eds. Schirmacher/Nebelung. London, New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2001. 246-271.

practices in the course of 20th century German and European history" (30) In addition, Ruge's text highlights how these practices inform and impact the private sphere. But rather than subscribing to an interpretive model that casts state ideology as the negative and disruptive influence on the pure and innocent private sphere, the text emphasizes that ideology is a construct of the people who turn it into a lived reality through their action and choices. Hence, the narrative underscores the agency involved not only in bringing the GDR to an end, but also in keeping it alive for 40 years. Through this, the text provides an insight into the pluralistic society of the GDR and the citizens' multifarious investments in the ultimately utopian vision of creating a socialist state. Similar to the previously discussed texts, the historic shift of 1989 is represented as the necessary historical caesura to address the familial conflicts of the past. Only in 2001, over ten years after the end of the GDR, is Alexander able to engage with his family's history, including his life in the GDR, in a productive manner. That he can only approach this project outside of Germany suggests that not only a temporal distance but also a distance to the dominant public discourses is required for constructively approaching recent Germany history. This necessity of distance is emphasized by Alexander's access to the world altering events of 9/11, which he only attempts to understand through the repeated reading of a Mexican newspaper. The foreign words paired with the disturbing pictures of the attacks on the World Trade Center suggest that the vernacular he knows is not applicable anymore to approaching the postmodern social constellations of the 21st century. Nonetheless, it is his simultaneous reading of his father's notes and the look into the past that frames his view on the most recent historical upheaval.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, textual representations of post-1989 Germany construct familial arrangements and memory as intersecting realms through which recent German history can be negotiated. Family is in these novels as much a social space for memory exchange and negotiation as it is a core element of memories itself. The centrality of family as decisive social constellation in post-1989 German literature from East and West German authors further indicates that social trends like globalization and

individualization that are characterized by the dissolution and instability of intimate and closely

connected interpersonal ties are accompanied by a resurgence of the socially sanctioned realm of family.

The broadening of horizons and the increasing permeability of any kind of borders appears to go hand in

hand with the reinvigoration of the family or at least family-like structures. This longing for belonging

that permeates both texts by East and West German authors highlights a social and literary trend that

appears to be less related to the experience of an ideological void in post-1989 Germany than to

postmodern social instabilities.

While familial relations influence the memory processes in all novels discussed here, their

respective textual representations differ greatly depending on the author's generational belonging: The

text by the author generation of the 1930s and 1940s construct unstable narratives, including narrative

devices that undermine the authority of the narrator and ultimately the text itself. Temporal layers are

blurred and so are the narrating voices. The working of memory and memory processes are explicitly

reflected and the narrative process that is heavily depended on memories is so made transparent for the

reader. The texts by authors born in the 1950s and 60s, in contrast, move away from the reflections of

memory and rather foreground the staging of memory processes within more formally constructed

narrative frameworks, such as the epistolary novel for example. At the same time, the texts employ

devices that continuously undermine their stable formal structure, for example by connecting the temporal

anchors of the text with moments of historical disruption and instability, as seen and discussed for Ruge's

novel. Overall, the later texts shift from a singular perspective to presenting multiple voices or to

revisiting the same event from multiple perspectives, as is the case in Schulze and Ruge. This aligns with

a shift in memory representations that Saunders and Pinfold (2013) have described as follows:

> […] the shift from visual to textual memory media since the GDR's demise (Geier, 2011:
> 102) is complemented by a second shift from monolinear, autobiographical narrative to
> polyvocal, multi-perspectival fictional texts which, by inviting the reader to invest
> emotionally in multiple characters and voices, allow him or her to experience vicariously
> a more complex image of the GDR. It is perhaps in such texts that the ongoing cultural
> memory of the GDR will be located. (6-7)

