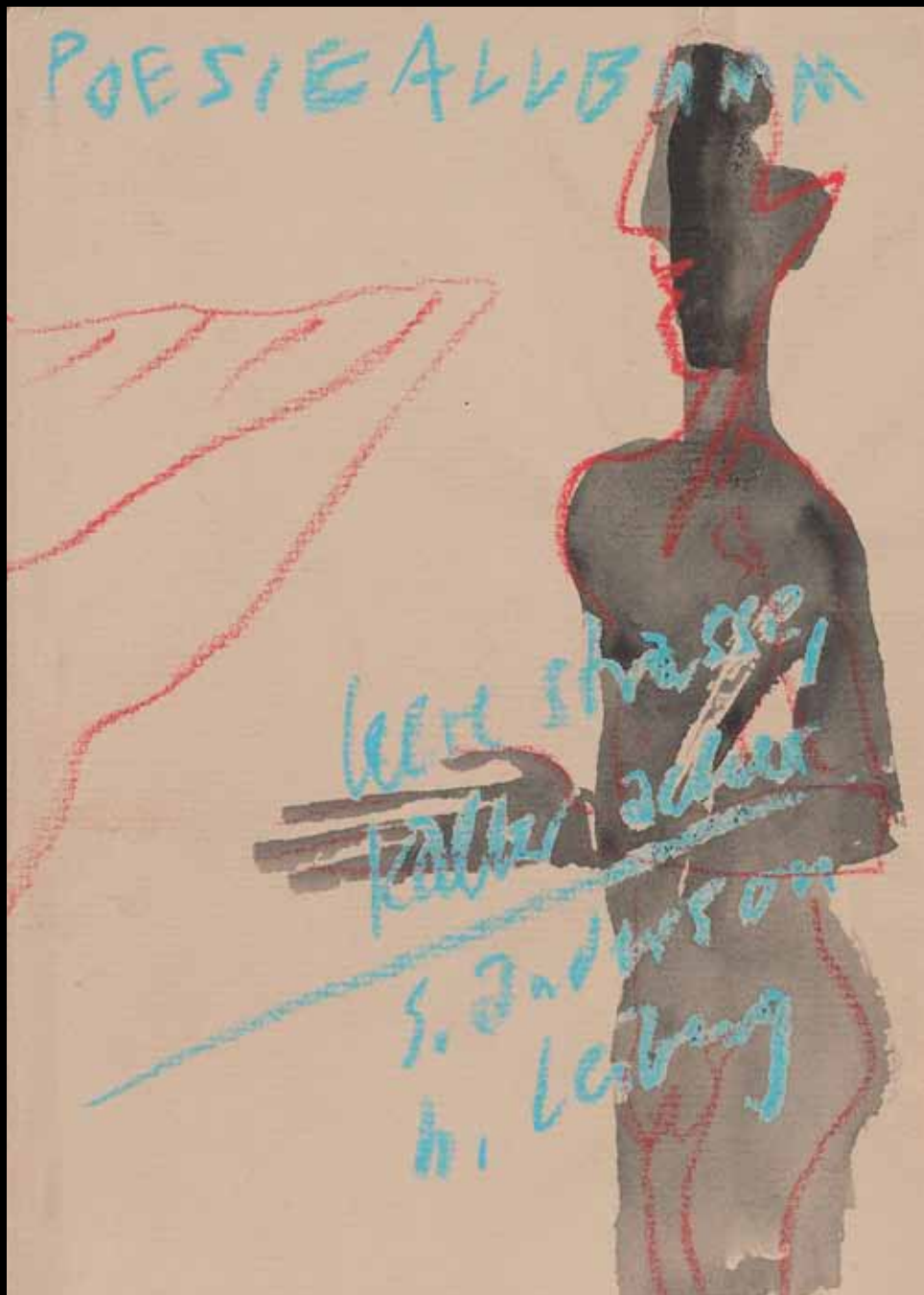hre seit der Bitterfelder Konfere
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fun on the titanic Underground Art and the East German State

Leere strasse, kalte acker—"empty street, cold fields"—the title of the underground 'zine at left evokes the implacably gray façades of "really existing socialism" that inevitably confronted stray visitors from the West who set out to explore East Berlin in 1984, the year it came out. That anything so vibrant could survive that bleak pervasive cold, devoid of people, cars, color, and life, one could scarcely imagine. But insiders knew better. In out-of-the-way districts like Prenzlauer Berg, diverse communities of poets and artists, film-makers, musicians, and performers cultivated a thriving *samizdat* culture that was rooted in one conviction all of them shared in common. Working within the framework and institutions dictated by the Communist regime was hopeless. You had to build your *own* venues, set up your *own* channels of communication, find your *own* audiences, if you wanted to make a space for creative experiment and artistic self-expression. And you had to do it while avoiding all contact with the East German state. This was the Alpha and Omega of underground art and poetry behind the Wall.

The line governing all manifestations of official culture was laid down at a meeting of Communist party functionaries in the small industrial city of Bitterfeld in the spring of 1959. Subsequently known as the "Bitterfeld Way," the policy essentially held that only art and literature that contributed directly to the task of building the new Socialist Society had a pro-

Previous page: Robert Rehfeldt, "Bitterfelder Weg," silkscreen print (detail), from Tina Bara, Oskar Manigk, et al., *Bitterfeld 4400* (1989).

Sascha Anderson and Helge Leiberg, *Poe Sie All Bum: leere strasse, kalte acker* (Berlin, 1984).

ductive role to play in the East German state. Artists and writers probed the boundaries from the beginning, but a crucial test of the doctrine—and a defining moment for the generation who built the underground networks of the '80s—came with the expulsion of Wolf Biermann, a popular folk singer and devoted Communist who dared criticize the East German regime, in 1976. The groundswell of protest and campaign of persecutions and repression that followed convinced many that official culture had reached a dead end: *kunst ist wenn sie trotzdem entsteht*—"it's art if it happens in spite of all that"—one artist's stamp declares, superimposed defiantly over clichéd affirmations of the official doctrine, in *Bitterfeld 4400*, a *samizdat boîte-en-valise* published on the thirtieth anniversary of the infamous conference in 1989 (reproduced on page 1).

