Queer Lives across the Wall

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“Schöneberg – old home!” Hilde Radusch began her diary entry for 8 May 1945. Her exclamation expressed her exhilaration at coming home and no longer having to hide after years of a precarious existence as a communist. Born in 1903, Radusch joined the Communist Party as a young adult and was active in party and union politics in Berlin throughout the Weimar Republic. The Nazis arrested and imprisoned her for just under six months in 1933. After she was released from prison, Radusch briefly continued her undercover political work and then led a quiet life. When an acquaintance tipped her off that she was about to be arrested again in 1944, she and her girlfriend Eddy Klopsch fled and lived undercover in a garden shed in Prieros, southeast of Berlin. Now, they returned to the city on the very day that the German army capitulated. Berlin had been under Soviet control for days – the Soviets had raised the red flag on the Reichstag on 30 April, and the German military had capitulated in Berlin on 2 May. Already on 28 April, the Soviet military administration had issued its first order and begun to reorganize public life in the city. German communists returning from their Soviet exile, and from the liberated concentration camps, quickly took charge of the urgent tasks of providing food and shelter and rebuilding infrastructure in the vastly destroyed city. Though Klopsch and Radusch were both weak from hunger and sickness, they had walked almost fifty kilometres from Prieros to Schöneberg, found temporary shelter at a friend’s apartment, registered with the district office, run into communist comrades there, and even acquired their ration cards, all within two days. With these necessities taken care of, Radusch’s next errand took her to the police station close to Alexanderplatz. Here, she sought the files that the authorities kept on her but realized that they had been burned. Her search unsuccessful, she continued walking north to Pankow, where she had been told that the Soviet commander-in-chief
resided. This information turned out to be false, and she turned around, walking south to her former apartment in the Mitte district. She found it partially destroyed by bombs but packed a steamer trunk on a handcart with her belongings and began her walk back to Schöneberg through the “completely wiped out city centre – still burning. Dust; people are stealing whatever they can.”4 When she arrived at her temporary home, she was feverish. Despite feeling “3/4 dead,” she left the apartment again the next morning, first to take her girlfriend’s place in line for bread, then to the Soviet commandant’s office to give her report on the war’s end as she had experienced it in Prieros.5 Between describing her errands, Radusch made notes on the ruined cityscape she traversed, on the mood among the population, and on conversations about the political future that she had with other communists. On 10 May, her wartime diary ends with two questions: “Where should I report for work? What about an apartment of our own?”6

Physical survival and the making of a new political future are the main themes in Hilde Radusch’s immediate postwar diary. In her account, bread, work, an apartment, police files, and politics appear as equally urgent necessities in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi war. Hence, both literal and figurative notions of home are at the centre of this chapter. Investigating the realities of postwar housing as well as domestic practices, I trace what challenges queer Berliners faced in making actual homes – in living by themselves, with a partner, or in other constellations. What did the affective work of making a Zuhause, or, in a more old-fashioned term, a Heim, look like?7 What homes were queer Berliners envisioning and building? For many Berliners who had opposed the Nazis, these were also questions of political belonging, often envisioned as a continuation of the progressive politics of the Weimar Republic. Communists like Hilde Radusch hoped, now that fascism had been defeated and Berlin was under the control of the Soviet army, that the city would be governed by socialists, herself among them. Others, such as trans man and activist Gerd Katter, sought to salvage the legacy of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and recreate the Institute for Sexual Science. This chapter documents their efforts, as well as those of dog groomer Rita “Tommy” Thomas and others, to make political and personal homes. Radusch’s and Katter’s aspirations for a new political beginning were soon disappointed in both East and West Berlin, and close analysis of archival documents will show some of the different forces at work to quell their political endeavours. “The private sphere was less a zone of immunity than a social assertion and even political claim,” as historian Paul Betts has argued for the GDR, and it was a space of queer articulation and embodiment in both West and East.8
Not everyone persecuted by the Nazis returned home like Hilde Radusch. Some of the between 5,000 and 6,000 men whom the Berlin Landgericht Court convicted of crimes related to homosexuality between 1933 and 1945 did not survive. Three-quarters of them received a prison sentence, and at least 138 men died in incarceration and never came home again. Other queer Berliners were racialized as Jews and murdered in the Holocaust, such as young Gad Beck’s boyfriend Manfred Lewin or Felice Schragenheim, known from the 1999 feature film *Aimée und Jaguar*. Journalist and writer Eva Siewert’s short story “The Oracle,” published in 1946, mourns and memorializes her lover Alice Carlé, who was Jewish and was deported to Auschwitz in 1943 and murdered there. The story and their relationship stand at the beginning of the chapter’s first part, which explores home as belonging.

**Theorizing Queer Homes**

“Home” is a productive concept to study queer lives in postwar Berlin, not just because the close etymological relationship of *Heim* (home) and *heimelig* (cozy, homely) to *heimlich* (secret, clandestine) appears promising in this period in which queer lives were often lived *heimlich*, meaning both in the privacy of people’s homes and hidden. Sigmund Freud has famously tracked the etymology of the word “*unheimlich*” in his essay “Das Unheimliche” (The Uncanny). Setting out from the assumption that *unheimlich* (uncanny) is the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut* (homely, familiar), he found that the ambivalence of *heimlich* as the “*Vertrauten, Behaglichen*” and the “*Versteckten, Verborgengehaltenen*” leads to the incorporation of *unheimlich* in *heimlich*. Home’s ideological inscriptions as the site of familial reproduction, as a peaceful haven from a menacing world, and as a female space opposed to a male public space all make it a pre-eminent site for any study of gender and sexuality. Feminist thinkers have long critiqued the notions of home as a safe space of belonging and of rigid boundaries between private and public. Rejecting the conceptualization of homes as spaces outside politics, they have instead pointed to the inherent instability of the boundaries between private and public, stressed the home’s significance as a space of resistance, and made the case for homemaking to be considered as fundamental to the making of the self. Recent publications in gender and sexuality studies have continued feminist inquiries as well as pushing beyond them, investigating the home as a key site of constructing and maintaining heteronormativity and attending to processes of queering the home. Here, scholars have questioned the field’s focus on “exceptional sites” such as bars and clubs, cruising
spots, marches, or festivals at the expense of quotidian spaces. Instead, they have highlighted “the role of the politics of domesticity in social change, the subversive possibilities of the home and the continued significance of a home-space for self-worth and well-being.”

This chapter’s inquiry of queer domesticity in postwar Berlin is guided by this theoretical framework. My discussion of sources will explore homes’ significance as spaces of rest and recovery, and as sites of self-constitution through sexual and gendered practices. The sources also exemplify the inherent instability of the boundaries between inside and outside, private and public. While the second half of this chapter is dedicated to case studies of queer domesticity, its first half discusses queer Berliners’ efforts to create a home in the sense of a place of belonging. For Hilde Radusch, it meant contributing to the political reconstruction of Berlin as a long-time communist. For Gerd Katter, it meant commemorating Magnus Hirschfeld and his Institute for Sexual Science, where he had found refuge as a trans teenager. Memory was also a driving force for Eva Siewert, who had lost her lover Alice Carlé in the Holocaust and mourned and memorialized her in her short story “The Oracle” (Das Orakel).

I. Home as Belonging

No Homecoming: Eva Siewert and Alice Carlé

Eva Siewert (1907–94) was a well-known radio journalist and speaker during the 1930s. The Nazis destroyed her career and severely damaged her health, and after the war, she was unable to achieve comparable success. Her life and works have recently enjoyed renewed interest thanks to historian Raimund Wolfert, who came across her during research on writer and activist Kurt Hiller and has since published on her biography and works. My discussion of Siewert’s life and writing is indebted to Wolfert’s work, particularly as access to the files of Siewert’s estate proceedings is limited to the “circle of involved parties (potential heirs, creditors, etc.),” but not researchers. Recently, new information about Siewert has surfaced, and a monograph about her and Alice Carlé is in the works.

Born in Breslau (today, Wrocław, Poland) in 1907 to concert singers Hans and Frieda Siewert, Eva Siewert grew up in Berlin. From July 1932 until March 1938, she was chief editor and speaker at Radio Luxembourg, a private radio station, and became a popular radio personality. She was featured in newspaper and magazine articles across German-speaking Europe and sent autographed postcards to her fans (figure 1.1).
Her elegant masculinity attracted attention. For instance, a newspaper portrait by the Czernowitz (today, Chernivtsi, Ukraine) writer Franz Porubsky noted with “utmost surprise” that she wore “gentlemen’s garb” in two star postcards. Siewert, who was also quoted as “hoping to stay unmarried for a long time still,” explained that “she prefers gentlemen’s garb because it suits her best, is practical and comparatively cheaper, but still elegant.”

Fearing the outbreak of war, Siewert attempted to leave Europe in 1938 for Teheran, Iran, where she had worked for a German company in 1930–31. She travelled to Berlin to apply for a visa at the Iranian
embassy, but her application was denied and her passport was seized, making it impossible for her to leave. With a “fully Jewish” mother according to the Nuremberg Laws, Siewert was categorized as a “half Jew” by the Nazis and prohibited from working for the radio or the press. She got by as a translator and typist but was repeatedly arrested and incarcerated for sharing anti-Nazi jokes. Soon after her arrival in Berlin, she met the clerk Alice Carlé (1902–43), and the two became close, likely lovers. How they met remains unknown. In her autobiographical short story “The Oracle,” published in 1946, Siewert worked through the loss of Alice, who was murdered in Auschwitz. The story, a moving account of a queer relationship between two women persecuted by the Nazis, is both a starting point and an end point: a starting point for grappling with the years of persecution, separation, uncertainty, and death; and an end point to that uncertainty, the coming to terms with Alice’s death through the process of writing. By fictionalizing her own story and by leaving uncertain the nature of the relationship between the narrator and Alice, Siewert mourned and memorialized a relationship between two women considered illegitimate by most of her contemporaries.

