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Walls and Other Obstacles:
Peter Schneider's Critique of Unity
in *Der Mauerspringer*

Peter Schneider's skepticism of unity has long been evident in his essays and narratives. Berlin is, not surprisingly, the setting in which he most often situates his depictions of division. This topic also remains central in his writings that have appeared since German reunification. In *Extreme Mittellage* (1990) he maintains that the differences between the East and West Germans, caused by external political forces, are now almost impossible to eradicate. And his novel *Paarungen* (1992), which depicts conflicts between the sexes in pre-1989 Berlin, continues this tradition. Schneider does not confine himself to merely representing political and social realities, however. Berlin, especially the Berlin Wall, also serves as a metaphor for Schneider's views on unity and transcendence in a more philosophical sense. He clarifies his position in the essay "Berliner Geschichten" (1988):

> Berlin ist die Bühne für das Revival eines uralten Mythos geworden, der vom Rest der Welt lieber aus sicherer Entfernung bestaunt wird: ich nenne ihn den Mythos von der Verwandlung. Tatsächlich gehört ja der Mythos von der Verwandlung, des Übergangs von einem Zustand in einen ganz anderen, zu den ältesten und hartnäckigsten Erfindungen der menschlichen Phantasie. . . . Selbstverständlich arbeiten die beiden Weltsysteme, die in Berlin aneinanderstoßen, mit einer politischen Trivialisierung dieses uralten Wunsches nach Verwandlung, Übersteigerung, nach Transzendenz. Jedes System stellt

sich als Metasystem dar, das die Lösung aller Widersprüche des anderen Systems verheißt.[1]

Schneider's pessimistic view of German unity contrasts with the varied opinions of other German intellectuals, such as Günter Grass, Monika Maron, or Martin Walser. Grass justifies his preference for a *Kulturnation* over a politically united Germany with reference to the burden of Auschwitz and fears of neo-fascism.[2] His concerns have been regrettably prophetic, but Germans have not taken him seriously.[3] Maron at first defended unification and the acquisitive fervor of her former compatriots against West German censure.[4] More recently, even she has grown impatient with what she calls the Easterners' *Zonophobie* and concludes that unification has become a nightmare.[5] Martin Walser defends German unification. He believes that the German language binds together the citizens of the East and West Germanies as "Germans," no matter under which political systems they live. He then ridicules Western intellectuals' lament that those in the East want only better economic opportunities from the West.[6] Schneider, however, in his tale *Der Mauerspringer* (1982), exposes as meaningless his narrator's evocation of German history and language as the answer to the question what is "Germany" (124). Nor does he have confidence in "Heimat" as a term on which all Germans can agree.[7] For him, the loss of a sense of history among younger Germans will ensure that

any attempts at cultural harmony that are grounded in a distant "German past" will be merely cosmetic. The invisible Wall will remain.[8] Schneider's doubts about the unification process, which he articulated well before the reality of political reunification, relate the problem of what it means to be German to the way political and personal identity are intertwined. His technique of employing the Berlin Wall as a metaphor for internalized impediments to wholeness challenges modes of thinking that have helped perpetuate the political divisions. It also connects his ideas to recent scholarly discussions on subjectivity and identity. In view of these notions of self, I shall analyze how Schneider criticizes the goals of unification in *Der Mauerspringer*. Schneider's depiction of the pitfalls of attempts at becoming either politically or personally whole, which he articulated so effectively years before the Wall came down, can also help clarify the persistent obstacles to German unification.