It is astonishing how much art "happened in spite of all that" in the East German underground of the '80s. *Mikado* (at right) is just one of dozens of self-published 'zines that circulated across the country in tiny runs. Distributed hand-to-hand, they varied widely, ranging from the simple carbon-copy typescripts and xerox handouts to elaborate multimedia packets combining text, music, photography, and original prints (often silkscreens, linocuts, or drypoint etchings). Repudiating the state, underground publishers had to make do without access to state-run presses—even basic xerox technology was off limits to all but a few. Out of necessity, they turned to modes and means of production they could assemble and operate themselves in the confines of their own apartments, private studios, and hidden workshops. By far the simplest and most common of these was silkscreen, an effective way to reproduce both text and image, at least in small runs.

"Limited runs of thirty or forty copies owed nothing to the whims of bibliophiles," Henryk Gericke later remembered, describing his work producing *samizdat* 'zines in Prenzlauer Berg in the mid-1980s. One limiting factor was the state itself, since runs of more than 99 copies required an official license. But it was the "absurdly laborious reproduction process" he was forced to use that explained the tiny run of Gericke's surrealist-inspired 'zine *Caligo*. Using an antiquated *A4-Ruminator* machine in the office

Uwe Kolbe, Lothar Trolle, and Bernd Wagner, eds., *Mikado* 3, no. 1 (Berlin, 1985).

where he worked, the resourceful self-publisher adapted a technology meant for transferring images onto aluminum plates for use with cheap "typing paper that smelled like it had been hand-made from dirt." The most perilous moment in production was the "burning-in" process, when 20 to 30-second blasts of intense heat were required to fix the image in graphite residue onto the plate (or in this case, a sheet of paper) using what he described as "a kind of open microwave oven." Dialing down the exposure time to two seconds, Gericke kept the paper from bursting into flames by allowing it time to cool, but multiple exposures were needed. For a run of 30 copies, he was forced to go through the entire process "in all its archaic production glory" no less than 390 times to produce the first 24-page issue of *Caligo*. And that didn't include the pages that went up in smoke along the way. Yet the results, even of mistakes, could be delightful: "large black

areas often didn't cover and, at the center of acutest vision, they boasted spots like bright irritations. These hard copies slogged through with light burn marks on their versos. The paper became brittle in such places, but it gave the impression that a thin layer of oil was sweating out from beneath the motifs on the other side. Such effects . . . lent the issues a scuffed-up haptic feel that really made *Caligo* lapse into agelessness once and for all."

Inventive use of media outside the mainstream lent East German *samizdat* a distinctive look and feel that arose by necessity out of the conditions of its production. But, as Gericke's comment suggests, it also fostered an aesthetic vision that profoundly shaped underground art and poetry in its own right. The complex interplay of text and image and the use of handwriting as well as typeface fonts, hallmark features of East German 'zines and artist's books, were easy to achieve through the wide-
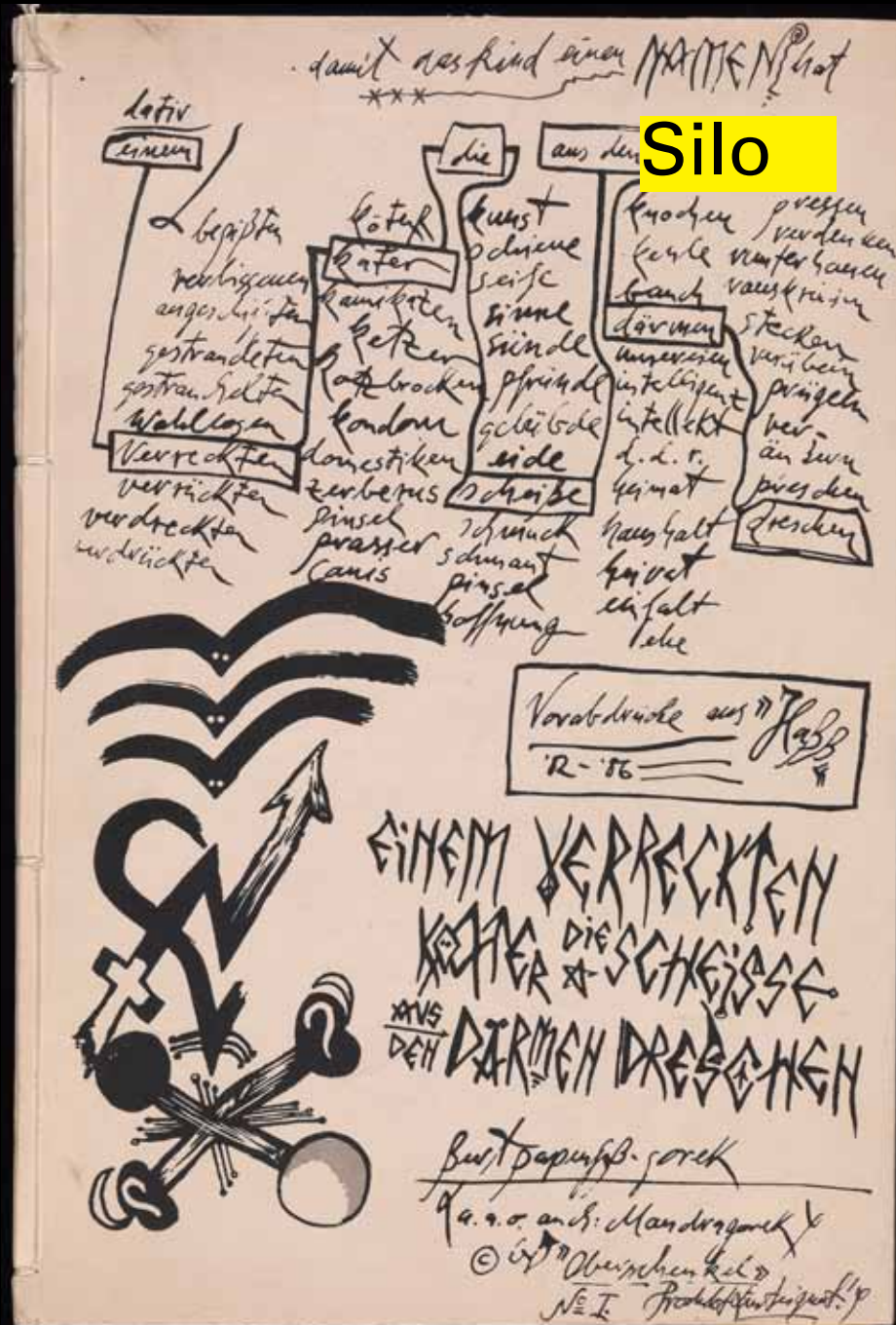
Recto and verso of a burned page from
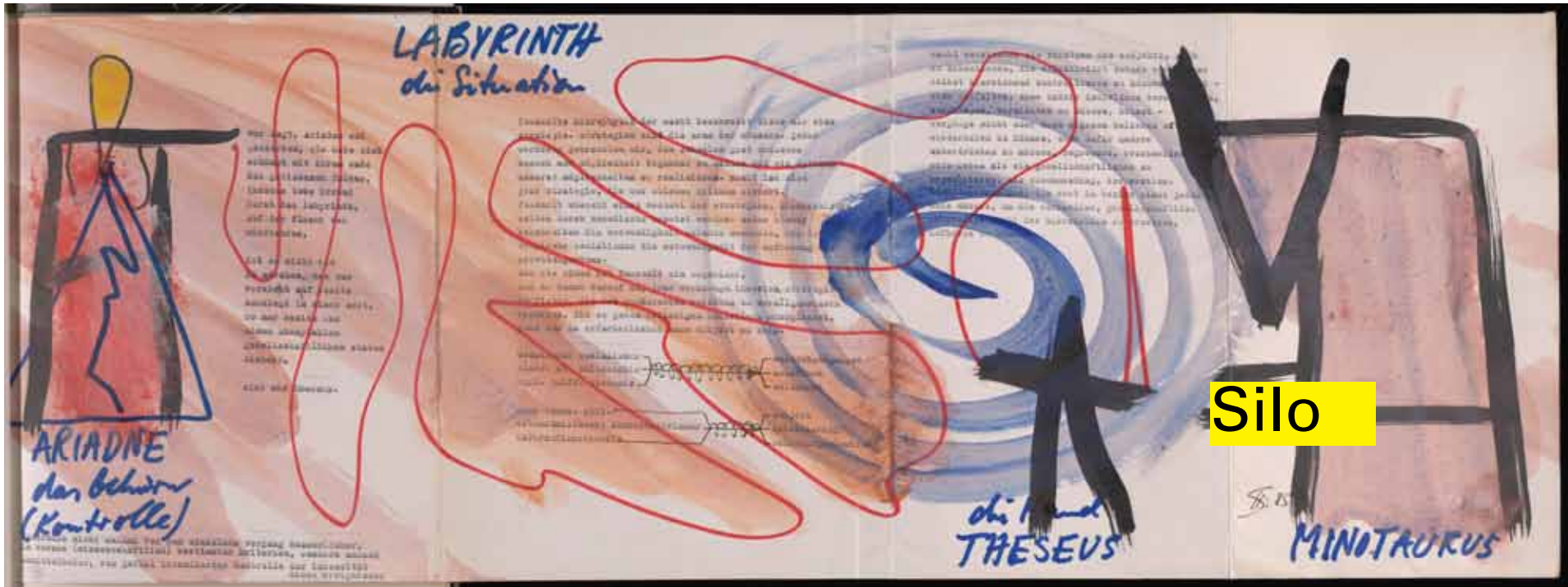Henryk Gericke's *Caligo*, no. 2 (Berlin, 1985).

