

3 Passing Through, Trespassing, Passing in Public Spaces

Oh beloved Guy, you are the only one for whom I have shed tears. In Lugano and here in Berlin. The tears came into my eyes as I saw you drive off in the omnibus, and I was glad that I could keep my countenance on the S-Bahn at least. Here at home I cannot anymore. And Mutti always wants to know if I want something to eat instead of leaving me alone.

– Eberhardt Brucks to Guy Morris, 18 December 1949¹

When we kissed yesterday in the waiting room and in front of the omnibus, it became terrifically clear to me again. When I saw you disappear in the omnibus, I could no longer hold the tears back.

– Eberhardt Brucks to Guy Morris, 19 December 1949²

My love, I dreamt of you again last night. We were sitting in a restaurant and eating. All at once you took your hand and stroked mine which was lying on the table, all the people were looking at us and when I saw everyone looking at us, I took your head towards me and kissed you on the mouth – it was so wonderful to feel your mouth again that it made me overjoyed.

– Eberhardt Brucks to Guy Morris, 16 January 1950³

The heartbreak of saying goodbye to a lover at the bus station; the need to keep the tears and the sadness at bay until reaching the privacy of home, where one's concerned but clueless mother won't even leave one alone; the joy of reuniting with the lover, if only in a dream; daring to kiss farewell in the anonymous space of the station; and celebrating a kiss in the imagined public of a restaurant in his dream: Eberhardt Brucks's letters to his American lover Guy Morris speak of the realities and fantasies of queering public spaces in postwar Berlin. Brucks and Morris had met in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1948, where Brucks, a

thirty-year-old visual artist and native Berliner, was spending a year to recover from a liver illness. Guy Morris, a car sales representative of the same age, was in Europe for work. The two fell in love, and reunited in Berlin in 1949, where Brucks was sharing an apartment with his mother in the suburban district of Lankwitz in the city's southwest.⁴ The letters serve as a passionate and poetic introduction to some of the themes of this chapter, which will examine how queer Berliners perceived the city's public spaces, how they moved in them, how their movements and actions were shaped by laws and policing, and how they subverted public spaces' intended uses, queering them for their own purposes. Some of these spaces, like streets and train lines, are transitory, avenues of movement and connection. Others, such as squares, parks, and train stations, are stationary, islands of rest, bringing the busy traffic to a halt. In the city's queer topography, these spaces take on meaning beyond their primary functions. They are spaces not only of seeing and being seen, of flirting, cruising, and sex, but also spaces of slurs, name-calling, and assault, of surveillance and arrest.

While Berliners of all genders passed through the city's public spaces, my analysis in this chapter is limited to the experience and policing of cis men and trans women. In the oral histories I used, gay men frequently mention public spaces as important sites, but they hardly come up in the narratives of the interviewed cis women. Police records about the patrolling and raiding of public spaces focus on "homosexuals," "streetwalking boys," and male-to-female "transvestites," making no mention of lesbian women or female-to-male "transvestites." Women who sold sexual services to men were heavily policed, and they often appear side by side with other sexual deviants in police records. Many of them had relationships with other women, and historians have recently pointed out that queer history would do well to study sources on female sex workers, both as an entryway to lesbian working-class lifeworlds and as a way to overcome its "overreliance on the modern sexual identity categories that serve as our point of departure," instead taking seriously the categorizations of the historical archive.⁵ While I wholeheartedly agree with both points, female sex workers are not part of this chapter because, in their presence in public space, they were not perceived as queer.

In Eberhardt Brucks's letters, the station appears as the site of a romantic farewell between lovers. In the literature on queer Berlin, this space is more commonly associated with anonymous, sometimes commercial sex between men. These aspects are explored in detail by historian Jennifer Evans, who in her analysis of sexual sites in postwar Berlin has described the changing meaning of train stations from being

“part of Nazi genocide ... [to] sites of transit to places of combat and sexual transgression.”⁶ Stations as cruising grounds for men looking for sex with other men are recorded in police and Stasi files, as well as in gay men’s oral history accounts. Klaus Born, who was born in 1944, moved to West Berlin from his native Westphalia on 28 August 1965. For him, tales of the city passed along from other gay men had turned West Berlin into a metonym for a worry-free gay sexuality. A trained electrician, he quickly found a job and was put up by his employer in a hotel in the Neukölln district. In an oral history interview conducted for the Archive of Other Memories, he recalled:

Then came ... September. Then I met a guy. Near the Gedächtniskirche [Memorial Church]. That was on the street, though. He must have been at the Zoo and not gotten any. Or he’d been elsewhere and not gotten any. Anyways: Our glances met. Faithful as we are. Smiles. And then we were a couple all at once.⁷

What is implied in Born’s narration is that “Zoo” refers to West Berlin’s train station, named Berlin Zoologischer Garten, or abbreviated, Zoo, and that the station was one of the main cruising grounds for gay men.⁸ “He had not gotten any” hence refers to sex: the other man had not found a sex partner yet. In Born’s narration, both men immediately understand the meaning of the glances and smiles they exchange. Their communication moves quickly to determining a place to have sex.

Where do we go? I say: We can’t go to mine. I live in a hotel. In Neukölln. And the bars, well, we can’t do anything there ... He says: We can’t go to mine either. I have a sublease. I say: Typical Berlin. Everyone’s got a sublease. Yeah, he says: But that’s how it is. You can’t get an apartment here. Take a look around: Everything’s destroyed. [breathes in] Well, what are we going to do? Well, I know a nice parking lot. There’s no lights there. Nobody can peep in. And it’s nice and large and empty. And there aren’t any cars there. Ok, fine. Let’s do it. Kantstraße ... So we drove onto it. It was really dark. He switched the lights off on Kantstraße already, though. Says, I [know] this by heart. I know exactly where to park. And above it, the S-Bahn passed by.⁹

Born’s account sketches out some of the coordinates of gay sex in West Berlin in the 1960s. Twenty years after the war had ended, parts of the city were still in ruins, even in the very centre, by the Gedächtniskirche and the Zoo, which meant a lack of housing: “You can’t get an

apartment here ... Everything's destroyed." Transient accommodation, such as hotel rooms or sublets, did not provide the privacy needed for intimate encounters. At the same time, the ruined cityscape opened up uninhabited spaces that could be used for short get-togethers, such as the dark parking lot in between busy Kantstraße and the S-Bahn. Born's partner demonstrated knowledge of the site ("I [know] this by heart") and the necessary precautions, as he switched off the lights before entering the parking lot.

Then we groped each other some. And then some more. Yeah, and then we put the seats right. So that you can fuck properly. Well, and then the fucking began. Then we were really going at it, yeah. And then the next shock came. All of a sudden big flashlights went on in four spots. Four spots. [breathes in] I could not say anything. Right? So how about you stop the fucking first, I heard somehow. Ok, and now come out. Then we had to get dressed first. We were naked in there after all. We were doing it! Yeah. What were these? [They] were cops. Police. [breathes in] ... And then he had to lock the car and leave it there. And then we had to go along. These cars were standing on the street already ... These cars with the bars. And then [we] were shoved in there. I did not know why. I really did not know why. And then we were driven to Keithstraße ... That's where that criminal building is [the LKA]. Yeah, so drove in there. I was crying. I did not know what to do. I did not, did not know why I was there. I just did not know. Right? For me that was a perfectly normal thing to do it. Yeah. And then it started. You have this and that. Section 175. You are temporarily detained. You do not have a permanent residence. I say: Yes I do, I live at Hotel Süden. You can ask there. That is not a permanent residence. Your ID says Benninghausen. Well, and then the next car had already arrived ... And in there were others that they had picked up, of course ... And then we were off to Moabit.¹⁰

Rather than the sexual paradise he had envisioned, Klaus Born's first sexual encounter in West Berlin led him directly to prison. Moabit, the West Berlin district just north of Tiergarten, housed the city's prisons, and the district name was used synonymously with them. Born's narration presents a spin on the well-rehearsed story of young queers coming to the big city to find, variously, sex/love/community/themselves. Despite a troubled youth as an out-of-wedlock war orphan who had suffered psychological, physical, and sexual abuse growing up, Born had perceived his sexual encounters with other men in his hometown as "perfectly normal." It was in West Berlin, a purported haven of gay sex, that he was first confronted with the culpability of his erotic

desires. Ironically, his Westphalian acquaintances who had raved to him about Berlin's supposed liberality had also warned him about the danger of punishment: "[In] West Germany you've got to watch out. [I]n Berlin you don't have to watch out at all."¹¹ When the flashlights abruptly disrupted his encounter with the stranger, he was caught by surprise, in shock and clueless as to what was happening. Only at the police station did he learn that §175 was the reason for his arrest. Born's narrative introduces two of the contrasting meanings and possibilities that the West Berlin streets could hold for a same-sex desiring man: quick, anonymous sex, on the one hand, and police persecution, on the other.

