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# Overthrowing Reality: Photo-Poems in 1980s German Democratic Republic Samizdat

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## ***Introduction: Intermediality in German Democratic Republic Samizdat***

In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, 1949–89) the Getty Research Institute (GRI) acquired a substantial collection of archives and books from scholars, artists, and curators from the former GDR.<sup>1</sup> Among them, a remarkable collection of more than one hundred handcrafted, limited-edition artists' books, magazines, and portfolios produced by small independent presses in the 1980s stands out. This collection was originally assembled by book-art scholar Jens Henkel, coauthor of the foundational bibliography *DDR 1980–1989: Künstlerbücher und originalgrafische Zeitschriften im Eigenverlag: Eine Bibliografie* (1991; Self-published artists' books and graphic arts magazines: A bibliography).<sup>2</sup> While the Henkel collection has been available in GRI special collections since its acquisition in 1993, the scholarly community was not broadly aware of its presence prior to its having been aggregated within the GRI's Library Catalog under one searchable heading.<sup>3</sup>

During the Cold War, across the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, independently (and often clandestinely) produced literature was known as samizdat, after *самиздат* (self-published) in Russian, or, for work published by independent presses, *im Eigenverlag* in German. Much like in other countries of the Soviet Bloc, there were numerous types of samizdat in the GDR, including environmental samizdat, samizdat by women and individuals of marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities, and the artistic samizdat under discussion here. The GDR's artistic samizdat of the 1980s represents the collaborative work of a vibrant community of emerging artists experimenting across media who were seeking to communicate with each other while circumventing state-sponsored production, publication, and distribution systems.<sup>4</sup> By creating limited print runs (from a handful to fewer than one hundred copies), artists could avoid having to secure official permits and thus bypassed government censorship.

Overall, although numerous studies addressing artists' books and magazines produced by small independent presses in the GDR have been published since the

Wende (a term that refers to the dissolution of the GDR and the reunification of Germany), much of this important area of cultural production has yet to be studied, due in part to the vast output of this kind of work, which is, moreover, dispersed across various public and private collections on both sides of the Atlantic.

Among the samizdat produced in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, the intermedial character of the samizdat under discussion here stands out as a unique form of artistic expression.<sup>5</sup> As a descriptor of innovative artistic production, the term *intermedia* was first introduced in the mid-1960s by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins to refer to art that “fall(s) conceptually between established or traditional media.”<sup>6</sup> It more broadly applies to artwork that crosses the boundaries between distinct art media, such as Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, John Heartfield’s graphics combined with photography, or American artist Allan Kaprow’s happenings, to produce synthetic or synesthetic experiences.

Intermediality as an artistic practice in East Germany has been a focus of art historian Sara Blaylock in her monograph, in the context of her discussion of Intermedia I, the legendary festival that took place in Coswig (GDR) in 1985. Blaylock argues that while the conceptual framework for intermedial art in East Germany was consistent in many respects with the term’s inception in the writings of Higgins, its theoretical grounding with particular respect to the East German situation was enhanced and shaped not only by art events such as the Intermedia I festival but also through discussions conducted in the art journal *Bildende Kunst* (Visual art), which, in 1981 and between April and June 1982, published several articles on the topic and even devoted a whole issue to experimental art forms in 1988.<sup>7</sup>

Blaylock points out how in 1989 in East Germany art historian Eugen Blume teamed up with Christoph Tannert, co-organizer of the Coswig Intermedia I festival, to put together the pathbreaking Permanente Kunstkonferenz (Permanent Art Conference), demonstrating that there was a “vast movement toward a different kind of cultural practice being led by artists and art professionals,” despite the authorities’ attempt to undermine such developments.<sup>8</sup>

This vast movement developed over the years out of a legal loophole that allowed visual artists to reproduce up to ninety-nine copies without official permits. As book-art scholar and East German samizdat collector Reinhard Grüner explains, writers who had limited opportunities to publish their work took advantage of this loophole by embedding their texts into visual or graphic works; this intermedial collaboration provided a platform for writers to publish their work as integral art forms rather than as literary texts, leading to new and autonomous ways of artistic expression that could circumvent censorship.<sup>9</sup>

Since the early 1980s, the samizdat artists in the Henkel collection collaboratively combined a wide variety of media art, integrating texts (poetry and literature) with printmaking, photography, music scores, and performance-art documentation; they did this while borrowing styles and techniques from various twentieth-century artistic movements in the service of making work that suited their purposes and turned out to

be, nevertheless, very much of its moment. While the artists often reclaimed prewar art forms such as German expressionism, Dada, surrealism, and abstraction, they integrated these with more recent forms of concrete poetry, conceptual art, and plein-air actions.

Highlighting the GRI's collection, this article draws inspiration from the scholarship on the intermedial nature of these self-published works. The works are characterized by the deliberate combination and juxtaposition of different graphic media—including printmaking, collage, and photography—with texts to create dynamic combinations of at times incongruous and polyvalent visual and textual narratives.<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting a variety of art media, the Henkel artists' books collection contains a gamut of contents and formats, sizes, materials, aesthetics, styles, and designs. From books in simple leporello formats, such as Manfred Butzmann's series of juxtaposed photographs *19 Schaufenster in Pankow* (1989, Nineteen shopwindows in Pankow), to the magnum opus of technical assemblage and multisensory reading titled *Unaulutu: Steinchen im Sand: Ein Malerbuch* (Unaulutu: Pebbles in sand: An artist's book) by Frieder Heinze and Olaf Wegewitz, these works defy easy categorization. Still, the material is rich in evidence of artists working together across different media, composing narratives that integrated images, poetry, and prose, and sometimes music in the form of accompanying tapes or scores. Because the objects that they produced were unsanctioned limited editions, they were compelled to make do with the kind of printing tools that were readily available. Accordingly, their output has a characteristically raw, uniquely handmade look. The bindings of books and journals might be fastened by staples on the central-fold spine, glued with stationery-store supplies, or elegantly stitched in the Japanese style. Multiple copies of texts were mostly reproduced with carbon paper on a typewriter or by mimeograph. Photocopying was used only rarely, when artists could access photocopiers, which were closely regulated by Eastern European regimes during the Cold War.

The case studies in this article examine especially the intermedial relationship between photography and poetry in different approaches that take into account both prewar avant-garde art forms and contemporaneous art movements and trends. The status of these experimental works in the longer history of European art movements has to be considered in terms of their particular historical context; these works were created, for the most part, collaboratively under the unusual conditions of working on the margins of or parallel to the East German art system and publishing industry. In art historical terms, this samizdat emerged during the heyday of postmodernism in Europe and the United States, which was frowned upon by GDR officials and to which some of the artists in question were exposed mostly through German translations of works by French theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault smuggled in from West Berlin by friends. Indeed, for some poets, including Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, Rainer Schedlinski, or Hans-Joachim Schulze, postmodernism provided theoretical frameworks for critiquing official East German discourse in their poetry and essays.<sup>11</sup>

More significantly still, the emergence of East German samizdat also coincides with the integration of modernist and avant-garde movements into the state's official canon—a convoluted process that began with de-Stalinization in 1956, was negotiated at the 1963 Kafka conference in Liblice, Czechoslovakia, and culminated in Erich Honecker's proclamation in 1971 that there would be no more taboos in the GDR's cultural production.<sup>12</sup> This relaxation was not unconditional, as the expulsion of East German songwriter and poet Wolf Biermann in 1976 served as a demonstration of the limitations on artistic expressions. Yet the 1980s saw the publication of numerous studies devoted to movements that, officially, were previously unsanctioned—from German expressionism to surrealism and Dada—on which, as already mentioned, the samizdat production in question draws. While a precise anchoring of this oeuvre in relation to discourses of modernism, postmodernism, and the (neo-)avant-garde is not possible, given the constraints of this essay and the heterogeneity of the oeuvre, Slaviciist and comparatist Svetlana Boym's capacious category of the "off-modern"—defined as a "detour into the unexplored potentials of the modern project [that] recovers unforeseen pasts and ventures into the side alleys of modern history at the margins of error of major philosophical, economic, and technological narratives of modernization and progress" (rather than, say, the postmodern captivation with the absurdity of communication)—aptly describes the works' varying preoccupations with the ruins of the East German project, with the utopian horizons of the historical avant-gardes, or with previous generations of experimental or marginalized authors.<sup>13</sup> The latter gave rise to transgenerational solidarities, especially among women artists and poets in the GDR, to whom a portion of this article will attend by discussing the collaborative artworks by Marion Wenzel (with Wolfgang Henne and Steffen Volmer), the influences of European modernist writers and American artists on the Günther-Jahn-Bach Editionen, and Christine Schlegel's engagement with posthumously published poet Inge Müller.

