

Chapter 3

THE VULNERABLE BODY IN UNIFORM



In *Julia lebt* and *An die Grenze* especially, the vulnerability of soldiers' bodies is the most prominent challenge to the socialist soldier personality promoted by the NVA. Men's bodies are an important part of their negotiations of masculinity throughout their lifetime. As Raewyn Connell writes: 'Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex.'¹ Connell uses sporting masculinities to demonstrate the construction of masculinities through body-reflexive practices: performative acts that are at once social and embodied. She argues that although bodies are central to the assertion of hegemonic masculinities, 'they can [also] be positively recalcitrant' in failing or refusing to perform in line with hegemonic masculine ideals.² Kaja Silverman goes further: she argues that ideals of masculinity are so invested in the coherence and inviolability of the male body that they are particularly vulnerable to challenges to their 'unimpaired bodily "envelope"'.³ Silverman's analysis of images of wounded soldiers in films suggests that ideal military masculinities are as susceptible as Connell's sporting masculinities to the excesses and vulnerabilities of 'recalcitrant' physical bodies, which limit the extent of an individual's conformity to masculine ideals. However, the reverse is also true: the body is not simply a source of resistance. Conscripts who reject military ideals are still forced into drill and military exercises, compulsory actions that shape their bodies in the image of ideal military masculinity. These body-reflexive practices make it impossible to reject the socialist

soldier personality completely, necessitating more complex negotiations of military masculinity.

This chapter investigates the relationship between conscripts' bodies and masculinities by exploring representations of the body in military uniform in three GDR-era texts. *Der Reserveheld* (*The Reserve Hero*), a 1965 film directed by Wolfgang Luderer (1924–95), and *Ein Katzensprung* (*A Hop, Skip and a Jump*), which was directed by Claus Dobberke (b. 1940) and premiered in 1977, are both DEFA films produced in the GDR. I compare and contrast these two works with *Fassonschnitt* (*Crew Cut*, 1984), an autobiographical novel written and published by Jürgen Fuchs (1950–99) after his exile to the West.⁴ These contrasting texts offer a nuanced picture of the role of the body in representations of East German military masculinities. At first glance, the works range from the films' light-hearted conformism to Fuchs's profound criticism, but closer analysis challenges this opposition and reveals similarities in the works' approaches to the body. Fuchs's novel was produced in the West as an explicit critique of the NVA and as a reckoning with his own experiences. Viewed alongside *Der Reserveheld* and *Ein Katzensprung*, Fuchs's writing brings into focus soldiers' vulnerability in the more light-hearted films. Viewed together, these three works show uniform as an interface between individual bodies and the military's ideals of masculinity. Luderer and Dobberke compare uniform to costume in order to explore the potentially subversive implication that the body might preserve its association with apparently more natural civilian masculinities, despite the demands of military service. Ultimately, however, uniform plays a sinister and disruptive role in both films and especially in *Fassonschnitt*: the works show bodies changed and marked, as conscripts are forced to negotiate the masculine ideals that the uniform represents.

The relationship between body and uniform in these texts, and between characters' individual masculinities and the military's gender ideals, can be understood initially as an interplay between two competing narratives of masculinity. On the one hand, the body is never innocent of meaning at the moment of enlistment.⁵ It has been constructed performatively over the conscript's life in line with certain masculine values, which the body has in turn shaped through the body-reflexive practices that Connell describes. On the other hand, the uniform takes the form of a complex narrative representation of the military's masculine ideals, which are applied to the soldier's body on entering the army. The NVA aimed to change men's bodies and behaviour to conform to its ideals. However, in *Der Reserveheld*, *Ein Katzensprung* and *Fassonschnitt*, existing civilian masculinities conflict with the socialist soldier personality, revealing the negotiations of masculinity set in motion by conscription. By analysing uniform as a representation of ideal military masculinity that is applied to soldiers' bodies, it is possible to show how

Luderer, Dobberke and Fuchs exploit the uniform's complexity to explore and even challenge the transformative and normalizing effects of military service. None of these texts successfully subverts the power of uniform or the military's harnessing of body-reflexive practices: all three portray soldiers' bodies, psyches and masculinities being changed by the embodied performances of military service.

Rewriting the Body

Uniform presents an ideal military masculinity that is supposedly tailored to fit the individual wearer, giving the impression that the soldier is a straightforward human embodiment of military norms. Just as a narrative is positioned within generic conventions and literary traditions, military uniform contextualizes the wearer's masculinity in relation to military values and wider social stereotypes concerning soldiers. In the GDR, the grey uniform, as opposed to the olive of the Bundeswehr, framed the wearer's military masculinity as East German and socialist. Yet the 'stone grey' also deliberately recalled the 'field grey' of Prussian and Wehrmacht uniforms, depicting GDR military masculinities as historically German, in compliance with Soviet policy that required satellite states to be 'socialist in form, national in character'.⁶ However, the uniform's Wehrmacht resonances in fact highlighted the contradictions in the NVA's claim to be an 'army of peace'.⁷

Besides the uniform's role in delineating a genre and tradition of masculinity, it shares several other features with narrative texts. Uniform uses a symbolic system governed by dress codes and regulations, much like the syntax and symbolism that govern language, characterization, imagery and other aspects of narrative works. Uniform charts temporal progression and variation, using stars on the shoulder and stripes on the sleeve to show a soldier's rise through the ranks and medals on the chest to document successes. In this sense, the uniform's narrative resembles a biography, highlighting key stages of a soldier's military career and bearing marks of achievements and development over time. Although a biography is generally more complex and personal than the uniform, the two share a concern with the unique and specific: the uniform displays an individual military career and masculine development, while portraying the wearer as a tangible embodiment of the military's ideals.