A third aspect comes up in Orest Kapp's 2014 oral history interview, also at the Archive of Other Memories. His narrative highlights how non-normative gender presentation attracted attention in public spaces and what the consequences could be. Kapp moved to West Berlin from West Germany in the late 1950s when he was in his late teens, after a devastating stay at a psychiatric hospital where electroshocks were used to "cure" him of his homosexuality. In the interview, he describes his life in Berlin: "I found friends, we had a lot of sex and that was quite okay, but it was dangerous. You could never let yourself be seen on the streets. Especially not alone."¹² Later, Kapp elaborates what "never let[ting] *yourself* be seen on the streets" meant: changing his gender performance by learning to be a "man," that is to appear to be normatively masculine.

Well, the time ... in Berlin ... it was always a catastrophe. You had to be cautious to not, by any means, move in a wrong way, walk, or talk in a wrong way. [-] It cost me **years**, at least five, six years it cost me, that I would act **manly** [-] that I would walk a **manly** stride [-] that I would make **manly** motions [-] that I would have manly conversations [-] that I would pass as a **man** in a pub or bar. [-] Yes, that was my great, my absolute must, my great must. That's what I **must** do, that's what I must achieve, then I can survive.¹³

Kapp here enumerates the requirements for passing as a "man," a learning process that took him "five, six years": to "act manly ... walk a manly stride ... make manly motions ... have manly conversations." His narration deconstructs in acute precision the work of performing normative masculinity as encompassing the whole body (motions) and mind (conversations), as an effort that demanded a total relearning of physical and social skills. His explanation of the process offers an eloquent vernacular illustration of what Judith Butler has theorized as the

performative constitution of gender. In their essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler writes:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.¹⁴

In Kapp's enumeration of the steps necessary for becoming a "man," normative masculinity becomes visible exactly how Butler describes gender: a stylized repetition of acts, of bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds. His agitation at recapitulating these efforts is visible in the transcription of his narration. Words that he stresses are printed in bold, and short breaks in his speech, caused by him drawing fresh breath before describing another step of this labour of transformation, are indicated by bracketed dashes. In their essay, Butler also notes that "performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect." If the painstaking work of becoming a "man" was an indirect punishment for Orest Kapp's non-normative masculinity, he was also faced with a more obvious punishment. Asked by the interviewers if he was ever insulted in the streets, Kapp again addresses his enactment of gender and sexuality.

Yes, when you could discern it, back then during the first years, that I am gay, I did look it [look gay], that's why I learned to become a **man** then, after all, in my motions, and generally. Yes, you were confronted with that, especially when it was cliques, about four to six persons, they enjoyed doing that. Yes, I am afraid of that to this day.¹⁵

The terror he experienced when groups confronted him in public thus haunts Orest Kapp into the present, more than five decades later. The tales of terror and joy, romance and thrill, pleasure and powerlessness relayed by Orest Kapp, Klaus Born, and Eberhardt Brucks have served as an introduction to the main threads running through this chapter: Berlin's public spaces as sites of sex, of police surveillance and persecution, of violence at the hands of homophobic thugs, and as sites of transgressing normative gender. In the following, I first juxtapose the oral testimony with records of the West and East Berlin police as well as the Stasi, attending to moments of connection and disjuncture between

a queer phenomenology of public spaces, their legal framework, and authorities' as well as Berliners' practices of policing queer gender and sexuality. Second, I return to the Berlin Wall and its significance for the city's queer public. Beyond separating relationships and cutting off East Berliners from West Berlin's bars, I argue that, through the case of Günter Litfin, the first person to be shot dead at the Wall, queer East Berliners in particular came to associate the Wall with death. By contrast, it served as a thrilling erotic fantasy for West German and Swiss readers of the homophile magazine *Der Kreis*.

Sex in Public

When you'd been in the city on the weekend and eventually had to ride back to Spandau, for me there was the last tram at Kantstraße, the [line] 75 and the [line] 76. And I would always make another stop at the Charlottenburg courthouse, where there is a wonderful wooden cottage.¹⁶

The stop at the "wonderful wooden cottage" by the Charlottenburg courthouse was a beloved part of Fritz Schmehling's weekend routine in the early 1960s, a last moment of pleasure before he returned to his home and his job as a carpenter in suburban Spandau. Like Klaus Born, Schmehling had moved to West Berlin from West Germany because of its reputation as a gay haven as soon as he turned twenty-one. Living in a Nissenhütte, Schmehling, like Klaus Born, had little choice but to pursue sex outside the home. *Klappen*, public toilets sought out for gay sex, were fixed points not just on his, but on many gay men's mental maps of the city, regular stops on their movements to and from work and leisure. It seems ironic that Schmehling's fondly remembered cottage was in close proximity to the courthouse, the site where gay men were prosecuted, publicly shamed, and often sentenced to time in prison. This vicinity did not seem to hamper his pleasure, however. He relates an unexpected encounter at his favourite *Klappe*:

One night I was standing in there, thinking, maybe something else will come around, maybe not. All of a sudden, the door opens, a cop comes in, in a white traffic coat. I packed mine in when he said, leave it out, we're doing it together. [laughs] Now my heart started pounding. I'm thinking, is this a real cop? It was a real cop. [laughs] The last tram was gone, of course. I had to walk over to Otto-Suhr-Allee, of course, where the tram to Hakenfelde was. And then I hitchhiked from Hakenfelde to Heerstraße at night. [laughs] So it goes when you're greedy. [laughs] That was one of my experiences that have really stuck with me.¹⁷

The sight of a “real cop” made Schmehling’s heart pound. Whether from sexual excitement, from fear, or both, the episode had a happy end as the policeman was looking for sex, not an arrest. Of course, not everyone was so lucky.

Klappen were not only sites of fleeting sexual encounters. Sometimes these turned into lasting relationships: Klaus Born met his partner of thirty-five years at a Klappe on Sophie-Charlotte-Platz in Charlottenburg. Klappen were monitored closely by the police, who patrolled them and often conducted raids. Unless police caught the men during sex, they could not arrest them. They did, however, record their personal information and took them to the precinct where they were instructed about the laws governing public toilets.¹⁸ The legal basis for this temporary detention was §15 of the *Polizeiverwaltungsgesetz* (Police Administration Law), which postulated that persons could be taken into police custody “to relieve a disturbance of public safety or order that has already occurred or to fend off an imminent danger, if no other measures can be taken.”¹⁹

If they were discovered having sex in public, men could be prosecuted under §175 as well as §183. This section, titled literally “Public Causation of a Sexual Nuisance,” criminalized those “who cause a public nuisance by acting indecently.”²⁰ This is what happened to Orest Kapp, who at age seventeen was caught having sex with a friend and arrested by the West Berlin police. The place of arrest is unclear in the interview; since Kapp frequently had sex in public toilets, it may well have been a Klappe.