Der Mauerspringer illustrates these concerns by directly addressing the ambiguities of living in a divided country and the interrelationship of personal and national identity crises. The first-person narrator, an unnamed (for a name would fix an identity) West German in his early forties, sketches his encounters with the unfulfilled citizens on both sides of the Wall as he endeavors to write a story about Berlin. He is also a Wall Jumper. The more he probes into the differences between East and West, the more he sees parallels to his own inner conflicts: "Etwas fehlt . . . aber [er] weiß noch nichts."[9] As he searches for a resolution, his attention always returns to the border between the differences and conflicts. That border, represented by the image of the Berlin Wall, simultaneously unites and separates. It divides the East and West Berliners from each other, but also provides them with a sense of national identity, uniting them with the other citizens on their side of the Wall and setting them off from what they are not. The mem-

ory or knowledge of pre-Wall times and the political discourse of eventual reunification maintain the impression that there is a missing totality which can one day be regained, either politically or by force. This recovered political wholeness would then trickle down to the citizens and offer them a firm national image against which to establish individual identity. Schneider, however, cynical of the advantages of either a *Kulturnation* or a reunified Germany, uses the Berlin Wall and a coterie of fictional Wall Jumpers to attack any notion of imminent reconciliation or transcendence.

Michael Buselmeier relates the uncertainty expressed in Schneider's tale to a feeling of "linke Heimatlosigkeit."[10] Walter Hinck also contends that Schneider describes here the situation of the disenfranchised German leftist intellectuals, a group to whom Schneider belongs, or did belong. These former participants in the student rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s are disenchanted with the outcome of socialism in both East and West, yet persist in their faith in a socialist utopia. Hinck continues: "Ihr Ort ist das Niemandsland zwischen zwei ungeliebten gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen, an deren keine sie sich binden lassen wollen. In einem tieferen Sinne sind die Niemandslandbewohner und die Mauerspringer identisch."[11] This group is particularly caught up in the unity/disunity quandary; in the writings and speeches where they voice their indecision over which is better, one could say that they help maintain the German "identity crisis."[12] Yet the episodes in the tale do not always focus on intellectuals.

In Schneider's tale, the political backdrop of the divided Germany serves as both an extension of and cause for the inability of East and West Germans to share a sense of "Germanness." The desire for returning to a political whole is responsible for creating the perception that each German state is only a half, or a part. There are, however, those who ignore the division and repress their sense of being politically in-

complete. The narrator finds that "je weiter weg von der Grenze, desto ungenierter bildet das jeweils halbe Volk sich ein, ein ganzes zu sein" (8). If the border is invisible, then the longing for the other side should disappear. But as we see in the narrator's meetings with various people on either side of the Wall, these people replace their feeling of political incompleteness with other experiences of lack. The narrator strives to counter this deficit by deconstructing his sense of self in order to find a different kind of identity, as in his assertion: "Wer endlich wer wird, muß einmal niemand gewesen sein" (123). In light of this and similar statements, the tale can be read as an appeal for abandoning the dualistic view of self as complete or incomplete, in favor of an identity that is neither one thing nor its opposite, but, like the various Wall Jumpers, composed of many different and changing facets.

Current research on notions of identity and subjectivity focuses on the problematics of wholeness or any unified sense of self. Gendered identity in particular has been regarded as a basis for self-image and the root of alienation—it defines itself in opposition to an "Other," so that one is always aware of what one is not. Such an identity is accompanied by a desire to regain what is missing. Of course, this view of identity sustains the concept of origin or totality, no matter how unattainable. As long as one yearns for oneness, one is doomed to feelings of lack. However, in attempts at progressing beyond traditional thought patterns based on binary oppositions, which are often expressed in terms of the masculine and the feminine, some feminist scholarship has promoted a counterview of the world. Specifically, so-called opposing terms, such as male and female, have been deconstructed into many variations and differences, each of which has value on its own.[13] Poststructuralist calls for a "play of differences" to replace attempts at absolute unity have their counterpart in notions of the self that emphasize what Paul Smith

in his book *Discerning the Subject*, which builds on the work of Julia Kristeva, calls "subject positions."[14] These are identities construed in context. The self is thus composed of many different identities in flux and is dependent on social interaction for affirmation. The writings of John McGowan on postmodernism are also related in their emphasis that identity exists for the self only in an intersubjective context. Identity crisis or alienation "stems from the creation of new identities in new intersubjective contexts, not from some existential split between the social and the true self. It is the need to reconcile old and new, or to scuttle one in favor of the other, that produces identity crisis or alienation."[15]