Military uniform appears to present a clear and unambiguous narrative that fixes the individual in a specific military identity and replaces any existing civilian traits. However, taking for granted the homogeneity or uniformity of the masculinities represented by the uniform can result in the complexity of its messages being neglected. Nathan Joseph has argued that uniform

communicates more than just adherence to military values: ‘The uniform depicts specialized offices, hierarchical position, internal organizational relationships, and external relationships with the public more accurately than any other category of clothing.’⁸ Uniform therefore presents not a single, monolithic ideal, but a range of hierarchically arranged masculinities that embody the ideal in specific, individual and varying ways. In order to portray these intricate hierarchies of power and achievement, uniforms are complex, varying their symbolism according to branch, regiment and occupation as well as rank. Military films and literature often depict civilians and new conscripts lacking fluency in the military’s symbolic systems, even in East Germany, where military ideals pervaded society through schools and youth groups. The uniform’s complexity as a narrative of military masculinity opens it up to readings by uninitiated or resistant observers that conflict with official messages, highlight potentially harmful effects and unsettle or even subvert the masculine ideal symbolized by the uniform.

In contrast, the body’s association with a civilian narrative of masculinity stems from the performative nature of gender. Embodied performativity is central to the construction of masculinities through military training, and this link offers a productive way of understanding GDR citizens’ participatory interactions with the state’s institutions as gendered interactions. Conscripts’ bodies are constructed through performative gender practice prior to entry into the military. As Butler argues, ‘regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies’.⁹ In other words, the dynamic of repetition and sedimentation that constitutes performativity does not produce gender separately from, but on and through, the body; the body-reflexive practices described by Connell are one means by which gender and the body are mutually constructed. For Butler, gender depends on reiterations in time, with each act ‘a repetition, a sedimentation, and congealment of the past’.¹⁰ In Butler’s understanding of performativity, then, the body assumes a narrative of individual gender practice through reiterations over time that are shaped by past actions. Although in some East German cases the military ideal complemented soldiers’ existing self-narrative, most were forced to adapt to the demands placed on their body by military training and the ideal of the socialist soldier personality.

The dialectic between the materiality and cultural coding of bodies is essential to the construction of military masculinities, particularly when those masculinities are represented in literature or on film. In a literary context, the referentially shifting ‘I’ of first-person prose gains stability as a representation of self where it can appeal to a coherent bodily referent, but coherence is itself a key meaning inscribed on that body by the narrative act.¹¹ The body in film often appears more visually consistent, yet its meanings are inseparable from narrative devices, such as sound, costume, lighting and camerawork,

and from codes and conventions governing the creation of character types.¹² Uniform's relationship to the body is defined by the same dialectics. The body's apparent visual coherence versus the ever-changing uniform threatens to disrupt the uniform's meanings. Yet the body is also vulnerable to being changed and marked by the uniform, its meaning rewritten by the experience of military training.

Der Reserveheld and *Ein Katzensprung* explore the potential for soldiers' vulnerable or 'recalcitrant' bodies to unsettle uniform's narrative projection of ideal military masculinity. They emphasize uniforms' costume-like qualities and suggest a more authentic narrative associated with the body. Ultimately, though, the two films challenge the idea that the body itself is unchanging or immune to changes during military training, with *Ein Katzensprung* especially emphasizing the vulnerability of soldiers' bodies that makes them susceptible to being shaped by the uniform and by military training. In all three works, and especially Fuchs's novel, the exploration of uniform as a costume draws attention to the material experience of wearing it, to the vulnerability of soldiers' bodies during military training, and to the physical and psychological changes that they undergo. Fuchs's novel is centred especially on the profound psychological effects of uniform and bodily changes. All three works deny that an authentic embodied masculinity can remain immune to military discipline and hierarchies. The works show soldiers engaged in bodily negotiations of military masculinities in response to physical changes, injuries and the military's body-reflexive practices.