spread use of silkscreen in the 1980s—and at a fraction of the cost a standard commercial printing press would have required. Handwriting in particular came to express the intensely personal aspect of *samizdat* creation, which many writers and artists consciously juxtaposed to the neat and tidy lines of rigid typeface that promulgated official culture in the totalitarian state. ". . . it's actually a more effusive product than a book," Bert Papenfuß-Gorek wrote of *samizdat* productions like the one at right in 1988; "this is not a commercial product, but something where things other than merchandising play a role. You've really had it in your hands for a while and worked on it, manually too. That is something decisive; it's like a gift or, well . . . the difference between commodity and gift."

Playing with words as visual elements on a page could also serve as a ploy to screen their *meanings* from the watchful eye of the censor, since poets and artists could argue that they were only pictures, after all. Seemingly chosen at random from columns of arbitrary grammatical elements, the title of Papenfuß-Gorek's *Einem verreckten Kater die Scheisse aus den Därmen dreschen* (at right) whimsically emerges to produce the (almost) nonsensical, yet certainly taboo combination: *Thrashing the Shit out of the Guts of a Croaked Tomcat*. Inspired by French poststructuralist theory, poetical acts such as this deconstructed language—including the official jargon of the state—in ways that posed an oblique, though often quite intentional, challenge to the absolutist claims of ruling Communist ideology. The political valences of wordplay in the East German underground can be seen in the elaborate foldout "Labyrinth" of Ariadne (p. 10). Openly acknowledging the debt to French theory, the text contrasts the trajectory of "utopian socialism, classical German philosophy, [and] English political economy"—arguably intellectual stepping stones to Marxist-Leninism—with an alternative trajectory spiraling out from "new French philosophy, epistemological theory, [and] computer theory." While the one ends in "mass movements, machines, [and the] world market," the other points the way to a free "subject, orientation, [and] self-organization."

Creative interplay of language, genres, and media types was the heart and soul of the *samizdat* culture sustained by the East German under-

Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, *Einem verreckten Kater die Scheisse aus den Därmen dreschen*, front cover (Berlin, 1988).

ground of the '80s. Poetry and art blended with photography and Super-8 film, music, and performance to produce a dynamic, ephemeral, happening-like quality that was essential to life in the insider scene that thrived outside official channels of the state. Tipped in to the underground 'zine *Schaden*, a photo from Lutz Dammbeck's experimental "Realfilme" (p. 12) gives a sense for the performative aspect of East German *samizdat*, as does Klaus Elle's haunting photo of a child's photographic portrait, held up in an underground gallery space by a spindly-legged figure (p. 13), or again a photo of punks gathering at an "Intermedia" festival/happening held in Leipzig in 1985 (p. 14). Taken at an impromptu performance of an experimental theater troupe, the scene below it documents

Above: 4-page gatefold with text and graphics by Hans J. Schulze, in *Schaden* no. 6 (Berlin, 1985)..