### ***Photo-Poetry***

Poetry's formal succinctness and well-established tradition in the GDR made it an appealing mode of expression for East German samizdat artists of the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> But while poetry's ubiquity in East German samizdat production has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, its integration with photography in samizdat publications has been less scrutinized. In contrast to conventional GDR photography, samizdat photography, produced for the most part by a younger generation of photographers born in the 1950s, is characterized by technical and thematic experimentation aligned with that moment's innovative trends in performance art and conceptual photography.<sup>15</sup>

In East German samizdat, poems, rather than being accompanied by traditional illustrations, were often an integral part of the graphic work (such as engraving, etching, relief printing, and serigraphy), etched or carved directly onto the printing plates of original, limited-edition prints. Some artists repurposed found photographs,

photomechanical prints, and collage as alternative forms of visual poetry. Poetry was also supplemented or enhanced with photographic prints, often reproduced in artists' books as original gelatin silver prints. What follows will examine East German samizdat's innovative practice of the intermedial genre of photo-poetry.

In his recent book on the history of photo-poetry, Michael Nott, citing Nicole Boulestreau's coinage of the term *photopoème*, quotes Boulestreau: "In the photopoem, meaning progresses in accordance with the reciprocity of writing and figures: reading becomes interwoven through alternating restitchings of the signifier into text and image."<sup>16</sup> For Nott, Boulestreau suggests that the *photopoème* "should be defined not by its production but its reception, as a practice of reading and looking that relies on the reader/viewer to make connections between, and create meaning from, text and image."<sup>17</sup> Nott outlines the different types of relationships between photograph and poem, those that can be "of disruption and serendipity, appropriation and exchange, evocation and metaphor."<sup>18</sup> Photo-poetry, in this sense, challenges the reader to consume a message by interpreting it through reading and looking; the two media (poem and photograph) require distinct vocabularies. This interplay between the visual and textual components invites an interactive and layered engagement with the artwork, and the ensuing process of decoding and interpreting both direct and indirect correspondences can evoke a unique experiential response or stimulate metaphorical understanding.

Following Nott's two-pronged emphasis on meaning-making and reception, this study charts three different ways by means of which photo-poetry artists have challenged their audience to decode a message created from the combination of photography and poetic verses. The study also explores the genre's significance to the generation of GDR artists that produced it. Three different approaches to photo-poetry will be discussed: separate juxtapositions of poetry and photography as autonomous, discrete practices in dialogue within a narrative sequence, across consecutive pages of an artist's book; montage of photograph and poem into a single work of art; and more elaborate intermedial fusion that combines found photographs with printmaking, painting, and poetic verses transcribed by hand in the context of a poet's oeuvre as a visual and textual narrative.

### ***Landscape as Signs***

The artist's book *Landschaft als Zeichen, messbar-vermessbar* (Landscape as signs, measurable, surveyable) explores the intermedial aesthetics of juxtaposing self-referential forms of poetry with photography. The book was made in Leipzig in 1983 by book-artist Henne with printmaker Steffen Volmer and photographer Wenzel. It is in landscape format and bound with four small metal screws reminiscent of mechanical assemblage components. The poetry is typed in Courier on red-lined metric graph paper, followed on subsequent pages by original black-and-white photographs of low contrast—ethereal landscapes showing the silhouette of a leafless forest, barely visible

in the winter fog, or reflections of reeds in still water, which look like abstracted signs of an illegible language. Within foldouts beneath the photographs there are mounted etchings or embossed prints in pairs (by Henne or Vollmer) of abstract compositions that visually render the themes of nature and artifice as coexisting, complementary, or conflicting worlds.

The book explores whether a landscape's value can be measured, surveyed, or quantified, and is critical of threats to the environment from pollution and the exploitation of natural resources.<sup>19</sup> The three poems call for the recovery and preservation of the natural landscape, addressing nature and culture as well as the impact of humans on the environment. Henne's concrete poem "Landschaft" is laid out on graph paper across Cartesian coordinates, for which the horizontal and vertical axes are composed of the repeated plus (+) signs of a typewriter. The grid-based composition evokes the mathematical procedure involved in measuring the value of the landscape, comprising the land and its natural resources (fig. 1):

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landscape
landscape
landscape

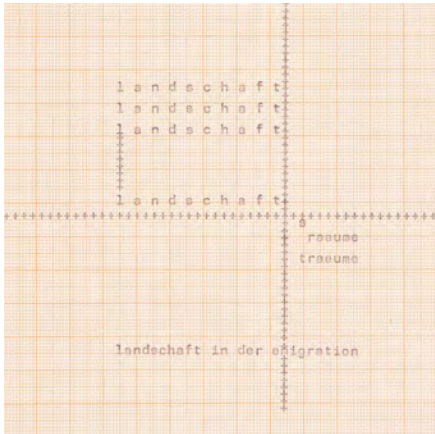
landscape
      's
      spaces
      dreams

landscape in emigration
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The words of the poem are typed abutting the vertical axis of plus signs on both sides, with the final phrase traversing it, running from the top-left quadrant toward the bottom-right quadrant. The word *landschaft* (landscape) is repeated four times on top, with a vertical line of eight plus signs linking the first letter of the third and fourth instances, creating a box, perhaps to suggest the parceling of land. The layout physically embodies the notion of measured spaces, which beneath the horizontal axis becomes "landscapes' spaces" and then dreams. In the last line, landscape is linked to emigration, which might be read literally or symbolically.<sup>20</sup>

Two pages later, Wenzel's striking, meditative photograph shows a river in a misty, hibernal light (fig. 2). Wenzel has said that she was interested in capturing the mood and the beauty of nature, the light, and the structural composition.<sup>21</sup> Flowing through a snow-covered field, the river cuts across from the top left of the frame toward the bottom right margin. The image contrast is so low that the horizon line between the earth and the sky is almost invisible. In the foreground, animal footprints in the snow appear as signs of a past presence, evoking passage and movement. As a visual correspondence with Henne's verse "landscape in emigration," these signs could subtly allude to the subject of emigration, rarely discussed openly in the GDR, where the

erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 significantly curbed freedom of movement, particularly the right to travel to the West.



**FIG. 1. — Wolfgang Henne (German, b. 1949).** "Landschaft," typescript on graph paper, 15 × 15 cm (including white margin). From Wolfgang Henne et al., *Landschaft als Zeichen, messbar-vermessbar* (Leipzig: self-published, 1983), n.p. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 93-B10567. © Wolfgang Henne.



**FIG. 2. — Marion Wenzel (German, b. 1958).** Untitled (Winter landscape), 1980/81, gelatin silver print, 15 × 15 cm. From Wolfgang Henne et al., *Landschaft als Zeichen, messbar-vermessbar* (Leipzig: self-published, 1983), n.p. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 93-B10567. © Marion Wenzel, VG Bild Kunst. Courtesy of the artist.

Concrete poetry features widely in GDR samizdat. But Henne's combined use of graph paper and photography creates a multilayered narrative, enhanced by the use of papers of different colors or textures, and interactions among different media. The book's layout enfolds additional imagery with original prints hidden within foldouts, which impart a dynamic rhythm to the haptic experience of finding covert pathways, correspondences, discoveries, and reflections. While the two media of poetry and photography, having been printed on different pages of the book, are not directly juxtaposed, the book's objective is to invite the viewer/reader to unfold its intermedial dynamic by meditating on one work at a time.