Wolfgang Luderer (Dir.), *Der Reserveheld* (1965)

Der Reserveheld is a comedy starring the popular East German comedian Rolf Herricht as a reservist, whose inimitable comic personality is represented largely through physical slapstick and apparently remains unaffected by military service and the NVA uniform.¹³ Like *Julia lebt*, *Der Reserveheld* was produced in the period of cultural liberalization after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and before the Eleventh Plenum later in 1965. For all its farcical humour, *Der Reserveheld* treats the nascent conscription system with irony, a liberty undoubtedly facilitated by Herricht's fame. The film is playfully conscious of its own contingency in this respect: Herricht's character is also a famous comedic actor, subtly renamed Ralf Horricht. Frank-Burkhard Habel has suggested that the film was withdrawn on ideological grounds after its premiere in February 1965, presumably with its irreverent approach to the NVA in mind, but cinema and television listings demonstrate that the film continued to be screened into the 1980s.¹⁴ It was generally praised by reviewers, although its exaggerated physical comedy was often deemed

unsubtle, a criticism that perhaps underestimates the film's self-referentiality and irony.¹⁵ The film was also well received by the NVA, which awarded Luderer, Herricht and Rudi Strahl, the film's screenwriter and former NVA Oberleutnant, the NVA Service Medal in Silver.¹⁶

The film's opening scene apparently shows a hapless soldier preparing for roll call, but suddenly he comes out of character, revealing that this scene is being shot for a film within the film. As the camera pans out, the actor, Horricht, rejects the role of soldier as beneath him and storms off set. That evening, he receives a conscription order for reserve service, which he mistakes for fan mail and destroys. The full eighteen-month military service only applied to men under twenty-six, but men of Horricht's age could still be called up for shorter periods in the reserve.¹⁷ To punish his director for giving him such a lowly role, Horricht leaves town in the middle of filming to marry his fiancée, Susanne. After the NVA tracks Horricht down at his wedding on the Baltic coast, Horricht reports for conscription while his director and screenwriter are investigating the base as a film location. The director refuses to have the conscription order rescinded, quipping that it will be the perfect opportunity for Horricht to study for his role. The film-within-a-film motif is more developed than in *Drei Stern rot*, turning the military base into a film set and many soldiers into actors or extras. Filming begins on base during Horricht's service, and the film's comedy revolves around the coincidence that Horricht is conscripted while working on an army film. He soon wins over his comrades and frustrates his commanding officers, Leutnant Malorti and Hauptmann Hottas, with his comic personality and lack of respect for authority. When Susanne visits, rumours spread of an affair between her and Hottas, but the resulting confrontation is resolved with minimal conflict and Hottas persuades Horricht to show more commitment to his service. He then surpasses all his comrades in a manoeuvre, which the director is also filming. The narrative ends with the regiment's manoeuvre ball, which doubles as the film crew's wrap party.

The film was presumably designed to popularize the NVA through humour and Herricht's celebrity. Strahl stated in an interview that he aimed to show 'that the young soldier need not shed his personality along with his civilian clothes'.¹⁸ Strahl metaphorically associates the shift from civilian to military identity and the compatibility of individuality with military service with a change in clothing, and uniform is an important part of the film's play with military and civilian identities. The film depicts Horricht maintaining his comic personality throughout his service, appearing out of place partly due to his irrepressible comedic talents and partly because Herricht and his character Horricht are older than most military recruits.

Geoff King has suggested that in 'comedian comedy', a genre focused on a celebrity comic rather than conventional narrative, the actor-comedian is

often out of place in the narrative, which is certainly true of Herricht in *Der Reserveheld*. As King states: ‘The comedian performer can be quite tightly integrated into the narrative and into the diegetic space, but retains a license to break the rules.’¹⁹ In *Der Reserveheld*, the narrative ‘rules’ are broken by playful slippage between Herricht, Horricht and Horricht’s character in the film-within-a-film. Herricht resists integration into ‘diegetic space’ due to constant reminders of his celebrity and the dissolution of any distinction between Horricht’s personality and his acting; Horricht’s face is instantly recognizable to all except Hottas, and the laughter that greets his every move consistently disrupts military discipline. The film’s layers of fictionalization resist any distinction between real characters within the diegesis and their cinematic roles, so that all masculine identities appear as artificial as the film’s uniform-costumes.

Uniforms are commonly opposed to costumes, but definitions frequently expose their close relationship. Paul Fussell, for example, states that ‘ideas of frivolity, temporariness, inauthenticity, and theatricality attend costumes’, while Joseph associates costumes with a break with prevailing social norms.²⁰ Although the military discourages frivolity in relation to the uniform, as with the fashion show in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland*, the distinction between uniform and costume is not always so simple. For example, the often elaborate nature of the dress uniform may border on the theatrical, while in a conscript military like the NVA, uniform is more temporary than conscripts’ civilian clothes.²¹ Portraying the uniform as a form of costume potentially presents the NVA as a show army, with the soldier becoming the product of casting and wardrobe. In contrast to the changing, artificial uniform, the body might then appear more constant and authentic. In *Der Reserveheld*, though, costume metaphors are routinely undercut by emphasizing the inauthenticity of all roles, military or civilian, with the body just as vulnerable to being rendered superficial.

The instability of identities in the film and the importance of uniform and costume for their construction and communication are established from the beginning by the film’s animated credits. A cartoon Horricht is first dressed in stereotypically bohemian style, complete with beret, scarf, pipe and bag, before his clothes suddenly morph into military uniform (0:08–0:29). Cartoon credits were common in comic films of this period and the style of animation in *Der Reserveheld* recalls the credits of *The Pink Panther* (1963).²² The change from artist’s clothes into military uniform introduces Horricht’s role change as the basis of the film’s comedy. By showing both Horricht-the-artist and Horricht-the-soldier as cartoons, the film implies that artist characters will be just as caricatured as military figures, and their clothes just as recognizably uniform.