“The Oracle” appeared in the 8 November 1946 issue of Der Weg: Zeitschrift für Fragen des Judentums (The Path: Journal for Questions of Judaism). Der Weg came out weekly beginning in March 1946. Its publishers envisioned it as both a medium to educate non-Jews and a forum for discussion in the Jewish community. Among the weekly’s features were not only news of Jewish congregational life, advice for those who wanted to emigrate, and personal ads of Jewish Berliners mourning their dead, asking for information about missing relatives and friends, or seeking marriage partners. Der Weg also offered space for personal reflections on the years of persecution, testimonials, and literary explorations of Nazism and the Holocaust, most often in the form of poetry.

Set between reprints of original documents about the “Kristallnacht” (November Pogrom, or Night of Broken Glass) of November 1938, short news dispatches, a longer piece detailing the question of postwar housing, and the personal ads section, the story’s title “The Oracle” evokes ancient myth, the transcendental, and the sense of an unknown future—the latter a central theme of the story. The narrative begins with the November Pogrom:

At that point it became clear to us that staying meant risking our lives. Until 9 November 1938, the desire to emigrate had been a desire for freedom. Now it became a necessity. We had to save ourselves.
Waiting anxiously for a possibility to emigrate together, the narrator and Alice seek out a fortune-teller in the hope of gaining certainty. Her oracle tells them that the narrator will get away first, then Alice, “very far away,” giving them cause for relief. The oracle continues, however: they will then never see each other again. This oracle appears to have been mistaken when the pair find a sponsor in London who agrees to host them. But his letter comes late, in August 1939, and they do not manage to leave before the war begins. Leaving is not as urgent for the narrator, who describes herself as “only ‘half.’” Alice and her sister, however, are racialized as fully Jewish according to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. When the narrator is imprisoned for anti-Nazi jokes and comments, a sympathetic guard lets Alice know that her friend leaves the prison in the mornings and returns at night from an outside work camp. Twice a week, Alice comes to the prison, standing on the other side of the street, which is busy with shoppers.

Twice a week we greeted each other with our eyes. More could not happen. Even a smile or a nod meant the greatest danger for her and Kellerstrafe for me. During this time of special punishment, we could not have seen each other ... In this way, we always saw each other for six minutes. Precious minutes. We both knew of the other that we were alive.\textsuperscript{25}

This precious contact is interrupted when the narrator’s work gets moved to a site within the prison, but Alice now sends weekly letters to keep in touch. She has gone underground and lives in a garden shed outside Berlin, and mutual friends serve as intermediaries for their mail exchange. Once Alice’s letters stop coming, the narrator is left with an agonizing ignorance about Alice’s whereabouts. When the narrator is released from prison, she runs to Alice’s house, hoping that the sympathetic concierge (“She was considered a secret ally”) might know something. But the whole block is in ruins. Her friends have found out that Alice and her sister were discovered and deported, probably to Auschwitz. This name has no meaning for the narrator, who consults an atlas to make sense of it. “I picked up the big atlas and looked for Auschwitz. So it was down there.” Then, she asks around, getting dramatically different answers: one person tells her that those in Auschwitz don’t have it so bad, being only required to work on farms; another one says: “They are long dead.” She refuses to believe it. In recurring dreams, Alice knocks on her door, asking her to hide her. When the war ends, the narrator inquires about Alice wherever she can, writing to search committees, going through lists, and contacting Alice’s brother.
in Tel Aviv. All her inquiries remain unanswered, however: “The oracle had fulfilled itself.”

At the beginning, Siewert’s narrator is “wir,” the first-person plural. Yet, as soon as her characters are torn apart, the story is told from the perspective of an unnamed, single, first-person narrator. While their relationship is not described in any detail, and the narrator never refers to Alice by any other referent than her name, it is evident that the narrative “wir” denotes the two of them. Their plan to emigrate together, the fact that they have their fortune told together, and their desperate hope that “we would find each other again somehow. Some ship would depart one day that would carry one to the other” leaves little doubt as to their coupledom.

While Siewert fictionalized the story, it still bears many autobiographical traces. She was “half” Jewish in Nazi race categorization. Like the narrator in “The Oracle,” she tried to leave Germany before the war. Like her narrator, she was imprisoned twice for jokes and critical comments about the Nazis. While little is known about Alice Carlé, Siewert’s statement that Carlé sometimes stayed overnight at her apartment was confirmed by multiple witnesses after the war when Siewert applied for recognition as a Victim of Fascism. After Siewert’s arrest, her apartment was no longer accessible as a hideout for Alice. Alice and her sister Charlotte were arrested in August 1943, deported to Auschwitz, and murdered in the same year.

“The Oracle” thus allowed Siewert to begin working through some of the traumatic events that she had experienced. Her use of the past tense and of temporal markers such as “back then” and “one day,” as well as phrasings such as “Berlin lay in ruins back then” and “the war ended,” create a temporal distance at odds with the date of the story’s publication, just one and a half years after the end of the war, when Berlin was still very much in ruins. By shifting the events back in time, Siewert distanced herself from the continuing pain of losing Alice. By conceding that the oracle had been fulfilled, she put an end point to the nagging uncertainty about her fate, creating a closure that reality had not yet provided. Writing the story may thus have helped Siewert to orient herself in the present and to turn from the future she had imagined with Alice to a future without her. At the same time, “The Oracle” is, of course, a memorial to Alice and to their relationship. Fictionalizing their story and leaving readers in the dark about the exact nature of their friendship allowed her to mourn her queer love.

For years after the end of the war, Eva Siewert attempted to find out about Alice Carlé’s fate, unsuccessfully (figure 1.2). She also sought to continue her career in journalism. Until 1947, she worked as a translator.
and interpreter for the Soviet-controlled Berliner Rundfunk radio station. She wrote for magazines and newspapers, among them the West Berlin Telegraph and, briefly, for the East Berlin Weltbühne. It was an article Siewert penned for the latter in 1947 that attracted the attention of the author Kurt Hiller, a major protagonist of the homosexual emancipation movement during the Weimar Republic who at the time was still living in his London exile. In the correspondence that ensued, Siewert reported on mounting political tensions in the Berlin media, but also shared glimpses of her personal life. She was pessimistic about the impact of her work and the prospects for a democratic Germany. “I write for many newspapers, but it serves little purpose,” she wrote in her response to Hiller’s initial letter.

Already, incorrigible compatriots have left notes at my door again: “Germany shall live!” … The majority of Germans sympathize with our informers, who once turned us in and are now running free. There is no point anymore in steering this mad ship with a hostile crew as a reasonable person or, in trying to do that, with the shadows of the dear dead floating around us.

Despite her well-founded pessimism and the threat that the note on her apartment door may have meant, Eva Siewert was a highly
productive writer in the immediate postwar years. By 1950, she had published over 130 short stories, reviews, opinion pieces, and translations, all this oeuvre despite significant health problems that resulted from her incarceration. With Hiller, she also exchanged notes about continuing the pre-Nazi homosexual activism, and for a short while in 1949–50, she served as a member of the Berlin chapter of the refounded Scientific-Humanitarian Committee. Two book manuscripts that Siewert wrote in the postwar years are lost: A memoir about her time in the women’s prison did not appear after the publisher Volk und Zeit went bankrupt in 1949. A manuscript on the topic of female homosexuality likewise was not published, despite her high hopes for public interest in light of the “major spread of this phenomenon, due to the mere lack of men.” Two years after her initial response to Hiller, Siewert remained depressed about the political situation. “We have not progressed in the past years, quite in contrast!” she wrote to him in April 1949. “We were further in 1945 than we are now. At times I give up all hope; at other times I get so angry that I want to fight more than ever.” In her despair about Germany, Siewert also considered emigration, but in the end she stayed in Berlin until her death in 1994. Her grief for Alice Carlé did not stop her from falling in love again – in her letters to Hiller, she mentions crushes and relationships with other women. Little is known about the second half of her life, whether West Germany’s liberalization in the 1960s made her feel less at odds with the Germans, or what she thought about the politics of the gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s.

More than twenty years after Eva Siewert’s death, and more than seventy years after Alice Carlé’s murder, public memorials made their love and their lives visible in Berlin and on the internet. In February 2017, three of Berlin’s queer archives, the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft, Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv, and the Schwules Museum laid out Stolpersteine (memorial stepping stones) for Carlé, her siblings, and parents. In 2018, the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft launched an online memorial space, “In Memoriam Eva Siewert,” commemorating the two women and making some of Eva Siewert’s oeuvre available.

Siewert’s struggle for survival in the postwar years is paralleled in some ways by the attempts of communist Hilde Radusch to gain political footing, contribute to Germany’s political renewal, and pursue a career amid personal threats from hostile men and escalating Cold War tensions.
The beginning of this chapter saw Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch making their way from the countryside through the outskirts into the city centre, seeking to be part of the rebuilding of German politics after fascism. The following section examines how their queerness affected Radusch’s ability to do so. To reconstruct the couple’s lives in the post-war years, I draw primarily on Hilde Radusch’s extensive papers at the Feminist FFBIZ Archives, which include calendars, housekeeping books, correspondence, unpublished manuscripts, and photo albums. I triangulate her personal papers with the couple’s Victim of Fascism (Opfer des Faschismus) files at the Landesarchiv, as well as the historiography on communist power consolidation in postwar Berlin. What emerges in my reading of these sources is a deeply precarious life endangered by economic hardship, hostility, and threats of violence. Radusch’s papers also demonstrate, though, how these two middle-aged women stubbornly pursued a dignified livelihood, withstanding continued hostility and not shying away from long exchanges with the authorities.

