Deciphering the Body of Memory: Writing by Former East German Women Writers

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The aftermath of German unification has not been easy for many women of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Ironically, the democratization of their land following unification in 1990 has meant a loss of both economic security and reproductive rights. As many feminists in the East and West have pointed out, the conservative body politics of the German government has placed a heavy psychological and economic strain on many GDR women who had come of age within a system that permitted abortion and the guarantee of equal rights. Although women in the GDR could make choices about their bodies, however, restrictive political and social attitudes toward issues of sexuality and female identity often prevented the overt development of a critical oppositional subjectivity. Instead, writers such as Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner, Helga Schütz, Christine Wolter, and others created spaces for utopian consciousness in their literary work that deviated from the more traditional expectations concerning gender roles in the private realms of GDR society. Tellingly, the worsening economic and political situation in the GDR prior to the fall of the Wall, complicated by upheaval in other Eastern European countries, also culminated in an extreme sense of pessimism, best portrayed in Monika Maron's novel Die Überläuferin (The Defector), first published in 1986 in West Germany. The oppositional utopian consciousness often found in the work of GDR women writers in the 1970s and early 1980s appeared to have disappeared as the semblance
of a viable socialist state crumbled under the growing dissatisfaction and demise of its economy in the years directly preceding the end of the GDR.

As former GDR women cope with the new existential and economic burdens that German unification has produced, the temptation to glorify the actual situation of women in the GDR cannot be separated from an understanding of the mechanisms of a resistant remembering that allowed women to imagine a socialist livelihood imbued with a desire to break out of state-dictated modes of emancipation. In the following pages, I will argue that women writers in the GDR often presented an alternative memory in their work that countered the official history of the GDR state. This countermemory became inscribed and located in the bodies of their female protagonists.

Whereas Wolf’s works and those of her contemporary Irmtraud Morgner often displayed a subversive interplay between gendered memory and the presumably ungendered official history of the GDR, the pessimistic tone of Maron’s novel *The Defector* points to the deterioration of GDR reality. The lack of a critical public discourse about body politics in the former GDR became a hidden subtext in these literary works that portrayed the bodies of female protagonists as sites and conveyors of resistance against state-controlled means of reproduction and remembrance. Rigid definitions of femininity still prevailed in the public discourse in the GDR, despite the implementation of laws designed to provide all citizens, regardless of gender, with access to nontraditional professions. The intersections between the perceived condition of the female body in the GDR and its mediation as a site of conflict and counterremembering in literary texts provide insight into the perception of the female body within the social realm of the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s. In the two decades preceding the fall of the Wall in 1989, the fabric of the GDR security blanket had already become worn and torn, and was on the verge of being ripped apart altogether.

Wolf’s *The Quest for Christa T.* first appeared in a limited edition (about 15,000) in 1968 with the East German press Aufbau. It was re-issued in 1973 in a larger edition, partially as a result of Erich Honecker’s liberalized cultural politics beginning in 1972. The West German edition, appearing in 1969, was often smuggled into the East. Maron’s novel *The Defector* was published in West Germany in 1986. The construction of
the body as a site of remembering in both texts exposes the conditions of women living under the constraints of a double standard and growing self-alienation despite state-sanctioned equal rights. In their writing, the deviant or dis-eased female body becomes the vehicle to express desires for an alternative body of remembrance in the GDR. Their work disrupts the GDR state's control of the body politic (as in reproductive rights, abortion, and doctrines on mothering) by portraying the female body not only as a passive entity inscribed with the forces of state power, but also as an agent that undermines the imaginary border between the private and public spheres.

Looking back, we can better understand the imprint of the social conditions of the GDR upon women's lives and memories by looking at the representation of the female body in media that reflect upon the tensions between the official image of women's lives and their lived experience. GDR national politics emancipated women while simultaneously constructing an image of female citizenship based on sex, not gender equality. Despite the heavy emphasis on women and work, women were equally (if not more) rewarded for performing as mothers and upholders of family values. Despite their strong presence in the labor field per se, women tended to work in gender-specific professions while they were underrepresented in positions of state power and economic control. Although a higher percentage of GDR women were able to make ends meet as single mothers, marriage was encouraged through the incentive of increased subsidies for every child born to married couples and easier access to apartments for them. There was a lack of open opposition to the underrepresentation, because here, as elsewhere, cultural values implicitly relegated women to the domestic realms.

Instead of portraying the body politics of East and West Germany as a clear-cut dichotomy, many feminist scholars have pointed to the patriarchal structures that, despite differences in the number of women in the labor force and an official policy of equal rights in the GDR constitution, pervaded both the public and private spheres. Irene Dölling, herself a GDR sociologist, attributes a lack of feminist consciousness to the "patriarchal-paternalistic" structures of a "father state" that appeared to provide for women's needs while, at the same time, perpetuating gender-specific values in the social realm (Dölling, WIG, 129). GDR women were provided with, given, promised, and ensured equal rights by a state apparatus that was patronizing and rigidly structured along patriarchal
lines. As Dölling and other feminist scholars from the East and West have shown, in the GDR, femininity retained its political currency (continuing to sustain gender inequality and sexual difference) despite the state's disavowal of women's exploitation in the public sphere. Dölling's analysis of images of women in GDR magazines, for example, concludes that the higher the professional standing enjoyed by a woman, the more feminine her body was portrayed. Any deviation from a subordinate and private female identity had to be compensated for with increased doses of femininity. Women in manual or repetitive positions were usually shown as nondescript, interchangeable, and competent—that is, satisfied with their position, nondistinguishable as women (129). They were apparently less of a threat to the status quo than women in positions of power, whose portrayal in attire and stances signifying the traditionally feminine in industrialized nations diverted attention from their power to their femininity. They were at once recognizable as women, that is, sexual objects, and, according to Dölling, fulfilled the expectation of both male and female viewers that equality at the workplace did not relieve women from the stereotype of being feminine and thus capable of reproducing and/or being sexually available (131). The representational system stabilized a practical and symbolic gender order that portrayed women as good workers, but nevertheless female and, thus, reproducers. Such images confirm what Dölling surmises—equality on paper does not guarantee a substantial transformation of the image of women per se in the social consciousness. Thus, women were “represented” in the most literal sense of the word. The state represented them, that is, took care of their needs for them, while the social semiotic system represented them in terms of traditional universalistic images of femininity.

The GDR state restricted the movement of bodies at the same time it claimed to emancipate them. The lack of a public forum to protest against the state control of women's bodies led some women in the GDR to protest via the text. Female protagonists in particular attempted to create a space in which to remember differently. Like the worn-out Marxist adage that a state measures its emancipation according to the emancipation of the women, women also bear the brunt of a society’s inequality. They are more susceptible to the upheavals in society because they inhabit private and public realms most affected by changes in the regulation of reproduction and, thus, women's bodies. To rely solely on statistics for describing the conditions of women's lives only obscures the experiential
and psychological dimensions whereby the body itself is a site from which to see the actual gains or losses of social and political upheaval. It is the body that manifests the memories that are unspoken or repressed in the public realm.