That was when I got caught with the friend, [–] when we, well, I don’t want to go into detail, let’s just say, when we were behaving sexually. And, well, yeah, the policemen were not very friendly ... I got blows on my belly, got an arm, an elbow rammed into my belly, or, hm, my head was pushed down and then pushed back with the knee, it was not very friendly with us. They showed us, hm, exactly what they thought of us, what we were, as I keep remembering it: you faggot, what are you doing? Hm, you ought to, you ought to be executed, you ought to be gassed, you, all the things they told me I ought to be.²¹

After being abused by the police, Kapp spent months in jail, then had his trial, and was finally let go because he was underage. Though he was arrested only once, he faced repeated abuse by the police, often during raids of public toilets. “The police provoked us, after all. Yeah, they wanted us to fight back or to talk back, and then they would, they would show us their power,” he recalled.²²

Klappen could be found throughout the city. Those known to be cruising grounds were also regular stops for police patrols in East and West Berlin.²³ Train stations, where thousands of people crossed paths every day, provided innumerable opportunities for sexual encounters with strangers. They were also crucial workspaces for men (and women) selling sexual services, which put them at the centre of the police's attention. The Zoo train station represented a central node for anonymous sex between men in West Berlin. But stations of regional transit, where the S- and U-Bahn stopped, were also regularly patrolled. The East Berlin police focused their attention on Mitte district, particularly the Friedrichstraße, Nordbahnhof, and Alexanderplatz stations, and the public toilets on Neuer Markt in the immediate vicinity of Alexanderplatz.²⁴

Jennifer Evans has offered an in-depth analysis of train stations and their policing in postwar West and East Berlin. In particular, she has examined stations as the workspace of "streetwalking boys," who, she has argued, occupied both a central and precarious position in postwar discourses. Evans rightly stresses the vilification of streetwalking boys, who faced the scorn of both state authorities and homophile activists. However, some of the streetwalking boys were at the same time perpetrators, mugging their clients, blackmailing them, and sometimes murdering them. Part of what makes it so tricky to interpret them is their overlap with gangs of male youth and young men known as juvenile delinquents, "*Halbstarke*," "Rocker," or "rowdies," whose violence in the streets and, as seen in chapter two, in bars was at times directed against queers. A connected reason for their analytical elusiveness is that authorities used both homophobic and non-homophobic rhetoric to justify their persecution. Police wanted them off the streets and far from the stations because their presence damaged public space's respectable and heteronormative appearance, but they also arrested them to prevent violence against gay men.

This entanglement of different persecutory motives is demonstrated by a 1952 report from the East Berlin criminal squad. The report noted that, in the year's first quarter, two out of a total of three murder victims had been homosexual men. It continued:

In the Mitte precinct (station hall Friedrichstraße train station) the streetwalking boy activity has again emerged as a focus area. Two massive raids were conducted, though with the goal of determining the murderers of homosexuals. Simultaneously, however, streetwalking boys could be given over to the [respective] working group for intense examination ... Resulting from these operations, measures were prepared to cleanse the train station of streetwalking boys before 1 May.²⁵

Hence, the stated goal of resolving murders allowed for massive policing and the “cleansing” of public space. The measures alluded to here are spelled out in the report for the following quarter. Every night in April 1952, police patrolled the station from 8 p.m. to midnight. They claimed that this intense surveillance resulted in a decline in blackmail and muggings.²⁶

Homophobic attacks at the hands of young men were often committed in groups. In 1952–53, a group of nine persons aged sixteen to twenty-two committed “50 crimes, such as robberies and predatory blackmail” in a nine-month period.²⁷ The police report noted that “in ca. 90 cases, the accused have engaged in homosexual activities. It was in this context, then, that the predatory blackmail occurred too.”²⁸ Members of the group had thus blackmailed the men with whom they had sex. The phrasing “engaged in homosexual activities [*homosexuell betätigt*]” shows that the definitional line between homosexuality and commercial sex among men could sometimes blur in police parlance. East Berlin police recorded streetwalking boys variously under prostitution and juvenile delinquency, suggesting that, apart from their lingering in public spaces that were meant for rapid transition, it was young people’s banding up in cliques that made them conspicuous to authorities. Indeed, the East German government moved to codify the criminalization of both these aspects within the next decade and a half in laws targeting “asocials” and “rowdies.”

In 1957, a group of eight males, four of them minors, robbed gay men in the city’s Eastern and Western sectors by acting as streetwalking boys at the Zoo, Lehrter, and Friedrichstraße stations. In the report on their crimes, the East Berlin police described their actions and linked their criminality to “asociality”:

All the accused admit to having robbed homosexuals ... by acting as streetwalking boys, luring the “johns” into ruins or remote spots, and then, depending on the situation, through blows or other force stealing the wallet, rings, or watches. This incidence is a typical example where the formation of a gang occurs through the association of asocial youths.²⁹

In their reports, police forces in both East and West Berlin forged a connection between streetwalking boys, juvenile delinquents, and asocials. As seen in [chapter 2](#) on bars, the West Berlin police deployed the term “asocial” to describe sexual deviants into the late 1960s. Recent studies on “asociality” have shown how the term took on a dramatically different legal meaning in the East and West German states, though. Initially, it functioned “as a self-evidently and unreflectively used umbrella term

for people with a lifestyle that deviated from the norm of the majority ... in East and West.”³⁰ But in West Germany, the term “asociality” never entered the books, and the acts and attitudes associated with it in §361 of the criminal law – vagrancy, begging, homelessness, “idleness,” being “work-shy,” and prostitution – were decriminalized in the late 1960s and early 1970s.³¹ In the GDR, however, “asociality” and “rowdiness” were theorized as “the socially other inside the GDR” and codified in criminal law in the 1960s.³² The 1961 “Ordinance about the Limitation of Stay” and §249 of the new criminal code, “Endangering Public Order through Asocial Behaviour,” promulgated in 1968, allowed the state to prohibit citizens from entering certain areas as well as force them to work if they were found to be “work-shy.” These laws were used against different groups who deviated from the socialist norm, in particular people who did not hold a steady job, defiant youth, and women selling sexual services. Prostitution was explicitly mentioned in §249. While streetwalking boys are not mentioned in the laws or the scholarly literature, “from the perspective of the state authorities and the jurists, homosexuals and people suffering from sexually transmitted diseases moved into the vicinity of ‘asocials.’”³³ Streetwalking boys and conspicuous queers thus were likely also targets of these laws. Those who were convicted under the 1961 ordinance or the 1968 law could be sent to “labour education commandos,” as well as prohibited from visiting the GDR’s “Windows to the West,” East Berlin and the convention city Leipzig, where they might encounter Western visitors. §249 allowed for prison sentences too, and courts made frequent use of it throughout the existence of the GDR.³⁴ An in-depth examination of how these asociality laws were used to penalize queer subjectivities, while beyond the scope of this book, would address larger questions of how normalcy and deviance were constructed in the GDR.

As seen in [chapter 2](#), groups of young men attacking queer bars, harassing and at times severely injuring patrons and staff, as well as causing significant material damage, made going out in the purported queer paradise a risky pleasure. West Berlin police, while very much invested in persecuting queers and curtailing the formation of a queer public, also kept records on homophobic crimes. The criminal squad in 1958 listed eleven “incidents in connection with homosexuals” over a fourteen-month period, nine of them in squares and parks in the West Berlin district of Wilmersdorf, all committed by youths, usually in groups.³⁵ The number is not small, given that many men who were assaulted did not notify the police, because doing so made them vulnerable to prosecution. Indeed, in the brief descriptions of the incidents, it is evident that, even when police investigated homophobic crime, the criminalization of homosexuality

meant that its victims were always equally under scrutiny. For instance, the fact that attackers were often arrested on scene, sometimes after their victim had cried out for help, suggests that police were in the immediate vicinity, surveilling the park. The descriptions of incidents often make note, too, of a *victim's* previous arrests on site or their status of being “so far unfamiliar” to the police. Suggesting that a victim was homosexual may also have worked as a strategy of defense for the youths’ crimes. In one case, seven youths who brutally beat up a man and tried to rob him claimed that he was homosexual. The report of the incident notes “investigations are still ongoing,” raising questions as to who and what was being investigated, the thugs or their victim. Finally, one of the accounts describes the victim as a “homo,” a clearly derogatory term.