Else “Eddy” Klopsch and Hilde Radusch experienced the end of the war in their garden plot in the village of Prieros, southeast of Berlin. After returning to the city, they first found temporary refuge in a sublet, but they could soon move into their own apartment in Schöneberg – a privilege they likely enjoyed because of Radusch’s communist merits. Born in 1903 into a family devoted to the German emperor, Hilde Radusch became a leftist as a young adult. At age eighteen, she entered the Communist Youth. After training as an after-school children’s caretaker, she joined the ranks of Weimar Germany’s new female white-collar workers as the prototypical Fräulein vom Amt in 1925, operating switchboards. She was active in the communist Roter Frauen- und Mädchenbund (Red Women’s and Girls’ Association), gave lectures, and wrote for different communist publications. She served in the union of the postal service and as a representative for the Communist Party on the Berlin Mitte District Council from 1929 to 1932. Because of the latter function, the Nazis arrested her in April 1933 and sent her to jail for just short of six months. After her release, she continued performing some underground party work, but stopped because she was, according to her own estimation, “conspicuous and unfit for clandestine work.” She survived the rest of the Nazi reign doing various clerical jobs.

Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch’s relationship began in 1939, when Radusch moved from her former home district Schöneberg to a new apartment in Mitte (figure 1.3). Klopsch lived in the same building.
The two became friends and then quickly girlfriends. Looking back, Radusch recalled Klopsch’s mention of Damenklub Violetta, a lesbian social group active until 1933, as the shibboleth that allowed them to know each other’s queerness and thus made their relationship possible. Much less is known about Klopsch than about Radusch, and most of what little can be reconstructed is based on Radusch’s papers. Klopsch was born in Berlin on 12 May 1906, likely with a heart deficiency. As a young woman, she worked in a tobacco factory, but at age twenty-two she had to stop because of her disability. In the early 1940s, the two women ran a cheap lunch restaurant in Mitte. In 1944, a friend of

Figure 1.3. Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch at Tiergarten, 1939. Hilde Radusch Papers, Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.
Klopsch’s informed her of Radusch’s imminent arrest during the *Aktion Gitter*, the concerted arrest of former representatives from non-nationalist parties in the national, state, and city parliaments on 22 August. From then on, Radusch, soon joined by Klopsch, hid on their garden plot southeast of Berlin, where they witnessed the arrival of the Red Army.

Back in the city in May 1945, Radusch quickly found work in her old neighbourhood of Schöneberg, heading the Opfer des Faschismus (OdF, Victims of Fascism) Department in the district office (figure 1.4). Initiated by a communist survivor of the Nazi camps, the OdF had a dual role: as a political body making decisions about who to acknowledge as a victim of fascism and as a welfare department in charge of supplying survivors with food, clothes, housing, jobs, and compensation. Radusch’s lifelong political work for the Communist Party served as her entrance ticket to the job. Her task was to help those who had survived the Nazi prisons and concentration camps, or an underground existence like herself, to survive and get compensation for what they had suffered. Within months, however, Radusch’s work for the OdF led to conflicts with the party. In late November, its Berlin leadership summoned her to appear in front of a “control commission.” On 1 January 1946, she was asked to appear before another investigation committee.
“to resolve a number of questions.” The day of the meeting, 7 January 1946, marks the end of her membership in the Communist Party, after almost twenty-five years. Just five days later, she quit her position with the Schöneberg OdF Department. But Radusch left neither her party nor her job voluntarily. A series of letters, pencil-written in clumsy handwriting, detail the reasons for her termination, painting a messy picture of postwar greed, political intrigue, and vicious misogyny. In an undated letter that is part of Radusch’s OdF file, a Heinz S. writes to his unnamed comrade:

Ms. Radusch had to leave too, after all, because she treated all four parties in the same way and rejected Jure’s order to give everything to those with a KPD [Communist Party of Germany] membership.

In a second letter to his comrade M., Heinz S. further reveals:

Comrade. I can no longer stand being seen as a rascal in your eyes therefore I make a confession to you … Before Christmas Jure, Binz, Krüger, Steinfort said How do we get rid of Radusch she is too smart and dangerous as a broad [Weib] I give 100 cigars and 5 jackets if somebody helps us. I was there and asked what one would have to do. I was then told take out a few bills and a package from the desk directly in front of the door to the right in Room I. They said after Christmas all will be put back inside. However in the meantime I found that that was not done but you and Ms. Radosch were kicked out of the office.

Heinz S. wrote a similar letter to Hilde Radusch herself, kept in her personal papers, in which he identified himself as a Social Democrat. Though none of the letters are dated, he likely wrote them in late February or early March 1946, when the US military administration filed a lawsuit against Schöneberg mayor Gerhard Jurr (misspelled Jure in the letters) and other communists. In this third letter, afraid to be implicated in the lawsuit, Heinz S. pleads with Radusch to save his skin by not testifying in the trial. His letters offer two explanations for her termination: when distributing goods in her OdF job, she refused to favour her comrades. She was thus an obstacle to enrichment. To get rid of her, the local clique of Communist and Social Democrat men arranged for the theft of valuables and documents from her office. The theft, and the likely indictment for embezzlement, rapidly ended what had appeared as a promising postwar career in city administration. At the same time, S. also writes that Radusch “as a broad” (als Weib) had become “too smart and dangerous.” The phrasing does not leave
much room for doubt: Radusch’s gender was perceived as a menace; she directly threatened male power.

In an oral history interview she gave in 1979–80, Radusch, who became an activist in the lesbian movement of the 1970s as well as a much-sought-after speaker on Weimar Berlin, the Nazi period, and the postwar years, herself gave an additional reason for her resignation from the Communist Party.

Yeah, as long as you collaborate with the Communists, helping them with their work, etc., everything is splendid. But back then, when I quit, I was told, well, yeah, we would let you join again if you promise to let your girlfriend go. [I] thumped the table with my fist, said: “My girlfriend is none of your business,” and handed in my membership book myself.52

In Radusch’s memory, it was her relationship with Eddy Klopsch, then, that made her unbearable for the party. She does not say here what her comrades had against her girlfriend specifically – if it was something she did or was, or rather their relationship that they objected to.53 It seems entirely plausible that it was homophobia that motivated them. As historian Susanne zur Nieden has shown, the anti-fascists who worked for the OdF shared the German “homophobic consensus” and deprived both gay men and lesbian women whom the Nazis had persecuted of recognition and material help.54 Heinz S.’s plea letter to Radusch helps untangle the men’s motivation. He writes:

You’ve been wanted dead for a long time but your girlfriend did not leave your side and once when she threw somebody out they noticed unforeseen forces in her that woman must have some kind of training because otherwise she could not throw a strong man into the air like paper after that one was afraid when she was present.55

According to Heinz S., Radusch might long be dead had it not been for her girlfriend, whose constant presence and physical strength protected her. This assertion comes as a surprise, given Klopsch’s fragile health – the heart defect that she was born with, her later disability. What is more, she was about a head shorter than Radusch, who herself was only 5 feet 4 inches (1.62 metres) tall, as figure 1.3 shows.56 It appears, then, that in their case, being visible as a queer couple created a presence that made it harder to attack them. For them, their openly lived relationship was a safeguard, not a hazard. Even if their relationship saved Radusch from a physical assault, however, it could not protect her from intrigue, from the heartbreak of losing her political home, and from the poverty
that resulted from her comrades’ bullying. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss how the couple dealt with these emotional and financial challenges, and how their home, while providing space for self-care and the constitution of sexual selves, could not keep misogyny and homophobia completely outside.