In order to explore the literary response to the social disintegration of the public realm in the final two decades of the GDR, I turn to the conceptualization of remembrance as formulated by Walter Benjamin in his theses on the philosophy of history, and the relationship between bodies and history as mapped out by Leslie Adelson in her recent book, *Making Bodies, Making History*.\(^\text{10}\) By combining Benjamin’s notion of a contemplative and commemorative remembering as resistance (*Eingedenken*) with Adelson’s conceptualization of the body as both the location and agent of history (and, I would add, of countermemory) I will reflect upon body politics in the two aforementioned novels by Wolf and Maron. The representation of female bodies in both texts exemplifies the clash between the limited official discourse on the body in the GDR and the desire of many women to find alternative means of representing and practicing female subjectivity. Like Adelson, who analyzes the representation of gendered identities through the body in works by women authors publishing in the former West Germany, I believe that history can neither be made nor told without reference to the body. In addition, I find Benjamin’s notion of a commemorative remembering (*Eingedenken*) useful for reading the structures of remembrance in the work of GDR women writers, since the context in which they wrote claimed allegiance to the dogmatic Marxist materialist historiography that Benjamin heavily criticized in his essays on the philosophy of history.

The GDR’s ideological identity as a Marxist-Leninist state meant that work and production played an important role in the literary and theoretical texts that attempted to portray the everyday life of its citizens. As Dorothy Rosenberg summarizes in her introduction to *Daughter’s of Eve*, many GDR women writers used literature “as a forum to probe the question of whether the emancipated socialist woman was in fact living a fully human life” (13). Their work expressed the search for a female subjectivity grounded to a large extent in a utopian consciousness that relied on a counterremembrance for its substance. Given the reduction of women’s rights in eastern Germany after unification, and the added insta-
bility of personal relationships as previous forms of community networks fell by the wayside in the midst of increased competition and insecurity, looking back can easily become a nostalgic exercise. Women began to take a closer look at their position in the GDR society even before the GDR collapsed under the pressure of the economic and social upheaval in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries in the late 1980s.

The state initiatives of the 50s, 60s, and 70s toward equal rights became more and more suspect in the early 1980s as the economy of the GDR entered a crisis period that would culminate in its demise. The subtle contradictions of a state socialism that regarded the struggle for women’s rights as obsolete, given the official assurance of the legal right to an abortion upon demand (1972), free child-care facilities, and generous maternity leave, played themselves out upon the female body in the GDR.11 According to the state, women had equal rights in the economic sector and thus had no reason to fight for equal rights independently of state-run organizations. Despite internal grumbling and the expulsion of a number of dissidents and the voluntary exile of others, the official GDR state organization for women (DDR-Frauenverband) declared in the late 1970s that “the emancipation of women in the GDR had been realized.”12 Gender equality was constitutionally guaranteed and women had been integrated into the work force (105). The apparent protective gestures of the state covered up the deeper inequalities and discrimination against women and the objectification of their bodies manifested in patriarchal state structures. Even as depictions of professional women in workplaces outside the home were commonplace in much of the GDR popular media, the proportionately lower number of women in positions of power in industry and in government exposed the falsehood of appearances. The contradictions between the official representation of women and their bodies, and their own perception of their situation is a common motif in the work of Christa Wolf, beginning with her novel *Divided Heaven*. Along with the growing emphasis on female subjectivity in her work, Wolf’s fundamental support of a utopian consciousness honed out of a recognition of the contradictions structuring women’s lives in the GDR and the possibility of overcoming them remains a major feature of her work.13 In comparison, Monika Maron’s pessimistic view of the “real existing socialism” in the GDR, as portrayed in *The Defector*, strongly counters Wolf’s insistence on creating a space within socialism for female
subjectivity. Whereas Wolf’s texts express the desire for an alternative consciousness within socialist ideology, Maron’s disillusioned depiction of the decay and hopelessness of GDR society anticipates her decision to leave the GDR in 1988 as well as her lack of commitment to the ideal of socialism.

In Wolf’s and Maron’s texts, the female body is not wholly subject to the state. Yet the tension between the desire for change in the status quo and the seeming impossibility for transformation is expressed in the representation of memory. Thus, in the last two decades of the GDR, more women writers than ever published works about the contradictions of having equal rights on paper, but having to perform traditionally female tasks at home.14 Wolf and Maron are worlds apart in their stance toward Western feminism and in their relationship to the memory of the GDR state. Whereas Wolf has been embroiled in a controversy regarding her apparent failure to use her position as an acclaimed writer to protest more vehemently against the injustices of the GDR state, Maron clearly supported the GDR state’s downfall long before it actually took place.15 Despite their ideological and political differences, both writers portray women’s bodies as sites of resistance and counterremembrance. The resistance is manifested as the superimposing of subjective fantasy upon reality and the replacing of the chronological time that structures dogmatic Marxist views of history with synchronical space. In their texts, female bodies become sites where synchronous moments of past defeat and glimpses of present resistance are in conflict. The conflict plays itself out in the remembering process, which becomes physically manifest as symptoms of disorientation, hysteria, and cancer. Instead of constructing male and female bodies as monolithic, universalistic beings, these writers questioned the implicit restrictions in the GDR placed upon individuals whose sense of identity differed from the norm.

In order to look more closely at the relationship between the representation of the body in the two texts at hand and the situation of women under the specific material conditions of the GDR, I turn to Adelson’s work on the relationship of the body to history. As she has noted, any understanding of the correspondences between the social meaning of the body and its representation must account for the material conditions that shape and are shaped by the presence of real bodies. In addition, given
the multiple meanings of memory and remembrance across disciplines, I would like to clarify my particular interpretation of the relationship of the body to resistant remembrance, before applying it to the two novels by Wolf and Maron.

Although Western Marxists and descendants of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory had incorporated psychoanalytical approaches into the reading of social and economic relations, the notion of the body as a textualized, inscribed surface, open to social and symbolic construction, is a foreign notion in a pragmatic socialist paradigm of social relations. From a Marxist perspective, when the body is seen as a site of conflict at all, it is usually an extension of the proletariat in their struggle against capitalism, a struggle played out in the fields of labor. The conception of the gendered body as a social and symbolic construction embedded in social relations is itself a fairly recent one. Such a notion first became evident in texts informed by Critical Theory that incorporated the psychoanalytical paradigms of libido. One of the most prolific contributions in this area was, of course, Herbert Marcuse's work on Eros and Civilization. More recent theoretical discourses have portrayed the body as a text inscribed with the effects of a postmodern "frenzy" of difference, displacement, and pastiche. The body is perhaps the most written about entity of postmodernist criticism, because the actual disintegration and unreflected simulation of real bodies through technology seems to have transformed flesh and blood into electronic bytes at the very moment that individuals are facing the hard reality of physical displacement, torture, hunger, and violence.