This shift away from a desire for a harmonious whole, or a union between the masculine and the feminine that can momentarily substitute for a whole, is relevant politically as well. The social scientist Joan Wallach Scott, who employs gender as an analytical tool in her award-winning book *Gender and the Politics of History*, describes the relation between politics and notions of gender as follows:

> Gender is one of the recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimated, and criticized. It refers to but also establishes the meaning of the male/female opposition . . . , the binary opposition and the social process of gender relationships both become part of the meaning of power itself; to question or alter any aspect threatens the entire system.[16]

Such remarks also apply to the question of personal and political identity crisis in Schneider's tale and can help in illuminating his attempts at resolving it. His questioning of binary opposites, symbolized in part by the multi-gendered Frieda Loch, reflects a concern with entrenched manners of perception that help maintain political divisions.[17]

The urban setting is significant for

Schneider's portrayal of identity crisis, for it provides an external analogy to the diversity of potential selves with which the main narrator contends. In general, there appears to be, as McGowan asserts, a "need to reconcile the various selves we are in various settings."[18] In the case of Schneider's tale, the main narrator's desire for a unified self is constantly thwarted in his encounters with others. His view of his political identity is especially fluctuating, for his inability to determine a coherent German national identity prevents him from attaching himself to an officially proclaimed identity, no matter how superficial that image may be. Although his *Ausweis* identifies him as a West German, there is no satisfying referent for that notion, just as there is none for "German." The city of Berlin, which should offer ample opportunities for confirming whatever identities he chooses, instead confuses him with its diversity of choice.[19]

The narrator's quest for political and personal identity parallels his attempt at establishing himself as the subject of a story. He is partially successful, for he narrates the tale we read and reports the subnarratives that his characters relate. The different narratives all share the theme of eradicating barriers by presenting various figures who cross back and forth over the Berlin Wall. The act of narrating, of setting oneself off against an object, would appear to enhance the main narrator's sense of control. Yet, whenever he recounts a story to one of his characters, that figure responds with a story of his own, as, for instance, when Pommerer, his East German writer friend, responds after listening to the narrator's stories of various Wall Jumpers: "Kennst du die Geschichte von den drei Kinogängern?" (47). The narrating character, defying the limitations the primary, or main, narrator has assigned to him, becomes the creator of his own tale, altering status from object to subject until the main narrator interrupts him (50). This repeated deferral of the object prevents the main nar-

rator from settling into his desired role of subject and from setting a boundary around his own identity. Moreover, any story he is able to appropriate is somehow dissatisfying. Indeed, the subtitle "Erzählung" is misleading, for *Der Mauerspringer* is a series of anecdotes that depict the main narrator's search for his "true" self in various locations. The characters are merely illustrations of the narrator's arguments about the absurdity of responses to the "German Question," an absurdity that is all the more evident in the narrator's ironic perspective as he records the bizarre activities of the Wall Jumpers. These reports prevent any closure to his main story. He tells Pommerer in a later meeting: "In jeder Geschichte fehlt etwas, das eine andere hat, an der ich wieder etwas aus der vorangegangenen vermisse. Vielleicht gibt es die Geschichte gar nicht, die ich suche" (107). Thus he must continuously chase the elusive object in the hope of bypassing and containing it, which he does intellectually by spinning more tales and physically by recrossing the border.[20] He expresses the frustration this process creates when he writes:

> Meine Geschichte verändert sich von Tag zu Tag. Sicher ist nur, daß der Mann, dessen Geschichte ich suche, in einer Vor- und Rückwärtsbewegung über die Mauer gefangen ist, gleich einem Fußballtorwart in der Zeitlupe, der immer den gleichen Anlauf nimmt, um immer den gleichen Ball zu verfehlen. (46)

The merging of private and public identity is problematical in every tale the narrator tells or is told. All protagonists see their own ideas of self in relation to the political system in which they have matured. Crossing from West to East or vice versa, the various figures strive to extricate themselves from their political identity, and, by living under another system, to forge a new self. Yet the main narrator undermines the political and personal aspirations of people on both sides of the Wall by stressing how strongly the po-

litical systems have formed their citizens. For those characters who live on the border, crossing over to one side creates an emptiness that they try to fill with experiences on the new side.