Below: Johannes Jansen, *prost neuland* (Berlin, 1989).

the work of the *Zinnober-Gruppe* ("Cinnabar Group," p. 14), which had played a central role in the underground since the late 1970s.

With its brazen defiance of authority, wild unscripted performativity, and raw Do-It-Yourself aesthetic, punk music resonated powerfully through the *samizdat* culture of the 1980s. Bert Papenfuß-Gorek and Henryk Gericke both spent time on the underground punk circuit, as did others in the scene, including Ronald Lippok, Gericke's partner in the *Caligo* printing adventure, and, Matthias Baader Holst, another master of "nonsense" lyrics, who loved to disrupt highbrow gatherings of the underground by commandeering the mic and delivering shocking unscheduled performances of his unruly art. Punk music circulated hand-to-hand, usu-

Above: Photograph from a "Realfilm" by Lutz Dammbeck, from *Schaden*, no. 10 (Berlin, 1986).

12   At right: Klaus Elle, photograph, from *Foto-Anschlag* (Leipzig, 1988).

ally in the form of bootleg cassette tapes, some of which were released in issues of *samizdat* 'zines like *Schaden*.

One of the (predictable) ironies in all this was that the state itself inadvertently helped to *invent* East German punk. Seeking to shock youngsters with extremes of Western bourgeois decadence, editors of an official Communist youth newspaper ran a story on the Sex Pistols, complete with photos of punks brawling on London's King's Road. It "was the best way to animate a teenager," Gericke recalled: "danger and beauty collided—it was love at first sight." And a model to be emulated. Mohawks, ripped jeans, rowdy parties, and DIY garage bands soon spread across the country, much to the chagrin of officials. While being a punk meant being ostracized everywhere, at least at the beginning, in the East it meant visibly identifying yourself as a "class enemy" (in the jargon of Communist ideology) at a distance. The consequences could be severe, even deadly.

The highly performative—and provocative—character of the East German *samizdat* culture inevitably begs the question: where could poets, artists, and musicians such as these find *space to perform* in the totalitarian state? Permits were required before holding any kind of event in public places, and even if the underground had not utterly renounced contact with official channels, such sanction could hardly be expected from party functionaries sworn to uphold the doctrine of Socialist Realism and the "Bitterfeld Way." As a result, readings, concerts, parties, and happenings mostly took place in private apartments or at most ventured out into the dubious semi-public of dingy bars. Occasionally the Church provided a safe haven (even for punks). Publicity circulated along the same networks as 'zines and cassette tapes, spreading by word of mouth, handmade flyers, postcards, and elaborate invitations, some works of art in their own right, which have become a particularly rare and precious genre of East German *samizdat* today. Yet despite this commitment to maintaining its own independent channels, the underground was never able to avoid contact with the state entirely. Contact was inevitable, and relations between the two cultures turned out to be far more complex than most imagined.

Above left: Photograph of the Intermedia Festival in Leipzig, 1985, from *Anschlag,* no. 5 (Leipzig, 1986).
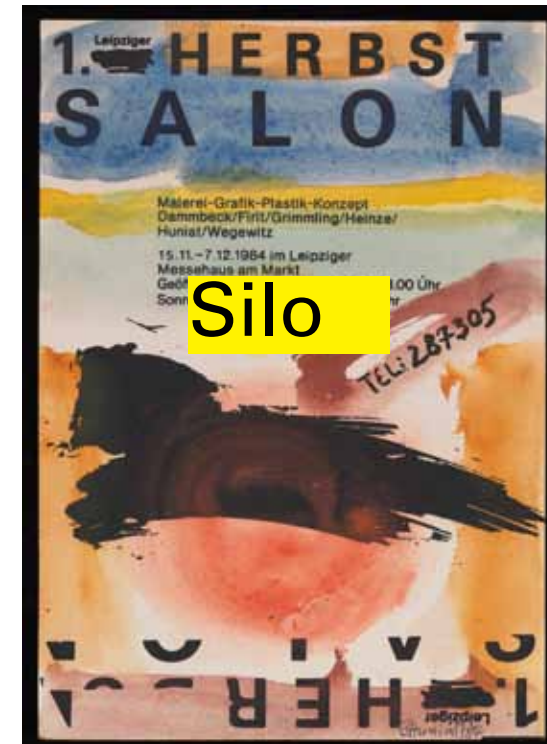
Below left: Photograph of the *Zinnober-Gruppe* in a scene from *Szen-Arium,* from *Schaden,* no. 10 (Berlin, 1986).

On one occasion, in 1984, it was underground artists themselves who initiated contact. Frustrated by a cultural policy that prohibited them from exhibiting their best works in public, six Leipzig artists cooked up a ploy to fool the state into submission. Pooling their resources, the group came up with 2000 marks needed for a deposit and simply rented a floor in an exhibition hall in the center of town. This they were entitled to do as card-carrying members of the *Verband Bildender Künstler* (Association of Fine Artists). Assuming they had also obtained the necessary clearance through official channels, building managers signed the lease, and the *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon* ("First Leipzig Autumn Salon") was up and running. The first officials heard of it, however, was when invitation cards went out publicizing the show (the one at right is signed by one of the organizers, Günther Huniat, and bears an original print by the same artist on the verso). Local party leaders were furious. Accusing the miscreants of "misuse of the Association's name," they demanded an immediate termination of the lease from building management. Undeterred, the artists stuck by the terms of the contract, announcing they would vacate the site only if forced out by the police. Yet the last thing the regime needed was another public uproar like the one that had followed the expulsion of Wolf Biermann in 1976.

At this point, the state blinked. The matter was referred to Berlin, where party officials determined that the political costs involved in evicting the renegade artists and closing the show would be too high. Now that the public was informed (also in West Germany), it was simply too late. The *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon* was to take place—albeit with certain restrictions. First off—there was to be no more publicity. Not a single poster or flyer announcing the event was to be found in all of Leipzig. Second, it was to be made clear that the show was not an art exhibition per sé, but instead only an "open workshop." Intended to help the party save face, the distinction resulted in formal constraints on how works could be displayed, forcing the group to resort to makeshift improvised installations that in the end did much to produce the kind of informal, interactive environment that was all too familiar for members of the underground. Lutz Dammbeck made a silent film of the event. The exhibition became a happening.