Adelson's book *Making Bodies, Making Histories* is refreshingly critical of theoretical approaches to the meaning of the human body that would obscure the interchange between the semiotic underpinnings of the body in discourse and its material reality in social constructions of identity. Adelson eloquently expresses the need to see bodies as locations and agents of resistance:

A discussion of the mediation between bodies as material realities and bodies as discursive constructs must also acknowledge that the mediation may be further deflected by distinctions, contradictions, or tensions between interior and exterior spaces, neither of which in turn can be justifiably considered wholly private or thoroughly constructed. . . . That is to say, bodies constitute a nonontological, material ground for action at specific moments in time. Such ground is, moreover,
subject to diachronic shifts as well as synchronic instability. A critical consideration of the body, especially of the body in literature, will perforce rely on a mingling of semiotics and social theory, for both offer insight into the nature of materiality and the construction of subjective agents of history. (Adelson, 15)

Taking Adelson’s model as a point of departure to talk about the necessity of seeing the body not as determined solely by material conditions, but also as a player in the production of the meaning of these conditions, I read the work of Wolf and Maron as subversive texts engaged in the production of a critical counter-memory enacted in the female body. In other words, the body as represented in the work of Wolf and Maron is not only a site of resistance that evokes and conveys the remembrance that refuses to be relegated to the constraints of a nongendered official history, but is also a location in which the degree of “subjective agency” can be measured. Instead of adhering to a Marxist notion of economic determinism and emancipation for reading the body in texts by GDR women writers, the insertion of Adelson’s differentiated interpretation of the role of bodies in making and representing history allows me to recall the tension between reality and imagination as it is gendered. That is, the images of female bodies both refer to and counteract the position of actual bodies within the structures of the GDR that declared women emancipated on paper without significantly altering the expectation that female bodies functioned in biologically female roles, that is, as mothers and sexual objects of desire. In the two texts, the placement of the female body in relation to a public history that did not significantly alter the gendered representation of female bodies recalls the protest against the erasure of the body from that history.

Instead of portraying bodies as simple imprints of social and political hegemony and/or of institutionalized discourses, Wolf and Maron recall the ambiguity of bodily agency for women in a state that guaranteed equal rights in the public realm of the workplace, but indirectly promoted the perpetuation of traditional gender roles in the so-called domestic realm. In The Quest for Christa T. and The Defector, the material base of human bodies is differentiated through gendered experience. Instead of a clear-cut dichotomy by which women in the GDR were either repressed or, in contrast, liberated, the shifting power relationships and the meaning of gender itself was generated by a growing dissatisfaction with the contradictions inherent in the “double burden” borne by women in the GDR state.
Major differences in the economic systems of the former FRG and GDR left their mark on the semiotic construction of the female body and the body image of women. Whereas a capitalist market economy promotes, in part, the commodification of the body, and most blatantly the female body, the nonprivate, socialist economy in the east, though not free of commodification, may not have objectified female bodies to the extent the Western media did and does. In reality, however, GDR women had access to Western television and cannot be said to have had a body image less encumbered by the commodification promoted in objectified images of women in Western media. The actual representation of the female body was not bound by the political borders. Accordingly, theoretical discourses about the representation of the body in the West, though not lending themselves smoothly to the analysis of the representation of the body in the East, can be useful for exploring the relationship between the material experience of embodied identities, including gender, and the representation of these identities in textual renditions that focus on the body and memory. Accordingly, Adelson's plea for reading the representations of bodies in texts by women living and writing in the former West Germany as "heterogeneous sites of contested identities" (127) can serve as a springboard for coupling gender with Benjamin's particular notion of historical remembrance as "Eingedenken."

As the infrastructure in the GDR continued to crumble in the mid- to late 1980s, the literature also took on a more ominous tone. Whereas writers like Irmtraud Morgner and Christa Wolf drew upon myth, fable, and Western feminism to portray their female protagonists in their struggle to gain equality and/or a voice, Maron paints a pessimistic picture of the GDR, in which women are obliged to become outsiders, estranged from their bodies altogether in order to survive. Her female protagonists become bag ladies or invalids. Wolf, though ambivalent toward the GDR state, refused to throw the baby out with the bath water. Her texts make clear that socialism was more humane than capitalism, whereas Maron's vehement protests against the GDR state are reflected in her critical rendering of the GDR in her novel. Of course, a major factor differentiating the two novels is the close to twenty-year time span between their publication—*The Quest for Christa T.* (1968) and *The Defector* (1986). Wolf's *Christa T.* was widely read during a time of a cultural political thaw, while Maron's novel cannot be separated from her role as
a conservative critic of the GDR regime in the 1980s. It is perhaps surprising, then, to note the resemblances in the two texts between the relationship of alternative forms of remembering and the location of this remembering in the bodies of female protagonists. Despite Wolf's and Maron's diverging backgrounds, both wrote under the threat of censorship, yet published in the West. Given the different temporal contexts in which the two authors wrote the texts in question, the similar connection between resistant forms of remembering and the female body may be attributed to a lack of substantial changes in the experience of women in the GDR from the early seventies to mid-eighties.

In Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T.*, the narrator recalls the desire of her deceased friend for a place in which she can achieve self-realization in her own terms, not those of the state. The narrator's realization that her friend's body exists in time, yet is capable of occupying differing spaces, interrogates the false chronology of a determinist materialist history that excludes the affective attributes of the body. In recalling her friend, the narrator searches for a way of remembering that would adequately recover her friend's lost identity. "The quest for her: in the thought of her. And of the attempt to be oneself. . . . I must forget my memory of Christa T. — that is what these documents [diaries] have taught me. Memory puts a deceptive color on things" (3). The remembered friend, Christa T., struggles throughout her life to function as a model citizen of the GDR state, only to retreat more and more into her writing. Her attempts to create an alternative utopian existence manifest themselves, however, in the very images promoted by the state — a house and family. The retrieval of Christa T.'s repressed memories by the narrator depends on factors that are not always under the conscious control of the rememberer. The affective remembering of her friend takes place on a visceral level. The text manifests the physical sensation of pain, disappointment, or joy that takes place through the portrayal of Christa T.'s dying body. The cancerous blood cells of leukemia are the catalysts for remembering, because they are reminders of the susceptibility of the body to internalize external dis-ease. Nevertheless, the dying body gives birth shortly before death. After Christa T. learns that she suffers from leukemia she bears a child: "The child, a girl, was born in the autumn, and was healthy" (182). Although Christa T. suffers a relapse and then dies in February, she leaves behind a legacy not only of pain, but also of contemplation:
She realizes that the blood transfusions are becoming more frequent and are lasting longer than the first time. She sees the other, healthy blood dripping from the glass container into her arm; and she thinks: now no power in the world can stop her bone marrow from flooding her own red blood with the destructive white cells. Lived too soon, she perhaps thought; but nobody can really wish to be born and to die in any time but his own. (183)

The events of Christa T.’s dying are relocated within the context that conjured them in the first place. The affective residue of Christa T.’s femininity becomes imprinted upon her body, which, in turn, develops the means to express the effects of the residue through symptoms that must be deciphered with meaning. Christa T.’s body has meaning in that it represents the ambiguity of being female in the GDR and, at the same time, produces the text that counters the official story.