The film also undermines any idea that the body might be more authentic or less stylized than its costumes. Horricht’s body is an important part of the

film's caricature of a self-obsessed celebrity actor, particularly while on holiday for his wedding. A wide shot of a beach pans and zooms in to show Horricht lounging in a chair with the affected decadence associated with stereotypes of actors or artists, one arm behind his head and the other draped dramatically across the sunlounger. His disinterested tone when Susanne disturbs him adds to the impression of an arrogant celebrity (9:42–10:22). Horricht is portrayed as the archetypal prima donna, with his self-interest, posture and interest in tanning somewhat feminized and shown as silly and undesirable. For example, when Susanne teases Horricht about his desire to tan as quickly as possible, and he lazily responds 'And you're marrying me because of it', her response jokingly highlights the undesirability of his behaviour: 'Not because, in spite of it' (10:17–10:22). Horricht's identity as an actor is associated with his casually splayed body in swimwear, and he is undeterred by the telegram that arrives, as if in direct response to his decadent behaviour, ordering him to report for reserve service (10:29–11:18).

Despite Horricht's caricatured performance of the masculinity of an actor, this identity initially appears more natural when he enters reserve service. He is introduced to the order and precision expected from socialist soldier personalities by a comrade who demonstrates how to stow his uniform in his locker. Still in civilian clothes, Horricht's attempts to tidy his uniform away are haphazard and his roommate intervenes, while Horricht lights a cigarette and lounges on his bed, with his legs crossed and his arms leaning over the foot of the bedframe (15:27–17:43). Horricht's shirt and tie and casual demeanour appear at odds with the ordered military surroundings and the neat uniforms of Horricht's comrades. Horricht's incongruity within the military environment is further highlighted when his comrades burst into amused laughter when they recognize him. In this scene, Horricht makes no attempt to conform to the masculinity expected of a reservist: his dress and his posture instead mirror his civilian persona from the beach.

Horricht's early interactions with the NVA reveal an inability to interpret the masculinities and power hierarchies described by different uniforms. When he first meets Leutnant Malorti, he gives him a friendly clap on the shoulder without recognizing that the stripes on his sports uniform mark him as Horricht's platoon commander and superior (19:32). Horricht then presents himself in an undershirt to the base commander, whose orderly protests: 'What sort of a get-up have you come here in?' In a comic misunderstanding, Horricht gestures to his messy, incomplete uniform and replies: 'I was ordered to wear it ... They're not even my things' (21:12–21:18). Horricht misinterprets the orderly's criticism of his partial undress as a criticism of the uniform itself, and his matter-of-fact response ridicules the uniform and the NVA's dress codes. During his ensuing plea to be exempted from service, over-the-shoulder shots direct attention to the base commander's epaulettes

as symbols of rank and superiority (21:29–23:35). Horricht's naive plea for dismissal and his state of undress conflict with this formal emphasis of rank through camerawork. The film's parodic touches and Horricht's comic errors mock his ignorance, but also make the NVA's uniform regulations appear fussy. Horricht's cheekiness and subordination are repeatedly laughed off by his peers and never result in punishment, reinforcing his affable nature while glossing over NVA officers' often harsh responses to uniform infringements, as depicted in both *Drei Stern rot* and *An die Grenze*. Horricht's misunderstandings show the potential for representations of uniform not just to visualize a hegemonic ideal to which conscripts ought to aspire, but also to make this ideal and the military's uniform regulations appear insubstantial and finicky.

Der Reserveheld does, though, present ideal military masculinity as a construction that depends on uniform maintenance, revealing the role of uniform in constructing military bodies by showing its integration into the military's disciplinary apparatus and routine. Horricht is never subjected to physically gruelling training, but uniform is shown as part of other body-reflexive practices that train discipline, obedience and care for appearance. Although Horricht appears uninterested in developing the skills to maintain his uniform, he presents an exemplary appearance because his roommates perform his chores for him and even dress him (19:08–19:12, 32:12–32:33). The film thus foregrounds conventionally backstage scenes of uniform maintenance, which normally play a central role in asserting a hegemonic masculine ideal. Care and maintenance of the uniform, including cleaning, polishing, folding and organizing, enforce a disciplined approach to appearance and bridge the military's discipline of behaviour and control of the body. *Der Reserveheld* depicts these chores as part of the construction of self-sufficient and orderly masculinities, and yet Horricht is adept at avoiding these body-reflexive practices altogether, deliberately avoiding working on his body in the way required by the NVA.