### ***Text / Image Equivalences***

A more elaborate approach to the creation of photo-poems can be found in the work of the artists' group Günther-Jahn-Bach Editionen, which for the most part conjoins the two media through montage techniques: the typed text was projected onto film negatives, after which the image was printed as an integrated work of art.<sup>22</sup> The trio's *foto-lyrik arbeiten* (photo-poetry works) were devised in the late 1970s by Weimar-based photographer Claus Bach and Berlin-based poet Thomas Günther, who were soon joined by printmaker Sabine Jahn. Born in Thuringia in the 1950s and friends since high school, the artists produced special editions together throughout the 1980s. Günther,

the group's poet, had been imprisoned at the age of seventeen for running a student reading club and protesting the repression of the Prague Spring. After his release, he moved to Potsdam, where he worked as a gardener at the Sanssouci Palace and, from 1974 to 1977, as a *Regieassistent* (assistant director) at the Berliner Ensemble, the theater company founded by Bertolt Brecht. Throughout the 1980s, Günther was a caretaker at the Georgen-Parochial-Friedhof I in East Berlin, pursuing his art collaborations within the unconventional space of the cemetery wherein he is now buried.

Günther's papers at the GRI provide unique archival documentation of the poet's artistic production in the 1980s, including works that, on account of their provocative subjects, could not find an official publication venue at the time, such as the photo-poem "Das Gesetz" (The law) (fig. 3).<sup>23</sup> On the verso of the photographic print, Günther annotated this piece with the phrase "nach Kafka" (after [Franz] Kafka), referring to the writer's short story "Vor dem Gesetz" ("Before the Law"), which recounts an individual's inability to tackle the law. Composed in 1981, Günther's poem was printed on transparent adhesive paper, mounted on top of a photograph taken by Bach for this purpose, and then rephotographed. Bach photographed the Schönhauser Allee subway station in East Berlin dramatically framed from the street under the elevated rail tracks, looking up toward the subway bridge. From this angle, the station appears as a colossal structure, an overwhelming receptacle, which dominates almost the entire field of vision. The imposing structure overtakes a pedestrian, barely visible through the entrance. Here the human figure appears on the verge of being swallowed by "the law," or unable to break through its system.

"Das Gesetz" addresses the authority of the law. "The law is made for you, so as not to dissuade you from the path that we all walk together," Günther asserts in the middle of the poem. The verse highlights the norms of the law that compel one to stay on the collective path, avoiding the "intricate ways" that would make one "go astray and so become guilty in the name of the law." In the poet's words, "loners are not in demand" in a system where the law is a "line" that requires one to walk on it without "stepping outside" of it. He assures the reader that if one allows oneself "what is allowed, within the framework of the law," one can pursue it, or "forget it," which are his final words, implying the impossibility of negotiating with the system.<sup>24</sup> Günther and Bach's collaborative photo-poem "Das Gesetz" invites the reader to read the image while looking at the poem, to experience the dissonance of the perspectival space that frames the symmetrical composition of the poem—centered rigidly within the spatially overwhelming elevated railroad rack.

A year after making "Das Gesetz," Bach and Günther created a montage photograph representing their group's manifesto, with a staged action at dawn on an empty highway on the outskirts of East Berlin (fig. 4). Bach photographed Günther as he walked toward the horizon while tossing their hitchhiking signs into the air and letting them flutter to the ground behind. Günther's performative gesture signifies the trio's artistic rejection of predetermined paths and destinations. In their own words, they were not seeking the theoretical frameworks of artistic movements as inspiration but simply pursuing their



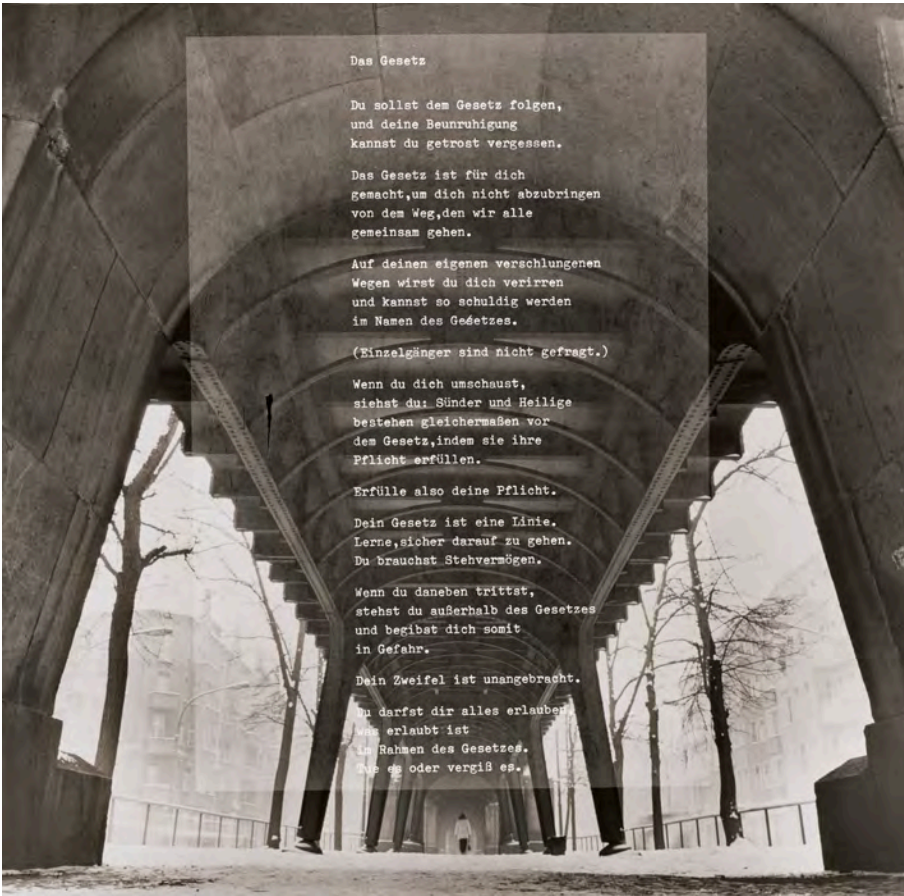


FIG. 3. — Thomas Günther (German, 1952–2018), poetry, and Claus Bach (German, b. 1956), photograph. *Das Gesetz* (The law), gelatin silver print, 30.5 × 23 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, DDR collections, Thomas Günther papers, 940002, box 86, folder 1. Art © Thomas Günther estate and Claus Bach.

own artistic language.<sup>25</sup> Centrally framed by the camera, Günther’s felt hat (a possible allusion to Joseph Beuys’s signature attire) marks the vanishing point at the center of the perspectival view, calling attention to the core role of the poet, his imagination springing outward in all directions.

Montaged below the portrait of Günther, a bard embarking on an unscripted journey, is a quotation from poet Antonin Artaud. Artaud’s line synthesizes the trio’s artistic vision: “Parce qu’on a eu peur que leur poésie ne sorte des livres et ne renverse la réalité” (Because they were afraid that their poetry might leap out of the books and overthrow reality). The quotation, a sentence that Artaud wrote with reference to the surrealist poets, amplifies the power of poetry to overthrow reality, recontextualized here for the trio’s artistic purposes.<sup>26</sup> If in “Das Gesetz” poetry is used to warn the reader about the restrictions of “the line of the law,” in the manifesto it is presented as a powerful subversive tool.<sup>27</sup>



"Parce qu'on a eu peur que leur poésie  
ne sorte des livres et ne renverse la réalité."

FIG. 4. — Thomas Günther (German, 1952–2018), collage, and Claus Bach (German, b. 1956), photograph. Artist's manifesto, with quotation by Antonin Artaud, February 1982, gelatin silver print, 29 × 22 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, DDR collections, Thomas Günther papers, box 86, folder 1, 940002. Art © Thomas Günther estate and Claus Bach.

Abstracting the perspectival view of the trio's manifesto, Jahn designed the cover of the portfolio *Traumhaus*, a set of twelve *foto-lyrik arbeiten* by Günther and Bach (fig. 5). The cover depicts four triangles, two yellow ones on top and bottom and two green ones on the sides, converging on a carefully designed vanishing point at the center of the image, like Günther's felt hat. The capitalized title (TRAUMHAUS) is printed in red and runs across the green triangles, with the point of convergence being not the inner points of the green triangles but the letter *H*, bounding the point of convergence between the yellow triangles. As a grapheme, the letter can be read as joining or separating the words to its sides, creating a double meaning. *Traumhaus*, which translates as "dream house," evokes an ideal dream space. However, in reading the words on the green background without the connecting *H*, the German "Traum aus" translates as the "dream (presumably to build a utopian world) is over."