In order to interpret the structure of remembrance represented through the body in the texts at hand, Benjamin’s memorial concept of “Eingedenken” (contemplative insight) provides a starting point for placing literary depictions of the interrelationship between subjective and collective remembering within the present context of GDR literature and society. The countermemory in Christa T., for example, activated by the juxtaposition between and disentanglement of subjective remembrance and official history, relies on its manifestation not only through the empathy between the narrator and the literary figures, but also in the portrayal of physical ailments that are expressions of repressed difference. This countermemory bears strong resemblances to Benjamin’s notion of “Eingedenken” (remembrance as “insightful commemoration”). This type of remembrance is not only a reminder of missed redemption, but also a rebellion against the forgetting of the circumstances that thwarted redemption; not a religious redemption, but one firmly based in the imagination of human agency. “Eingedenken” resists forms of public or state-supported remembrance that criminalize deviant, subjective renderings of the past. Christa T.’s struggle to fit in to a society that has no place for her becomes a struggle to remember her life not as one who deviated from the expected route a GDR woman was to take, but rather as one who interrogated the limited spaces for female subjectivity. The narrator in her quest for Christa T. not only thematizes the dilemma-inducing divergence of official history and subjective remembrance in the GDR. She also constructs a textual form of “Eingedenken.”
In The Quest for Christa T., for example, and continuing up to the semi-autobiographical works Störfall and Sommerstück, Wolf explores the intricate workings of both personal and historical forms of remembering reflected in the ambiguity of technological advances that both destroy and cure the body.  

How does this untraditional and provocative method of remembering manifest itself in terms of gender difference? Adelson's call for the incorporation of the "notion of positionality" in interpretations of the role of gender in producing power relations between bodies and in history (125) reminds us that gender is only one identity and that it is differently present with other identities, such as race and class. Adelson convincingly demonstrates that the human body as represented in the literary texts published in the former West Germany cannot be understood without knowledge of how gender and racial identities are imbricated in the power relations both engaging and being engaged by the body. By recognizing that bodies are engendered, racialized, and historicized in different ways in different contexts, one can take a closer look at "socioaesthetic constructs of bodies" as they are positioned in literary texts, but not separate from the historical experience that embodies them. If we understand "woman" to be a construct, then the embodiment of this construct as female body allows one to see gender as only one factor in determining difference. Thus, it is not the femaleness of the bodies in Wolf's and Maron's work that produces countermemories, but the choice of the female gender for conveying countermemory that is significant. It is not to say that having or being female gives women a predilection for remembering differently, but rather that the choice of representing resistant remembrance through the female body is a reflection of the double bind in which women found themselves in the GDR.

The remembering process experienced by the narrator in Christa T. allows the reader to measure the gap between the perceived agency and the actual lack of it as recorded through the physical limitation of the female protagonist's body. In Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history, "Eingedenken" signifies a type of remembrance that demands an active and attentive commemorating on the part of the rememberer. Benjamin's famous rendering of history in his description of Klee's Angelus Novus describes the dilemma confronting not only historians, but also writers who engage seemingly private images of subjective remembering in their writing. Such authors reject the subsuming of divergent
memory images into stifling, homogeneous views of history. Benjamin allegorizes the angel of history:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 260–61)

The angel of history, caught between the desire to wake the dead and the yearning to succumb to the winds of progress, has the power, however, to see the actual accumulation of debris that represents resistance not only against the forces of progress, but also against the betrayed remembering of this resistance.

Benjamin’s angel of history has been the subject of numerous interpretations, most indicative of the ideological trappings of the interpreter. The various feminist approaches to Benjamin, though provocative and comprehensive, do not commit the angel of history to a particular gender. Nevertheless, the angel can be seen as a metaphor for a type of history that gathers together those memories that are excluded from the homogenous notion of history as progress, and that are represented as waste and debris. In the present study, the memories and imagination of female subjectivity within the GDR state can be said to be representations of the contradictory status of women in that state and as a resifting of the debris. Christa T.’s death can be read as a cry of protest, not resignation to the pressures of living the contradictions through her body. Furthermore the remembering of alternative ways of remembering and the inclusion of the body as the main conveyer of countermemories has a counterpart in Benjamin’s angel. The angel sees the chance for resistance against oppression as it appears in a momentary flash amidst the ruin of a present that stifles a critical remembering process for the sake of progress or for maintaining an illusion of health. The angel desires the fulfillment of the process not just for present sufferers, but also in the memory of those who suffered in the past. Similarly, by recognizing the contradictions of the GDR society, Wolf’s texts, like Benjamin’s metaphorical angel of a
resistant history, represent the consequences of progress based on illusion in their expression of the disappointment with and critique of "real existing socialism."

In Wolf's first book to deal with female subjectivity, *Divided Heaven*, the role of remembrance is portrayed as a redemptive, if thankless task. She wrote in an environment where traditional views of historiography as progress were stubbornly and absurdly upheld by the official party line. Wolf constructs textual constellations where past and present momentarily come together in what Benjamin would call the "Jetztzeit" (now time) of "das dialektische Bild" (the dialectical image): "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now" (Benjamin, 263). For Wolf, remembering the past could not be separated from imagining a better future. Her writing represents a process of breaking down the petrified and static linear chronology of official national or public memory into a composite of subjective perspectives. In the moment this composite image appears it is, however, immediately in danger of being reappropriated, reconstituted, and reinscribed into the conventional "Medaillons," petrified images of a collective history void of subjective intervention. Such an intervention takes place at the site of collision between memory images devoid of subjective input and those counterimages that deviate from conventional, rationalized views of the past.

The painful remembering of the past nevertheless coincides with both the impossibility of retrieving the losses and the hope of intervening in the present to prevent the further silencing of suffering. Wolf depicts the attempts of protagonists — predominantly of the female gender — to unravel the tightly knit structure of a rationalized collective history that prohibits the intrusion of subjective correctives into its formations. Frequently, the female voices in her novels represent the attempt to overcome the repression of uncomfortable or painful memories through their struggle to establish their identity in terms of the past. Wolf's novel *The Quest for Christa T.* appeared in the GDR at a time when subjective remembering was just beginning to play a major role in breaking down a petrified collective public memory through the inclusion of different perspectives and views of the past.