Even without publicity, the Leipzig salon caper of 1984 drew in crowds of visitors far beyond the limited circles of the underground—the organizers even made a profit—and many young artists hoped for a repeat the following year. Determined to prevent this, the state launched a campaign of harassment and persecution that compelled many to flee to the West. Three of the original six who organized the event —Lutz Dammbeck, Hendrick Grimmling, and Günter Firit—were among those who left for the West over the next few years, while the other three—Günther Huniat, Frieder Heinze, and Olaf Wegewitz—chose to stay behind in the East. Some careers were ruined, friendships broke apart, while others blossomed in new semi-public spaces that opened up, despite all the acrimony, in the aftermath of the *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon*. It was a defining moment for the East German underground, and its repercussions can still be felt to this day.

Original invitation postcard for the *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon*, signed with an original print on the verso by Günther Huniat (Leipzig, 1984).

Frieder Heinze and Olaf Wegewitz,
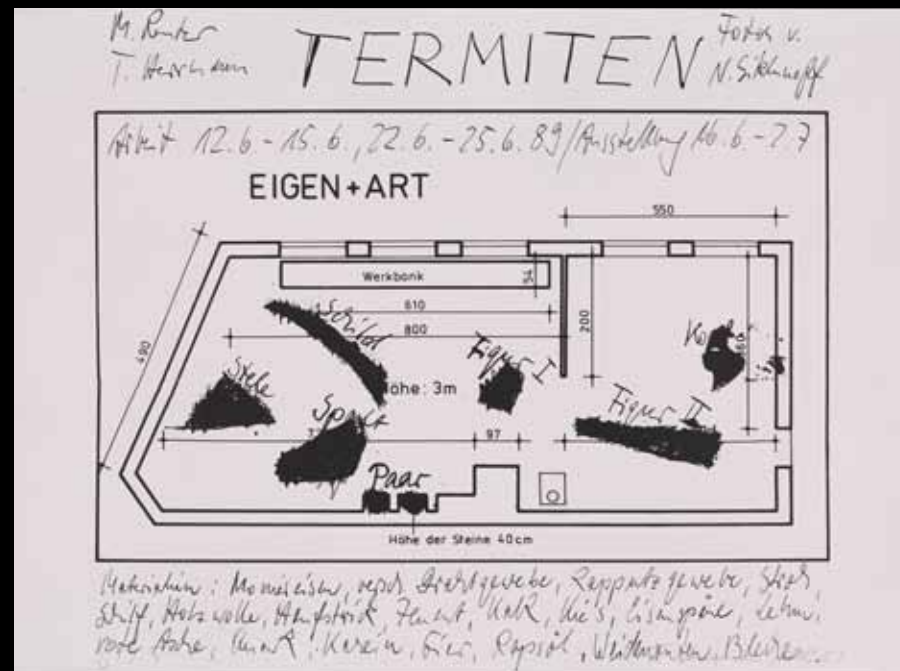*Unaulutu: Steinchen im Sand* (Leipzig: Reklam, 1985).

The slapstick skirmish between underground and official culture in Leipzig produced bizarre ripples that affected both sides, usually with predictable results, but occasionally in surprising—and not altogether negative—ways. One of the most brilliant and most unexpected outcomes on the part of official culture was the decision to publish *Unualutu*, a spectacular artist's book by two of the *Herbstsalon*'s organizers, Frieder Heinze and Olaf Wegewitz, the following year. How the artists managed to secure state sanction to publish the piece, parts of which were actually produced during the course of the "open workshop" in Leipzig, remains something of a mystery. Yet published it was, and by the prestigious Reklam Publishing House. Inspired by notebooks of a German anthropologist who toured the Amazon basin before the First World War, *Unaulutu* takes its title from a Carajan word for the sound that pebbles make rolling through the sand of a river bed. A large folio packed with enormous fold-out artworks, Native American texts and drawings, even toys made from the bark of trees in the Amazon, the piece is exquisite, a virtual exhibition-in-a-book, and by far one of the most impressive examples of East German printing skill ever produced.

While the spectacle of underground art produced (and performed) in public could not be repeated, the spirit of the *Leipziger Herbstsalon* lived on, carving out new spaces for performance and exhibition that were neither condoned nor repressed by the East German state and constituted an alternative channel for those seeking opportunities to experiment and promote their work outside the route of the official state galleries and all the compromises it entailed. Perhaps the most important of these was *Eigen+Art*, a workshop/gallery on the outskirts of Leipzig that was founded by Judy Lybke in 1985. Not surprisingly, the gallery's name is a play on words. *Eigenart* means "idiosyncrasy," but broken up into its component parts it suggests a sense of personal investment and ownership that perfectly captures the character of East German *samizdat* culture as well as the operating model of the gallery itself: roughly "(Our) Own + Art."

Eigen+Art had its beginnings in a Leipzig bar, where paintings of young artists (including some by the *Leipziger Herbstsalon* organizers)

were auctioned off to raise funds for the enterprise. Lybke followed the "workshop" model that had provided an escape clause for the *Herbstsalon* venture (and also for the state, which was desperately seeking to save face) the year before. Legally defined as "residencies in the workshop," exhibitions were financed by the artists themselves through the duration of the show with proceeds for the sale of catalogs, posters, invitation postcards, and so on. On average, the gallery drew between 300 and 700 visitors to each of its 50 shows. Music, dance, readings, and performance enhanced the dynamic, happening-like atmosphere in many exhibits, while installations in other shows encouraged interaction with the works rather than passive spectatorship and consumption. Experiences could be intense. Inspired by Josef Beuys and the more radical work of the Viennese Actionists, the exhibition *Allez! Arrest!* included shocking performances by a group of self-defined "Self-Perforators" (*Selbstdurchlöcherer*). Each year *Eigen+Art* published a large portfolio with a narrative summary of the season's events, photo documentation, original artworks, and pieces like the gallery floor plan at right, covered with notes for another exhibition, "Termites."