In exploring her own intermedial combinations of photography and text, Jahn used screen printing to do more than add a chromatic dimension to the work. In 1987, upon finding a catalog of black-and-white photographs of flowers by American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, Jahn felt that these images, in her own words, "screamed for color," and she proceeded to create a set of five screen prints that transformed Mapplethorpe's flowers by infusing the forms with brightly saturated color in a high-contrast, pop-art style that simplified and enhanced the flowers' core shapes.<sup>28</sup> According to Jahn, she was inspired by the work of two prominent women artists, Georgia O'Keeffe and Patti Smith, who were powerful not only on account of their own artistic creativity but also because of the creative synergies that ensued from working with their partners, photographers Alfred Stieglitz and Mapplethorpe, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Jahn conceived this portfolio as an homage to all four artists, highlighting their interconnected creative relationships by combining appropriated images and texts from all of them. For example, in one plate, Jahn combined a poem by Smith with a painting by O'Keeffe. Jahn further expressed her admiration for these artists' collaborative partnerships by continuing to produce intermedial work over several decades with her own partner, Günther.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the bold-colored flowers, Jahn made a screen print reinterpreting a portrait of O'Keeffe, appropriating a photograph by Stieglitz that shows the painter sitting on the floor next to her palette while looking back at the camera.<sup>31</sup> On the empty visual field created by the area of her skirt, Jahn added text written by hand, a German translation of O'Keeffe's poem "I Have Picked Flowers Where I Found Them."<sup>32</sup> Its text is a contemplative commentary on nature and the desert landscape as sources of inspiration (fig. 6). By placing O'Keeffe's personal words on the artist's figure and using screen print with poetry on a reappropriated photograph, Jahn transforms O'Keeffe's own body into her poetic voice. Jahn's portfolio also points to the influence of American art from both prewar figures (such as Stieglitz and O'Keeffe) and contemporary cultural stars such as Patti Smith and Mapplethorpe, whose respective intermedial work (combining images and poetry) is presented in other plates.





FIG. 5. — Sabine Jahn (German, b. 1955). Cover design for *Traumhaus*, 1988–89, screen print, h.: 61 cm. Image courtesy of Claus Bach. © Thomas Günther estate and Sabine Jahn.

While overall the photo-poetry of the Günther-Jahn-Bach Editionen reflects the group's active engagement with international artistic movements, referencing significant prewar writers (such as Kafka and Artaud) as much as popular icons of their time from across the Atlantic, Jahn's intermedial work elevates the concept of artistic collaboration to a subject for her own art, showcasing personal relationships as a driving force in her creative process. Jahn does this not only by engaging with her own group's members but also by reinterpreting other artists' works beyond spatiotemporal boundaries through her own highly transformational process.

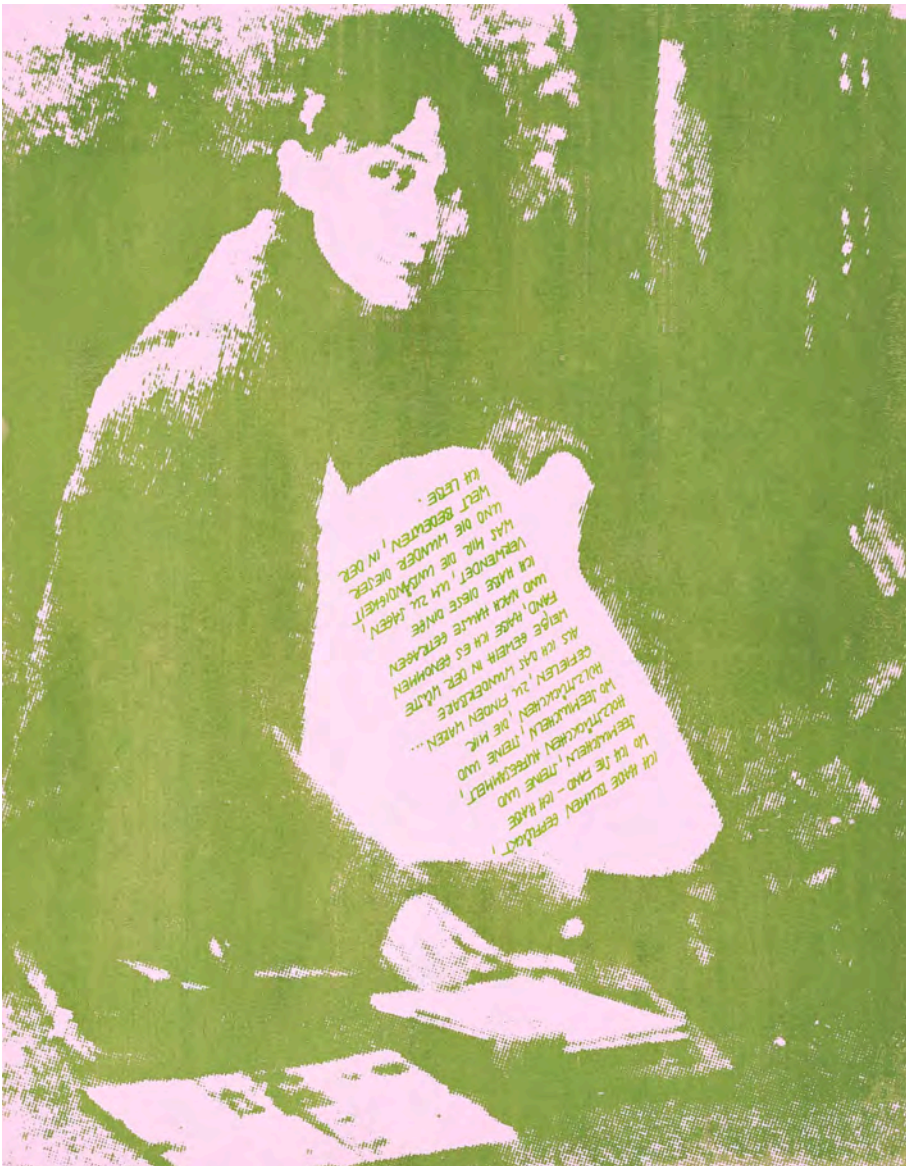


FIG. 6. — Sabine Jahn (German, b. 1955). Screen print after the photograph *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe* (1918, printed 1929/1934) by Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), 73.3 × 51 cm. From Sabine Jahn, untitled (Mapplethorpe) portfolio, nine plates, 1988, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2019.PR.18. © Sabine Jahn.

### ***Intergenerational and Feminist Solidarities in Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden***

Experimentation and the blurring of conventional distinctions between media and artistic forms—including the fusion of poetry and photography—became the salient feature of the final generation of the GDR’s writers. To this end, the young writers looked to the historical avant-garde, notably Dadaist practices of collage and photomontage and German expressionist draftsmanship and printmaking as well as techniques from

neo-avant-garde movements, especially concrete and visual poetry and Fluxus. Drawing on several of these traditions, the artist's book *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* (Perhaps I will suddenly disappear), created in 1986 by Schlegel (b. 1950), combines Schlegel's collages, drawings, and overpainting treatments with the poetry of the late East German poet Müller (1925–66).

In addition to being intermedial, Schlegel's engagement with Müller is also transgenerational, which in the context of the GDR carries both aesthetic as well as political implications. According to literary historian Wolfgang Emmerich's influential tripartite generational classification of East German writers, the first generation, comprising repatriated antifascists who had fled Germany during the Nazi regime, fervently adhered to socialist realism in service to the task of building socialism.<sup>33</sup> The second generation (born between 1915 and 1935) were, in Emmerich's view, engaged in the socialist project's easing of strict socialist-realist criteria for artistic production and availed themselves of predominantly modernist aesthetics. According to Emmerich's model, the third and final generation (born in the 1950s) assumed an attitude of disassociation (*Aussteigertum*) from the political or aesthetic projects of its generational predecessors.<sup>34</sup>

Yet while Emmerich's study provides a nuanced lens through which to read a body of work that spans the forty years of the GDR's existence, his neat ascriptions of political allegiances and aesthetic norms can also obscure the exchanges, dialogues, and homages that did take place across generational lines, as evidenced by third-generation East German artist Schlegel's engagement with the poetry of second-generation East German writer Müller. In addition, Emmerich's conjecture—that the final generation of East German writers had no interest in the East German project whatsoever—coincides perhaps too neatly with the post-Wende marginalization of East German culture following the German reunification, where many rich and incisive works produced in the GDR continued to be overlooked.