Soldiers' dress would normally be judged against standards of cleanliness and order, and infringements would be punished, but Horricht avoids punishment, and even feminizes other soldiers around him by encouraging them to compensate for his incompetence. In military environments, uniform care enforces a conventionally masculine self-sufficiency and extends the more obviously phallic weapon cleaning, as in the opening of *Härtetest*, to the phallicized body in uniform.²³ However, in 1960s civilian contexts, these chores were conventionally coded as feminine, and *Der Reserveheld* uses scenes of uniform maintenance to depict the military quotidian as domestic and fussy. Even Hottas slips from the role of father to mother when he irons Horricht's trousers, and his request that Horricht keep this incident secret implies that it might challenge the military's masculine hierarchy:

Incidentally, I would be much obliged if you would keep this affair to yourself. It is generally not the done thing for a company commander to iron his soldiers' trousers and sew on their buttons. (40:10–40:19)

His polite and formal utterance is far removed in grammatical complexity, register and tone from the abrupt orders expected from a commanding officer. Critics have argued that Hottas's good-natured manner is unrealistic and prevents any real conflict with Horricht, but the exaggeration of domestic chores in this scene is nonetheless important.²⁴ Such tasks are as central as drill and sports to the military's attempts to impose masculine ideals, but focusing on domestic body-reflexive practices in a light-hearted and even feminizing manner renders them ridiculous, unsettles the uniform's disciplinary role and reduces the ideal soldier to a superficially well-maintained uniform.

The emphasis on uniform care and maintenance foregrounds the constructed nature of military ideals, which are ironized and even challenged by the film's self-conscious staging of its own construction. The characters of the director and screenwriter particularly destabilize the NVA's image and the film's narrative. While assessing the barracks' suitability as a film set, the screenwriter is disappointed because his script requires a 'raging torrent', but the river at the barracks is 'little more than a stream'. The river is an intriguing image in light of Theweleit's work on military masculinities. Theweleit describes the body of the 'soldierly man' providing an armoured dam against femininity and homosexuality, both of which he identifies with images of fluidity. The base's inadequate river thus suggests not just the NVA's impotence, but that the metaphorical tide of Western imperialism and 'ideological diversion', which justified the army's heroic efforts, might be overestimated; in the film at least, this metaphorical flood is just a trickle. The director responds: 'That scene will be cut anyway ... These scenes are always cut' (14:15–14:29). The cuts and editing that create the finished film thus appear arbitrary: we never know what role the scene was to play, and the director never explains why such scenes are cut.²⁵ Scenes even make it into the script by chance. When the screenwriter learns that Horricht has been conscripted, he describes it as a 'fantastic twist' (*großartiger Gag*) and promises the director: 'I'll write it into the screenplay!' (15:00–15:03). This motif recurs several times and represents a self-ironic nod from Strahl, according to whom the reality on set often furnished better comedy than his script.²⁶

The film's tongue-in-cheek self-referentiality subtly ironizes the NVA, which continually fails to live up to expectations. The manoeuvre towards the end of the film provides the most striking critique of the NVA's claim to be a powerful modern army. The scene opens with an establishing shot of a film crew in the foreground filming the manoeuvre, before cutting between shots of tanks and of the filming (1:02:02–1:02:40). The crew's camera on a moving



Figure 3.1
Officers' binoculars are dwarfed by film equipment in *Der Reserveheld* (1965). © DEFA Foundation.

platform, light screens and sound equipment are juxtaposed with two officers' binoculars as they oversee the manoeuvre (1:02:05; see Figure 3.1). Part of the joke here is that both officers and crew seem inadequately equipped, and the tiny microphone and light screens are comically inadequate for the scale of the scene being filmed. But the wide low-angle shot here ensures that the film equipment fills the screen and towers above the characters on the hill. The two officers are easily lost amidst the other figures, with the NVA's grey uniforms camouflaged among the film crew's clothes. Throughout the ensuing sequence, viewers might be struck by the old-fashioned tanks and military technology, and the screenwriter declares he had imagined something more impressive with fighter jets and parachutists (1:03:50–1:04:00). The film thus gently ridicules the NVA's self-portrayal as a modern army and suggests that the reality is less impressive than the propaganda. As in *Härtetest* and in the films already discussed, Luderer's film plays with observation and voyeurism. As with the 'look' in Silverman's work, such scenes potentially destabilize hegemonic masculinities by revealing their construction.

Because of the film-within-a-film conceit, the comparisons between the barracks and a film set, between soldiers and actors, and between uniforms and costumes are accentuated. This suggests the constructed nature not only of Horricht's identity, but also of the military environment itself. The film-within-a-film undermines any idealization of military identities, since all actions, not just Horricht's, appear orchestrated for the cameras. By depicting uniform as costume, the film extends its comic self-referentiality to soldiers' embodied masculinities. When Horricht escapes from the barracks to investigate rumours of an affair between Susanne and Hottas, the director is fitting

reservists for costumes for his film, a farcical situation in which a room full of soldiers are trying on soldier costumes indistinguishable from their 'real' uniforms. The director recasts soldiers in roles that supposedly correspond better to their bodies, announcing in one case: 'We can make a Hauptmann out of the fat man' (53:50–53:53). With this comment, the director highlights the men's bodily differences and the irony that officers are often older and less fit than ordinary conscripts. Horricht steals a costume and dresses as a General to escape the barracks, resulting in soldiers saluting him and even Hottas failing to recognize him. Horricht's unrecognizability conflicts with earlier scenes, in which his face is instantly recognizable and a source of comedy. However, even when dressed as a General, Horricht is never completely disguised; he hides in a van to elude the officer at the gate, and Susanne merely laughs at his General uniform. His celebrity and comic personality shine through the uniform, which in these scenes represents not a hegemonic masculine ideal, but artificiality, temporariness and inauthenticity.