_Gerd Katter: Memorializing Magnus Hirschfeld as Homemaking_

Like Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch who had socialized at Damenclub Violetta in the 1920s, Gerd E. Katter had also discovered his queerness during the Weimar Republic. For his coming out as trans, it was not Berlin’s subculture that had played the key role, but the homosexual and transvestite magazines of the era, his subsequent visits to the Institute for Sexual Science, and his acquaintance with Magnus Hirschfeld, who he came to regard as a father figure. After the defeat of the Nazis, Katter started his personal campaign to commemorate the former mentor. In June 1947, his impassioned letter reached the desk of Anton Ackermann, head of the cultural department of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany) and functionary of the Kulturbund, a forum for intellectuals and cultural workers. Katter introduced himself as a “cultural creator, member of the Kulturbund, and especially comrade and SED functionary.” He was deeply upset that the new Germany had so far neglected to commemorate “an eminent man of German science,” a man who was also a “victim of fascism” and deserved recognition as a “fighter for social reform and human rights, as a friend of the Soviet Union … [a] staunch pacifist.” The man that the writer wanted to see memorialized and commemorated was Magnus Hirschfeld. Gerd E. Katter, a resident of Birkenwerder, a village just outside the northern Berlin city limits, was inspired to start a campaign to honour Hirschfeld and to rebuild his Institute for Sexual Science from his experience of the institute in the Weimar Republic, a place that he remembered as a place of belonging. Katter was not the only one fighting to procure Hirschfeld his rightful place in German collective memory in postwar Berlin. What makes Katter’s case particularly interesting are his motivation and his social standing. In contrast to other postwar activists for Hirschfeld’s cause, Katter was neither a scientist nor an intellectual or politician, but rather a working-class person driven by his warm personal memory of Hirschfeld. The difficulties that he ran into shed light on the politics of memory in East Germany in the immediate postwar years. Before discussing his postwar activism, however, it is important to understand his prewar biography, especially his encounter with sexual science, Magnus Hirschfeld, and the institute.
Katter was born in Berlin-Britz in 1910 and registered and raised as female, but never felt at home in that gender. As a teenager, he came across an article by Max Hodann, sexual scientist and colleague of Magnus Hirschfeld, and subsequently discovered the homosexual and transvestite magazines published by Radszuweit Verlag, which he bought at kiosks and hid at home. Katter’s parents, first unhappy about their child’s gender nonconformity, soon became supportive. His father helped him find an apprenticeship as a carpenter, a male profession. In the carpenter union’s library, Katter found Hirschfeld’s *Geschlechtskunde*, which contained sections on homosexuality and transvestism. A communist acquaintance told his parents about the Institute for Sexual Science, and an uncle who was a direct neighbour of sexual scientist Max Hodann put them in touch. In 1927, Katter visited the institute for the first time, accompanied by his mother. Remembering the friendly welcome, he described the experience as life-altering: “This meant the end of doubts and fears; I had nothing to fear from such friendly people.” For the following two years at least, Katter became a regular at the institute. Hirschfeld helped him procure a *Transvestitenschein* (transvestite pass), a document identifying its bearer as known to the police to wear the clothing of the opposite sex (figure 1.5). Holders could show the pass to the police to avoid being arrested for causing a public nuisance. In 1929, Katter applied to have his first name changed officially to Gerd, and he also underwent surgery, likely a mastectomy. At the institute, Katter met other teenage patients. He hung out with archivist Karl Giese, and even imagined a professional future for himself as Giese’s successor or assistant. “After all, my trade, though I practised it with joy, was not something that could satisfy my mind!” Looking back on his years in the institute sixty years later, Katter called them “the most interesting of my life.” He met international visitors, “many Americans, English, and Japanese.” Even more meaningful to him were meetings with members of the German parliament, who came to the institute to learn about homosexuals first-hand as they discussed a reform of §175. Perhaps most importantly, he developed a close relationship with Magnus Hirschfeld, who, according to Katter, endearingly called him “Katterchen” and on one occasion even “my dear son.” Hirschfeld’s role as paternal figure, and the institute’s significance as a place of safety, comfort, community and kinship, learning, and political engagement would motivate Katter’s postwar activism, and he cherished the memory of his time spent there into old age. In a way, he continued inhabiting the institute long after it was gone.
Little is known about Katter’s life during National Socialism. He worked for an insurance company during the war years and, following his passion for the stage, took private acting lessons. After the war, he settled in Birkenwerder with his mother. It was from there, from the outskirts of Berlin, that he campaigned for a refounding of the Institute for Sexual Science and for the recognition and memorialization of Hirschfeld. Katter claimed that he had begun these efforts in 1945, but the earliest documentation is his letter to the Kulturbund dated 24 June 1947. In his appeal, Katter constructed both himself and Hirschfeld as good socialists and anti-fascists. He stressed that he had actively fought for Hirschfeld’s honour already during National Socialism. By describing Hirschfeld as a “victim of fascism” and a “fighter,” Katter used the terms of the emerging socialist recognition categories for survivors of the Nazis. *Opfer des Faschismus* (OdF, Victim of Fascism) was the official term for those survivors who were recognized as such by the state.
Katter put particular emphasis on Hirschfeld’s quality of being a “fighter”: he was a “fighter for social reform and human rights,” led the “fight against ignorance and mindlessness,” saved hundreds from suicide by giving them purpose as “fellow fighters,” was a “fighter for the truth,” in short, a “gigantic fighter.”

Constructing Hirschfeld as a fighter appeared as an especially promising rhetorical strategy because it echoed the OdF distinction of “active fighters” and “passive victims,” with the latter less deserving of recognition and tangible help. But Katter also appealed to his readers’ national pride. He called Hirschfeld a “German hero,” famous around the world, where he stood “in the bright lights … of the world’s public.” He asked: “What will the world think of us” with no attention given to Hirschfeld’s memory three years after the end of Nazism? And he ended his letter with a warning penned by none other than the quintessential German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “Noble man! Woe the century that pushed you away! Woe the progeny that misjudges you!”

It is noteworthy that Katter stressed Hirschfeld’s Germanness but remained silent on his Jewishness. Apparently, he – correctly – did not believe that mentioning it would help his cause. Rather, it would have undermined his construction of Hirschfeld as a “fighter,” since the OdF hierarchy denigrated the Jewish victims of the Nazis as “passive victims.”

Katter bolstered his appeal for Hirschfeld’s recognition, and the continuation of his work, by finding prominent supporters for his endeavour. He contacted writers Friedrich Wolf and Arnold Zweig; Paul Krische, scientist and sexual reformer; Felix Bönheim, director of Leipzig’s university hospital; Harry Damrow, chief press officer of Berliner Rundfunk, the East Berlin radio station, and member of the Kulturbund’s Berlin leadership; among others. They were all sympathetic to his concern, but at the same time, as merited anti-fascists, they now held important functions in the cultural and medical sectors and were all extremely busy. Krische reported that he had contacted newspapers to feature memorials to Hirschfeld in celebration of his birthday. Wolf promised that he would try to write a memorial for him in the magazine of the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (VVN, Association of Those Persecuted by the Nazis). Damrow answered that he had contacted the federal leadership of the Kulturbund and would steer the attention of his station’s cultural editors to Hirschfeld. Zweig, who had returned to Berlin from Palestine in October 1948, called Katter’s letter one of the “most thanks-deserving events since my return to Germany.”

He cautioned him that Hirschfeld’s rehabilitation would take
some time, and he offered an explanation why nobody seemed interested in him.

You must realize that the public’s attitude towards the memory and life’s work of Magnus Hirschfeld is not only an act of sexual displacement … but in addition, it also represents a pause in dealing with the psychological side of social processes.78

Zweig thus read the German public’s disinterest in Hirschfeld as an expression of German guilt for the Holocaust. Indeed, the resistance that Katter encountered can be explained as the result of an overlay of different discourses. By portraying Hirschfeld as a pacifist and an early friend of the Soviet Union, Katter had given good arguments to celebrate Hirschfeld as a hero for the new socialist Germany. But the Nazis’ defamation of Hirschfeld as a Jewish pervert, built on an earlier identification of Jews and sexual liberalism, and sexual science as a Jewish science, continued to reverberate in the postwar era.79 Hirschfeld’s membership in the Social Democratic Party (SPD, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) would likely not have counted in his favour after the unification of the SPD and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD, Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands), resulting in the creation of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the East, was rejected in the sectors controlled by the Western Allies. Additionally, many of the leading figures of the East German SED had adopted the reactionary sexual politics that they witnessed in exile in Stalin’s Russia, despite the sexual progressivism of the KPD during the Weimar Republic.80 When a 1947 Kulturbund article called for the creation of “a new, clean, and decent life,” “in the area of mind and culture too,” the terms anticipated the East German state’s emphasis on moral cleanliness and decency that became party policy in the 1950s.81 Thus, it is not surprising that the prominent support for Katter’s project failed to lead to a recognition of Hirschfeld through the Kulturbund. If Zweig, Damrow, or Wolf did lobby for his memory, their efforts have left no traces in the archives.82 If one of the Kulturbund’s Berlin district chapters organized a talk about Hirschfeld and the Institute for Sexual Science in 1948, as Harry Damrow vaguely remembered, it was not recorded.83

Framing Hirschfeld, and himself, as socialists and the appreciation of Hirschfeld’s legacy as a task of the new, anti-fascist Germany did not keep Katter from appealing to possible partners in West Germany. In February 1951, he wrote to the West German periodical Liebe und Ehe.84 This short-lived advice journal served as a forum for discussions of sex
in and outside marriage, oscillating, as Dagmar Herzog has shown, between distancing itself from and reaffirming Nazi attitudes towards sex. Here, Katter’s request fell on deaf ears, however. The editor, Dr. Kaltofen, informed him that the new Institute for Sexual Science, which had been founded in Frankfurt am Main, sought to distance itself from Hirschfeld. Kaltofen associated Hirschfeld with “extreme” positions in the debates about §175 and claimed that his ideas had been “misunderstood” and used as “licence or justification,” resulting in Hirschfeld becoming “a victim of his own, by all means sincere, efforts.” Kaltofen also voiced hesitations about the continuing validity of Hirschfeld’s research, mirroring the distancing moves of leading West German sexologists. Kaltofen’s criticism of Hirschfeld remained imprecise. Since Alfred Kinsey’s research was not published in German until a few years later, the scientific doubts that he referred to were likely those of Nazi sexology. Kinsey’s volume on women’s sexual behaviour was translated into German in 1954; his report on men became available in German in 1955. However, Germans had known about Kinsey’s studies for years, as magazines had reported his spectacular findings, and an array of summaries written in understandable, non-jargon language were available at low cost in the early 1950s. In light of the violent destruction of Hirschfeld’s institute, and the Nazis’ repeated defamation of him, the editor’s suggestion that Hirschfeld himself was to blame for his demise was nothing but pure hostility. Kaltofen’s response is an example of the continuity of Nazi attitudes in Liebe und Ehe. As Dagmar Herzog has shown, the magazine gave voice to anti-semitic sentiment both implicitly, through the denigration of Freud and psychoanalysis, and through an explicit linking of Jewishness and sexual depravity.