Trespassing the Borders of Normative Gender

Orest Kapp’s traumatic memories of having to “become a man” and facing violent threats from groups of youth have illustrated the dangers that feminine men faced in public spaces in the 1950s and 1960s in West Berlin. Despite these dangers, some consciously used elements of feminine style to draw attention to themselves. A person interrogated by the East Berlin Stasi in 1955 explained:

To meet men, I applied make-up, pencilling over my brows, rouging my lips with a lipstick, and undulating my hair, so that when I visit a bar in this made-up state, or go for a walk, I become conspicuous as a homosexual.³⁶

While the interrogated appears to have limited their use of feminine style to modifying their head, others cross-dressed completely, donning women’s clothing too. Indeed, while the speaker identifies as a “homosexual” here and is described as a “man” in the report, the statement might also be read as a trace of a non-binary or trans subjectivity. Whereas this source does not allow a definite conclusion as to the arrested person’s gender identity, Klaus Born told interviewers about his acquaintance Manuela, a West Berlin trans woman. After his incarceration and trial for §175, Born had lost his accommodation, the hotel room in Neukölln. During the following year, he lived “underground,” as he put it, “hopping from bed to bed.”³⁷

Then I met someone, her name was Manuela. I stayed with her for a whole two months even. I always had to look out for her, though. Because she was frequently out of luck. She always got beaten up, very often, because she walked around in drag all the time.³⁸

In the interview, Born explains that Manuela worked “as a transvestite” in bars, among them the well-known Chez Nous. The two thus helped each other out. Manuela gave the homeless Born a place to stay, and he used his normative masculinity to protect her from street violence.

People whose embodied gender did not read as conventionally masculine or feminine could also run into trouble with the law. Wearing the clothing of the other gender was not forbidden, but causing a public nuisance was punishable in Germany under §183 and §360 of criminal law. Both sections originated in the nineteenth century and continued to be effective in this form until the postwar era. §183, “Public Causation of a Sexual Nuisance,” punished those “who give a public nuisance by acting indecently” with up to two years in prison or a fine of up to 500 Marks, and additionally allowed for the revocation of civil rights.³⁹ §360 made “engaging in disorderly conduct” punishable by a fine of 150 Marks or imprisonment.⁴⁰ These laws remained in place in both German postwar states until the reforms of the late 1960s: the new socialist criminal law codified in the GDR in 1968 and the West German Great Criminal Law Reform of 1969. Cross-dressers and trans people could hence run into problems if they became conspicuous in public: that is, if they failed to pass. As early as 1910, Magnus Hirschfeld had addressed this question, and following his proposal, the Berlin police had issued *Transvestitenscheine* (transvestite passes). These documents stated that their bearer was known to the police to wear the clothing of the other sex and included their photograph in their everyday, transvestite appearance.⁴¹ Part of the cooperation between sexual scientists, activists, and police, this practice reinforced the notion that public order depended on the gender binary. At the same time, the practice also acknowledged that gender could be separate from the body, that the body people were born with might not correspond to the gender they felt they belonged to. As I show in the following pages, the West Berlin police stopped issuing *Transvestitenscheine* around 1960.

The transvestite passes, which other German cities had adopted during the Weimar years, continued to be issued in Berlin well into the Nazi period.⁴² For postwar East Berlin, Ulrike Klöppel has shown that the authorities continued to issue transvestite passes into at least the second half of the 1950s.⁴³ In West Berlin, the police continued the policy throughout the 1950s, but then discontinued it in the 1960s, as a file at the Police Historical Collection Berlin suggests.⁴⁴ The correspondence archived in the file sheds light on a local, on-the-ground negotiation about the definition of gender between trans people, the police, and city administration during the decades in which medical and legal experts

in West and East Germany struggled over the mutability of gender and its repercussions for the law, and ultimately fortified the system of binary gender.⁴⁵

In the early 1950s, “wearers of women’s clothing” who were “known and registered with the police” could be issued a confirmation that included their photo in female attire.⁴⁶ The case of a Kreuzberg trans woman, F. Krüger, gave occasion to the police to come up with a policy for issuing regular identity cards to people whose outer appearance differed from the gender in their documents. The police administrative department II, in charge of issuing passports and ID cards, collaborated with the criminal squad. The local precinct had confiscated Krüger’s identity card. When applying for a substitute, Krüger asked to include their portrait in women’s clothing because their old identity card, which had their portrait in male appearance, “caused trouble.”⁴⁷ The dissimilarity between Krüger’s photo and live appearance was likely the reason why the police seized the ID card in the first place. Police department II reported that Krüger had “refused to cut his hair short just so that photos for the preliminary ID card could be made; further he was no longer in possession of men’s clothing.”⁴⁸ The officer in charge followed Krüger’s argumentation, noting to his colleagues at the detective squad that “his objections ... cannot readily be denied.”⁴⁹ He thus suggested to go along with Krüger’s wish to include a photo in female attire and to add a note stating:

This Identity Card is only valid in connection with the confirmation issued by the Police President, Department K, from [date], that the holder of this Identity Card is known and registered as a wearer of women’s clothing.⁵⁰

The detective squad agreed, noting that, since the “tiresome matter” had led to disagreements in the past, it welcomed a lasting solution to the issue.⁵¹

Two years later, in 1952, an inquiry from the Munich police prompted the West Berlin police to explicate the procedure in more detail.⁵² A Munich trans person had informed the local police of Berlin’s *Transvestitenschein* practice, and the Bavarian officers were curious to learn more, apparently unaware that Munich police had issued them during the Weimar Republic.⁵³ In their response, the West Berlin detective squad explained that transvestites could apply for an identity card with their photo in female attire with the detective squad. Their statement was recorded at the police station, and they had to have a doctor’s statement, which they had to pay for themselves.⁵⁴ If the doctor found that the person was a “pure transvestite, and there is no danger of him

practising a deviant sexual inclination ... in public (suspicion of homosexuality),” the confirmation could be issued.⁵⁵

Sexologists during Nazism used the notions of “pure” and “impure” transvestitism to differentiate heterosexual transvestites, on the one hand, from homosexual transvestites and cross-dressing male sex workers, on the other.⁵⁶ While the terms were of Nazi origin, the distinction itself was not; rather, it was a key feature of sexological theories of transvestitism as well as discourses among transvestites since the beginning of the century.⁵⁷ In addition to the continued use of Nazi terminology, the phrasing in the letter (“practising a deviant sexual inclination ... in public”) suggests that the police amalgamated concepts of homosexuality and male prostitution. The West Berlin police further explained to their Munich colleagues that “his [the applicant’s] outward appearance in women’s clothing must not give cause to a public nuisance.”⁵⁸ Hence, to get the recognition that the *Transvestitenschein* represented, trans women had to perform a seamless version of normative femininity before the authorities; they had to be able to pass to get a pass.

In 1960, the West Berlin police changed this practice. An inquiry to the detective squad from police department II B, in charge of passport matters, relayed that recently, three passports had been issued to “persons of male sex who appear in female clothing and hairstyles.”⁵⁹ The writer continued:

In my opinion, for reasons of public order, only such passport photos should be used that correspond to the personal information recorded in the passport and indicating the sex, for instance the first name, the profession. On the other hand, one could demand for reasons of identification that the photographs show the passport holder in the garb and look that he usually appears in. I have presented these questions to the Senator for the Interior who is interested in the position that the criminal squad and the Federal Criminal Police Office, respectively, take in this matter. One would also have to entertain the question whether persons of female sex should be allowed to bring photographs showing them in male clothing. Do you have any experience in how far men have tried to evade a penalty for a violation of §175 by using female clothing?⁶⁰

The writer distinguished between the upholding of public order and an effective identification, two interests that had previously been understood as related, if not identical. Whereas the practice of issuing *Transvestitenscheine* was based on the understanding that public order depended on the possibility of the state to identify people in public space, the writer argued that public order did not so much rely on the

congruence of outward appearance and the ID photograph, but instead on the concurrence of the photograph with the markers of gender that the document contained, "first name" and "profession." Identity cards and passports at the time did not record their holders' gender. Also, the three people whose passports prompted the inquiry apparently did not apply for a name change to go by gender-neutral names, as was often the case.