Quasi-public spaces like *Eigen+Art* remained the exception. Despite occasional ventures into the open, relations with the East German state were anything but smooth, and for those who resisted the urge to leave for self-exile in the West, the backlash of persecutions and harassment in the aftermath of the *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon* ensured that life in the underground continued to thrive mainly behind closed doors. Back-courtyard apartments, private workshops and galleries, out-of-the way bars frequented by regulars from the scene provided venues for readings, editorial meetings, concerts, and happenings in Prenzlauer Berg and countless other rundown neighborhoods in cities and towns across East Germany. Documentation for such venues is understandably scarce. Glimpses can be seen in photos taken at shows held in private studios that were published in the *samizdat* 'zine *Schaden* (p. 22). But given the eagerness to avoid the notice of outsiders (and the state), they appear only rarely. News about events circulated by word of mouth, or via handmade flyers and

Gallery floor plan from *Eigen+Art* (Leipzig, 1988).

Below: 'Photo documentation from the *Allez! Arrest!* exhibition at *Eigen+Art*, from *Anschlag*, no. 10 (Leipzig, March 1989).

Silo

invitation cards that could be works of art in their own right. Far rarer even than the tiny runs of 'zines, invitations to such private parties have become one of the rarest and most precious genres of East German *samizdat*.

As more and more young artists and writers felt compelled to emigrate, underground happenings could often turn bittersweet, becoming good-bye parties that lasted all night and ended in the gray light of dawn with a trip to the *Tränenpalast* ("Palace of Tears") adjacent to the Friedrichstrasse train station, the main border crossing between East and West Berlin. Here soon-to-be exiles disappeared from the scene, knowing that they would never return as long as the Communist regime endured. It was a rite of passage and, as far as anyone knew, even in the late 1980s a permanent farewell. Published by a young Berlin couple who had witnessed far too many of these events, Thomas Günther and Sabine Jahn's *Ver-Fehlte Feste* ("Missed (Out) Parties") includes some photos (below left) alongside silkscreen graphics and lyric testimony documenting this side of life behind closed doors. But the book itself could be published only in 1993, long after such parties—and the East Germany state that occasioned them—had become a mere memory.

The desire to stay indoors—and as far as possible from the prying eyes of the state—was well founded. Once identified as players in the underground, artists and writers of East German *samizdat* often faced relentless campaigns of intimidation, harassment, outright imprisonment, and—worst of all—menacing house calls from agents of the secret state police, the *Stasi*, at all hours of the day and night. Closing the door to such visitors had dire consequences, as the Nobel Prize winning author Herta Müller recalled in her 2009 acceptance speech. Returning to work, she discovered that she no longer had an office in the building. Determined not to give in, she worked out on the staircase until finally forced to join the ranks of the "asocial" unemployed. Despite the underground's avowed commitment to avoiding all contact with the state, few had the nerve to deny entry when the *Stasi* came knocking. Through a mixture of threats and blandishments, agents sought to gain the confidence of their victims or, if necessary, to coerce them into becoming informants—

Above left: Michael Brendel, "Angst vor A.R.," from *Schaden*, no. 15 (Berlin, 1987).

Below left: Photo silkscreen from Thomas Günther and Sabine Jahn, *Ver-Fehlte Feste* (Berlin, 1993). Photo by Claus Bach (1979)

"unofficial collaborators" in the jargon of the *Stasi*—in other words to become spies on the underground in service to the state.