In this textual world of disjointed subjects and objects, the one figure who appears to be at ease is Frieda Loch, the transvestite who lives in the narrator's apartment building. This festively dressed dweller, whose leitmotif is his manner of wending his way past several garbage cans before arriving at the door, key in hand, appears to the narrator at first to have found an answer to the problems of disunity: "Hinter seiner Tür mußte irgendein Geheimnis verborgen sein, eine Anweisung zur Heiterkeit, zum angstfreien Leben" (20). The secret, that is, Frieda's double life, is not what the narrator expects, but is central for understanding Schneider's position on the impossibility of unity in its sense of transcending differences. Moreover, the narrator always encounters Frieda in the inner courtyard, that is, within the walls that also enclose his own home. The relationship between the two approaches a kind of "identity." But Frieda has many selves. Indeed, Frieda becomes the culmination of the narrator's search for completeness, which he tries to accomplish by finding the positive pole in various sets of binary opposites. He compares geographical, political, linguistic, and personal dichotomies in a vain attempt at finding the better half. An examination of these oppositional pairs and the problems in synthesizing or reconciling them will clarify the path that leads him to Frieda.

The most apparent schism to overcome is that between East and West Berlin, representative of East and West Germany. The artificiality of this separation is presented in the perspective from the airplane in which the narrator enters the city. From his perch above, he can unite the city in a glance, but at the same time cannot overlook the dividing Wall; in a statement which ascribes a kind of natural, enduring status to walls, he maintains that the Berlin Wall is the only human construction besides the Great Wall of China that is visible to the naked eye from the moon (9). The plane soars over the Berlin Wall several times before landing, which suggests the arbitrary nature of the side on which it alights. The plane's shadow also rushes back and forth between both parts of the city. Unable to remain forever in the suspended state that transcends the unity and disunity of the city, the plane lands on one side of the Wall and on top of its shadow. But, as the narrator remarks, "erst wenn der Reisende ausgestiegen ist, bemerkt er, daß der wiedergefundene Schatten in dieser Stadt einen Verlust bedeutet" (6). The earthbound narrator then devotes his energies to recapturing on the ground his experience from the skies. Just as the airplane becomes one with its shadow upon landing, the best choice for the narrator's self would incorporate all his conflicting parts in such a manner that he would no longer feel that something was missing. Such a union proves ephemeral, however, for it also signals a loss—only when separate from the plane can the shadow move freely between both parts of the city. Thus, Schneider uses the image of shadow and plane to demonstrate the limitations of unity, for freedom of choice has been sacrificed. Something similar holds true for the political differences.

Constantly communicating in the comparative and subjunctive, the different characters demonstrate their allegiance to a particular political system. Yet the two systems in question find no justification except as negations of each other. The "Krankheit des Vergleichs," as the narrator calls it, compels those discussing the merits of a particular system to focus on the other one and what their system is not. However, "der Zwang zum Vergleich verstellt den Blick auf die eigene wie auf die fremde Gesellschaft" (67). Each side uses the same method to set itself at the top, but the similarity of the methods exposes the hollowness of any claim to superiority. This com-

parative method functions in the same way as the Wall. Another example of this relationship are the news and weather programs, broadcast from the East and from the West. As the narrator watches one news program fade away, he believes he sees the shadow of the other newscaster behind the one who has just reported (30). As with the airplane, the shadow is both present and separate. Merging together on the screen, the two newscasts maintain their division, but only for a few seconds. Thus the television enables the narrator briefly to transcend the dichotomy of unity and disunity without eradicating either, but he is as unable to keep them both in sight as he is to decide in favor of one. Their televised harmony is a figment of the imagination and/or technology.