Gerd Katter was not alone in his efforts to memorialize Hirschfeld, of course. In Saxony, psychiatrist Rudolf Klimmer appealed to authorities and the Kulturbund to resume Hirschfeld’s work and establish a sexological institute. Homophile publications such as Switzerland-based Der Kreis periodically published commemorative pieces, often penned by Hirschfeld’s friend and comrade-in-arms Kurt Hiller. Hiller was himself active in West German efforts to continue Hirschfeld’s work, though quickly became disenchanted by the cautious politics of post-war sexologists. In 1952, Die Freunde, another homophile magazine, reprinted a short note from the West Berlin night paper nacht-depesche on a commemoration held for Hirschfeld at Kreuzberg’s chamber music hall in Hallesche Straße in November 1951. The event was organized by the Adolf-Koch-Institut and the Bund für Körperkultur und Erziehung, two Weimar-era organizations dedicated to working-class nudist culture and refounded after the war with the support of the Kreuzberg
district office. Speakers were Kreuzberg mayor Willy Kressmann as well as former colleagues of Hirschfeld’s from medical and activist circles. The brief note gives no further information about the memorial, such as how large the attendance was or what the speakers said. Still, the fact that it was sponsored by the district administration and held in a festive hall show that Hirschfeld was not universally forgotten or rejected. In Kreuzberg, a working-class district that had been home to a queer subculture since the late nineteenth century, Hirschfeld was celebrated even in the early 1950s. Hallesche Straße, where the memorial took place, was in walking distance of the bars and ballrooms that Hirschfeld had often visited and described in his works. The name change of the Bund für Menschenrecht, a prewar homosexual rights organization re-registered after multiple attempts at the Charlottenburg district office in 1951, to Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft may have been inspired by heightened attention to Hirschfeld’s name after the Kreuzberg memorial. That first postwar group bearing Hirschfeld’s name had its office, as well as an Archiv für Sexualwissenschaft, on Skalitzer Straße, also in Kreuzberg. As with all other organizations dedicated to fighting the criminalization and stigmatization of homosexuality, its traces disappear by the end of the 1950s, however.

Despite the efforts by Katter, Klimmer, Hiller, and others, Hirschfeld and the Institute for Sexual Science remained lost to German memory, both East and West, until the 1980s, a long-term result of the Nazis’ destruction of the institute and the discipline of sexual science, more generally, and the active suppression of memory after the war. In 1970, the West Berlin postal office denied a request to memorialize Hirschfeld through a stamp. The office claimed – falsely – that the sexual scientist had not been known to the general public. Research and commemoration of Hirschfeld and the institute only took off in the 1980s. In 1982, a group of young West Berliners active in the gay and lesbian movements founded a new Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft (MHG), dedicated to researching Hirschfeld, the institute, and German sexual science; and in 1986, Charlotte Wolff, who had studied medicine and enjoyed the queer nightlife in Weimar Berlin, published her Hirschfeld biography. Katter, who was still living just outside East Berlin, heard about the MHG on a West Berlin radio station in 1985. He immediately wrote to them, evading possible censorship by giving his letter to a friend who took it to West Berlin. Katter understood the MHG’s efforts as a continuation of his own attempts to bring into being, or rather resurrect in honour of the humanist Magnus Hirschfeld and to the benefit of those people whom he cared for, an
in institution that will finally close the gap that had emerged since his expulsion from Hitler’s Germany and the shattering of the institute, which he had generously given to the German state.  

His own efforts had failed, Katter thought, “through the lack of a respective mandate from a non-existing responsible authority” – an adequate analysis given the lack of a free public sphere in the GDR and the difficulties that the nascent gay and lesbian organizations faced in the 1970s and 1980s. Katter’s lifelong quest to memorialize Hirschfeld was finally successful when he recorded his memories and donated his papers to the archives of the MHG. Sharing the shelves with the books and magazines that were so important to his self-making as a young person, and with the personal papers of others who inhabited the space of the institute, they have, in a way, returned home.

The first part of this chapter has traced queer Berliners’ efforts at finding belonging in postwar Berlin. The sources analysed here produce an ambivalent image. Eva Siewert memorialized her lover Alice Carlé through fiction. By not spelling out the romantic or sexual terms of their relationship, she created a space to mourn her queer love. Gerd Katter passed; he did not discuss his being trans publicly. His queerness remained invisible and did not affect his work negatively. Hilde Radusch’s homosexuality was well known among her socialist comrades, who pressured her to break up with her girlfriend. Whether their motive was homophobic or sexist, or both, they knew that the relationship with Eddy Klopsch protected Radusch. While they did not succeed in destroying the couple’s bond, their intrigue ended Radusch’s promising career in city administration and resulted in decades of precarity and poverty. How their home and practices of homemaking helped them cope with this difficult situation, and how domesticity looked for other queer Berliners in the postwar years, is the subject of the second part of this chapter.

II. Queer Domesticity

In May 1945, one-third of Berlin’s prewar apartments were uninhabitable, destroyed by the Nazis’ plans for turning the city into their imperial capital Germania, allied bombs, and the battle of Berlin in spring 1945. Only a quarter of the apartments that existed in 1939 were left undamaged; all others were in need of repair. The population had also shrunk: through the Nazis’ exiling, deportation, and murder of the city’s Jewish population; civilians killed by bombs or leaving town to escape the bombings; and the death or war imprisonment of German
soldiers. After 1945, refugees from formerly German or German-occupied regions in Russia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia flocked into the city in great numbers. While the Soviet city commander issued a prohibition to move to Berlin and attempted to steer refugees to other parts of Germany, they continued to arrive in Berlin and stayed, often in camps that had previously housed forced labourers or in makeshift accommodation such as the British Nissenhütten. These huts had a floor area of forty square metres and were often shared with a second party, the occupants separated only by a thin wall.

The housing problem was urgent, but building materials were hard to come by. Additionally, the city administration did not have the necessary funds for large-scale reconstruction in the first years after the war, and state-administered programs for urban planning and public housing did not begin until after the foundation of the two German states in 1949. As a consequence, most households were home not to a nuclear family but to women and children, more distant relatives, or people not related at all. As Kirsten Plötz has shown, this reality found its way into the debates over the Grundgesetz (Basic Law, rump constitution) for West Germany. Female-female couples raising children together were so prevalent that there was discussion of including these families, Frauenfamilien (women families), in the Grundgesetz’s protection of families – a radical, if ultimately unsuccessful challenge to prevailing ideas of family and the ideology of the nuclear family that would become dominant in the 1950s. In East Berlin, large households accommodating various parties – close as well as distant family members and non-related occupants – remained the predominant reality for residents into the late 1960s. In West Berlin, funds became available for public housing from the federal government and the United States in the mid-1950s, and construction of apartment buildings moved ahead faster than in East Berlin, where the development of heavy industry and representative architecture took precedence over housing. At the same time, in West Berlin too, “few Berliners lived in nuclear-family households before the mid-fifties, and thereafter the numbers increased but incrementally over time.” In sum, Berlin’s housing situation remained extremely tense well beyond the founding of the two German states. Privacy was a luxury, not the norm for most of the city’s inhabitants. And most Berliners, whether they resided in East or West Berlin, did not live the nuclear-family model throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

What did the shortage of housing mean for queer Berliners? While a lack of privacy affected most middle- and working-class Berliners, its repercussions varied immensely. Working-class men living in hotels, sublets, or communal accommodation could not bring other
men to their home. This restriction was the case for Fritz Schmehling, who had moved to West Berlin from West Germany in the early 1960s because of its reputation as a gay haven.\textsuperscript{110} As a skilled labourer, he was able to escape military conscription in exchange for committing to two years of work in West Berlin, an opportunity that he took gladly as soon as he was twenty-one. The job that the West German employment office found for him came with accommodation in a Nissenhütte in the West Berlin district of Spandau. Because of its lack of privacy, Schmehling had little choice but to pursue sex outside the home. I will pick up his narrative in my discussion of public spaces in chapter 3.

In personal ads in pen-pal services such as Berlin’s \textit{Amicus-Briefbund}, same-sex love and friendship were sometimes sought in combination with accommodation. \textit{Amicus-Briefbund} was a monthly list of pen-pal ads, published since 1948 with the permission of the American military command.\textsuperscript{111} Its name, \textit{Amicus}, was Latin for “friend,” a term long understood to signify a same-sex partner and used concurrently in Weimar-era queer publications such as \textit{Freundschaft} or \textit{Die Freundin}. The publisher described its purpose in words that sounded neutral to the ignorant but were well understood by the list’s intended subscribers: the \textit{Briefbund} was for those seeking “honest camaraderie” and “like-minded people,” “also across zonal and country borders.” He promised an end of loneliness to those in want of “pure friendship, valuable life camaraderie” and appealed to those who wanted to be particularly cautious and did not want to be recognized right away. Subscribers looking for others who shared their hobbies or for business partners were also welcome to post an ad, though.\textsuperscript{112} While ads came from across postwar Germany, Berliners placed the majority, and most of them resided in the western sector.

In \textit{Briefbund}’s February 1950 issue, one man from Berlin’s east sector placed an ad in search of a “long-term friendship,” adding: “I would be thankful for a job and accommodation.”\textsuperscript{113} In the same issue, three men and one woman from the city’s west mention in their ads that they own a home, signalling a higher sense of privacy for the same-sex encounters they sought as well as possible accommodation for a new “friend.” In June 1951, Hamburg homophile magazine \textit{Die Freunde} called on its readers to give the editors notice of available rooms to help those “friends” who had to start from scratch after being subjected to a lawsuit or even prison time for a violation of §175.\textsuperscript{114} The same magazine collected addresses for temporary stays around Germany and Europe, including not just the big cities but also mid- and small-sized towns.\textsuperscript{115}
Frauenfamilien

By contrast, female couples living together were generally less conspicuous, even a “respectable part of society,” which tolerated possible intimacies between women – as long as they did not publicly show or speak about them.116 As seen earlier, many households consisted of two women raising their children together in their husbands’ absence. The perception of female couples began to change in West Germany, however, as conservatives established marriage as the only legitimate model of cohabitation over the course of the 1950s and into the late 1960s.117 In the following, I discuss two examples of lesbian love relationships in a Frauenfamilie. The first is the relationship of Käthe “Kitty” Kuse and Ruth Zimmel. Käthe “Kitty” Kuse is a well-known figure of Berlin lesbian history. Of the same generation as Hilde Radusch, she too participated in the activism of elderly women in West Berlin’s lesbian movement in the 1970s, befriended a group of young lesbian activists, and was the subject of oral history interviews, publications, and documentaries in the 1980s.118