Among those facing such pressure in the mid-1980s was Frank Lanzendörfer—or flanzendörfer, as he preferred to be called—undoubtedly one of the most gifted, creative, and original artists of the East German underground (pictured at right in a scene from his experimental Super-8 film, *Eisenschnäblige Krähe*, or "Iron-Beaked Crow). After finishing high school, flanzendörfer worked as a freelance artist in Dresden, where he quickly became an initiate of the underground scene, publishing his work in a local *samizdat* 'zine, *UND*, shortly before it was closed down by the state. In 1984 he moved to Berlin, where he helped to found *Schaden*, a flagship journal of the underground, and immersed himself in a variety of media and venues: poetry, prose, performance art, and film-making. Soon the *Stasi* was shadowing his footsteps, and an unsuccessful bid for an exit visa only intensified the pressure. In 1988, at the age of 26, flanzendörfer took his own life by throwing himself off a building. Coming little more than a year before the East German state itself collapsed, the loss was devastating for the underground.
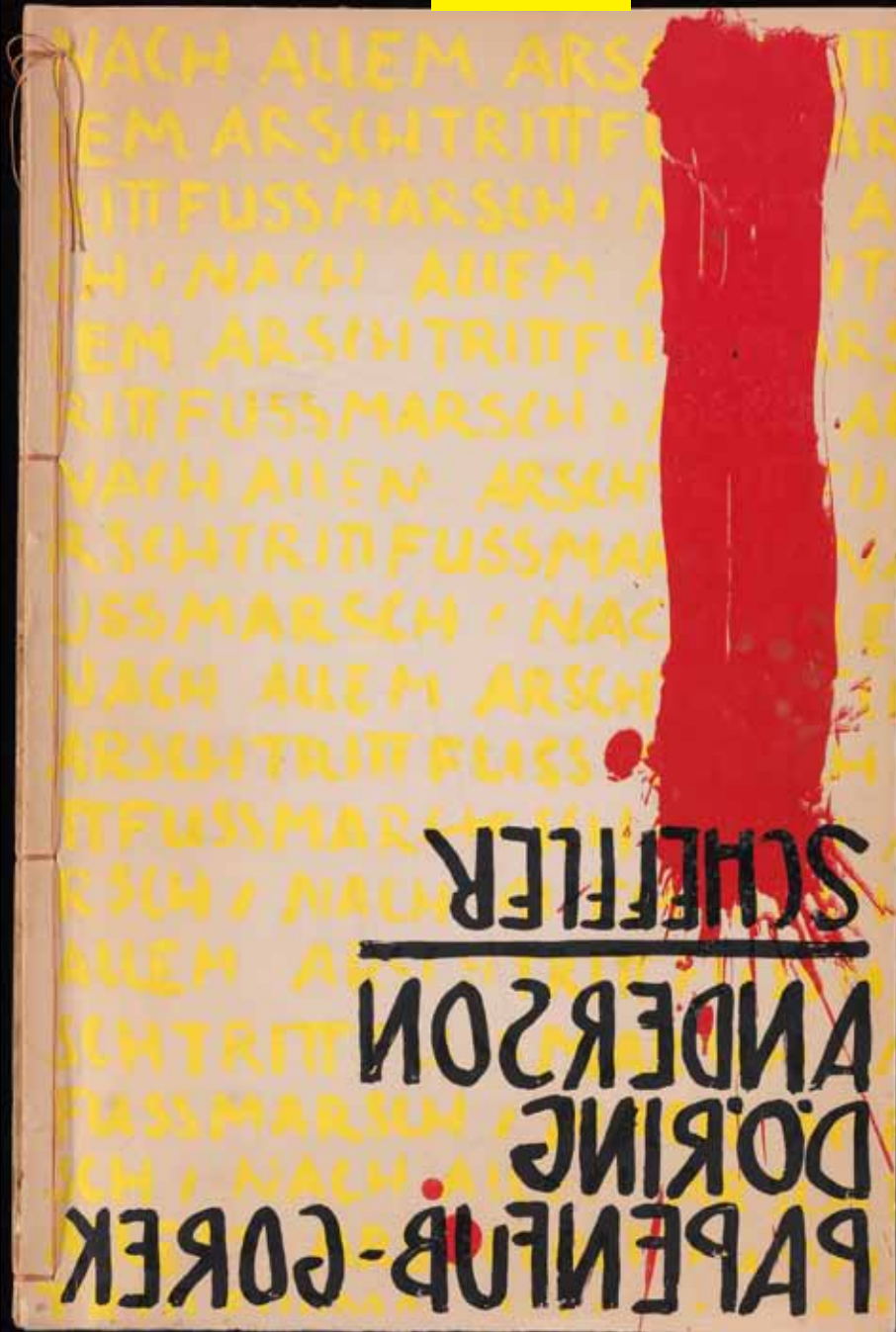
Few artists conveyed the longing to reclaim ownership of the creative process, punctuated by the sense of subjugation and alienation shared by so many of his generation, with as much force and originality as flanzendörfer. Taking up the motif of profound dispossession at the level of the body itself, *Iron-Beaked Crow* explores uncanny parallels between the animate and the inanimate, panning in on the body parts of statues executed in the heroic style of the totalitarian state in shots later echoed in close-ups of the artist's own body lying apparently lifeless in a garret apartment (shown at right). Wandering precariously along rooftops in other scenes, flanzendörfer seems to be reaching for the freedom of the sky, gestures rendered sinister and ominous in light of his suicide a few years later. *leib eigen + fremd*, the title of one of his poems, captures this eerie tension perfectly. *Leibeigen* means "in bondage," but it is composed of the words for 'body' (*leib*) and 'own' (*eigen*, as in '*my* own'). Taking it apart and adding the word *fremd* ("alien"), the title of flanzendörfer's poem becomes "body, own and alien."

A source of alienation and dread, the underground's entanglements with the East German state turned out to be deeper and darker than anyone could have imagined before the fall of the Wall in 1989. Once the *Stasi*'s files were opened, poets and artists of the former underground faced a shocking revelation: one of the central (and arguably most gifted) creators of *samizdat* culture had been working for the *Stasi* the whole time. The case of Sascha Anderson (or "Sascha Asshole," as Wolf Bierman called him in a 1991 speech that brought the scandal to light) shook the identity and self-understanding of the East German underground to the core. Anderson had been there from the beginning, launching a series of *samizdat* artist's books that became a model for the wave of self-published 'zines of the '80s, *Poe Sie All Bum* ("Poetry Album," but also "Poe-You-All-Bum") together with Bert Papenfuß-Gorek in 1979. Moving to Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg in 1981, he became a linchpin figure, organizing new editorial proj-

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Frank Lanzendörfer (flanzendörfer), "Gudrun, ich bin," in *Bizarre Städte* (Berlin, 1987).

ects, making and breaking "careers" in the underground, and orchestrating the publication of the first anthology of East German *samizdat* poets in the West, *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung* ("Touching is Just a Marginal Phenomenon") with Elke Erb in 1984. Anderson was indeed among the pioneers of the poetry of wordplay and deconstruction many deemed a challenge to the East German state, though Anderson himself favored a turn away from politics, promoting the view that all ideological language—even the language of resistance and liberation—was essentially groundless and could always be turned on its head.