Both Schlegel and Müller were already marginalized in the GDR on account of their status as women artists. Their work, moreover, straddled officially sanctioned and unsanctioned GDR culture of the 1960s and 1980s, respectively, and was subsequently written out of the canon in post-reunified Germany.<sup>35</sup> Though Schlegel had studied painting and graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden from 1973 to 1978, was a member of the official artists' union (Künstlerverband), and had her work included in official exhibitions, the artist viewed the official expectations placed on art as "dictatorial" and became involved in the unofficial artistic scene.<sup>36</sup> She regularly contributed to the unofficial journals *und, usw.*, and *Mikado*, designed the cover of *ariadnefabrik* (ariadne factory), and created posters for various underground events such as poetry readings, before emigrating to West Berlin in 1986. Schlegel has also attributed her marginalization in the GDR to the well-documented exclusion of women artists from the country's artistic underground (with Raja Lubinetzki and Gabriele Stötzer as notable exceptions), and to the general position of women in the socialist state, in which women's emancipation was an officially pursued goal that fell short

in practicality on issues such as the double burden, in which women bore the dual responsibility of earning wages outside the home and performing unpaid domestic labor inside the home.<sup>37</sup>

Schlegel came across Müller when, in 1986, twenty years after Müller's death, a volume of her poetry titled *Wenn ich schon sterben muß* (If I do have to die) was being prepared for publication with the official press Aufbau. The volume was overseen by Dresden-based poet and publisher Richard Pietraß, who also lent Schlegel all of Müller's texts from which to choose for her artist's book.<sup>38</sup> *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* thus came into existence contemporaneously with the official publication of Müller's poetry.

Born in 1925 in Berlin as Inge Meyer, the author's youth was dominated by life in the Third Reich and the Second World War. From 1942 until 1945, she was drafted into Nazi war efforts, first working as an agricultural laborer, then as a maid in a Nazi officer's household (reportedly on account of her "political unreliability"), and eventually, in January 1945, as a *Luftwaffenhelferin* (assistant to the German air force).<sup>39</sup> Shortly before the liberation of Berlin, Meyer's parents died in a bombing orchestrated by the German air force against the approaching Red Army, while Meyer herself spent three days trapped underneath a collapsing building. The traumas of the war resurface periodically in Müller's biography—she died in 1966 by suicide after numerous attempts following the end of the war—and in her work.

In the fledgling GDR, Müller, who joined East Germany's communist party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED [Socialist Unity Party]) in 1948, worked as a journalist, and became a successful children's author. With her third husband, renowned East German playwright Heiner Müller, whom she married in 1955, Inge Müller cowrote several theater plays, notably *Der Lohndrucker* (1957; The wage shark) and *Die Korrektur* (1961; The correction). The latter led to Heiner Müller's expulsion from the official writers' union and a ban on publishing his work in the same year, which by association extended to Inge Müller, and which Ines Geipel describes as the "beginning of the radical unraveling of Inge Müller's life."<sup>40</sup> While Heiner Müller eventually earned a considerable international reputation along with which he regained his standing in the GDR, the volume of 1986 was the first significant publication of Inge Müller's work in the GDR following the ban of 1961.

Schlegel was "touched and inspired" by Müller's poetry, which she "decidedly liked" and found "absolutely contemporary" (*absolut zeitgemäß*), even more than twenty years after it had been written.<sup>41</sup> She felt drawn to the poet's thematic preoccupations, including environmental concerns and the "vulnerability of nature"; friendship; and death; as well as the "concision," "economy," and "clarity" of Müller's poetic language that, nevertheless, gives its readers the "whole picture."<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, while the two artists belong to different generations, the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 represents a caesura in their lives and their respective relationship to the state: while for Müller it coincided with the publishing ban in the volatile atmosphere of



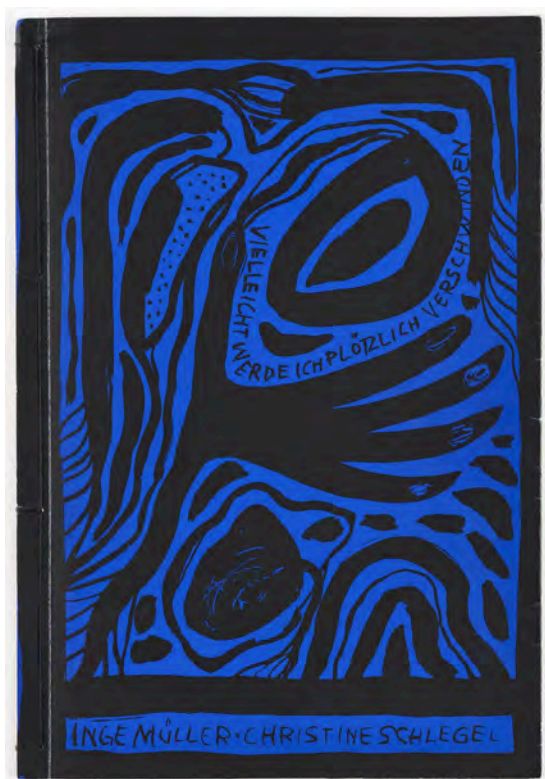


FIG. 7. — Christine Schlegel (German, b. 1950). Cover of *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* (Perhaps I will suddenly disappear), 1986, screen print, 36.8 × 25 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2019-B181. © Christine Schlegel, Dresden.

the wall's construction, Schlegel identifies the building of the Berlin Wall as a watershed moment of her childhood, after which the situation in the GDR took a turn for the worse.

*Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden*, titled after a poem by Müller, contains a selection of twelve poems, handwritten by Schlegel and distributed over the book's thirty pages. The poems are at times juxtaposed with illustrations, at times integrated into adjacent drawings, and on several occasions combined into photo-poems. The artist's book is gathered in a Japanese binding with a black-and-blue cover that bears the title, as well as Schlegel's and Müller's names, in hand-drawn lettering and embedded in an organic composition that mixes abstract and figurative elements (fig. 7). The composition is organized around what can be recognized as an outstretched hand, which might allude to the de-skilled artistic gesture. Its rough finish recalls both the visual vocabulary of the pictorial movement *art informel* and an earlier tradition of expressionist woodcuts. The volume was among several artists' books produced by the *Malerbücher Eigenverlag* (Self-Published Artists' Books) under the auspices of Sascha Anderson, the artistic impresario of the GDR's unofficial art scene and, as it was later revealed, a prolific Stasi informant, who had also approached Schlegel about creating the artist's book, although the choice of Müller's poetry and themes remained, in Schlegel's testimony, her own decision.<sup>43</sup>



The present study concentrates on three works included in the artist's book—two spreads and one triple-page foldout—devised around Müller's poems "Drei Fragen hinter der Tür" (Three questions behind the door) and "Freundschaft" (Friendship) as well as a photo-poem of a found family photograph and fragments of Müller's poem "Der verlorene Sohn (1941)" (The lost son [1941]). All three selections combine Müller's poetry with group photographs to negotiate themes such as national and familial accountability for the Second World War, the role of women in the Third Reich, and the relationship between the Nazi past and the new sociality of the GDR.

### Family Photographs, Unsettled

In its creative overpainting and overdrawing of an appropriated photograph and Müller's eponymous poem, Schlegel's rendering of "Drei Fragen hinter der Tür" layers national and familial memories (fig. 8). The spread displays a photograph of the Monument to the Battle of the Nations (Völkerschlachtdenkmal, completed in 1913) in Leipzig, a controversial site commemorating battle of 1813 fought between Prussia and its allies against Napoleon that in its embodiment of *völkisch* (ethnonationalist) motifs "revealed the growth of a popular nationalism" that was later mythologized by the Nazis.<sup>44</sup> Before the monument, a group of five people, ostensibly women, can be seen posing for the camera. The photograph is likely a found object—Schlegel collected "bizarre" and "strange" family photos in thrift stores and secondhand bookshops.<sup>45</sup> The artist overpainted crude outlines of the female body over the body of the central figure. She distorts another figure beyond recognition by adding a giant eye and jagged lines suggesting an ominous grin.