Closely related to the political aspect is the recourse to history and tradition as unifying elements. Yet perception and memory fragment the past to such an extent that it provides no common ground for contemporary Germans. For example, a television documentary on the history of the division of Germany causes the narrator and his friend Pommerer to argue divisively (116–17). Each perceives the program as correct or biased according to the criteria he has learned and absorbed from his state. Postwar political systems still block Germans on both sides of the Wall from their common past. According to Schneider's tale, Germans from the generations who have grown up since 1945, such as the narrator, have no access to a potentially binding tradition. They remember only division and have no interest in the previous events that caused the split nor in the guilt connected to it. Attempts at instilling a sense of history through film or writing have not been strong enough to overcome the short-term memory of lived experience.

The quest for wholeness also proves disappointing linguistically. The narrator hopes to find the real Germany, and thus himself, in the mother tongue rather than in the fatherland. He states:

Wenn ein Vaterland der Deutschen weiterhin existiert, so hat es am ehesten in ihrer Muttersprache überlebt, und wenn es wahr ist, daß das Land vom Vater und die Sprache von der Mutter stammt, so hat sich das mütterliche Erbe als stärker erwiesen. (124)

But has it? A return to the news programs shows that the language has metamorphosed into polemics, preventing any opportunity for closeness through communication. The only way to find one German language would be "der Versuch, eine gemeinsame deutsche Sprache zu sprechen . . . mit der Weigerung, das Kirchenlatein aus Ost und West nachzuplappern" (125). Yet this has now become almost impossible, in the opinion of the narrator. The political cultures in their struggles for supremacy have affected the language to such an extent that the inhabitants remain infected with the disease of comparison.

In the essay "Berliner Geschichten," Schneider discovers that the impediments to a common language lie not only in different terminologies but in different referents for the same words, such as *Freiheit, Demokratie,* or *Menschenwürde.*[21] The inability to agree upon a common meaning for a word is parallel to the narrator's failure to delineate the boundary between subject and object. As long as the uncertainty remains, he implies, the struggle between different systems to achieve supremacy will continue. Language is only superficially binding—it also prevents communication. The narrator laments that, when he and Pommerer converse, "wir können nicht miteinander reden, ohne daß ein Staat aus uns spricht" (117). But can one establish an identity without recourse to politically tainted language? The narrator finds no answer to his inquiry: "Wo hört ein Staat auf und fängt ein Ich an?" (92). If the state ceases to exist, what happens to the individual? Would this stateless person be the narrator's "niemand" out of whom he hopes to form a new self?

The past tense and subjunctive mode are the only indicators of an identity in Schneider's tale. The narrator attempts to define himself by telling his own story in the past tense, interspersed with musings in the subjunctive. Yet the use of the conditional instead of the future tense indicates the difficulties in choosing one outcome for oneself. This is in contrast to his lover Lena, who has the energy "die Möglich-keits- in die Vergangenheitsform zu ver-wandeln" (95). As mentioned earlier, the narrator is dissatisfied with the stories he tells, and he finds it difficult to conclude them. So he remains in a wavering stance, crossing and recrossing from West to East until forced to remain in the West. Indeed, his quest appears to have been futile when he states at the end of his tale: ". . . diese Mauern werden noch stehen, wenn nie-mand mehr da sein wird, der hindurchge-hen könnte" (135).