What monolinear (Maron, Becker) and polyvocal (Ruge, Schulze) memory narratives share, is the prevalence of gaps and voids that are tied to subconscious repression or conscious forgetting of familial ruptures or personal disappointment. As is illustrated in all of these novels, characters either choose to forget or are unable to recall specific instances of the past, which seems to be most prevalent in Maron's text in her near complete narrative deletion of the GDR. And even the multi-perspectival texts of Ruge and Schulze demonstrate, how each perception and description of an event is defined by gaps, thus including the moment of 'forgetting' already in the storing of the memory. Hogwood (2013) with reference to Connerton sees this as an ultimately positive development that points towards the positive and constructive coping mechanism in place in post-1989 Germany:

> As Connerton explains, this type of 'forgetting' should not be understood as a loss. Instead, it represents an active and constructive choice to discard memories that no longer serve any useful purpose and that might even obstruct the development of new identities and aims. This combination of remembering and forgetting suggests that the emerging post-GDR identity is essentially forward-looking: that memories of the GDR are selected and reconstructed in order to secure survival under new social and economic conditions. (44)

As the post-1989 texts emphasize, the negotiation of what is remembered and what is forgotten ultimately takes place in familial arrangements, despite the strong impact of public discourses of remembrance. The texts demonstrate that these negotiations depend less on intragenerational coalitions, as was the case for example with the so-called 68er movement, but are rather anchored in intergenerational constellations, mainly between parents and children. This indicates the contested position of the ideal of the nuclear family in the literary imagination of German after 1989. It further suggests that, as Beise (2011) argues, the resurgence of family, especially the socially contingent construct of the nuclear family, in post-1989 literature can be read as "Reflex kultureller Verunsicherung" [reflection of cultural insecurity]. As I have shown in this chapter, this insecurity or uncertainty originating in the public sphere deeply marks familial relations in literary representations after 1989 that construct family as important concept in addressing historic events and their social impact.

Conclusion

In year 24 after the opening of the Berlin Wall that epitomized the downfall of the GDR and initiated the German unification, contemplations about the state of this process seem to have moved to the margins of the political and media discourse, resurfacing mainly around the anniversary dates of November 9 and October 3 or the publication of the governmental *Bericht zum Stand der deutschen Einheit* (Report on the State of the German Unification). Interestingly, during these times of mandatory interest, a resurgence of family metaphors has been noticeable in political speeches and newspaper articles that frame public evaluations of German unity for example through reflections about the "fremde Brüder und Schwestern" [foreign brothers and sisters] (Sturm 2007) or "Deutschland, eine Patchworkfamilie" [Germany, a patchwork family] (Kattermann 2009). The continuing relevance of family as versatile metaphor to capture the contingent and contested project of German unification suggest its abiding power as referential framework to negotiate 40 years Germany's separation and the struggle of coming together as one nation over the past 20 years.

This study demonstrates that family features as significant narrative construct through which literature in post-1989 Germany examines the meaning of the historical transformation initiated through the GDR's demise. The novels discussed here stand for a larger body of texts that construct heterogeneous family arrangements, including elective kinship relations such as friendships and affairs, as the social constellations where the challenges of the unifying Germany as well as unresolved experiences from the post-war and GDR past can be approached and negotiated. In this process, the texts partake in a meta-discourse about the notion of family itself, particularly its significance as socio-imaginary space in post-1989 Germany, emphasizing its hybridity and social constructedness.

The novels discussed in this study construct gender, generation, and the public discourse as three major influences on familial negotiation processes of historic change. As the analysis of selected post-1989 novels has shown, texts imagine the tensions within familial arrangements as well as their negation