Horricht's comic performances and the film's self-referentiality come together in his sudden transformation into an ideal soldier after his reconciliation with Hottas. In the manoeuvre, Horricht effortlessly surpasses his comrades in the commando crawl that he had previously been too inept to execute. The apparent ease of his transformation suggests that he simply assumes his new role once the cameras are rolling. His performance is introduced by an exaggerated zoom, foregrounding the camera's role not only in surveying the manoeuvre but also in his transformation (1:03:00). The accompanying marching-band music adds to the parodic effect of his exaggerated performance. The lines between his performances as actor and soldier are blurred, and the scene might suggest that he only acts the ideal soldier when needed for his film. His ability to execute the commando crawl is apparently due not to physical conditioning or the military's body-reflexive practices, but rather, ironically, to his skills as an actor. No longer associated purely with casual arrogance, Horricht's body is shown as a vehicle for his proficiency in switching between roles and, in this case, performing ideal military masculinity when required.

For all its light-heartedness, *Der Reserveheld* presents a rather cynical narrative of masculinity based around the relationship between Horricht and his uniform. The film's farcical humour reduces all roles to caricature. Uniform is the primary means of unsettling identity and narrative, appearing as a costume, as well as a source of slapstick. Despite associating Horricht's body with his comic personality through physical comedy and his casual posture and gestures, the use of stereotypes suggests that his identity as an actor-comedian is no more natural than the ideal military masculinity that he assumes at the end. Horricht's character becomes no more than a series of charades: just as his acting depends on costume and exaggerated bodily gestures, so too is his performance of the ideal soldier contingent

on a well-maintained uniform and performance for the cameras. Luderer depicts the centrality of uniform to the military's routine and discipline, but although the film shows neither Horricht's civilian nor his military masculinity as at all authentic or natural, the uniform's effects remain temporary and superficial, with little acknowledgement of how the uniform's involvement in body-reflexive practices might change and constitute military bodies.

Claus Dobberke (Dir.), *Ein Katzensprung* (1977)

Ein Katzensprung also styles uniform as costume to explore the potential for soldiers' bodies to challenge the uniform's narrative of ideal military masculinity. However, the film goes further than *Der Reserveheld* by depicting the lasting effects of military discipline and training on conscripts' bodies.²⁷ The screenplay for *Ein Katzensprung* was loosely adapted by Flegel from his 1976 collection of short stories.²⁸ The film is based primarily on the story 'Der Morgen eines Zugführers' ('A Platoon Commander's Morning'), which describes a conflict between Leutnant Günter Riedel, also the film's protagonist, and other officers, notably his company commander Hauptmann Kaiser, who assumes a more central part in the film than in the original story. The film begins with Riedel's return from his honeymoon to resume command of his platoon. The plot revolves around his ensuing conflict with Gefreiter Weißenbach, who had commanded the platoon in Riedel's absence.

Weißenbach focuses on making his own military service as uncomplicated as possible, excusing weaker recruits from exercises to ensure the platoon's success and using physical abuse to train and discipline them. Riedel, by contrast, idealistically aims to support his men and develop their abilities equally, in line with officially prescribed 'socialist relationships' and in a similar way to Oberst Schanz in Flegel's later work *Es gibt kein Niemandland*. Riedel struggles to assert authority over Weißenbach, and as punishment for insubordination demotes him from his position as driver, replacing him with an inexperienced recent conscript. The consequence of Weißenbach's demotion is the platoon's failure on manoeuvres because the new driver floods the vehicle's engine while crossing a river.

Riedel's conflict with Weißenbach is mediated by Kaiser, who is detached and stuffy with little time for Riedel's idealism and who countermands Riedel's demotion of Weißenbach. Kaiser also limits Riedel's social freedom, denying him free time with his wife, Maria, when she visits the barracks, for example. The film's conflicts remain unresolved. When Weißenbach is imprisoned for unauthorized absence and for brawling, Riedel goes to investigate the brawl without permission. He discovers the apparently mitigating factor that Weißenbach was fighting a man for sleeping with his

wife in his absence. By not giving scope to explore this situation, Dobberke implicitly appears to condone homosocial violence between men in a power struggle over a woman. Riedel's investigations cause him to miss an exercise, which endangers the company's performance and angers Kaiser still further. However, Riedel's punishment and any final decision on Weißenbach are deferred beyond the film's end. Instead, Kaiser selects Riedel's platoon for a prestigious regimental manoeuvre, leaving the viewer with an emphasis on military efficiency in place of narrative closure.