Even Anderson's defenders (and there were some) agreed that his poetry needed to be read in a new (and not so ambiguous) light after the revelations of his betrayal. But beyond this, many questioned the entire project of the East German underground. Building alternative networks and venues that avoided all contact—and conflict—with the state, the Alpha and Omega of *samizdat* culture, had turned out to be a fool's errand. With Sascha keeping the *Stasi* informed every step of the way, at the very least it was an illusion. Still worse, many came to suspect that the autonomous zone they believed they had built was actually a *creation* of the East German state. The thousands of documents in Anderson's *Stasi* files clearly document the intent not just to surveil, but to shape and channel the subversive potential of the underground in highly specific ways. It is equally clear that Anderson overestimated his influence with the *Stasi,* believing that he could use his position to foster a look-the-other way policy on the part of the state that might create opportunities, obtain special privileges, and secure freedom of movement, for himself and his colleagues in the underground.
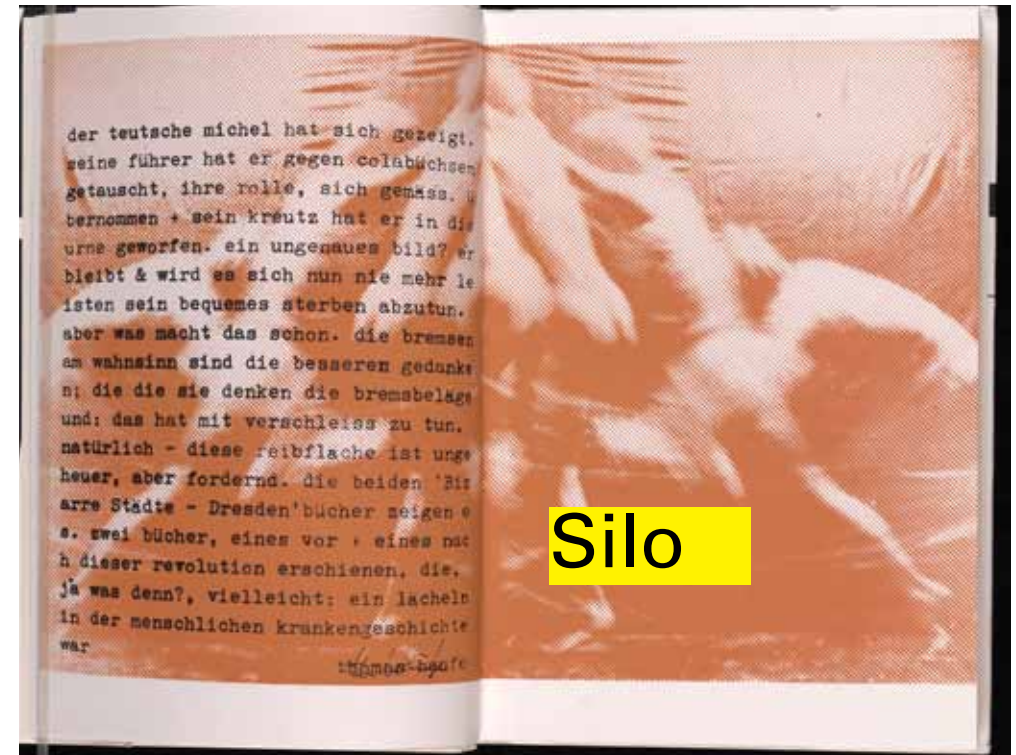
Was the East German underground—for all its creative ingenuity and rebellious spirit—nothing more than a tool of the state? Filling the pages of the German press, the acrimonious public debates that followed revelations of Anderson's betrayal proved remarkably unenlightening. But as many artists and writers from the scene pointed out, it did nothing to erase the vast, colorful, and original outpouring of *samizdat* culture, which deserves to be judged on its own merits. The record stands, and it was paid

Sascha Anderson, Stefan Döring, and Bert Papenfuß-Gorek,
Nachallemarschtrittfussmarsch (Berlin, 1984).

for in the dearest of terms by those like flanzendörfer, who certainly did not have much to gain from Anderson and his double-dealing ploys.

In the night of November 9, 1989, East German officials opened the gates, and the Wall came tumbling down. The system of surveillance, repression, and terror that had provoked—but also sustained—the underground vanished. While they had been unanimous in repudiating the state, however, few artists and writers of *samizdat* culture wished to exchange life in the Communist regime for the vagaries of the capitalist West. After the initial jubilation, reflections could be bitter: "the german [archangel} michael has shown himself," the text in this striking two-page silkscreen layout published in the underground 'zine *Bizarre Städte* (at right) mocked in the spring of 1990: "he has exchanged his leaders for cola bottles, has taken on their role and, accordingly, thrown his cross into the urn:"

> an imprecise picture? he is staying and will never again be able to shrug off his comfortable death. but what does it matter? brakes on insanity are the better thoughts, those who think them are brake pads and: that's a matter of wear and tear. of course, the point of friction is tremendous, but also challenging. the two 'Bizarre Städte' books show it. two books, one appearing before, one after this revolution, which—well, what about it?—is perhaps: a smile in the clinical pathology of human history.

Could the East German underground survive the fall of the Wall? The outrageous life (and death) of the poet, punk, and performance artist "Matthias" Baader Holst seemed suggestive to many, particularly in the early '90s. It is from one of his poems, "viel spaß auf der titanic," that the title of this exhibition is borrowed: *have fun on the titanic*. "coitus, shoe polish, or the order shoot-to-kill," the poem begins: "doesn't matter, but don't ever tell me the truth i'll give you anything for that." With lines such as these, it is little wonder that many took Baader's unscheduled performances in venues of the underground for sheer gibberish, delivered as they often were in a state of extreme inebriation with the accompaniment of the equally

Silo

notorious *samizdat* writer, Peter Wawerzinek. In fact they were lines of brilliant, Dada-inspired poetry, carefully memorized line for line.

An outsider even in circles of outsiders, Baader had come to Berlin from the provincial town of Halle in 1988, coaxed by Wawerzinek, with whom he terrorized highbrow readings of "serious" *samizdat* poetry (like Sascha Anderson's). Just months after the Wall came down, he was struck in the wee hours of the morning by a streetcar and succumbed to his injuries a few days later—in the night, as it happened, before East Germans traded their currency for the West German mark, an important step on the way to (re)unification. An accident? It seemed unthinkable to

Thomas Haufe, "der teutsche michel hat sich gezeigt,"
Bizarre Städte (Berlin, 1990).

Wawerzinek, who remembered Baader's almost pathological fear of being run down even on the quiet streets of Halle. One last act of poetic defiance? Whatever the truth, the legend remains. Many former members of the underground still see Baader's destiny as a fitting omen for their fate after the collapse of the East German state. Like musicians on the *Titanic* they had had their fun, but in the end they went down with the ship.

The legacy of the East German underground remains undecided. For every flanzendörfer, Baader, or Anderson, there is an accomplished artist who has gone on to international recognition. The Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller, for example, or Durs Grünbein or Wawerzinek, who has since become an award-winning novelist in his own right. Above all, there remains the vast creative output of *samizdat* culture, which survives in the delicate and rare copies of its 'zines and artist's books, documenting an inventive interplay of media and genre types that both reflected and defied the constraints of the East German state. In some ways, too, it was not so different from efforts to create an autonomous counterculture in the West, likewise sustained by networks of self-published books and 'zines, bootleg cassettes, mail art, concrete poetry, impromptu happenings, illegal concerts. Whatever else it may turn out to be, the story of underground art and the East German state is part of a larger one that links the postwar avant-garde to the rise of a transnational protest culture in ways that are only beginning to be understood.

Baader standing in front of a street car, photo silkscreen, from *"Matthias" Baader Holst* (Halle: Hasenverlag, 2011).

Following page: Guillermo Deisler, untitled poem, from Deisler and Ulrich Tarlatt, *Heimatlos* (Halle, 1989).