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as highly gendered processes.[147] In the novels, the social and representational concept of gender intersects with generational constructions in that familial intergenerational conflicts are mainly carried out between characters of the same gender and of neighboring generations (mother-daughter, father-son). Intragenerational conflicts, in contrast, often take place in cross-gendered constellations, mostly between spouses or unmarried partners. The intersection of gender and generation indicates that narrative constructions of family in post-wall Germany are invested in highlighting disparate referential frameworks for approaching the historical change of 1989 as key element in the continuing struggle of unifying Germany. In addition to character's dissimilar experiences of the GDR's demise and its aftermath based on whether they are East or West German, believed in or opposed the GDR's utopian project, actively participated in the mass protests of 1989 or stood at the sidelines, the texts emphasize the differing historical experiences and positionalities based on gender and/or generation. By infusing the polar constellations of GDR remembrance culture (Arnold-de Simine/Radstone 27) with reflections about the significance of gender constellations and generational belonging, post-1989 literature provides new access points for approaching the historical transformation of 1989 as well as the subsequent multifarious literary, political, and medial constructions of the GDR in the unifying Germany. The novels selected for this study often position public discourses about the GDR and the German unification in tension with private memory narratives and individual experiences in post-1989 Germany. Due to the challenges to negotiate these tensions within the public sphere, post-1989 literature constructs familial relationships as crucial social constellations where the necessary negotiation processes can be carried out.

In approaching literary imaginations of familial arrangements through the concepts of memory, agency, and space, it was my goal to highlight three crucial components in the narrative construction of kinship relations. Doing so focused my close readings of the selected texts, which ultimately also provided insights about these concepts and their significance in post-1989 Germany. In addition to

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[147] For family as gendered social institution see Kimmel. *The Gendered Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, especially Chapter 6.

particular findings with regard to memory, agency, and space respectively, each of them underscored the narrative construction of moments of alienation between the private and the public sphere as well as of the pressures that subsequently culminate in the private sphere as a result of this disparity. While my analyses have addressed loss, rupture, and trauma as important experiences that the texts attribute to characters in the aftermath of 1989, my main interest was to foreground reflective and constructive modes of approaching these moments of historical upheaval and turmoil as well as their dependency on familial arrangements, ultimately highlighting the notions of renewal in a character's attitude and behavior. As I hope I have shown, post-1989 literature is keenly invested in portraying and constructing modes of renewal and closely connects them with familial arrangements. Rather than indicating a "conservative turn" in the literary imagination of post-1989 Germany, the withdrawal into the private sphere and the privileging of family recalls an artistic strategy that was prevalent in the cultural representations of the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s (Gabriele Mueller 199) and is in this study approached as an indicator of social crises. Similar to cinematic approaches of the 1990s that engaged with Germany after the opening of the Berlin wall, the texts selected for this study "address the more complicated effects of historical loss and liberation related to the end of the GDR, which did not enter the dominant cultural discussions centered around national victory" (Pinkert *Film and Memory* 207). In this context, it is noteworthy that the modes of renewal are mainly constructed as inwardly directed, privately-oriented impulses of characters. While the texts emphasize that a character's approach to 1989 as a moment of possibilities rather than solely a moment of uncertainties has an overall influence on the character's life, ranging from familial arrangements to economic or professional success, these privately constructed notions of renewal do not impact society on a larger scale. This relates to the oppositional construction of private and public sphere in the narratives and indicates a persisting power asymmetry that marks far-reaching societal change initiated on the level of the individual as questionable.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the selected novels portray how characters counter the experience of social, personal, and spatial displacement in post-1989 Germany through the reconstruction of malleable

spheres of belonging that the narratives relocate nearly exclusively to the private sphere and intersect with elective kinship relations. The texts discussed in this chapter, hence, foreground affective social constellations outside or on the margin of the socially sanctioned ideal of the nuclear family, such as friendships, extramarital affairs, or married couples. Chapter 2 demonstrates that post-1989 literature confers its characters' agency to address and undermine the stereotypes that continue to define the interaction between East and West Germans. The close readings in this chapter indicate the significance of negotiating the GDR-past as prerequisite for addressing the challenges in unifying Germany, which the texts connect to a general devaluation of East German's life experiences. While post-1989 narratives of the 1990s construct the relationship between spouses or extra-marital lovers as crucial social sphere for the negotiation of these experiences, the relationship between parents and children moves more to the narrative foreground in texts after 2000. This shift in the literary imagination of familial arrangements is also evidenced by the analyses of the memory contests in post-1989 Germany that are at the core of Chapter 3. The texts situate these contests between public commemoration and private remembrance, and extend them to the disparate memories of different family members, who hence have to negotiate conflicting memory narratives within and beyond the imagined boundaries of familial relationships. The close readings in all chapters demonstrate that the texts generally cast 1989 as a moment of rupture that quickly initiates a large trend of re-evaluation, targeting political representatives, utopian projects, and institutions, but also personal beliefs, dreams, and life-achievements.[148] This re-evaluation, which the texts mark as more pressing for East German characters, is at first primarily governed by external forces, such as the political and media discourse, that overall focus on narratives of devaluation with regard to the GDR and its citizens' accomplishments. Nonetheless, post-1989 literature emphasizes that in openly engaging with these discourses, characters ultimately obtain a stance of agency that allows them to address their past beyond the limited framework of nostalgia and approach the historic rupture of 1989 as opportunity to revisit configurations of the self as well as possibly traumatic experiences of the past.