How did the criminal squad respond to this inquiry? Interestingly, the file contains two versions of the reply. The first one proposes a continuation of the transvestite pass policy, noting that cases of persons cross-dressing to escape criminal persecution "are rare and do not give occasion for special measures."⁶¹ But then, the person in charge, likely criminal squad director Wolfram Sangmeister, had a change of mind. The second version of the response expresses agreement that the photographs in passports should correspond to the "personal information noted in the passport and indicating the gender, as well as the description of the person."⁶² Further, should a search for a transvestite occur, "identification would not be hampered because the circle of transvestites is generally known," and the police could "fall back on photographs displaying the transvestites in their everyday garb and look." The police hence kept a comprehensive register of transvestites. Though the second version of the letter also acknowledged that cross-dressing to escape criminal persecution was a negligible phenomenon, it concluded with reinforcing the necessity for police control. Proclaiming that "it is, however, a fact derived from experience that transvestites essentially only wear the clothing of the other sex to camouflage their homosexual practice," the letter again amalgamated transvestitism, homosexuality, and male prostitution. Such arguments were in line with the position taken by most judges dealing with trans claimants' applications for a change of gender at the time. In a 1957 case where the West Berlin Senator of the Interior contested a marriage because the husband, though identifying as male, appeared to be biologically female, the Court of Appeals annulled the marriage, ruling that "according to the general and undisputed opinion relevant here, a human's gender depends crucially on his physical constitution. It is of no import to the question of his gender whether he feels like a man or a woman irrespectively of this constitution."⁶³ Since the case involved the Senator of the Interior, who was in charge of both the register offices and the police, it is likely that this ruling influenced the change in police policy.

Since the file only contains the drafts of the two letters, it is unclear which one was sent in reply to the passport department's inquiry. The crime squad did, however, ask the Federal Criminal Police Office to

put the matter on the agenda for the upcoming meeting of the working group of the directors of the Federal and State Criminal Offices (Bundes- und Landeskriminalämter).⁶⁴ An excerpt from the minutes of that meeting suggests that the inquiry, prompted by the three passports issued to West Berlin transvestites, had far-ranging consequences. Not only did the discussants agree that passport photographs should correspond to their holders' gender as recorded at birth: "a person of male gender must be pictured as man, a person of female gender as a woman."⁶⁵ The group also made a recommendation for changing the design of future identification documents, noting that "additionally it would be desirable if, in the future, forms for passports and identification cards would designate a category for stating the person's gender." Correspondence from various state criminal offices from the 1970s shows, however, that states continued to pursue their own policies regarding photographs in passports, suggesting that the push for a unified federal policy was not successful.⁶⁶

In summary, the *Transvestiten* file from the West Berlin police attests to a continuation of the Berlin police practice of issuing transvestite passes into at least the early 1950s. Throughout the 1950s, police even issued passports with photographs that showed their bearers in their everyday transvestite presentation. At least for trans women, this liberal policy depended on their seamless performance of a normative gender and sexuality, however, demonstrating the long-lasting effects of early sexologists' differentiation between heterosexual and homosexual transvestites, taken up by Nazi sexology as "pure" and "impure" transvestitism. The West Berlin police's change in transvestite policy after 1960, from a tolerance dependent on passing to a disavowal of trans subjectivities, is in line with both contemporary legal discourses and practices towards trans people and the development towards a more repressive queer bar policy, particularly the intense policing of transvestites in bars seen in [chapter 2](#).

The Wall: Dividing the City's Queer Public

When the GDR constructed the Wall on 13 August 1961 and over the following days and weeks, queer East Berliners were sealed off from West Berlin's queer public. As seen in [chapter 2](#), the Wall separated couples such as Hans-Joachim Engel and his boyfriend. It also cut off bar-goers like Tommy and Helli from their beloved queer bars. The loss that this separation entailed remained largely unspoken in their testimony. Their silence in remembering lost love and sociability may express more than the difficulty to remember and speak about a painful

period in their own lives. That the construction of the Wall was an especially traumatic event for queer East Berliners is suggested by the case of Günter Litfin, the first person to be shot dead by GDR border troops while trying to escape to the West. Litfin's queerness, used by the East to vilify him as a criminal, was not mentioned in Western coverage of his death, and in fact remains unacknowledged to the present in official commemorations.

Günter Litfin was born in 1937 and grew up in the Weissensee district in Berlin's northeast.⁶⁷ After completing an apprenticeship as a tailor, he worked for a custom tailor close to the Zoo train station in West Berlin while continuing to live in Weissensee. He was thus one of the thousands of *Grenzgänger* (border crossers), Berliners who resided in one part of the divided city but worked in the other.⁶⁸ When East Berlin authorities increasingly harassed border crossers, he rented an apartment in the Charlottenburg district in West Berlin. He put off registering with West Berlin authorities, however, so as not to be counted as *republikflüchtig*, as the GDR termed its citizens who fled to the West. Leaving the country without a permit was a crime that could carry up to three years in prison.⁶⁹ Those deemed "refugees of the Republic" were hence subject to arrest when returning to the GDR; registering in West Berlin would have meant that Litfin could no longer visit his family in Weissensee in East Berlin. When the border was closed on 13 August 1961, Litfin was in Weissensee with his family. On the afternoon of 24 August 1961, he attempted to cross the border by swimming through the Spree River between the Friedrichstraße and Lehrter Bahnhof S-Bahn stations, close to where the city's main train station is located today. He was spotted by the East Berlin police, however, who fatally shot him in the head.⁷⁰

Dieter Berner has shown how the East Berlin press used Litfin's homosexuality to vilify him as a criminal and to detract attention from its murderous border regime.⁷¹ At first, East Berlin newspapers printed only a brief report by the People's Police, which claimed that "a person persecuted for criminal deeds" had ignored multiple demands to give themselves up to the People's Police. The report stated – inaccurately – that the person had fallen into the water after being hit by an aimed shot and had probably drowned.⁷² A week after Litfin's death, however, the East Berlin press felt compelled to report in more detail. On 29 August, East Berlin border police had shot and killed another refugee who had also tried to escape by swimming, and West Berlin newspapers had reported widely on his death, printing photographs of his failed flight.⁷³ The East German government hence was under tremendous pressure to justify the killing of the refugees.

In reaction, East Berlin newspapers mixed Stasi knowledge of Litfin's persecution under §175 in West Berlin, neighbourhood talk of his feminine masculinity, and discourses of predatory homosexuality and "work-shy" "streetwalking boys." Combined with the site of his attempted flight and murder in the vicinity of the Friedrichstraße train station, widely known as a location of male prostitution, the result was toxic. *Berliner Zeitung* titled its article "Front City Press Turns Criminal into Hero":

One does not even shy away from playing up politically ... a criminal with a history of multiple offences who was caught doing criminal deeds by our detective squad in the proximity of Friedrichstraße train station on 24 August. This work-shy element, who was widely known under his moniker "Puppe" [doll] among homosexual circles in West Berlin, and who had been looking for victims in democratic Berlin since 13 August, had tried to resist his arrest through the People's Police, jumped into Humboldt Harbour, and died in the process.⁷⁴

Immediately after Litfin's death, the Stasi collected information about him in the Weissensee neighbourhood that was home to his family. Neighbours stated that he had been known as "Puppe" (doll) in their neighbourhood, a term long used to designate feminine gay men. They shared their estimation that Litfin was "homosexually inclined because he has not had a closer connection to any girl so far."⁷⁵ They told the Stasi that Litfin often went out by himself and that neighbours would then gossip that he was going on a "doll stroll" (*Puppentour*). Litfin had not become "suspicious in this regard" in the neighbourhood itself, though. Another Stasi report dated 31 August 1961 and addressed to Erich Honecker, who was at the time the SED Central Council's secretary for security, repeated this information but added that Litfin had been incarcerated under §175 in West Berlin in 1957–58.⁷⁶ This report's emphasis, however, was on Litfin's membership in the youth group of the local chapter of the illegal Christian Democratic Union (CDU), his participation in a trip organized by its educational foundation, and his parents' long-term involvement in the CDU.

The Stasi was correct about Litfin's prosecution for §175 in West Berlin. His name comes up in the prisoner file of Hans-Ulrich H., who was arrested in August 1957 under the suspicion of having established a "traitorous relationship" with the Stasi and the East German labour union FDGB over a period of two years.⁷⁷ H. was arrested and incarcerated for both treason and transgression of §175 in 1957. The arrest warrant for the latter crime accused H. of sex with Litfin on multiple

occasions in the summer of 1957.⁷⁸ The file also contains a note that H. was to be brought before court in November 1957 to testify in the criminal case against Günter Litfin and others.⁷⁹ While the file thus documents that Litfin was arrested and brought before court under §175, it does not confirm his incarceration.