The more he seeks certainty, the more he feels himself dissolving. He explains:

> Am eigenen Leib und wie im Zeitraffer-tempo erlebt er den Teilungsprozeß, bis er glaubt, nachträglich eine Entscheidung treffen zu müssen, die ihm bisher durch Geburt und Sozialisation abgenommen war. Je öfter er aber zwischen beiden Hälf-ten der Stadt hin und her geht, desto absurder erscheint ihm die Wahl. Miß-trauisch geworden gegen die hastig ergrif-fene Identität, die ihm die beiden Staaten anbieten, findet er seinen Ort nur noch auf der Grenze. (24)

His last effort at leaving the no-man's-land is through personal links, especially to two East Germans now living in West Berlin, Robert and Lena. Yet with both of them, he is forced to confront his estrangement even more. Robert undermines his attempts at deciding in favor of one political system or another by always arguing the opposite: for example, by placing blame on the state or other external powers for apparent accidents and, in the next moment, accusing Western

individualism of causing social ills (92).

The narrator's relationship to Lena be-comes more estranged the more intimately they know each other, until he feels walled in by her. The disintegrating boundaries around their relationship further his crisis and compel him to seek a reconciliation, but a harmonious relationship eludes his grasp. Gisela Shaw points out in her article "Peter Schneider und Berlin" that gender differences do not play a role in Schneider's earlier writings where he depicts society as intact, such as that of the northern Italian workers in *Lenz*.[22] However, the erotic union of opposites has no redemptive power in Schneider's Berlin.[23] The realiza-tion that the narrator and Lena speak a different language, that the other language binds her more closely to other East Ger-mans than it ever can to him, unsettles him even more. She soon views him as an extension of his state and increasingly mistrusts him. He comments on their worsening relationship: "Anspielungen, Metaphern, Zweideutigkeiten in meinen Sätzen erschienen als Versuch, etwas zu verbergen, die Verwendung des Konjunk-tivs, auch wenn er grammatikalisch ge-boten war, als etwas Gekünsteltes, als Beweis für einen Mangel an Gefühl, an Di-rektheit" (99). There is a wall between those living in the East and West that is much more durable than the physical barrier. Robert and Lena's desire for wholeness led them to make a choice for a different life. But crossing from one side of the Wall to the other does not unite them with other Germans.[24]

The character Frieda Loch is the incor-poration of Schneider's paradox. Jumping from one gender identity to another, she/he is simultaneously both and neither. The three times the narrator encounters Frieda, the gender is different: he sees Frieda first as a man, then as a woman, and, finally, as a woman who turns into a man. In the third encounter, the narrator, wending his way through the garbage cans in the same way as Frieda, hears Frieda's voice call out to

him for light to help find the key to the apartment door. The narrator, who earlier believed that Frieda had a special key, joins his neighbor, and they look for it together, in vain. Just as the airplane gradually is absorbed into its shadow, the narrator approaches Frieda, of whom he had written earlier that she/he had the most cheerful appearance "unter allen jungen und alten Schatten" (19). As the narrator sees her/his various costumes lying around in the debris, he realizes that Frieda has no self but, like the numerous characters in his stories, springs around from one persona to another.[25]

The name Loch implies a gap, a way through, or an entry. Depicted with key in hand, Frieda Loch appears to hold the secret to passing through walls. The narrator's attraction to and repulsion from this multi-gendered person is a defense against "die anzüglichen Dankesworte des Alten" (130) for his assistance and the earlier promise that "Frieda Loch hält, was andere Löcher nur versprechen" (76). This cornucopia of gender identities contained in one aging body is not the anticipated resolution of his crisis, and he recoils from the fragmented solution it implies.[26] For Frieda Loch's self is in flux, but not in crisis. The name also signifies emptiness. It offers only a possibility for fulfillment, just as becoming "niemand" opens up unlimited potential for becoming a self, or flying over Berlin offers the option of landing anywhere. The penetration metaphor of the narrator pushing Frieda through the window into the apartment exposes the empty promise of choosing sides. Once one is no longer in the hole or on the border, potentiality vanishes. Shoving the old man/woman to the other side does not protect the narrator from sharing something with Frieda, however. Like Frieda, he assumes many "subject positions" but has been ignoring them in the search to give priority to one of them. Frieda is not concerned with such a goal. Shortly afterwards, the narrator's border crossings are terminated arbitrarily by the East Ger-

mans. Nevertheless, his forced confinement in the West solves nothing and increases his sense of limitation.