Born in Schöneberg in 1904, Kuse had lived in lesbian relationships since the 1920s.119 Through the Weimar and Nazi years, she worked as a typist and accountant. After the war, she continued her education, got her Abitur (high school diploma), and enrolled at Humboldt University for a degree in economics.120 Her education and her membership in SED and Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB, the state-sponsored union in the GDR), which she joined in July 1946, became the basis for a stellar career in East Berlin, and Kuse earned extremely well by the early 1950s, making more than four times the median income. She worked in different agencies in East Berlin: the Zentralverband der Deutschen Industrie, later Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission, from 1946 until 1950; then in the Regierungskanzlei of the GDR; then the Patentamt from 1951 until 1954, where she held leadership positions; and finally the VEB Forschungs- und Entwicklungsbetrieb für Turbinen und Transformatoren from January until September 1955.121 In 1952, while recovering from a breakdown at Weissensee hospital, she met Ruth Zimmel, another patient and a refugee from East Prussia. Born in 1911, Zimmel had worked in retail and later in her husband’s grocery store, whose direction she took over when he was drafted into the army. When Zimmel met Kuse, she was married, but she divorced her husband in the same year, and she and her two daughters moved in with Kuse, whose income supported the whole family.122 While Kuse lost her well-paying job when the family moved to West Berlin in 1955, she and Zimmel remained a couple until 1970.
In Kuse’s large collection of photos, there is a black-and-white one that shows Ruth Zimmel and her daughters in what appears to be a joyous, carefree moment. It is dated for 1952, the year that Kuse and Zimmel met. Just off the centre of the image is Zimmel, smiling broadly, if somewhat awkwardly, her eyes looking directly at the photographer. In front of her, to her left and her right, are her daughters, beaming at each other and their mother. The image is taken on a sunny day outside, and a tall object made of wicker, reminiscent of a beach chair, is in the background. In the gazes and smiles that the photographed direct towards each other and the camera, and in their body postures, turned towards one another, the children’s arms touching their mother’s upper body, the photo exudes lightheartedness, intimacy, and trust. The combination of sunlight and wicker evokes an association of the beach, and their casual but trim dresses suggest Sunday outfits. In these qualities, the photo appears as an exemplary family snapshot. The lack of a second parent does not hamper the impression of familial bliss; rather, it is a common feature of such images, since one of the parents is often behind the camera. Whether that was Kitty Kuse in this instance or not, her inclusion of the photo in her personal papers suggests that the scene represented something important to her: that her role as parent and, at least for a while, family provider was a significant part of the life story that she decided to leave to posterity.

A second example of a lesbian relationship in a Frauenfamilie comes from an anecdote that Christine Loewenstein shared in a 2018 oral history interview for the Archive of Other Memories. Her narrative demonstrates how the inconspicuousness of Frauenfamilien depended on keeping signs of a lesbian relationship within the home. Loewenstein was born in 1946 or 1947 and grew up in the Johannisthal district in Berlin’s southeast. In the interview, when discussing how she realized that she herself was attracted to women, Loewenstein begins to explain that she did not know any lesbian women in her childhood, but quickly corrects herself:

I did not know any lesbian, I mean, that’s not entirely true, but in my childhood, in my youth, that term did not really exist. The word did not exist either. I heard it from my husband, well, my boyfriend at the time … It was funny, we were visiting my friend … we are going out, and then he says: “Well, since when, since when has your mother been lesbian?” And we [gesticulates] did not know at all, how, what. And then it turned out that the mother of my friend was living together with her girlfriend. And it was quite obvious, but I did not see, we both did not see it. She herself [Loewenstein’s friend] did not see it. They had a real, a, a, a marital bed
[Ehebett], with nightstands left and right, and were both sleeping there and were clearly one of those traditional lesbian couples. The wife [Frau] always a bit with suits, her with the skirt. And we did not ... We did not know that. We did not have a word for that. And that’s why, if you don’t have a word, you can’t bring things into your consciousness, either, right? And therefore, that was not a way for me either.\textsuperscript{125}

Loewenstein explains her and her friend’s inability to see the nature of the women’s relationship with a lack of words. They did not know the word “lesbian,” and this ignorance meant they did not see that the two women embodied lesbian subjectivities and (ostensibly) had a sexual relationship, or at least furnished their home like a married couple. Once Loewenstein’s boyfriend introduces the term, the pieces fall into place: the women’s embodiment of a masculine-feminine, or butch-fem\textsuperscript{126} couple (suits and skirts), their sharing a bed. It seems to me, though, that the key moment in the teenagers’ understanding of the women’s relationship is their entering the family’s home: it is right after their visit, after they leave the house, that the boyfriend blurts out his question. It is seeing their shared household, in particular the “marital bed with nightstands left and right,” that lets him know that the two women are “lesbian.” In other words, seeing the inside of their Heim brought their Geheimnis into the open. Loewenstein’s anecdote is hence an apt example of Sara Ahmed’s notion that bodies “are sexualized through how they inhabit space.”\textsuperscript{127} It shows, too, that the home, even its most intimate parts, often is not completely sealed off or private, but rather porous. The theme of the porosity and precarity of home continues in my discussion of Eddy Klopsch and Hilde Radusch’s homemaking work in the following section.

West Berlin Domesticities: Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch

After Hilde Radusch had been ousted from her job in the Schöneberg district office and shut out from the nascent socialist postwar order, she and Eddy Klopsch struggled to make ends meet. They lived on the verge of poverty well into the late 1950s, getting by just barely through a mix of temporary city jobs, small business ventures, writing gigs, and compensation and pension benefits. Eddy Klopsch died sick and poor in 1960, just fifty-three years old. The materials that Hilde Radusch left behind in her personal papers allow for a reconstruction of their day-to-day efforts to get through an economically, physically, politically, and spiritually difficult time. They also document the couple’s relationship practices and speak of lesbian subjectivities in mid-century Berlin.
Finally, they show the instability of a notion of home as private, secure, and separate from the public sphere and its power struggles.

As soon as Hilde Radusch was out of her OdF job, in February 1946, the couple applied to open a restaurant, then began peddling with waste glass and scrap metal. Beginning in May 1946, they ran a second-hand store in Mitte. For two and a half years, business was good – they even hired an employee – and the store provided their income despite what appears to have been continuous harassment by Radusch’s former comrades. Indeed, two anonymous letters in Radusch’s papers show that the threats against the couple did not cease after she left the party and her job at the OdF district office in Schöneberg. Presumably written in 1947–48, these letters threaten the couple’s lives openly. Like the letters discussed earlier, they are written in pencil, in clumsy handwriting and in colloquial language, disregarding spelling or punctuation rules. They were delivered to their home address by hand. One letter writer makes a brutal, sexualized threat, its graphically violent language recalling the mass rape of Berlin women at the end of the war. The letter writer postulates: “We are still in charge and Nobody will change that here.” Who is meant by “we” is clarified in the second letter. “Those who become an inconvenience will be finished no matter how we are still in charge and not broads [Weiber].” The two women are threatened precisely because they endanger male power. Moreover, abuse calling Radusch a “cranky old woman, hysterical and moody” is a stereotypically gendered insult: a colloquial reference to the medicalization of outspoken or otherwise conspicuous women as “hysterical” and, more generally, to women’s alleged inability to control their emotions, in contrast to men’s sober, level-headed demeanour. The fact that the letters were delivered by hand, as evidenced by the lack of a stamp on the envelopes and the delivery instructions, “Drop off before seven only otherwise after dusk,” suggests that the writer had observed Radusch and Klopsch and knew their everyday rhythm. Their home was clearly not safely remote from outside intrusion.

Radusch and Klopsch thus continued to fear the Schöneberg Communist Party clique, but also more generally the SED. Radusch made notes in her 1947 daily calendar about a man who ostensibly shadowed them. In 1948, their store was broken into six times in a period of six months, and they noticed intensified surveillance. Their complaints to the police did not lead to arrests. In November of that year, Klopsch wrote down a conversation that she overheard in the hallway in front of their store between two men who were apparently assigned to harm
them. The following two weeks, they were constantly observed, and they took the summons for “personal consultation” sent to them by the Mitte Housing Office as a signal to leave the Eastern sector head over heels. They deregistered their store and returned to Schöneberg in the American sector in November 1948, where they went back to peddling for a few months. In 1951, Radusch found employment for six months in the West Berlin Senate’s emergency program for municipal workers. Four years later, the same program took her on again for six months.

Another source of income was financial compensation for health damage and career obstacles resulting from Radusch’s activism against the Nazis, but these payments were always precarious too. Already in March 1948, during a revision of all OdF benefit recipients, Radusch’s status as OdF had been revoked, though she was allowed to keep an enhanced ration card. Her incarceration had been too short, and she could not prove that her relocation to Prieros had been motivated by imminent arrest rather than fear of allied bombings, the committee argued. In 1948, as a consequence of the escalating Cold War and the growing separation between East and West Berlin during the Berlin Blockade of 1948, the OdF committee ceased to be responsible for West Berlin, with an Amt für politisch-religiös Verfolgte (PRV-Amt, Office for the Politically, Racially, or Religiously Persecuted) instead taking care of victims of Nazi persecution there. Here again, Radusch was denied recognition for many of the same reasons as in East Berlin. She appealed the decision successfully and was granted a one-time compensatory sum of 870 DM, appealed again and received another 500 DM, still less than she believed to be adequate. From January 1953, she was granted a monthly disability pension in the amount of 165 DM for the rheumatism she suffered as a result of Nazi persecution, allowing the couple a somewhat stable existence, albeit in poverty. This pension was cancelled in February 1954, however, because the Senator for Work and Welfare found “the occupational disability no longer extant,” according to her latest medical exam. Radusch appealed, and nine months later, the PRV-Amt again confirmed her rheumatism, though to a lesser degree, reducing her disability pension to 60 DM. Radusch’s struggle for compensation dragged on until 1963, when the PRV-Amt Berlin granted her a final redress of 24,570 DM for “career damage” suffered as a result of Nazi persecution.