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[148] Glaeser (2000), Cooke (2005), Saunders/Pinfold (2013).

In emphasizing the narrative imagination of renewal in my readings, I wanted to show that these

approaches to 1989, are not limited to ironic or picaresque narratives for which they have been

emphasized so far (Nause 2002, Twark 2007). Rather, the reflective and constructive modes of

negotiating the meaning of historical change pervade post-1989 novels that span over 18 years and

represent a variety of narrative approaches to Germany's GDR past as well as the unifying Germany. The

texts range "from monolinear, autobiographical narrative[s] to polyvocal, multi-perspectival fictional

texts" (Saunders/Pinfold 7) and portray heterogeneous familial arrangements. In shifting the analytical

focus from occurrences of loss and trauma to processes of renewal and demonstrating the significance of

familial bonds in the literary imagination after 1989, this study provides an innovative approach for the

analysis of post-1989 literature. Through this it contributes to the scholarly field of German studies in

general and research about the GDR and post-1989 Germany specifically, while at the same time

connecting to scholarship on post-communist culture. The analysis of familial arrangements and their

significance in contemporary German literature appears to be especially important, since narrative

constructions of the family have been researched for nearly all historical periods[149], but have remained on

the margins of scholarship on contemporary German literature.[150] This could be explained with

perceptions of the family as ahistorical and normalized social constellation that might even appear

outdated and irrelevant in the 20th and 21st century. I hope that the analyses in this study have

demonstrated in contrast that the cultural imagination in post-1989 Germany continues to be invested in

family as crucial representational concept for approaching and negotiating German history in its post-

socialist context. Post-1989 literature privileges the private sphere, and heterogeneous kinship relations in

particular, in examining the meaning of ideological collapse and historic change. The texts revisit central

societal issues that arise in the aftermath of the GDR's demise and during the process of unification in

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[149] Luhmann (1982) [17.Jdh.], Streit (1997) [19.Jhd.], Villwock (1999) [18.+19.Jhd.], Spörk (2000) [19.Jhd], Recker (2000) [19.Jhd], Braun (2001) [15.+16.Jhd.].

[150] Eichenberg. *Familie – Ich – Nation. Narrative Analysen zeitgenössischer Generationsromane*. Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009. Zhang. *Der Wandel des Familienbildes in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945*. Frankfurt a.M. et. al: Peter Lang, 2012.

German within familial relationships and in doing so amplify social tensions as well as the varied impacts of historic rupture. Further, this narrative trend not only positions crucial debates regarding the historical transformation of 1989 within familial arrangements, but simultaneously engages with social constructions of family before and after 1989, negotiating notions of family in the process.