In *Christa T.* the female body is the site for both subjective and collective remembering. The two types of remembering are not diametrically opposed to one another. Instead they represent different ways of
remembering that intersect with one another. Accordingly, subjective remembering refers to the memories and the process of recalling personal experience, while collective remembering signifies the inclusion of historical, public or group memory in an individual's conception of past experience.

Whereas Benjamin's theory of remembrance is often grounded in the artifacts and spatial constellations of the past, present in the built environment, my approach to memory, while drawing from the construction Benjamin describes, locates remembrance in the gendered body.²⁰ Benjamin's images provide a sensuous component to the notion of materialist historicism. Without explicitly referring to gender — the notion of gender difference was at the very least underdeveloped in Benjamin's writing — the recognition of recording the history of the marginalized could be aligned with the attempts by Wolf to speak from a female perspective. Her work counteracts the official notion in the GDR that gender discrimination had ceased once laws were put into place to assure the rights of women in the workplace.

Instead of seeing the juxtaposition of Benjamin's form of remembering with a gendered countermemory acted out upon and by the bodies of female protagonists in Wolf's texts as an essentialist association of the female with emotion, I see this as a sign of the material experience of women in the GDR that exposed the pitfalls of official history. Many women were expected to take on feminine roles as defined by motherhood, yet they were provided with the material means to seek other forms of production and self-expression. This contradiction played itself out most tellingly upon the figurative bodies of the female protagonists in Wolf's works.

Perception takes place through the body, through vision, and through insight. It is perhaps the latter element that most aligns Benjamin's notion of "Eingedenken" with a gendered remembrance, that is, one structured by the experience of being male or female.²¹ The angel, as a figure of redemption is also one of contemplative empathy. As Niethammer points out:

By making history contemporary he [the angel] seeks to redeem the hopes of those who have been passed over by history: that is, to release them for the freedom of further effectivity, so that their existential tradition-affirming power may be brought to bear in the struggle that must halt the catastrophic storm of history. The storm is already blowing from paradise, and is thus a force moving all history. (116)
An approach to history that incorporates an empathic identification with victims of the past is by no means nostalgic or sentimental. In order to fight back, one needs to give up the search for glorious history and victors and, instead, seek out the memories of the vanquished through a historical awareness that illuminates the hopes of those who fought but were defeated (117). The task of the materialist historian is to glimpse the moments in the past when utopian vision was imbued with a desire for change and empowerment by marginalized groups, but defeated by a status quo, by a dictatorship, or by military force. The historian remembers the struggle through a “tiger’s leap into the past,” thereby giving a voice to the speechless in the text by refusing to reinscribe the body into an official story, but to liberate it from oblivion.

In Christa T., the struggles of the female protagonist to break out of the pressures of conformity and to speak her own voice are portrayed as a slow death. Christa T. experiences how leukemia invades and is circulated through her body. Without reducing real cancer to a mere metaphor, Wolf retrospectively rearranges the scraps of Christa T.’s life in order to form a more complete picture not just of a troubled woman, but also of the social and cultural constellations that restricted her expression and freedom of movement. Thus, the illness is not just a sign of psychological disorder; it is also a reminder of the price that women pay for their difference in a patriarchal society and of the hopelessness of a cure in a society that does not acknowledge the existence of power relations that utilize or naturalize this difference.

Christa T.’s story is remembered by a female narrator who attempts to piece together her friend’s life after her death. The nonchronological narrative, a mixture of reminiscences, diary entries, and monologues, traces the life of a young GDR women from her childhood through her death due to leukemia. As much as the novel is about the somewhat eccentric hopefulness and utopian consciousness displayed by Christa T.’s attempts to write and to accomplish the tasks her society expects of her as teacher and mother, it is also about the mechanisms of remembrance and forgetting, of mourning and rejoicing in the actual process of remembering a life. The narrator’s re-membering in her quest for Christa T. provides her subject with a second chance to break out of a petrified notion of biography. By thinking Christa T. back to the present, the narrator creates a community of memory in which Christa T.’s body is not dismantled from her mind, and in which female subjectivity can
perform according to desires otherwise repressed during her lifetime in the earlier years of the GDR.

Although Christa T. dies, she leaves behind a legacy that pleads for a recognition of the power of subjective forms of remembering. At the same time, however, the finality of her death indicates the necessity of remembering in community. In fact, it is only in the remembrance of the narrator that Christa T. has perhaps lived at all. Her body is the place where her cogent, but subdued dissatisfaction takes its toll. Christa T.’s death, as symbolically as one might read it, represents the impossibility of detaching female subjectivity from the social constellations of the GDR state that defined sexuality as well as social identity. Like the tragic figure Antigone, Christa T. is bound in an old order that desires to return the body to the word and to rebel against an abstraction of the body into a machine or into a reproductive chamber. Like Benjamin’s angel of history, she is bound by her body because it is both in and of history. And this body is a gendered one. As Wolf’s novel demonstrates, the pressures of performing as both a mother and a worker in the GDR state led to a conflicted existence, particularly for women. Christa T.’s cancerous body becomes the site in which subjective desire and social expectations are pitted against one another. Through writing, Christa T. attempts to articulate the conflict her body expresses.

It is not just the internal cancer that kills Christa T.; it is also the lack of a communal space, in which she can speak her pain openly. The public consciousness was rarely open to seeing the illnesses of the body as signs of the decay and disintegration of GDR society. The drastic amounts of pollution that corresponded to the high rate of cancer in heavily industrialized areas of the GDR were publicly disconnected from one another. Thus, diseased bodies were not seen or understood to be the expression of social or political ills. Resistance to the obscuring of the connection between the state-sanctioned hazards and personal dissatisfaction took the form of isolated protests, emigration to the West, and finally, in the 1980s, of mass demonstrations. In many literary texts, however, resistance to a particular social expectation was often expressed through disease. Ironically, the same thing that expresses the injustice also kills the body.

The portrayal of the female body is less subtle in Maron’s novel, as is her pessimistic political stance. Yet her work similarly portrays the structural violence affecting women’s bodies and their resistance to it. In her novel The Defector, Maron exposes the painful clash between a state-
condoned and ordered assembling of the past and the re-membering of it through an imaginative “Eingedenken” that plays itself out upon and through the body of the female protagonist, Rosalind. After waking up one day unable to walk, Rosalind searches for a form of expression that allows her access to the realm of cultural, not just biological, reproduction. Her body becomes the site that undoes the essentialist images of femininity projected upon it, in order to demonstrate the actual social construction of the body enmeshed in semiotic systems of meaning. Thus, her body is subjected to traditional historical icons of femininity while, at the same time, it breaks down these norms.