Schneider uses the figure of the transvestite to show the absurdity—or Wahnsinn, as he calls it—of all attempts at surmounting obstacles to wholeness, for disparities have become too ingrained. The very notion of being complete is a paradox. Coming together does not eradicate differences; it merely places them in closer proximity. The disease of comparison implies a set of relationships in which there will be a best choice that will outweigh all others. A dualistic worldview maintains divisions, because the idea of the opposite is necessary for creating limits. According to Schneider's depiction, the sense of being incomplete persists, whether or not external conditions change. For each obstacle that is overcome, another replaces it. Therefore, eradicating political barriers will give rise to other ones. German unification serves only to displace the omnipresent sense of lack from the political realm onto something else. According to Schneider's tale, the goal of transcending differences, no matter what their cause, and becoming whole is unattainable. As with Frieda Loch's shifting gender, identity or unity is constantly deferred.[27] The way out of Niemandsland, in which the narrator and his companions are trapped, is not towards any superior system, which would inevitably result in stagnation and loss of potential, but in an interchange of multifarious positions. The narrator is too enmeshed in a world of dialectics and transcendence to recognize the alternatives posed by Frieda Loch's existence. Frieda is the "new paradigm" for which the tale's characters are not prepared.[28] The tale thus demonstrates the futility of seeking a unity that would abolish all contradictions and disparity. Now that the Wall has come down and Eastern and Western Germans are still wrangling over the problems of their newly regained national togetherness, Schneider's ironic depiction of identity crisis is all the more

germane. It is a provocation to seek alternative formulations of public and private identity that acknowledge differences instead of masking them.

Notes

[1]Peter Schneider, "Berliner Geschichten," *Deutsche Ängste: Sieben Essays* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988) 10.

[2]See, for example, Günter Grass, "Schreiben nach Auschwitz," *Die Zeit* 2 March 1990: 11–12; "Viel Gefühl, wenig Bewußtsein," *Der Spiegel* 20 November 1989: 75–80.

[3]See, for example, Ian Buruma's discussion of Grass's decline in "Postcard from Berlin: Günter's Ghosts," *The New Yorker* 19 October 1992: 45–46.

[4]See Monika Maron, "Warum bin ich selbst gegangen?" *Der Spiegel* 14 May 1990: 22–24.

[5]Monika Maron, "Peinlich, blamabel, lächerlich," *Der Spiegel* 24 August 1992: 136–41.

[6]See, for example, Martin Walser, "Die deutsche Teilung für vernünftig zu halten, das ist Wahnsinn," *Stuttgarter Zeitung* 23 August 1989: 6; "Kurz in Dresden," *Die Zeit* 27 October 1989: 17–18; "Vormittag eines Schriftstellers," *Die Zeit* 21 December 1990: 13–14.

[7]See Eckart Schiffer, "Der Koran ist nicht Gesetz," *Der Spiegel* 30 September 1991: 57.

[8]See Schneider's essay "Berlin: If Dogs Run Free" about the former guard dogs, the "Wall dogs," who still sense the border—or miss it; *Harper's Magazine* October 1991: 30–35; for further discussion of the Wall motif in recent German fiction, see Siegfried Mews, "Political Boundaries and the Boundaries of Politics: The Berlin Wall in Recent Fiction," *Space and Boundaries in Literature (Continuation)*, vol. 3 of *Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, München 1988*, eds. Roger Bauer and Douwe Fokkema (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1990) 260–65; Gisela Shaw, "'Die Mauer im Kopf': Observations on Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer*," *New German Studies* 11 (Autumn 1983): 191–201. Dieter Saalmann addresses the Berlin Wall and the ironic mode in Schneider's tale in "Irony as a Means of Illuminating the German-German Mind-Set," *Humor* 3 (1990): 277–85.

[9]Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer: Erzählung* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1982) 44. All subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[10]Michael Buselmeier, "Peter Schneider," *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1978ff.), vol. 6; 13th Nlg (1983): 9.