If the group is supposed to be cast as female, the upper half of the image of the monument is coded as male, signified by a headless, nude male figure drawn hovering above the group, Schlegel's addition of stark outlines around the statues of soldiers on the memorial, and the delineation of the phallic shape of the memorial itself. The masculinist investiture of the monument is countermanded by the painted lines, through which Müller has crossed out and obscured portions of the memorial and rendered the hovering male figure as decapitated alongside the quasi-decapitated memorial itself, whose photograph has been cut off at the top in the page layout. Müller's poem is created in a white space within painted black outlines on the opposite page that echoes the shape of the memorial and likewise resembles a decapitated torso, mirroring the headless monument on the right page. The poem takes the perspective of a child, who is unaware of the bygone cheer of the poem's addressee behind a "door" reminiscent of the fairy tale "Bluebeard":

DREI FRAGEN HINTER DER TÜR  
aus Kindertagen  
und Du hast gelacht  
gestern vor zweitausend Jahren



FIG. 8. — Christine Schlegel (German, b. 1950), artwork, and Inge Müller (German, 1925–66), poetry. *Drei Fragen hinter der Tür* (Three questions behind the door), mixed media, 36.8 × 47 cm. From Christine Schlegel, *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* (Perhaps I will suddenly disappear), 1986. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2019-B181. Art © Christine Schlegel, Dresden.

### THREE QUESTIONS BEHIND THE DOOR

from childhood days  
and you laughed  
yesterday two thousand years ago

The work stages and subverts what historian Mary Fulbrook terms the “biological essentialism”<sup>46</sup> of the Nazis, which attributed fundamentally different roles to those men and women deemed to be part of the Nazis’ racialized community, and at once turns historically victimized women into perpetrators. It encounters this past, moreover, as something inaccessible, concentrated in the background of the image that Schlegel nevertheless proceeds to excavate.

If the past in “Drei Fragen hinter der Tür” seems to be obscured, it is foregrounded in a photo-poem of a found family photograph that Schlegel combined with verses from Müller’s poem “Der verlorene Sohn (1941)” (fig. 9). The photograph features a seated woman—likely the mother—surrounded by five children. The crux of the image is undoubtedly a boy wearing a Prussian military uniform, who is also the only figure that Schlegel leaves unmodified. The remaining figures are given a spectral presence with spidery lines tracing their silhouettes or, in the case of the mother, with Müller’s poem, which thematizes family-sanctioned sacrifice of children as soldiers toward the end of

the war, with words and phrases such as “parents” (“Eltern”), “betrayal of the country” (“Landesverrat” [sic.]), “he killed” (“tötete er”), and “his brother” (“seinen Bruder”) written across her head and clothing. The work confronts the viewer with the past head-on, mobilizing the uncomfortable frontality of the image in a manner reminiscent of German artist Gerhard Richter’s painting *Uncle Rudi* (1965) and foregrounding the connection between Prussian militarism and the Second World War.<sup>47</sup>



FIG. 9. — Christine Schlegel (German, b. 1950), artwork, and Inge Müller (German, 1925–66), poetry. Found photograph of family portrait and fragments of verses from “Der verlorene Sohn (1941)” (The lost son [1941]) by Inge Müller, mixed media, 36.8 × 47 cm. From Christine Schlegel, *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* (Perhaps I will suddenly disappear), 1986. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2019-B181. Art © Christine Schlegel, Dresden.

The task of coming to terms with the past is evoked from a different perspective in “Freundschaft” (Friendship) (fig. 10). The work consists of a three-page foldout featuring a wide-angle photograph of a group of people, possibly officials of some kind, that is cut off to show only the legs and the feet. The empty ground at the photograph’s center features a nearly illegible text—the text of the poem “Freundschaft”—which appears as though it has been etched into the dark background and then scratched out or otherwise defaced. A clean copy of the poem is reproduced on the following page:

FREUNDSCHAFT

Freundschaft ist sentimental

Unwissenschaftlich, dumm, dunkel

Nicht erkennbar wie alle Gefühle:  
Sagen Wissenschaftler, Leute, Schriftsteller  
Dichter? Sie verstellen die Schrift  
Und benutzen die Schreibmaschine.  
Ihre Aufgabe: die Macht zu analysieren  
Haben viele aufgegeben.  
Freunde:  
Außer den Toten: die  
Den Befehl verweigerten  
Die den Ängstlichen  
Die Angst nicht vorwarfen.  
Die jeden grüßten ohne Ausnahme  
Die nicht sicher waren  
Ob sie einen Fehler machten.  
Aber sie taten etwas.<sup>48</sup>

#### FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is sentimental  
Unscientific, dumb, dark  
Not recognizable like all feelings:  
Say scientists, people, authors  
Poets? They distort the script  
And use the typewriter.  
Their task: to analyze power  
Many have given up.  
Friends:  
Except for the dead: who  
Refused the command  
Who did not reproach the anxious ones  
For their fear  
Who greeted everyone without exception.  
Who were not sure  
If they were making a mistake  
But they did something.

The poem claims that attempts by poets to describe friendship fall short because they have given up on their task “to analyze power”—a phrase that, due to the ambiguity of the original German, can also be translated as the “power to analyze.”<sup>49</sup> Instead, the poem predicates friendship as a diachronic alliance between the poetic ego, “the dead,” the antifascists (those who “refused the command”), and antiauthoritarians. In so doing, it recalls the utopian, antifascist aspirations under the auspices of which the GDR had been founded, countering the erasure of previous emancipatory and antiauthoritarian

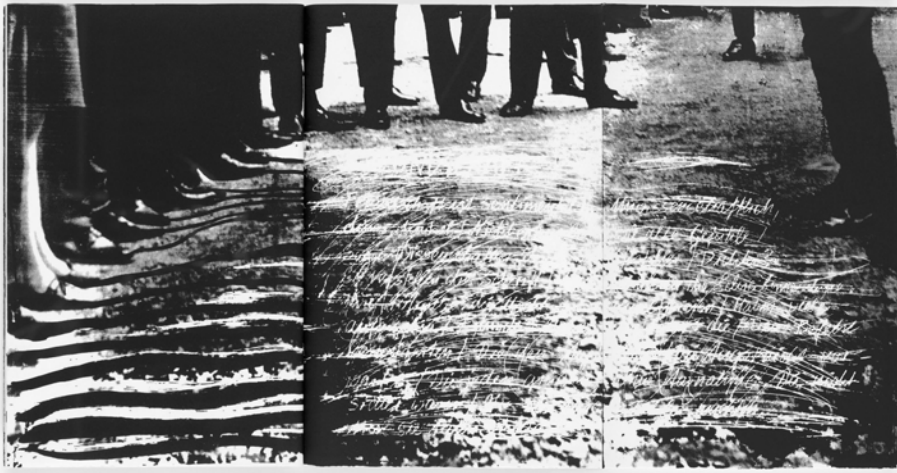


FIG. 10. — Christine Schlegel (German, b. 1950), artwork, and Inge Müller (German, 1925–66), poetry. *Freundschaft* (Friendship), mixed media, 36.8 × 70 cm. From Christine Schlegel, *Vielleicht werde ich plötzlich verschwinden* (Perhaps I will suddenly disappear), 1986. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2019-B181. Art © Christine Schlegel, Dresden.

histories. This erasure, one can say, is visualized by Schlegel's scratching out of Müller's text, as though it had been done by the feet of the solemn group above.<sup>50</sup> Schlegel thus might be trying to rescue not only moments of resistance and utopianism that she felt the East German project had abandoned with the building of the Berlin Wall but also the poetry of a censored yet prescient Müller.

### Conclusion

The three collaborative exchanges examined here are quite different in nature and process. Henne selected photographs that had been taken by Wenzel because they responded to his artistic sensibility.<sup>51</sup> Günther, Bach, and Jahn worked together, creating dynamic montages with photographs often deliberately staged to accommodate poetry or altered to visually enhance it. Schlegel worked instead as a visual artist engaging with found photographs and poetry.

Yet the use of poetry and photography to communicate between the lines empowered these young GDR poets and artists to challenge the official cultural mandates that organized artistic media in compartmentalized ways. Their intermedial art opened up new possibilities for bypassing censorship and addressing taboo subjects, summoning the visual and linguistic power of poetry to challenge the East German collective imaginary. As the present case studies show, this art addressed, for instance, the beauty of the natural landscape threatened by industrial pollution and environmental decay in the work of Henne and Wenzel; the urban, everyday public space and personal experience of East Berlin (Günther, Bach, and Jahn); and connections to the country's historical legacies and wartime traumas in the integrated work of Müller and Schlegel.