How did Eddy Klopsch and Hilde Radusch cope with these challenging years of financial insecurity, political disillusion, and constant threats? Radusch’s calendars and some love letters written by Klopsch document how they experienced this difficult time and how the couple
structured their everyday lives. Brief jottings in Radusch’s calendars concern her mood, her and Klopsch’s health, their economic situation, work, political and personal events, and the weather.


In 1949, when the couple had relocated to West Berlin, the year began with a joyous event, the celebration of their ten-year anniversary on 7 January. Hard times notwithstanding, the “neat celebration” boasted “coffee, torte, cake, schnapps/cigarettes, head cheese, tomato salad, potato salad, tea.” To afford the party, Radusch had sold her mother’s necklace and two skirts. At the end of the week, she notes: “did not work at all/just walked around for the celebration on the 7th and spent money.” Despite this pessimist bottom line and a toothache, she records “good mood” on most days.

As the year continued, there was little occasion for good moods, however. After hastily giving up their store in Mitte, they needed new jobs in Schöneberg, especially once Radusch lost her status as OdF in May 1949 and was not recognized as a Politisch-Rassisch Verfolgte (PrV, Persecuted for Political, Racist, or Religious Reasons) by West Berlin’s PRV-Amt. Radusch wrote articles for newspapers and the radio (the British-controlled NWDR, the US-controlled RIAS), but most were not published. They continued to sell valuables to get by, received a small amount of welfare, and sometimes friends helped them out. The two took turns being sick and depressed, as testified by notes such as “E sad” (19–20 January), “Quite desperate” (25 January), “Vati [Daddy] heart” (22 January), “E gall and heart” (28–29 January), “desperate, toothache” (1 February), “E crying” (21–22 March), “E gall” (25–26 March), “Everything too much for E” (15 April), “E rails against everything” (16 April), “E heart attacks/falls asleep during breakfast and cries from pain” (27 June). Accordingly, Radusch’s weekly summaries for 1949 remained deeply pessimistic: week four, “no money, no prospects”; week five, “no prospects”; week twelve, “no prospects”; week thirteen, “no money”; week eighteen, “no rent for May”; and week thirty-two, “the year progresses and nothing gets better.”
The couple’s 1950 housekeeping book sheds light on their economic situation five years after the war had ended. Monthly expenses ranged from about 190 DM (November) to 260 DM (December), with the biggest chunk of their budget going to rent (114 DM) and food (between 55 and 80 DM). Other sizable positions were light (14 DM), the newspaper (7 DM), tobacco (6 DM), and public transport (between 4 and 10 DM). Housekeeping was Eddy Klopsch’s responsibility, whereas Radusch checked the book, often adding laudatory comments such as “a commendation for good economizing. Vati” or “Oh how thrifty! One extra kiss! Vati.”

Cleaning the apartment was a duty shared between “Mutti” and “Vati.” Their choice of gendered terms of endearment, Mutti (Mommy) and Vati (Daddy), suggests that the couple embodied gendered roles, with husbands as breadwinners and wives responsible for keeping the books on domestic expenses. In their relationship, Radusch, the “Vati,” appeared in public – getting involved in party politics, writing for magazines, looking for wage jobs. Klopsch’s fragile health kept her from work outside the home. At the same time, as seen in the first part of this chapter, when it mattered, her physical strength was superior to Radusch’s, and “Mutti,” not “Vati,” protected their bodily integrity.

Some pieces in Radusch’s papers inspire reflections on the couple’s love life. In rare letters to Radusch, Klopsch sometimes called her “my sweet chappie.” For her birthday one year, she asked “Vati” for “1000000 sweet little kisses everywhere, and where they can’t be applied right now, later on” as well as “So much love that Mutti doesn’t know where anymore,” adding “How? Sweetly, Vati must know how it’s best done.” In another note, “Mutti” asked the “sweet man of the house” for a follow-up examination, and “the family doctor” reported his diagnosis: “healthy on both cheeks and most of all in the middle.”

Frequent “x” markings in Radusch’s calendars, sometimes preceded by the letter “E” or “H,” likely documented their sex, possibly their orgasms. The fact that Radusch made these notes – if indeed they record their sexual encounters – shows that sex was important to her, something she wanted to track and keep in her memory. During these years of physical weakness and pain from hunger and sickness, of emotional turmoil and financial and political instability, sex may have been especially significant for Radusch as an assurance of her body’s continued ability to give and receive pleasure. The calendar markings structure a time otherwise characterized by material want as one of simultaneous sexual fulfilment.

Eddy Klopsch died in March 1960 in their home in Staaken. She had designated her girlfriend to take care of her funeral and final affairs.
Radusch sought to bury her in her own mother’s grave in Sophien Cemetery in Mitte, the cemetery that was also the final home of many members of the Klopsch family. She organized Klopsch’s cremation and a memorial ceremony at Wilmersdorf Krematorium, where she delivered the eulogy. She then had her neighbour, a pastor, inquire with the cemetery about the possibility of rededicating Radusch’s mother’s grave to accommodate Eddy and, after her own death, herself. The pastor’s letter stated that Klopsch had “no relatives apart from her friend, Frau Radusch.” This statement was not true – Eddy’s sister, Hertha Kaufmann, was alive and living in East Berlin. The two were not on good terms, however. The cemetery’s administrator wrote back a week later, informing the pastor that Klopsch’s ashes would be buried next to the ashes of her deceased husband, Otto Klopsch, and that all fees had been paid by Klopsch’s sister, Hertha Kaufmann. It was the sister who had suggested that Eddy Klopsch had been married. Otto Klopsch, however, was Eddy’s father. Dismayed, Radusch tried to mobilize the West Berlin media for her cause. She wrote to the Tagesspiegel daily paper: “Out of hate I have been deprived of the ash urn of my deceased (girl)friend.” In her letter, she described their life together, as well as their agreement to be buried together and the power of attorney letters they had written for each other. Klopsch’s spiteful sister had neither held a memorial service nor installed a gravestone, she continued. The Tagesspiegel declined to cover the story and had no advice for Radusch either. She herself came up with a way to fulfil her girlfriend’s wish, however. Even if Eddy could not be buried with her, she could be memorialized in the way the two of them had devised. She commissioned a stonemason to add Eddy Klopsch’s name and life dates to her mother’s tombstone and, because she believed she would not live much longer, to add her name and birth date too.

East Berlin Domesticities

In the Hilde Radusch papers, the domestic has emerged as space that facilitated the formation and performance of sexual subjectivities and intimacy between a long-term lesbian couple. This function of the home was not particular to West Berlin, of course. The photo collection of East Berlin dog groomer Rita “Tommy” Thomas, and the oral history conducted with her for the Archive of Other Memories, allow glimpses into East Berlin domestic spaces as sites of lesbian subjectivity formation and sociability. Consisting mostly of portraits and snapshots of parties, Tommy’s photos document lesbian butch-fem subjectivities and queer community in East Berlin from the 1950s into the 1980s. They
not only bring into sight previously unseen subjects, however. They also make visible “desire as a fundamental feature of historical self-knowledge,” as Jennifer Evans has suggested of West Berlin photographer Herbert Tobias’s 1950s erotic photos of streetwalking boys.163 Rather than focusing solely on the role of images as tools of discipline, for instance, as evidence collected or produced by the police in their persecution of gay men, she points out that “erotic photographs can create a much-needed space for historicizing the productive role and potential of desire, opening up ‘new acts of seeing’ the past, politically, aesthetically, as well as emotionally.”164 I argue that this point is true not only for explicitly erotic photographs but also for portraits of butches and fems, gendered identities in lesbian subculture that carried political and sexual meanings.

The terms “butch” and “fem” are best known as denoting masculine and feminine gender identities in US lesbian subcultures of the mid-twentieth century. In the German context, gender-differentiated female couples have been known since the turn of the twentieth century, when Magnus Hirschfeld described various names for masculine-presenting lesbian women, among them Bubi (lad).165 During the Weimar Republic, the feminine partner of a Bubi was called Dame (lady), variously Mädi (girl), and Rita “Tommy” Thomas reported being introduced to the terms Bubi and Mäuschen (little mouse) in the mid-century.166 For the US context, Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy have described the sexual and political significance of these gendered identities in their seminal oral history study Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, an analysis of the lesbian working-class community of Buffalo, New York, at mid-century.167 They argued that, by appearing publicly in gender-differentiated female couples and thus demonstrating the possibility of living without men, these women paved the way not only for the gay and lesbian liberation movements emerging in the late 1960s but also, more generally, for women’s sexual empowerment.168 Whereas middle-class lesbians had much to lose by becoming public and hence took care not to become conspicuous, working-class lesbians could make their sexual difference visible without having to fear social decline. In their interviews with butches and fems who had participated in 1940s and 1950s bar culture, Davis and Kennedy found that, to their interviewees, “the erotic was as important as the political in the system of meanings created by butch-fem roles.”169 In the erotic butch-fem system, the masculinity-presenting butches were usually the active sexual part. Their role was to satisfy their fem partners, from whose satisfaction they then derived pleasure. The role of fem women was that of receiving pleasure.170 Historical scholarship on German lesbian subcultures has overwhelmingly
been limited to the study of published sources, and butch-fem roles have not seen in-depth analysis. While it may no longer be possible to determine whether German gender-differentiated lesbian subcultures adhered to a similar sexual system as those in the United States, butch-fem couples were as visibly different in Berlin as in Buffalo, and their public appearance is proof that alternatives to the postwar heteronormative order, be it capitalist or socialist, existed. The photo collection of Rita “Tommy” Thomas at the Feminist FFBIZ Archives in Berlin opens a window into how butch-fem couples styled and presented themselves in East Berlin in the 1950s and 1960s, and documents the embodiment of lesbian subjectivities as well as the making of lesbian communities in the domestic spaces of garden and apartment.