[11]Walter Hinck, *Germanistik als Literaturkritik: Zur Gegenwartsliteratur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983) 170–71.

[12]See, for example, the Winter 1991 edition of *New German Critique*, especially Andreas Huyssen, "After the Wall: The Failure of German Intellectuals," *New German Critique* 18 (Winter 1991): 109–43.

[13]Judith Butler questions the political efficacy of the notion of unity as related to gender in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 15: "Does 'unity' set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim? Without the presupposition or goal of 'unity,' which is, in either case, always instituted at a conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that have purposes other than the articulation of identity."

[14]Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988). He defines "subject" on page xxxv "as the term inaccurately used to describe what is actually the series or the conglomeration of *positions*, subject-positions, provisional and not necessarily indefeasible, into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and the world that he/she inhabits."

[15]John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 245.

[16]Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 48–49.

[17]Such questions also connect his tale to current debates on multiculturality. See, for example, Schiffer 53–59, where he argues against the "Modebegriff" of multiculturality: "Ein Modebegriff geht um in Europa, der der multikulturellen Gesellschaft" (53).

[18]McGowan 245.

[19]Indeed, Berlin is Schneider's metaphor

for a stifled alternative to the unity/disunity dichotomy. One would expect that the multitudes in such a big city would extend the "play of differences" among each other so that a whole is always beyond reach, eventually diverting attention from efforts at transcending difference. As Young states in her article which advances the idea of a city as a viable means for achieving unity: "The modern city is without walls; it is not planned and coherent. Dwelling in the city means always having a sense of the beyond, . . . and [one] can never grasp the city as a whole"; Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 318. She finds just that lack of closure conducive to cultural harmony and a different kind of totality—a whole that is not yet filled. Schneider's interweaving of the urban and personal crises of Berlin and its displaced citizens exemplifies Young's thesis *ex negativo*: this German city (in 1982), enclosed, artificially complete, is one which suffocates and alienates its citizens.

²⁰Shaw maintains that even the tale itself is not his story, but rather a collection of his experiences. "Das Material liefert die groteske Realität: das Erleben des Erzählers, das seiner Freunde, sowie das von sechs Menschen, deren Zahl, so legen Text und Erzählweise nahe, sich unendlich erweitern ließe." Gisela Shaw, "Peter Schneider und Berlin: Die Suche nach einem Standort," *Modern German Studies* 5 (August 1988): 44.

²¹Schneider, "Berliner Geschichten" 16.

²²Shaw 47–48.

²³Finney also draws parallels between sexual and political differences in her analysis of East German stories about sexual transformations and asserts that "the metaphoric parallel between sexual difference and political difference does not seem out of place; indeed the mot-

to of the collection [*Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*] might be that the differences between the sexes are as insurmountable as the Berlin Wall was at the time"; Gail Finney, "Imagining the Other: Sexual Transformation and Social Reality in GDR Literature," *German Life and Letters* 44.1 (October 1990): 55.

²⁴See also Schneider's views on the difficulties of unity in "Concrete and Irony: What the Germans found when the Wall came down," *Harper's Magazine* April 1990: 52–56; "When the Two Germanies Unite, What Happens to the Bavarian Yodeler?" *The New York Times Magazine* 16 September 1990: 41, 44, 105–06; and *Extreme Mittellage: Eine Reise durch das deutsche Nationalgefühl* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990).

²⁵Butler sees a similar critique of the concept of identity in Michel Foucault's analysis of the journals of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin and finds that "Foucault proposes an ontology of accidental attributes that exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction"; *Gender Trouble* 24.

²⁶See also Butler: "Inasmuch as 'identity' is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined"; ibid. 17.

²⁷See also Butler: "Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time"; ibid. 16.

²⁸Schneider's tale foreshadows the end of the "literary and critical paradigm" that Huyssen attributes to the Christa Wolf debate; see Huyssen 143.