If the West Berlin court found Litfin guilty of having had sex with a man, the denotation of Litfin as a “criminal” that the *Berliner Zeitung* used was factual, illustrating once more the power of §175 to turn a consensual sexual encounter into a crime that ruined reputations. Since Litfin’s attempt to escape was a crime too, it was not wrong that he was “caught doing criminal deeds.”⁸⁰ However, the phrasing “committing criminal deeds in the vicinity of the Friedrichstraße train station” combined with the adjective “work-shy,” the moniker “doll,” and the claim that Litfin had been popular with “homosexual circles” in West Berlin mobilized images of a “streetwalking boy” looking for clients. The article failed to mention Litfin’s employment at the West Berlin custom tailor. Finally, the claim that he “had been looking for victims in democratic Berlin since 13 August” reinforced the idea of homosexuals as dangerous criminals preying on the innocent.

In light of the international attention that Litfin’s death attracted – *Life Magazine* printed a photo of his lifeless body being dragged out of the water, for instance – East Berlin media further escalated its rhetoric.⁸¹ The newspaper *Neues Deutschland* compared West Berlin efforts to memorialize Litfin with the Nazis’ celebration of Horst Wessel, a young SA leader who was shot by a Communist in 1930. It thus insinuated both West Germany’s fascist character and the equal depravity of Litfin’s homosexuality and Wessel’s alleged work as a pimp.⁸² And a year later, when a memorial stone was set for Litfin at the western side of Humboldt Harbour, commentary on GDR television again drew on the Horst Wessel comparison. Television host Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler showed footage of the memorialization ceremony from a West German station in his weekly show *Der schwarze Kanal* (The Black Channel), a propaganda program that contrasted Western footage of current problems in West German society with images of GDR success.⁸³ Schnitzler described the site as a “memorial for a professional homosexual.” In case viewers had not yet caught on to the insinuation, he continued: “That’s what this Litfin was. He was living on our side and had his worksite at Zoo train station.”⁸⁴ Again, his audience would have understood his mention of the Zoo station as a code word for commercial sex between men.

The case of Günter Litfin helps explain East Berliners’ silence about the meaning of the Wall. “For the SED propaganda, the physical

extermination of the refugee was not enough, he also had to be eliminated in reputation and in the public's consciousness," Dieter Berner wrote.⁸⁵ Put another way, just weeks after its construction, the Wall came to signify queer death in multiple ways: the death of a queer man as well as the death of queer sociability. As seen in the bar chapter, by cutting off queer bar-goers from West Berlin bars, the Wall isolated queer East Berliners, who took years to recover a queer social life. Through the vicious defamation of Günter Litfin in the East German public sphere, the Wall also became associated with a notion of homosexuality as utterly shameful: as commercial, as criminal, and as predatory. I will return to Günter Litfin and the lasting effects that the SED's defamation had for his memorialization even beyond the fall of the Wall in this chapter's conclusion.

While the Wall came to signify queer death, it also served as a queer erotic fantasy in a short story published in homophile magazine *Der Kreis* in 1963.⁸⁶ The trilingual magazine featured articles in German, French, and English, and was published in Zurich, Switzerland, and read worldwide. The story, titled "Behind the Wall," met with strong reactions from readers. Some rejected it as irresponsible kitsch; others appreciated that the author had treated the heavy subject with a light hand. The discussion of the two-page story filled ten pages over three issues of the magazine.

The story is the account of Michael, a West German of unknown age, who visits East Berlin on a Saturday in the winter of 1962. Michael knows Berlin: "He wanted to take a peek behind 'The Wall,' visit all the familiar sites that had once endeared Berlin to him."⁸⁷ He arrives in East Berlin by S-Bahn, going through border controls at Friedrichstraße train station. While waiting in line to have his passport checked and get a day permit, he makes eye contact with a young officer who is patrolling the waiting line, picking out "old people and those who he saw were about to collapse" for immediate passport controls.⁸⁸

Once he has passed border controls, Michael walks down an empty Unter den Linden boulevard, feeling "an unusual chill that hurt."⁸⁹ At Palace Square, he visits the closeby Café Bukarest.⁹⁰ At this wine bar, Michael re-encounters the border control officer, and they begin a conversation that becomes more relaxed as they evade the issue of politics.⁹¹ Michael then asks the officer to join him at the opera, and they see a performance of *La Traviata*. During the performance, the officer's hand reaches for Michael's, and they once again exchange glances. The story then jumps ahead to the two of them walking slowly on Unter den Linden towards Friedrichstraße train station, where Michael will catch the S-Bahn back to West Berlin and the officer will begin his night shift.

The narrator explains that Michael knew that their relationship would not last:

Over there was a wall that prevented that, and maybe there was even more there; but they had not talked about that. They had only lived the moment in the shadows of a ruin; more had not been granted to them.⁹²

Hence, besides the Wall, here trivialized by the use of the indeterminate article as just *a* wall, there might have been other obstacles to Michael and Eberhard's – the officer is now named – continued relationship, such as an existing boyfriend or a wife. But that possibility is never mentioned. All that time allows is quick sex in a ruined building. Before they get to Friedrichstraße station, they say their goodbyes. The boulevard is empty, facilitating a tender farewell:

All alone they were standing on the walking path between the linden trees and were holding hands. Gently, Eberhard took Michael's head between his hands and tenderly kissed him on the mouth. "Let us never forget this hour," he added.⁹³

The story ends with Michael hurrying towards his hotel along West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm boulevard, which, in contrast to its Eastern counterpart, is "flushed with traffic," whereas "Eberhard began his control walk along the Wall."⁹⁴ The remaining space on the page is filled with a schematic illustration of a wall.

The goodbye scene between Eberhard and Michael is reminiscent of the farewell between Eberhardt Brucks and Guy Morris, which introduced this chapter: a kiss in public, rendered in melodramatic tone. Volker, the story's author, represented the two parts of divided Berlin as different, but not too much so, and the Wall as an obstacle that could easily be overcome, at least for a West German; it is not a deadly barrier but a brief delay for a young man promenading through the city's public spaces. The humane treatment he receives from the border officer and the experience of being checked out by him gives the wait at the border a new meaning. In the story, East Berlin appears as a succession of landmarks within a half mile radius of Friedrichstraße, sights that would have been easily recognizable to *Der Kreis's* readership. And while West Berlin's bright lights and traffic signal modernity, the backwardness of East Berlin, expressed in its emptiness, darkness, and the ruins, makes possible the intimacy between officer Eberhard and visitor Michael.

Critical readers of the story took offence at its poor style, pointing out that the formulaic melodrama had missed the very real drama that the

Wall signified for queer Berliners. “A ‘Wall-tearjerker’ with the undertone ‘They aren’t that bad after all,’ decorated with a cute construction kit wall,” summarized reader Horst from West Berlin. His scathing critique of the story opened and set the frame for the intense debate that followed between readers, editor, and author.⁹⁵ In his letter to the editor, which was as long as the story itself, he offered trenchant comments on the stylistic and substantial problems of “Behind the Wall.”

The whole story shows that the “Eastern Wanderer” has barely made an effort to engage with the human tragedy of the Wall. He has merely tried for the facades: Unter den Linden – Café Bukarest with the mellifluous violin music – State Opera – and, what coincidence, the young officer! He, too, pardon me, the facade of a probably attractive-looking man. Neither did our “Eastern Wanderer” look behind the scenes, not those of the representative of the Eastern gentlemen [the SED party leaders], either, because – they did not talk about politics. Not about humanity, either, because certainly, the “shadows of the ruin” where they later “lived the moment” was already casting its shadows before them, obscuring everything else.⁹⁶

The superficial description, Horst argued, made not only for poor style. To get across what the author had failed to grasp by not going beyond appearances, Horst polemically continued the story.