Rosalind’s debilitated body becomes the site of emancipatory imagination and resistance, even as it remains physically passive. Ironically, Rosalind steps out of her preordained role in history (symbolized by her absence from her job at an Institute for Historical Research), by losing the capability of walking her normal route. Her physical immobility prevents her from forgetting: that is, from following the prescribed everyday routine of her job at the Institute for Historical Research in East Berlin. Her bodily confinement transforms itself into a catalyst for remembering not only deceased family members and friends, but also the repressed parts of herself buried beneath the surface of everyday acquiescence to the status quo. The memory images conjured up as dream montages, fantasy scenarios, and recollections of actual events depict the tension between external (public) and internal (private) types of remembering. The conventional dimensions of time and space are distorted as are those of narrative sequence and perspective.

In the process of mourning the loss of a more rebellious self, Rosalind’s voice dis-integrates into three figures: a third-person narrator, a first-person narrator, and Rosalind’s Doppelgänger Martha. The three voices repeatedly revive one another from their slumber in the crypt of Rosalind’s repressed memory as each carries the immobile Rosalind through synchronic spaces of past and present. Having removed herself from the everyday routine, and thus from conformist ways of perceiving the past, Rosalind contemplates her newfound ability to dissolve the restraints of time. Instead of envisioning her predicament as one allowing her infinite time, she transforms the time of remembrance into space: “It made more sense, she thought, to look at time as a restricted space in which she wanted to collect experiences like books in a library, memories accessible
to her all the time. . . . She could also recall times past in this room and fuse desired time to a lasting present” (4). The narrator seeks traces of her identity submerged in the interior of her mind and lost in the process of separation between her imagined potential self and the obedient person she has become. By returning to places harboring memories of the dead, Rosalind liberates the previously buried grief over this separation and gains insight into the forces preventing the excavation of both the grief and the fragments of her imagined identity. In her quest for her other selves, Rosalind encounters resistance. Her imagination is imbued with the strictures and real constraints of physical disability. Whereas Wolf remembers the fragility of bodies through the displacement of external constraints to internal illness, Maron, in keeping with the postmodernist conditions of the 1980s, portrays the female body as a convenient place to imagine a different way of moving through space. While moving through space, the body absorbs the remnants of hope that Rosalind’s prior consciousness had given up.

The narrator as Rosalind’s “I” counters mechanical reactions to dying within GDR society with subjective renderings of delayed grief. By relocating the close emotional proximity between the irrevocable, diachronic leave-taking through death on the one hand and recurring ritualistic farewells like those at train stations on the other, she exposes the living death not only of frustrated, resigned GDR citizens in particular, but also the decay of GDR society in general. In order to depict the rendering of the past as neither linear, progressive nor as circular, mythical, Maron takes the past out of the framework of time and deposits it in the realm of a space imbued with, but not solely defined by, mythic qualities. These qualities invoke the temptation to revert to myth instead of incorporating it into a critique of a rationalized present.

In her novel, Maron conjures up a number of mythical figures (Orpheus, Antigone), in order to visualize an alternative to the static mourning rituals perpetuated by GDR social codes. The comings and goings at the Ostbahnhof (East Berlin train station) symbolize a vaudeville-like reenactment of the Orpheus myth similar to Benjamin’s image of departure in the *Passagenwerk:*

Once again we are audience to the worn-out Greek melodrama: Orpheus, Eurydice and Hermes at the train station. In the mountain of suitcases in which they
stand, the craggy corridor arches, the crypt in which they descend, when the hermetic conductor, in search of Orpheus’ moist glimpse, gives the signal for departure. . . . Scars of farewell, that quiver like the crack of a Greek vase over the immortalized bodies of the gods. (Benjamin, *Passagenwerk*, L-I,4, 512)

The mythical rendition of farewell rituals contradictorily reinscribes them with historical meaning by placing them against the backdrop of a rationalized, mechanical gesture estranged from subjective experience. Eternalized in myth and thus removed from time, the scars of departure are destined to stop short of entering time and thus affecting history. The train station in Maron’s version of this famous myth of farewell revives the mythical image as it places the observer surveying the image both outside the event as voyeur and later, within it as participant. The narrator’s other, the persona Martha, passionately experiences the theatrical catharsis of departure and farewell at the Ostbahnhof:

Embraces, tears, oaths, up to the moment which drew Martha here, when the train began to move with a slight jolt, inexorably increasing the distance with every instant between those who traveled and those who stayed behind. . . . The futile gesture when those departing grasped the void in order to grab one another, the going and the remaining, finding each other again. The spectacle of uncontrolled joy and the sorrow intoxicated her, Martha said; she exulted and grieved at the same time, and thought she grasped for a few moments the meaning of human life. (Maron, 100)

Given the mythic quality, the insurmountable grief and simultaneous joy expressed by Martha remain trapped in an ineffectual time warp, until they are placed in the perspective of the present. The departure of passengers coincides with the inability of the official practices of commemoration to mourn the loss of the repressed potential for change.

The tightrope act of defying conventional mourning codes of GDR society and, at the same time, remaining within the bounds of articulation occupies Rosalind’s remembrance of the different deaths of her aunt Ida. Ida, first introduced in the story as a presumed corpse buried under the rubble of a bombed-out building, appears three days later and continues to live another thirty years: “Ida was alive, Ida was not dead, Ida almost died. It was a miracle that she was still alive, Ida said. My mother said Ida was a borderline case between life and death” (9). At Ida’s hospital deathbed, Rosalind coaxes her aunt to let go of life, only to feel guilty as her corpse is wheeled away to make room for the next patient. Remembering her actions upon returning to Ida’s apartment after her death, Rosalind
recalls how she attempted to dismantle her aunt’s lingering presence by disrupting Ida’s sense of order, thus giving reign to chaos. Objecting to the reappropriation of Ida’s memory and subsequent dissolution of it by the lack of a diversified collective forum for mourning, Rosalind’s destruction of Ida’s order represents an attempt to view Ida’s absence not only in body, but also in the things that embody her memory. The presence of Ida’s belongings disturbs Rosalind because it keeps a memory alive that depends on the objectification of the dead and not on real empathy for the deceased. Ida’s furniture is sold off to an antique dealer whose contempt for Ida’s taste maligns her even after death. Rosalind sees herself as an accomplice in this second eradication of Ida. She moves between the realm of conventional mourning and one that defies the calculation of a person’s memory in terms of the value of the belongings they leave behind. The disarrangement of the objects allows Ida to be remembered in relationship to the living, not petrified in the objects.