Ein Katzensprung was less popular than *Der Reserveheld*, but the NVA honoured the cast and crew with its Theodor Körner Prize for cultural contributions to the military.²⁹ This award came despite the NVA's initial opposition to the film's representation of internal conflicts, which continually delayed its production.³⁰ From a military perspective, the film was produced at a time of détente in the mid 1970s, perhaps allowing Dobberke more latitude to explore internal problems in the NVA. Yet the production and release coincided with the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 and the protests and arrests in 1976 and 1977, which may have contributed to the NVA's caution on approving the film. Reviewers praised the film's emphasis on pragmatism over idealism and its criticism of soldiers seeking an easy route through military service.³¹ Critics paid less attention to Dobberke's other apparent objective: he shows soldiers with their own values and identities, suggesting that a degree of individuality was compatible with military service.³² Dobberke shows Riedel and his platoon negotiating between their individuality and the military's expectations, resulting in a varied range of military masculinities. The film associates individual masculinities with soldiers' bodies, particularly by depicting them in various stages of undress. However, this emphasis on individual identities is combined with a portrayal of vulnerable bodies being marked and changed by military service and by the symbolic and physical effects of uniform.

Dobberke's presentation of the compatibility of existing narratives of civilian masculinity with military service centres on Riedel. Critics have associated Riedel with youthful idealism, but he also represents a stubborn individualism that conflicts with his military uniform.³³ His individualism is figured through civilian clothes, such as his motorcycle leathers (2:30) or his stereotypically fashionable wide-collared shirt with Aviator sunglasses (44:00). Although the popular cultural references of Riedel's casual clothes suggest individuality, his civvies actually represent other forms of casual uniform, just like Horricht's caricatured artist's clothes in the credits to *Der Reserveheld*. Riedel's leather jacket, for example, recalls countercultural use of 'James Dean jackets' in the GDR to denote opposition to the state, so for most viewers it would probably signify opposition to military norms rather than their compatibility with individuality.³⁴ Riedel's switching between



Figure 3.2 Riedel's wig betrays the artificiality of his officer masculinity in *Ein Katzensprung* (1977). © DEFA Foundation.

military and countercultural uniforms denies him any coherent individual identity because, like Horricht, he is shown moving between predefined roles. Moreover, the fact that he wears civilian clothes at all emphasizes his power as an officer, as his subordinates are not afforded such a luxury.

Dobberke suggests a comparison between Riedel's uniforms and costumes by using a theatrical metaphor. Riedel's wife, Maria, is a make-up artist, who on visiting the barracks practises for her professional examinations by applying a bald wig to her husband, exaggerating the military requirement that hair be cut short (44:35; see Figure 3.2). In this shot, the focus on mediation of images again attempts to destabilize masculine ideals through the 'look', to quote Silverman once more, with the inclusion of a mirror and a diegetic light source in addition to the light source outside the frame. The repetition of Maria's image in the mirror and on Riedel's photographs adds to this effect, even likening the mediation of Riedel's image to the circulation of images of women as erotic or romantic objects. The bald wig makes Riedel appear more like stereotypes of the career officer, but the flap at the back of the wig betrays its artificiality, and Maria continually emphasizes that his youthful face betrays his unsuitability for the role, judging him to be 'too young'. However, Riedel comments that the bald head and beard will suit him once he is a regimental commander, suggesting that his body will not always display his individuality and will ultimately be shaped by his military career (44:46–44:49). Riedel's comment implies a complex interaction between body and uniform: although his youthful face perhaps challenges the uniform as a symbolic representation of ideal military masculinity, the uniform will in turn exert pressure on his body over time, transforming it physically and symbolically.

The remainder of this scene further resists any suggestion that bodily changes during military service are purely cosmetic, when Kaiser and two other officers visit Riedel's room and interrupt his private time with Maria.

The continued relevance of hierarchies of military masculinities in free time renders Riedel powerless to object to Kaiser's intrusion. Maria styles Kaiser in the same bald wig, and he poses for a photographs, flexing his muscles, grinning and changing pose in an exaggerated and parodic display of hegemonic masculinity (50:34–50:50). The bald wig looks more natural on him than on Riedel, so that his tomfoolery becomes, perhaps unintentionally, self-parodic. Combined with the film's playful photographic montage technique here, this parody threatens to unseat Kaiser's authority. However, a military march is played in the background, diegetic sound generated by a record given by Kaiser to Riedel as a wedding present. This record functions throughout as a narrative reminder that, despite the momentary challenge to military hierarchies suggested by the make-up scene, military discipline and hierarchy still permeate Riedel's private space. Moreover, the fact that the bald wig suits the older and more senior Kaiser better than Riedel confirms Riedel's earlier suggestion that in time military service will leave a physical imprint.

Dobberke focuses repeatedly on the physical effects of uniforms on the men in Riedel's platoon. In some cases, the uniform itself appears physically restrictive and suffocating: after running in gas suits during the exercise near the beginning of the film, the men are visibly pale-faced and gasping for breath (8:44). Uniforms have long been a tool for restricting and transforming soldiers' bodies.³⁵ In nineteenth-century Europe in particular, rigid, unforgiving dress uniforms shaped military bodies by cinching in the waist, emphasizing the shoulders and padding the chest. Stiff, heavy materials forced an upright posture and made movements slow and cumbersome.³⁶ GDR dress uniforms were not dissimilar to their nineteenth-century predecessors, and even combat uniforms designed for greater freedom of movement were thick and heavy. During training exercises in *Ein Katzensprung*, the men's combat uniforms do not enhance the body, but conceal it in thick, uncomfortable-looking layers, visualizing the military's attempts to homogenize its conscripts (34:37). The uniforms efface individual identities by obscuring men's bodies, while also hiding the physical effects of military service and instead displaying a narrative of ideal military masculinity. The details and symbols on combat uniforms are less prominent than the colours and markings of dress uniforms, and in *Ein Katzensprung* combat uniforms often appear in wide-angle shots of groups of soldiers that make it near-impossible to distinguish between ranks or even recognize characters. The potential for reading combat uniforms as homogenizing or cumbersome, rather than efficient or functional, recalls the uniform's openness to misinterpretation in *Der Reserveheld*. Dobberke's potentially homogenizing use of uniforms further suggests that Riedel's body cannot provide more than a temporary challenge to the NVA's attempts to influence his masculinity.