Certainly Michael did not consider that good Eberhard, after they parted at 21.45, theoretically and also very practically, by virtue of his order, might have, already at 22.05 when he began his control walk, shot down a human being, who possibly, just as coincidentally, might have been one of us, and whom a stronger bond than a Saturday afternoon romance might have given the strength and the courage to flee over the Wall. To flee to his West Berlin boyfriend, who after all cannot go to East Berlin for a café and opera visit.⁹⁷

Horst hence insisted on the reality of divided Berlin in response to Volker’s fantasy of a queer encounter between West and East outside the political. As West Berliners, neither Horst nor the “West Berlin boyfriend” he imagined could visit East Berlin in 1962–63. Visits only became possible in December 1963 with the first of the *Passierscheinabkommen*, the treaties that allowed West Berliners to come to East Berlin for a brief time. Horst also confronted “Behind the Wall” with the reality of the Wall as queer death. His description of “one of us” being killed by a border guard while trying to flee to his boyfriend in West Berlin can be read as a possible reference to the case of Günter Litfin. As a West

Berliner, Horst might have known Litfin personally; at least it is likely that queer West Berliners were aware of the SED's smear campaign against Litfin and would have discussed it with friends. In his letter, Horst does not refer to Litfin directly, however. Indeed, the following sentences suggest that he may be referring to another case.

The gunned down man was a soldier and was guarding the Wall, he was separated from his boyfriend on 13 August 1961, he no longer had the strength to endure the separation, and he no longer wanted to live "the moment" over and over again.⁹⁸

The change in grammatical mood, from subjunctive to indicative, may signify a change in genre from fiction to non-fiction. The definitiveness of the simple past implies factuality; the letter's tone shifts from the polemical to the authentic, maybe even autobiographic. Was this soldier Horst's boyfriend? Is he telling his own story? Horst brings back "Officer Eberhard," the fictional figure from the story, in the next sentence. But historical reality surfaces again in the final sentence, when he describes Eberhard as "the murderer of a human whose only 'crime' consisted of having dreamt, since 13 August 1961, of once again being kissed gently and tenderly by his boyfriend."⁹⁹ The word "crime," I posit, can be read as a reference to the vilification of Günter Litfin as a "criminal" engaging in "criminal deeds" by GDR media. The multiple layers of reference in Horst's letter, expressed in varying registers of grammar and voice, destabilize the fictional framework of the story and make historical reality shimmer through the fictional facade of "Behind the Wall."

Horst also addresses historical reality directly. Referring to the publisher's location in Switzerland, far away from East-West tensions, he writes:

Certainly, it is difficult to grasp the problem of the Wall comprehensively from Zurich; just how hard it is can be gauged by the fact that not even the West Germans succeed in it, as the mindless example of the story shows ... Believe me, there must be thousands of cases where couples of friends [*Freundespaare*] were separated by this deed of impotence by a hated regime, just like families, marriages, fiancés, and all scales of human bond were recklessly torn apart.¹⁰⁰

The reactions to Horst's letter were split, with some readers enthusiastically agreeing with him and others, including the publisher and author, reading his response as tainted with Cold War fury, failing

to engage with his criticism, and displaying a remarkable naïveté. “Why should he [the young officer] shoot right away? Normally, we especially are not so trigger-happy, here as there,” reader Klaus from Geneva wrote, postulating a gay exceptionalism of peacefulness.¹⁰¹ He believed that the story, because it was “not drenched in hate,” could show readers that there were “people ‘over there’ too, who sense and feel like humans.”¹⁰² Author Volker shared Klaus’s incomprehension over Horst’s outrage. “Why turn a story into a drama, a coincidental encounter of two young people into a political problem right away?” he asked.¹⁰³ He was concerned “not with the facade, but with the purely human,” he claimed. His response ended with the call: “Let us not look at the uniform, but through it!”¹⁰⁴ That suggestion was gladly taken up by editor Rolf, who found it adequate to extend such a generous ignorance of uniforms to those who had worn them less than two decades earlier.¹⁰⁵

It is as utterly wrong today to see in an officer of the Eastern police only a henchman of the regime as it was wrong during the Thousand-Year Reich to see a sadist devoted to Hitler in every bearer of an SS uniform. We know today that some – certainly not enough – let themselves be roped in so as to be able to prevent some of the monstrous, and did so too.¹⁰⁶

To Rolf, the concern that the officer in the story had shown for the old and infirm waiting in line at the border was proof enough that he would not coolly execute the command to shoot illegal border crossers. He could find no fault with the story whose singular point he described as “the vital spark of eros stopping before no border and no wall and no ‘enemy,’” and he reproached critics for wanting to “attach such heavy weights to everything.”¹⁰⁷

Despite his disagreement with the critics, editor Rolf gave them more room in the pages of his magazine. In the May 1963 issue, discussion took up another three pages. Reader Rolf C. rejected the editor’s talk of “heavy weights,” instead repeating Horst’s point that the story’s triviality was incompatible with its subject’s gravity. “What is demanded here is solely the right relation of topic and form of discussion,” he wrote. “It is also called tact.”¹⁰⁸ He saw no contradiction between his call for keeping the right measure and his own juxtaposition of the walled-in GDR with the Nazi concentration camps. “The Wall has created the most modern KZ, and we would find a schmaltzy portrayal of human episodes in a Nazi KZ unbearable today,” he wrote. Horst from West Berlin, whose letter sparked the discussion, responded to his critics and addressed their resistance against imagining the border guard as

a killer. He pointed out that those who became officers in the People's Police did so voluntarily and enlisted for a minimum of ten years, suggesting their ideological commitment to the GDR. He denied that being "one of us" made anyone less trigger-happy.¹⁰⁹ But editor Rolf continued to be unmoved by arguments about the inadequacy of the story, insisting that it "neither could nor wanted to grasp or artistically shape the ground of the Berlin Wall in its whole breadth and depth, but only show a small adventure and a quiet cheerfulness that had strayed into the ruins."¹¹⁰ This statement was his final word, wrapping up the discussion once and for all: he stood by his opinion that printing "Behind the Wall" had been the right decision.

"Behind the Wall" and the heated debate it elicited show a clash of everyday experiences and fantasies of the Berlin Wall and of Berlin as a queer space. As the story's critics pointed out, the Wall served as mere decoration in this narrative, East Berlin as mere facade for telling a titillating tale of quick sex with a man in uniform. The reluctance to imagine gay men in uniform as murderers and the readiness to grant them superior, benevolent motives for joining both oppressive regimes, apparent in many of the readers' responses, is disturbing to the contemporary reader. Perhaps even more shocking is the casual use of the Nazi concentration camps as simile for the walled-in GDR, which was, however, a feature of much Western reporting on the Wall.¹¹¹ Whereas the Nazi comparisons remained unchallenged in *Der Kreis*, the story's treatment of sex was met with ample comment. In its tame, yet comparatively explicit mention of the sexual encounter – multiple readers mentioned that the sex scene took up an unusually central place in the narrative – and its more pronounced description of public tenderness between men, the story reinforced Berlin's image as a haven for queer love. More than fifteen years after the war ended, the city's ruins remained part of the "moral geography of danger and desire" articulated by Jennifer Evans.¹¹² As the responses to the story and its critique by West Berliner Horst demonstrate, the lethal reality of the Wall for queer East Berliners could easily be ignored by the magazine's West German and Swiss readership, which appears to have been unaware of Günter Litfin's case. At the same time, multiple readers asked whether the magazine had subscribers in East Germany, conveying genuine interest in the situation of their Eastern "comrades," a term often used to express community with other homophiles. Editor Rolf did not answer this question, and East German voices were not represented in the discussion, suggesting that there were no East German subscribers beyond medical professionals and institutes.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine how queer Berliners perceived the city's public spaces, how they moved in them, how their movements and actions were shaped by laws and policing, and how they subverted public spaces' intended uses, queering them for their own purposes. In gay men's oral histories, stopping at *Klappen* for anonymous sex emerged as a beloved routine, albeit one whose thrill came with the danger of violence, arrest, and incarceration. "Streetwalking boys," many of whom worked in public spaces, appear as ambivalent and contradictory figures in this chapter. Authorities' desire to cleanse public space of signs of sexual deviance and commercial sex meant that they were heavily policed. At times, a man's presence in a space known for male prostitution was enough to be arrested. The GDR's formalized persecution of individuals whose lifestyle did not conform to socialist ideals of work and family through the "asociality" law may have affected streetwalking boys too. But streetwalking boys could be perpetrators as much as victims, robbing, blackmailing, physically hurting, and even killing the men who purchased their services.