The spatial depiction of remembering as bio-graphics, relayed in the narrator’s constant referral to actual streetnames and places in East Berlin, also suggests an alternative to both a rationalized version of mourning and its circular entrapment in myth:

How could she learn a new way of thinking this quickly? she wondered. Paths of thought are like streets, paved with cobblestones or concrete, one went along them as usual, unawares; at best one sought a turning one hadn’t noticed before, or beat a small path to the left or right into the unknown. Her articulated system of main and secondary streets, alleys, and trails, quite adequate for her life up until now, turned out to be a trap for every one of her thoughts. In this way, Rosalind thought, all present and future would produce nothing more than the constant repetition of the past, which would only bore and not assist her. (Maron, 14)

The imaginary walks taken by the immobile Rosalind in search of Martha cut paths along historical passages in East Berlin that metonymically commemorate events appropriated by official GDR history. The most cogent reminder of repressed remembering is the concrete border severing East from West and the imagined walling-in of corpses in the Eberswalderstraße after a mysterious slaughter encountered by the narrator on a jaunt into the city. The site of the Berlin Wall becomes a monument painfully visible despite the measures taken by the official GDR story to imbue it with normalcy. For Rosalind her routine walk to work along such borders depicts her internalization of the normalcy. She
only resees, and, thus, re-experiences the painful physical division in her imaginary walk as “I.”

In her search for Martha, Rosalind as “I” encounters wounded or dead individuals apparently the victims of a gruesome confrontation involving an illegal border crossing, the direction of which remains unclear. In her attempts to find the site of the battle she runs into a wall of police. Again, engaging her voyeuristic talents, she peers through a brief break in the ring of uniformed men and glimpses a mass of corpses, about to be hidden from view by a hastily built wall.

And now they were walling up the eastern entry. Or exit. In between were people, a thousand, two thousand, who knew how many. The next morning pedestrians rushing by would be amazed or not indifferent that where there had been a street the day before, there was now a wall. In a few weeks the wall will be covered with film posters and the call-up for those born in ’68 to register for conscription. There used to be a street here, the people will recall, until that too fades into oblivion. (141)

The process of forgetting is allegorized as a state-sanctioned mass entombment of the dead and dying. (The dead or dying might also signify those who have physically left the GDR or who have succumbed to dissatisfaction and frustration by leaving it psychologically). The misremembrance of the dead, like the ring of police representing the brutal, but vulnerable power of the state, obscures the narrator’s subjective vision. The collectivized version of the past represented by the obstructed view shows the effects of a collective memory estranged from the subjective perceptions and experiences of the people it supposedly serves.

Consequently, Rosalind’s own memories are affected by the presence of the internalized, ineffectual remnants of a stultified way of remembering and fashioning of the present. She recognizes her own complicity in their existence. The interaction between different kinds of remembering and perceiving (nostalgic, monumental, subjective) reveal at once the sociopolitical side of subjective remembering and the impossibility of estranging oneself totally from social forms of remembering.

The alienating effects of an official and exclusive collective history on the psyche of the narrator implicitly comment on the detrimental effects of this history upon an individual autobiography. The existence of a coherent, stable autobiography separate from the historical context forming and being reformed by it, is placed in question by the countermemory produced by the narrator’s fantasy and imagined exodus from everyday
forgetting. Such forgetting is forged by her complicity in perpetuating the appearance of continuity and progress in traditional historical narratives written by her in her capacity as dedicated historian. She recovers a sense of herself through a mourning process that creates a concrete resistance to the status quo and to the conventional disregard for mourning. The active fantasy of the narrator re-activates the practice of a narrative “Eingedenken,” yet, at the same time, dismisses any hope of a utopian consciousness enacted in earlier GDR novels such as The Quest for Christa T. Although Maron’s novel upholds the significance of subjective fantasy and remembering for textually challenging the petrified and stagnant view of the past propagated through official GDR channels, its bleak ending represents a loss of faith in the power of counterremembrance to promote actual social change. In ending her novel, Maron depicts the reunion between Rosalind and Martha, her repressed, rebellious, sensual, and artistic persona. “I” (Rosalind) traverses the streets of East Berlin in the direction of the train station, and finally finds Martha in the Bowery in New York City. The futility of an imagined freedom is embodied in Martha’s condition: she is an alcoholic street person. Instead of demanding external freedom with simultaneous internal liberation, Martha’s ambiguous departure from the constraints of an unimaginative environment in the GDR into an image of self-mutilation and marginal existence questions the possibility of fantasy’s power for bringing about self-actualization within a social context solely in opposition to the external reality and not in direct protest against it. In retrospect, the actual political changes in the GDR and the accompanying hopes for subsequent reforms surpass the imaginative depiction of rebellion symbolized in Maron’s text. Maron’s pessimistic view of GDR society and of the role of the writer foreshadowed not only the end of the GDR, but also of the utopian consciousness that had sustained many women writers in their quest for a socialist and female subjectivity within the GDR state.

Unlike the hope implicitly expressed in the closing phrase of Christa T., “when if not now,” Maron’s novel leaves us with a sense of emptiness. Rosalind’s attempts to remember alternatively by taking on a different body become reinscribed into the oppressive status quo of the GDR. The memories become petrified, as though they did not have an afterlife that takes on a different guise depending on the constellations in which they are found.

As texts by Wolf and Maron attest, GDR women struggled with the
regulation of their bodies, though they lived in a society that guaranteed them equal rights. Ironically, as much as the collapse of the GDR brought women democracy, it also brought them the confrontation with a capitalist system and forms of gender discrimination that left them feeling victimized. Were they better off in the former GDR, where the material conditions seemed to favor their freedom of choice? Texts by Wolf and Maron imply that agency is only gained in remembrance, a gathering together of past moments and attempts at resistance for the present. It is a remembrance that depends on presence of mind and insight. Yet the affective components of remembrance come about though the body. Wolf's remembering of Christa T. evokes a dilemma of moving beyond mourning to an active contemplation of the meaning of memory, and Maron imagines the possibility of leaving one's body, in order to obtain a differentiated vantage point from which to observe and name the cultural networks that prevent a body's freedom of expression.

NOTES

I thank Ellen Berry, Ute Brandes, and an anonymous reader for their insightful and candid feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

1. In particular, former GDR women lost the right to unconditional, free, and legal abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy, a right that had been guaranteed to them since 1972. For a detailed analysis of abortion politics in the GDR and following unification, see Katherine von Ankum, “Political Bodies: Women and Re/Production in the GDR,” Women in German Yearbook 9 (1993): 127–44 and Nanette Funk, “Abortion and German Unification,” in Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 194–200. References to works cited will be included parenthetically in the text after first full citation in the endnotes.