Especially striking in this body of work is the recourse of multiple women artists to the genre of photo-poetry, whether to transmit concerns about the fragility of nature (Wenzel), explore transnational aesthetic allegiances (Jahn), or enact intergenerational solidarities with marginalized women authors (Schlegel). If for Artaud the new poetry had the power to “leap out of the books to overthrow reality,” the examples discussed above show how this work generated a uniquely intermedial language, giving rise to artistic networks and influences across generations and international borders. It is thanks to exchanges and collaborations such as these that the last generation of East German artists could develop practices that broke through not only aesthetic and geographic barriers but also social and political taboos.

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#### Notes

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1. Berlin-based dealer Jürgen Holstein assembled the archival materials and special editions on the “GDR art experiment” (“Kunstexperiment DDR,” as he put it). See Jürgen Holstein et al., eds., *Bücher, Kunst und Kataloge: Dokumentation zum 40 jährigen Bestehen des Antiquariats Jürgen Holstein* (Berlin: Jürgen Holstein Antiquariat, 2007), 136–37. The collections acquired by the Getty consist of the DDR Collections, 1928–1993 (bulk 1950–1993), Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (GRI), 940002 ([http://primo.getty.edu/GRI:GETTY\\_ALMA21123809170001551](http://primo.getty.edu/GRI:GETTY_ALMA21123809170001551)) and the collection of artists’ books and magazines assembled originally by Jens Henkel.

2. Jens Henkel and Sabine Russ, *DDR 1980–1989: Künstlerbücher und originalgrafische Zeitschriften im Eigenverlag: Eine Bibliografie* (Gifkendorf: Merlin, 1991).

3. The GRI’s collection of the East German samizdat from the 1980s is linked in the Getty Library Catalog per the initiative of Isotta Poggi

under the aggregate phrase “East German Samizdat collection,” which can be entered into the search field at <https://primo.getty.edu/primo-explore/search?vid=GRI>. As of October 2022, this collection counts 170 artists’ books, magazines, or portfolios. The list was linked as part of the research project On the Eve of Revolution: The East German Artists in the 1980s, <https://www.getty.edu/projects/on-eve-revolution-east-german-artist-1980s/>.

4. Notable exceptions aside, artistic samizdat in the GDR had a relatively shorter trajectory than that of other countries of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union. The emergence of East German artistic samizdat in the late 1970s to early 1980s is credited in part to the vastly demoralizing impact that the 1976 expatriation of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann had on the emerging generation of East German artists as well as to a loophole created by the Bildende Kunst bill from 31 August 1971, which postulated that editions of graphic artworks comprising more

than one hundred copies had to be officially approved; the bill unwittingly shielded small-scale interdisciplinary projects from the censor. See Jay Rosellini, *Wolf Biermann* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992); and Frank Eckart, *Eigenart und Eigensinn: Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980–1990)* (Bremen: Temmen, 1993), 37.

5. For the dynamic range of types of samizdat from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the GDR, see Wolfgang Eichwede et al., *Samizdat: Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa, die 60er bis 80er Jahre* (Bremen: Temmen, 2000).

6. Higgins wrote extensively on intermedial arts that fit this characterization. Richard Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of Intermedia* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 15. Higgins's use and definition of the term first appeared in his "Synesthesia and Intersenses: Intermedia," *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1966) (accessible on UbuWeb: Papers, [https://www.ubu.com/papers/higgins\\_intermedia.html](https://www.ubu.com/papers/higgins_intermedia.html)), where he mentions the example of intermedia as a painting that is fused conceptually with words.

7. Sara Blaylock, *Parallel Public: Experimental Art in Late East Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), 180.

8. Blaylock, *Parallel Public*, 165.

9. Reinhard Grüner, "Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland . . . Es war ein Traum." Künstlerbücher ostdeutscher Künstler, Eine fragmentarische Autopsie," in *Imprimatur: Ein Jahrbuch für Bücherfreunde*, n.s., 28 (2023): 121–43. Grüner's references on the distinct circumstances of the intermediality of GDR samizdat include: Helga Sauer, "Über die Künstlerzeitschriften der DDR," *Deutsche Fotothek*, December 2000, <https://www.deutschefotothek.de/cms/kuenstlerzeitschriften-ddr.xml>.

10. Select publications in chronological order: Egmont Hesse and Christoph Tannert, eds., *Zellinnendruck*, exh. cat. (Leipzig: self-published, 1990); Erk Grimm, "Der Tod der Ostmoderne oder die BRDigung des DDR-Untergrunds: Zur Lyrik Bert-Papenfuß-Goreks," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 1 (1991): 9–20; Thomas Wohlfahrt and Klaus Michael, *Vogel oder Käfig sein: Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften in der DDR 1979–1989* (Berlin: Druckhaus Galrev, 1991); Anita Kenner [Christoph Tannert], "Avantgarde in der DDR heute? Ein Panorama der Kunst-, Literatur-, und Musikszene," *Niemandland: Zeitschrift zwischen den Kulturen* 5, no. 2 (1988): 94–110; Uwe Wittstock, *Von der Stalinallee zum Prenzlauer Berg: Wege der DDR-Literatur 1949–1989* (Munich: Piper,

1989); Arnold Heinz Ludwig and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *Die andere Sprache: Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre* (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1990); Eckart, *Eigenart und Eigensinn*; David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Karen Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Peter Böthig, *Grammatik einer Landschaft: Literatur aus der DDR in den 80er Jahren* (Berlin: Lukas, 1997); Birgit Dahlke, *Papierboot: Autorinnen aus der DDR—inoffiziell publiziert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997); Alison Lewis, *Die Kunst des Verrats: Der Prenzlauer Berg und die Staatssicherheit* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003); Carola Hähnel-Mesnard, *La littérature autoéditée en RDA dans les années 1980: Un espace hétérotopique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Uwe Warnke and Ingeborg Quaa, *Die Addition der Differenzen: die Literaten- und Künstlerszene Ostberlins 1979 bis 1989* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2009); *Poesie des Untergrunds = Poetry of the Underground: Catalog of the Exhibition at the General Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany in New York City, December 9, 2010 to March 3, 2011*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Galerie auf Zeit, 2010); Seth Howes, "'Killersatellit' and Randerscheinung: Punk and the Prenzlauer Berg," *German Studies Review* 36, no. 3 (October 2013): 579–601; Birgit Dahlke, "Underground Literature? The Unofficial Culture of the GDR and Its Development after the Wende," in *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. Karen Leeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 160–79; Stephan Pabst, *Post-Ost-Moderne: Poetik nach der DDR* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016); *Fun on the Titanic: Underground Art and the East German State*, a thirty-one-page booklet for an exhibition held at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, [https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Fun on the Titanic\\_Underground Art and the East German State.pdf](https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Fun%20on%20the%20Titanic_Underground%20Art%20and%20the%20East%20German%20State.pdf); Seth Howes, *Moving Images in the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany* (London: Camden House, 2019); Blaylock, *Parallel Public*; Sarah E. James, *Paper Revolutions: An Invisible Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022); Brianna J Smith, *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022); and Jutta Müller-Tamm and Lukas Nils Regeler, eds., *DDR-Literatur und die Avantgarden* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2022).

11. Dominic Boyer, "Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 66, no. 2 (2001): 207–36. See also

April Eisman, "East German Art and the Permeability of the Berlin Wall," *German Studies Review* 38, no. 3 (October 2015): 597–616.

12. Honecker's speech was given at the 8th congress of the Socialist Unity Party. See also Thomas W. Goldstein, "The Era of No Taboos? 1971–76," chap. 3 in *Writing in Red: The East German Writers Union and the Role of Literary Intellectuals* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 69–96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787441651.004>.

13. Svetlana Boym, "The Off-Modern Mirror," *e-flux journal* 19 (October 2010), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/19/67475/the-off-modern-mirror/>.

14. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996).