Free passage through public spaces was predicated upon a normative performance of gender: to pass as a man, queer Berliners could not be feminine, but had to pick up the gestures, movements, and language of normative masculinity. To pass as a woman, trans women had to perform a seamless version of normative femininity. In West Berlin, police recognition of transvestite subjectivities ended in 1960 at the latest, as the practice of issuing *Transvestitenscheine* and passports that showed their bearers in their chosen everyday appearance was abolished.

In 1961, the construction of the Wall materialized Berlin's border and ended the porousness that had characterized the inner-city division since the beginning of the Cold War. It broke apart the queer public that had existed up to this point in the postwar city, despite the economic inequalities and political and legal differences in East and West. When the SED regime's violent enforcement of the new order hit a gay man as its first victim, and it then leveraged homophobic prejudice to legitimize his killing, the Wall came to signify queer death to queer Berliners.

Even beyond the end of the GDR, the SED's defamation had lasting effects for the memorialization of Günter Litfin. His portrait on the Chronicles of the Wall website, a project by three major federal institutions documenting the history of the Wall and commemorating its victims, mentions neither his homosexuality nor East German media's homophobic abuse for propagandistic purposes.¹¹³ The website stresses his family's membership in the CDU and their Catholicism, accompanied by Litfin's first communion photograph (figure 3.1). His sense of

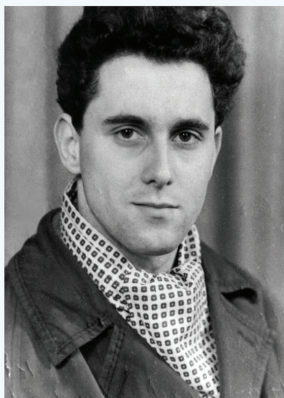
Victims at the wall

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Günter Litfin

born on January 19, 1937
shot dead on August 24, 1961

in the Humboldt Harbor near Charité Hospital
at the sector border between Berlin-Mitte and Berlin-Tiergarten



Günter Litfin, photo: ca. 1960 (Photo: private)



Günter Litfin: Memorial cross for Günter Litfin at the Reichstag building in Berlin, 2005 (Photo: Hans-Hermann Hertle)

It was just after 4 p.m. when Günter Litfin began his attempt to reach West Berlin by fleeing between the Friedrichstrasse and Lehrter train stations. According to reports from the East Berlin police, he crossed Charité Hospital grounds and climbed over a wall bordering the bank of the Spree River when members of the transport police discovered him.



Günter Litfin: First communion (photo: ca. 1947) (Photo: private)



Günter Litfin was born in Berlin on January 19, 1937 and lived in the city district of Weissensee. He grew up during the Second World War and later experienced the country's reconstruction and the gradual division of the city. His father Albert worked as a butcher and in 1945 helped found the local CDU district chapter, which his wife Margarete also joined. The four sons were baptized Catholic and attended the St. Joseph School in Berlin-Weissensee. The family was clearly rooted in a milieu that was not supportive of the East German government and its mission to "establish socialism." [1] The sons continued to maintain this attitude as adults: In 1957 Günter Litfin and his younger brother, Jürgen, joined the West Berlin CDU, which unlike the CDU block party in East Germany, existed illegally in the eastern part of the city. [2]

After completing an apprenticeship as a tailor, Günter Litfin got a job in a West Berlin tailor workshop. He was fashion conscious, dressed elegantly and dreamed of becoming a costume maker for the theater. At first the young man commuted daily from his parents' apartment in Weissensee to his job near the Bahnhof Zoo. But "border-crossers," as people who worked in the West and lived in the East were called, were under increasing pressure in East Germany. To avoid conflict Günter Litfin found an apartment in the West Berlin district of Charlottenburg, but he did not register his new address with the police because that would have made him a "republic fugitive" - someone who has deserted East Germany - and would have meant that he could no longer visit his relatives in East Berlin. Günter Litfin's brother later described him "as the calming force in the family and the one everyone could confide in." [3] After his father died in May 1961, Günter strongly felt it was his responsibility to be there for his mother:

Consequently, he postponed his permanent move to West Berlin - until it was too late. The construction of the Berlin Wall suddenly put an end to his plans for the future. Günter Litfin spent August 12, 1961, a Saturday, with his mother and brother visiting relatives on the west side of the city. When they took the S-Bahn back to Weissensee late that evening, they had no idea that measures were being prepared to close the border. The shock was great the next morning when they heard on the radio that the sector border had been completely sealed off during the night. Günter Litfin, unable to accept the existence of the Wall, began looking into

Figure 3.1. Screenshot of the commemorative page for Günter Litfin on the Chronicles of the Wall website, 6 May 2019.

fashion is mentioned too, not without the addition that it “corresponds to his profession” as a tailor.¹¹⁴ This portrayal of Günter Litfin as a Christian, conservative young man whose impeccable appearance was an expression of his professional ethics and his good upbringing continues the efforts of his brother Jürgen Litfin, three years his junior, who until his death in 2017 made it his life’s work to commemorate his older brother. In 2003, he opened a memorial to his brother and the other victims of the Wall in a former guard tower close to the site of Günter’s attempted escape.

In his 2006 memoir, Jürgen Litfin remembers his brother and their relationship, Günter’s death, and the repercussions for him and his family. Growing up, the brothers Günter and Jürgen had been close. Jürgen Litfin’s pride in his brother shines through in his account of Günter’s “excellent work and courteous nature,” his tailoring work for well-known actors, “his good manners,” “good looks, tall (182 centimetres), slender, dark hair, and dark eyes,” his “warm, outgoing manner.”¹¹⁵ Günter supported his brother and his parents financially, and the brothers also socialized together, going on bike tours and out to dance. In this context, Jürgen Litfin mentions “my brother’s girlfriend ... Monika.”¹¹⁶ At the same time, he also describes that Günter had to endure “derisive criticism” on the streets of Weissensee for his elegant wardrobe.¹¹⁷ Whereas Günter appears as an exceptionally well-dressed, well-mannered heterosexual man in Jürgen Litfin’s characterization, the sneering comments that he suffered for his looks hint at the fragility of this image of heterosexual masculinity, and at his brother’s awareness of it.

The day after Günter Litfin’s shooting, without knowing what had happened, Jürgen Litfin was interrogated for hours by the Stasi.¹¹⁸ His questioners confronted him with two contradictory theories about his brother, both of which he describes as “slander”: that Günter was homosexual and that he had sexually harassed a female nurse at the Charité Hospital.¹¹⁹ When Jürgen returned home, he found his mother in despair. Their apartment had been turned upside down and partly destroyed by Stasi agents who had not bothered to inform her about the reasons for their search. The two of them only learned of Günter’s violent death the following day, when the West Berlin television news reported on it. The family was then forced to keep quiet about the circumstances of Günter’s passing.

After the fall of the Wall, Jürgen Litfin worked ceaselessly to rehabilitate his brother and get justice for him. He tried to find out more about the course of events that led to his brother’s death, in particular the identities of the policemen who shot him. In this context, he discusses

the content of the Stasi report to Erich Honecker. He mentions how the report maligned the family for their CDU membership but omits its reference to his brother's alleged homosexuality and incarceration in West Berlin. In the reprint of the report that is included in the text, the respective lines are blackened.¹²⁰

In light of the traumatic connection between his brother's death and the state's vicious homophobic defamation, it is understandable that Jürgen Litfin glossed over all hints of Günter Litfin's homosexuality. But the result is a misrepresentation. Günter Litfin was not only a Catholic and a political conservative, but, quite likely, he also loved men. His brave attempt to flee the GDR, I would suggest, was motivated also by a need to be among friends and lovers in West Berlin and to partake in West Berlin's queer public, not only by his political leanings and his wish to continue his professional success. In addition, Jürgen Litfin's refusal to even entertain the possibility of Günter's homo- or bisexuality perpetuates the very homophobia expressed so heinously by GDR media. By uncritically following his account, official commemorations such as the *Chronicles of the Wall* participate in upholding a silence that signifies the shamefulness of queer love.