2. Von Ankum demonstrates how the laws legislating women's rights in the GDR clearly saw "women's reproductive work" as "one of the primary indicators of their ideological commitment to socialism" (129). In 1971, the GDR government recognized that their attempt to regulate family growth had failed and they opted for supporting women's productive capabilities in the workplace, while giving them more reproductive freedom. In 1972 abortion became legal (137). For further analysis of the situation of women prior and subsequent to unification, see Irene Dolling, "Alte und neue Dilemmata: Frauen in der ehemaligen DDR," Women in German Yearbook 7 (1991): 121–36; Erica Fischer and Petra Lux, Ohne uns ist kein Staat zu machen. DDR-
3. As von Ankum points out, access to abortion on the one hand, and the continued ideological pressure to bear children on the other, produced a conflict for many women in the GDR that played itself out in literary texts. Given that public forums on the matter were extremely limited, literary texts provided a forum for the expression not only of dissatisfaction, but also possible alternatives (137). This consciousness is also prevalent in the short stories of many women writers whose work has been recently translated and anthologized in Dorothy Rosenberg’s and Nancy Lukens’s collection Daughters of Eve. For a discussion of women’s literature and examples of literary expressions of oppositional consciousness in the GDR, see Eva Kaufmann, “DDR-Schriftstellerinnen, die Widersprüche und die Utopie,” Women in German Yearbook 7 (1991): 109–20; and Dorothy Rosenberg and Nancy Lukens, Daughters of Eve: Women’s Writing from the German Democratic Republic, trans. D. Rosenberg and N. Lukens (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). In fact, the exchange between North American feminists, particularly in the field of “Germanistik,” and GDR women writers such as Irmtraud Morgner, Christa Wolf, Helga Schütz and literary critics such as Eva Kaufmann in the mid-70s due, in part, to the feminist organization of German teachers and students, the Coalition of Women in German, is worth noting. Seeking kin outside of their own often male-dominated departments, some of the North American Germanists found kindred spirits among the GDR women. The similar pragmatic approach to everyday life, the insistence upon political activism, and the shared sense of the burdens of a double standard, continues to be a fruitful interchange. The extent to which a feminist consciousness went beyond the circle of writers and their readers is the subject of many of the articles in recent volumes on the situation of women in the former GDR. See Germany and Gender or So nah beieinander und doch so fern, ed. Guido Goldman, Charles Maier, and Andrei S. Markovits, German Politics and Society 24 and 25 (Winter 1991–1992).


7. See Germany and Gender, and So nah beieinander und doch so fern [So close to one another, yet so distant].

8. Irene Dölling, “‘Unsere Muttis arbeiten wie ein Mann’: Ein Blick zurück auf Frauenbilder in DDR-Zeitschriften der vergangenen Jahre,” in Joester and Schöningh, So nah beieinander und doch so fern, 133.

9. Tellingly, the portrayal of women in magazines after unification places them in predominantly domestic realms — an image that corresponds to the growing number of women who have lost their jobs and who are apt to spend more time at home.


11. For a detailed overview of the differences between the experience of work for women in the former GDR and FRG, see Rosenberg, Daughters, 2ff. Rosenberg also summarizes the statistical information on the actual percentage of women working in the GDR.


14. Compare Eva Kaufmann’s overview of GDR women’s literature.


16. Without ignoring the specific temporal genesis of The Defector (it was published in 1986), an inevitable rereading of it in light of the circumstances leading to, encompassing, and succeeding the opening of national borders in the GDR in November 1989 undermines the radicalness of the social criticism reflected in Maron’s text. Nevertheless, the undeniable interrelationship between literature and society in the GDR makes a reading of Maron’s novel all the more timely. It anticipates the concrete reaction of many GDR citizens against reified and outdated methods of recording history that refused to consider subjective forms of remembering.

17. A number of articles on Kindheitsmuster, for example, analyze the juxtapositions of different kinds of remembering and the significance of writing about the remembering process for dismantling rationalistic, ordered forms of recalling the past and understanding the present. See, in particular, Wulf Köpnik, “Rettung und Destruktion: Erinnerungsverfahren und Geschichtsbewußtsein in Christa Wolfs Kindheitsmuster und Walter Benjamins Spätwerk,” Monatshefte 84, no. 1 (1992): 74–90.
18. Benjamin’s conceptualization of “Eingedenken” in his implicit and explicit readings of Proust, Baudelaire, Freud, and Judaic texts, is more complex than its limited use in my essay would suggest. The concept is, however, a worthy alternative to designations such as “Erinnerung” (remembrance) or “Gedächtnis” (memory) because of the commemorative and thus, potentially critical social task it assigns to remembering. Citations from Benjamin’s work are taken from Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften. Unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1972–1988). English translations are from Illuminations, edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), unless otherwise noted.


20. Niethammer nicely sums up the studies on Benjamin that attend to gender, such as studies by Susan Buck-Morss, Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, Krista Grefrath, Karin-Maria Neuss, Marleen Stoessel, Sigrid Weigel, and Liselotte Wiesenthal. The image of the feminine in Benjamin’s work can itself be seen as an allegory of hope and simultaneously as a symbol of dread, both common tropes in modernist aesthetics.

21. Niethammer’s reading of Benjamin’s remembrance in terms of gender is a good place to start for understanding the ambiguity of the angel figure. He interprets the angel of history as the divine messenger, the representative of a belief in redemption “stored in the religious tradition” (112). The angel cannot return to religion, but can remind one of the “human contact with history — both in reference to the past and for political action in the present” (112).


23. By maintaining the right to see what others refuse to see or cannot see, Kassandra, for example, in Christa Wolf’s book of the same name, is condemned to die for rebelling against the military order, where heroism is the order of the day. Much like Wolf herself, who remained within the borders of the GDR system, yet attempted to draw attention to its weaknesses, Kassandra relies on other women for companionship and community. See Wolf, Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays, trans. J. von Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984).

24. The political role played by Christa Wolf before the fall of the GDR and the attempt by a number of Western journalists to discredit her critical stance is well documented. For a summary of the debate, see Anz, “Es geht um Christa Wolf.” Maron’s open critique of the GDR state and her move to the West in 1988 is further complicated by her family background — her stepfather was a Minister of the Interior under Ulbricht. Both she and Wolf enjoyed a privi-
leged status in the GDR, although their attitude toward unification could not have been farther apart. Whereas Wolf belonged to the proponents of a separate GDR state, Maron embraced unification.

25. As the events in November 1989 demonstrated, the transformation of the Wall from a location of both real and symbolic division into a marketable (and eventually absent) historical monument has also realigned its mediation as a literary trope in GDR literature.

26. Reading this quotation after the border crossings in November 1989, I cannot help noting the twist Maron's satire has taken. The actual historical events have since inverted her depiction of the painful division embodied by the Wall into a pessimistic parody. One could revise her lines to read "There used to be a Wall here, the people will recall, until that too fades into oblivion."

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