15. Conventional photographic practices in the GDR adhered to the prescribed role of photography as a tool to document society and to promote the socialist values that the state had outlined in the context of nation building in its earlier decades, a role that was still prevalent in the early 1980s. Official photography exhibitions and photo books tended to promote the "family of man" type of photography, based on pictorial traditions that emphasized positive modes of representation, from the beauty of the natural landscape to the peaceful society of socialist people's republics. See, for example, the exhibition series *BIFOTA (Berliner Internationale FotoAusstellung)* organized by the Zentrale Kommission Fotografie, or ZKF, of the GDR, discussed by Sarah Goodrum in the introduction and first chapter of her dissertation. Sarah Goodrum, "The Problem of the Missing Museum: The Construction of Photographic Culture in the GDR" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2015).

16. Nicole Boulestreau, "Le Photopoème Facile: Un Nouveau Livre dans les années 30," in *Le Livre Surréaliste: Mélusine IV* (Lausanne: L'Âge de l'Homme, 1982), 164, quoted in Michael Nott, *Photopoetry, 1845–2015: A Critical History* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 2.

17. Nott, *Photopoetry*, 2.

18. Nott, *Photopoetry*, 2.

19. Wolfgang Henne, email to author, January 2022.

20. The authors thank Daria Bona (Curatorial Fellow, Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Stiftung, 2021–22) for the translation and interpretation of the poem and for her email

correspondence with Wolfgang Henne and Marion Wenzel.

21. Marion Wenzel, email message to author, 19 January 2022. The location of this photograph is Klein-Trebbow (near Neustrelitz) in the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

22. The authors thank Claus Bach and Sabine Jahn (along with Jahn's daughters Juliane Jahn and Philine Jahn) for providing oral accounts of the history of the Günther-Jahn-Bach Editionen.

23. See DDR Collections, series XIV, Thomas Günther papers, 1979–1993, boxes 86–87, GRI, 940002.

24. The authors thank Alina Samsonija (Getty Graduate Intern in 2018) for the translation of "Das Gesetz."

25. See Thomas Günther et al., *Texte zeigen Bilder Bilder zeigen Texte*, exh. cat. (Lüdenscheid, Germany: Kulturhaus der Stadt Lüdenscheid, 1987), 15. In his introduction, Günther writes: "Wir hatten dabei keine ästhetische Theorie im Kopf, von der wir uns leiten ließen. Viel mehr interessierte uns das freie und ungezwungene Spiel mit der Wirklichkeit, das sich für viele Assoziationen offen hält und rückwirkend wieder eine veränderte Sicht auf die Bilder und die Zustände der Realität freigibt." (We had no aesthetic theory in mind to guide us. We were much more interested in the free and unconstrained play with reality, which keeps itself open to many associations and in retrospect again reveals an altered view of the images and the real-world conditions.)

26. Antonin Artaud, "Letter on Lautréamont" in *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman, trans. David Rattray (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965), 123–27.

27. Günther, who was involved extensively in the samizdat art scene, contributing works to independent artists' magazines such as Uwe Warnke's *Entwerter/Oder*, described East German samizdat as a "paper rebellion" (*papierne Aufbegehren*) that provided a much-needed "lifeline for a silenced generation," a case, he argued, unprecedented even for the previous avant-garde movements. Thomas Günther, "Die subkulturellen Zeitschriften in der DDR und ihre kulturgeschichtliche Bedeutung," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 20, no. 92 (1992): 27–36.

28. Sabine Jahn conveyed her urge to give brilliant color to the black-and-white images in an interview with the authors on 5 September 2022. Apart from the Mapplethorpe portfolio, for which Jahn uses vibrant colors, her artistic practice favored, for the most part, softer, calmer tones.



Interestingly, after the Wende, Jahn discovered in her Stasi (Ministry for State Security) file that, from the early 1970s onward, she had been assigned the code name Colorid, a fabricated, anglicized word alluding to her professional work as a painter and her purported love of colors.

29. Jahn learned about Georgia O'Keeffe in a documentary screened at the American Embassy in East Berlin in 1986 as part of a tribute to the artist, who had just passed away that year, and about Patti Smith in 1978 in a concert screened on the West German TV show *Rock-Palast* that Jahn watched illegally in Karl-Marx-Stadt.

30. Jahn provided this information to the authors in the interview of 5 September 2022. The visual-poetry collaboration had started with *Zehn Gedichte* [Ten poems]: *Here Come the Ocean and Waves Down*, 1986, a series of poems by Günther visually montaged as screen prints by Jahn, housed in a handmade enclosure featuring a glowing gold-on-red abstract composition on its cover. The mandala-like image was based on a photograph of a manhole (by Claus Bach), representing the gateway to the underground. Here too the intermedial dialogue created a highly dynamic composition work. After the Mapplethorpe portfolio, Jahn and Günther published *Zwischenwaende* (lit. "between walls") and *Collagen* (both released in 1993); and *Sabine Jahn: H-A & E/O: Kleiner Werkkatalog; Grafik 1990–2000 aus der originalgrafischen Zeitschrift Entwurter/Oder & der Kunst- und Literaturzeitschrift Herzattacke* (2000; small catalog of original prints published from 1990–2000 in the artists' magazine *Entwurter/Oder* and in the art and literature magazine *Herzattacke*).

31. See the source image, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, by Alfred Stieglitz, on the website of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., under "Collections": <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.60057.html>. Jahn, however, found the photograph reproduced in an art book in Berlin at the time.

32. Jahn found the poem, translated into German, in Wolfram Schäfer, Wolfram Berger, and Joseph Czestochowski, *Go West: Der Wilde Westen in Der Malerei* (Wiesbaden: Ebeling; 1978), n.p., fig. 96. O'Keeffe's poem has widely circulated since it was first published with the title "About Painting Desert Bones" in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Paintings 1943*, exh. cat. (New York: An American Place, 1944). This information is courtesy of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Library & Archive, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Thanks to Elizabeth Ehrnst, head of Research Collections and Services.

33. Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, 119, 404.

34. Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, 404.

35. For a detailed discussion of the underrepresentation of independently published women artists and writers, see Dahlke, *Papierboot*.

36. This information was given to the authors by Christine Schlegel in a telephone interview on 16 December 2020. For Schlegel's biography, see the "Vita" page on the artist's website: <http://www.christineschlegel.de/pages/vita/>.

37. For an overview of the situation of women in the GDR, see Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 141–75. See also Kristen Ghodsee's recent comparative study conducted in the context of the former Eastern Bloc: Kristen Ghodsee, *Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth-Century Communism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

38. Christine Schlegel, email to authors, 5 January 2022.

39. Ines Geipel, *Dann fiel auf einmal der Himmel um: Inge Müller, die Biografie* (Leipzig: Henschel, 2002).

40. Geipel, *Dann fiel auf einmal*, 211. See also Inge Müller and Sonja Hilzinger, eds. *Daß ich nicht ersticke am Leisesein: Gesammelte Texte* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2002), 123–31.

41. The information quoted in this paragraph was given to the authors by Christine Schlegel in a telephone interview on 16 December 2020.

42. Telephone interview with Christine Schlegel and the authors, 16 December 2020.

43. Christine Schlegel, email to authors, 5 January 2022.

44. Jason Tebbe, "Revision and Rebirth: Commemoration of the Battle of Nations in Leipzig," *German Studies Review* 33, no. 3 (2010): 619.

45. Christine Schlegel, email to authors, 5 January 2022. Schlegel also mentioned that her father, who was a trade-fair designer, had a collection of politicians' photographs, on which Schlegel also made drawings.

46. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 144.

47. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning," *October* 75 (winter 1996): 60–82.

48. Inge Müller, *Wenn ich schon sterben muß: Gedichte* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 1997), 48.

**49.** This insight stems from the many productive discussions on translating Müller's poetry between Julia McSpirit Beckett and Anna Horakova.

**50.** In Schlegel's words, the scratching out of the poem's text is also an homage to Müller's manuscripts, which she remembers as being heavily redacted: "Sie [Inge Müller] hatte viel an den Texten korrigiert. Oft gab es mehrere Streichungen übereinander. Auf dem Foto mit den

Repräsentantenbeinen habe ich als Reminiszenz zu ihren Texten alles durchgestrichen." (She [Inge Müller] had corrected her texts a lot. Often there were several deletions on top of one another. On the photo of the officials' legs, I crossed out everything as a memory of her texts.) Christine Schlegel, email to authors, 5 January 2022.

**51.** Wolfgang Henne, email to authors, January 2022.