Rita “Tommy” Thomas was born in Berlin-Weissensee in 1931. She trained as a dog groomer and then worked in the profession all her life. In her early twenties, she met seventeen-year-old Helli on the job. The two fell in love and remained lifelong girlfriends until Tommy passed away in 2018. Tommy was an avid photographer, and she and Helli donated hundreds of their photos to the Feminist FFBIZ Archives. The images range from Tommy’s childhood to her old age. Some of them were taken in public spaces, but most of them are party snapshots, captured at private parties since the mid-1960s. The most prominent spaces in the collection are Tommy and Helli’s apartments and Tommy’s garden.

Like many Berliners, Tommy rented a garden plot in the city. For a period in the 1950s and 1960s, her garden in an allotment just beyond the S-Bahn circle line between Greifswalder and Landsberger Allee stations served as her home where she slept, ate, kept animals, and entertained guests. When she first met Helli, Tommy was living in her garden cottage. “She was with me a lot, and we were mostly living in the garden. That was nice,” she remembered of their early time together in an oral history interview in 2016. “[Helli’s] mom cooked for us, and we would take the pots of food with us to the garden. I was only ever at the garden.” Tommy raised ducks, geese, and chickens, and her dogs had space to play in the garden. She may also have lived there full time because of the continuing housing shortage in the city, though she never brought this problem up herself as a reason. Photos of the inside of the cottage, taken in 1966, show a radio, sofa, and a poodle poster on the wall. It is a site of socializing with friends and family, and of the couple’s Christmas celebrations with a Christmas tree (figures 1.6 and 1.7). In the spring and summer, the leaves of the greenery shield the garden from the outside, allowing for erotic play and passionate kisses under the roses (figures 1.8–1.10). As the photos show, Tommy and Helli embodied
Figure 1.6. Tommy and Helli celebrating Christmas in the garden cottage, 1966. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.

Figure 1.7. Tommy in the garden cottage with friends, 1966. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.
Figure 1.8. Erotic play in the garden. Tommy (on the right) with two friends. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.

a butch-fem couple, as did some of their friends. Helli and the other fems had long hair, and they wore pumps and skirts or dresses and figure-hugging tops, or in the summer, bikinis. Tommy and her butch friends expressed their masculinity through hair and clothing: their hair kept short, wearing button-down shirts combined with a leather vest or a cardigan, long or short pants, boots or clunky sandals.

Figure 1.8 suggests that sexual aggression, here performed through the two butches’ grabbing of the centre woman’s breast and crotch, could also be part of butch subjectivity. The photos also demonstrate, however, that butch and fem subjectivities were far from uniform. Instead, they could encompass a range of femininities and masculinities. The young butch holding and kissing her fem partner embodies
what might be called a feminine masculinity, with pants that accentuate her hips and simple, but elegant slippers (figures 1.9 and 1.10).

The collection also includes a series of party pictures from the same year, taken on two different occasions and at two different apartments. They show party guests conversing, flirting, having a laugh, drinking, dancing, and making out. The first apartment evokes turn-of-the-century coziness with a tiled stove, floral wallpaper, an Oriental rug hung on the wall, a dark wooden credenza, and guests crammed together tightly on a bench (figure 1.11). They are women of different ages. Other photos from the same night show a male couple partying along with the women. The interior of the other apartment is brighter and more
Figure 1.10. Passionate kisses under the roses. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.

Figure 1.11. Tommy and friends partying at home, 1966. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.
Homes

modern. Dancers are moving their bodies alongside a mid-century sideboard with a glass front (figure 1.12). Many of the women are wearing white shirts, combined with dark vests, sweaters, or jackets, but most are decidedly feminine in cut. Likewise, the short hair that many of them sport is in tune with 1960s women’s hair fashion. The different embodiments of gender that are apparent in the party pictures may mirror broader social developments, as the body ideals of the 1950s with their clear gender demarcations gave way to the more androgynous fashion of the 1960s.

The collection includes more shots from both parties. It is noteworthy that the different images, though taken at one occasion, bear the imprints of different photo studios on their backs. Tommy may have ordered extra prints to give to friends, or some of the pictures may have been taken by other party guests and then given to her. Josie McLellan, in her analysis of Heino Hilger’s photos of gay male sociability in 1960s and 1970s East Berlin, has pointed out that the practice of taking and exchanging photos was important in constituting queer community in East Germany: “Taking group photographs and circulating them were

Figure 1.12. Helli and friends dancing at home, 1966. Feminist FFBIZ Archives, Berlin.
part of the building of communities away from the mass organizations and official loyalties of the socialist state.”174 The photos from Tommy’s collection demonstrate that lesbian women in the GDR also used photography as a means to constitute queer subjectivity and community.

It is no coincidence that these pictures, taken in 1966, document house parties. Until 1961, Tommy and Helli regularly hit the West Berlin queer bars; in fact, bar-going was an integral part of their weekly routine in their early relationship, when Tommy lived in the garden. Tommy described her life in those years:

I continued running the dog salon and looking after the animals, all the ducks and chickens, three ducks and three chickens, not so many. And in the evenings we always went out to number 21, Adalbertstraße 21. There was dance in the evening, at eight p.m. there was dance, and some coziness, you could talk to others. Most of the time there were women there only, no men.175

Adalbertstraße 21 in Kreuzberg, just across the Spree River from Friedrichshain, where Tommy’s garden and dog salon were located, was home to Fürstenau, a club popular with lesbian women. When the East German regime completely sealed off the border in August 1961, those bars, even though just a couple of kilometres away, became utterly out of reach for East Berliners. As we will see in the next chapter, queer bars were few and far between in the socialist capital. With the state controlling the public sphere and shutting down all efforts of queer community organization, the domestic served as the main site for queer sociability in East Germany until the 1980s, when gay men and lesbians began congregating under the roof of the Protestant church.

Conclusion

This chapter has brought together narratives and images of diverse queer subjects to explore how queer Berliners went about making homes in the postwar years, literally and figuratively. The first part of the chapter explored Eva Siewert’s, Hilde Radusch’s, and Gerd Katter’s efforts to find belonging in postwar Berlin. Siewert, a well-known radio personality before the war, had lost her lover Alice Carlé in the Holocaust. After the war, she commemorated her through the autobiographical short story “The Oracle,” though she remained vague about their love relationship. Siewert’s political and personal hopes for a new beginning were soon crushed, as she found most Germans all too eager to forget Nazi crimes, and her journalistic prospects disappointed.
Radusch, who had been active in Communist Party politics during the Weimar years, hoped to contribute to rebuilding the city in a leadership position in the Victims of Fascism section at the Schöneberg district office, but her male comrades quickly bullied her out of her job as well as out of the party. Faced with her comrades’ sexism and homophobia, her relationship with Eddy Klopsch protected her from bodily harm and mentally sustained her. Gerd Katter, a working-class trans man with fond memories of Magnus Hirschfeld and the Institute of Sexual Science, used socialist rhetoric to bring Hirschfeld back into public memory and to continue his emancipatory legacy. His appeals to key cultural and medical figures in Germany’s Soviet-controlled zone met with interest but remained ultimately unsuccessful. In their struggles for belonging in socialism, both Katter and Radusch kept their queer genders and sexualities out of public discussion. In Radusch’s case, this discretion did not stop the Communist Party from demanding that she end her lesbian relationship.

The case of Hilde Radusch and Eddy Klopsch acted as a link to queer domesticity, the subject of the chapter’s second half. Their home, and their practices of homemaking, emerged as crucial sites of constituting lesbian subjectivities. In their terms of endearment for each other, Mutti and Vati, and their distribution of tasks, such as housekeeping and earning income, they embody a model of a gender-differentiated relationship reminiscent of both German prewar lesbian cultures and contemporaneous butch-fem ones in the United States. Their calendars and letters reveal sex as an important practice of sustaining the self, one for which their home provided a private space. At the same time, the threatening letters that were delivered to their house demonstrate that their home was not a safe haven, that the violence of postwar politics did not stop at their door. Though less dramatic, the years of pleading for recognition and restitution with different bureaucratic authorities equally endangered their home’s security.

In the photos from East Berlin dog groomer Rita “Tommy” Thomas’s collection, two kinds of domestic spaces appeared as sites of the constitution of lesbian subjectivities and communities: the apartment and the garden. The latter provided sheltered space for the relationship between Tommy and Helli, as well as for socializing with other lesbian couples. Produced at different photo studios, the photo prints point to a practice of sharing party photos among East Berlin queers. Documenting their celebrations, constituting their queer subjectivity by posing for the camera, and sustaining the fleeting community of a party by circulating these photos were crucial strategies for creating and maintaining queer community in the deeply homophobic GDR.
The chapter has also shown that, in postwar Berlin, the conditions for making homes were difficult, with privacy a rare luxury. At the same time, the absence of many male heads of household and the presence of extended family or strangers in the home collapsed the nuclear-family model, creating new realities of kinship. One of these was Frauenfamilien, and in my discussion of this widespread family model, I have shown how the postwar moment created queer possibilities: for women previously married to men to enter into long-term relationships with a woman and for women who had been in relationships with other women all their lives to take on parenting responsibilities.

However, well into the 1960s, the accommodations of many queer Berliners were neither private enough for sex nor heimelig enough to serve as spaces for socializing among friends. The next chapters will turn to spaces outside the home where queer Berliners sought and found community, sociability, and sex, beginning with one often described as a “second home”: the bar.