Through widening the analytical scope from kinship relations usually ascribed to the nuclear family, such as parent-child or matrimonial relationships, to social constellations outside this traditional or conservative prescription of family, this study sought to address the variety and hybridity of familial arrangements in post-1989 literature. Additionally, it was my aim to emphasize that these elective kinship relations are narratively constructed alongside the socially contingent ideal of the nuclear family in that they are based on similar affirmative affects, such as love, support, and caring. The narratives further imagine these voluntary familial bonds as placeholders or substitutes for more traditional familial arrangements to which characters ultimately either return or for which they continue to long. Hence, this study demonstrates the prevalence of the normative ideal of the nuclear family in the literary imagination of post-1989 and reads its persistence in "an age in which non-familial relationships seem to be increasingly important" (Tincknell 2) as an indicator of continuing societal instabilities that in the narratives are approached through a retreat into the imagined safety of socially sanctioned familial arrangements. The resurgence of family as significant representational construct in moments of political or historical crisis is also addressed in scholarship about literary imaginations of post-war Germany, such as Snyder Hook's (2001) *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German novel. Literary Explorations in the Aftermath of the Third Reich*. Without equating the Third Reich and the GDR, a comparative perspective connecting studies about representations of family at different historical moments of crises could enrich the understanding of family and its particular significance in post-1989 Germany.

While I have attempted to create an extensive archive of family arrangements in the literary imagination of post-1989 literature, the works of the most recent generations of writers, born approximately between 1975 and 1985 or even after 1989 are missing from this study. Future research

could benefit from including the distinct voices of this generation, represented for example by works by Jana Hensel, Claudia Rusch, Julia Schoch, or Jakob Hein, since their often autobiographic approaches to narrating the GDR past and the present in the unifying Germany appear to be less generationally unified, and strongly impacted by familial experiences and narratives. Due to this prevalence of autobiographically infused texts combined with the limited first-hand experience of the GDR due to the author's age, these texts would provide a valuable insight into post-memory processes in contemporary German culture. It would be interesting to analyze which representational trends continue to pervade the narrative imagination, which new trends have evolved, particularly with regard to familial arrangements, and how they relate to recent publications by previous generations, who had a different investment in the GDR and its utopian project and consequently a different experience of its demise.

Another subject that I have not addressed in detail is the relevance of intergenerational silences in the narrative construction of family after 1989. While I do neither equate the "Third Reich" and the GDR nor the respective historical ruptures caused by their end, I agree with previous scholarship that the cultural imagination in the aftermath of these ideologically charged nations share similarities with regard to what kind of narratives are preferred and how these narratives are constructed.[151] As Schlant (1999) has aptly described, literature "reveals even where it is silent; its blind spots and absences speak a language stripped of conscious agendas" (3). Hence, the narrative construction of communicative voids and absences in literary constructions of family after 1989 are noteworthy, since they might indicate yet another level of intergenerational tensions as well as a particular negotiation strategy. Analyzing these silences could provide an important addition to the analytical framework for approaching post-1989 literature, especially assuming that "what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meaning" (Eagleton 179). Based on my argument that post-1989 literature is invested in reflective and constructive modes of engaging with the past, it would be productive to analyze if and how

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[151] See for example Pinkert (2008), especially the epilogue. Or Erhart/Niefanger, eds. *Zwei Wendezeiten. Blicke auf die deutsche Literatur 1945 und 1989.* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997.

these intergenerational silences could be read less as traumatic signifiers or indicators of repression, but instead as indicator that generational and societal negotiating processes regarding the historic transformation of 1989 are still incomplete.

In 2012, looking back on 22 years of German unification, author Christoph Hein repeated and defended his initial forecast regarding the time frame of the unification project: "Ich bleibe aber dabei, auch wenn ich damals dafür kritisiert wurde: Das wird insgesamt 40 Jahre dauern, auch die Trennung dauerte 40 Jahre" ("Christoph Hein") [I stick to it, even though I have been criticized for it back then: It will take all in all 40 years, the separation as well lasted 40 years.] Looking at literary texts of the now completed first half of this time frame shows that contemplations about loss and rupture have been complemented by the narrative imagination of constructive approaches to the past. While processes of renewal are still underway, post-1989 literature appears invested in reshaping the public discourse regarding the German unification and demonstrates a particular interest in heterogeneous familial arrangements as crucial socio-imaginary concept for approaching the historical transformation of 1989.

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