Perhaps because the film's plot revolves around the relationships between individual soldiers, scenes with men in full uniform not only conceal their individuality, but often interrupt the storyline with a spectacle of military efficiency. Although dress uniforms are usually designed to attract attention, Dobberke's heavy, loose-fitting combat uniforms ensure that the object of the viewer's gaze is the organizational body the uniform represents rather than the individual body. Laura Mulvey has discussed how in narrative film, the woman as spectacle 'tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation'.³⁷ In military film, the male body, not the female, becomes the focus of military spectacle, but the spectacle created by uniform in *Ein Katzensprung* still runs counter to the storyline, as Mulvey describes. For example, a training exercise early on in the film is edited as a montage, with abrupt cuts between shots and only incongruous rock music in the background to cohere the scene (5:34–7:46). The music is by Stern-Combo Meißen, whose synthesizer sounds and prog and art rock influences add to the film's portrayal of a modern military aligned with the individual interests of the young men it recruits.³⁸ The use of montage emphasizes the digression from the plot and renders the exercise a pure spectacle of military masculinity. The gaze cannot linger on individuals; even the occasional disembodied dialogue is not clearly attributed to individual characters. Instead, the uniform draws the gaze not to individual male bodies, but to the institution they represent. Uniforms are associated with delays to the plot and narrative digressions, which make them a narrative inconvenience as well as the physical inconvenience suggested by their awkwardness and ill-fitting shape.

Nevertheless, a uniform's shape depends on the body of the wearer. Bodily deviations from the military ideal are not simply concealed by the uniform, but highlighted by the juxtaposition between ideal and really existing military masculinities. Joseph has described this fact: 'The precision and explicitness of a uniform makes even small departures from the norm more obvious and meaningful to both wearers and audiences, thereby making the study of deviation much easier.'³⁹ His concern is with deviations from uniform codes, a case for the knowledgeable observer, but military uniform also highlights bodily deviations that are clearer to the uninitiated. For example, slight or overweight bodies become more noticeable by contrast with the idealized stature modelled by the cut of the uniform. Bodily changes are more gradual than changes in uniform, which occur not just with progression through the ranks, but with the season, activity or time of day: the NVA had different uniforms for exercises, ceremonies and sport as well as codes governing clothing in washrooms and corridors. In this context, it could be tempting to use the body to represent civilian masculinities that are apparently more

coherent or authentic. Yet the soldierly body too remains vulnerable to the performative training techniques of military service and the shape imposed on it by the uniform.

Dobberke reveals the complicated relationship between soldiers' bodies and the socialist soldier personality by partially removing their uniforms. Weissenbach, for example, is broad-chested, slim-waisted and covered in chest hair, wearing braces that draw further attention to his muscular chest (16:37). He cuts a more forbidding figure than newer recruits, suggesting the success of the NVA's attempts to construct physically hardened bodies. A scene with a volleyball game confirms that these physical changes are not just aesthetic, but extend the uniform's narrative display of military hierarchies to the body, even when the uniform is removed (43:09–44:00). Many recruits are playing shirtless, displaying a range of physiques and disrupting the homogeneity of military bodies given by previous scenes featuring cumbersome combat uniforms. Conscripts continue to be marked out by uniform, with the distinctive red shorts of the NVA's gym uniform distinguishing them from officers playing in blue shorts. Sport establishes an alternative hierarchy of physical fitness, but this seems to correlate with time spent in training. The team with Kaiser and Weissenbach is more successful, so that hierarchies of rank and experience reinscribe themselves through bodily differences even when the uniform is removed.

Dobberke's soldiers' bodies are thus not immune to military training, and the vulnerable bodies of two new recruits are marked by their subordinate position. First, Weissenbach finds out that Soldat Maier cannot swim and decides to absent Maier from a swimming exercise by sending him to the medic. Although Weissenbach appears to spare Maier the humiliation of his weakness being exposed, he later seems to take pleasure in making Maier's weakness visible on his naked body: he gives Maier swimming 'lessons' by tying a rope around him and forcing him into the river. As Weissenbach watches Maier, the height difference and the rope accentuate the power differential and sadomasochism of the scene. Maier appears to consent to this hazing to address his weakness and live up to the military's expectations, but Weissenbach's brutality exploits and perpetuates Maier's weakness and subordination. Dobberke uses low-angle camera shots to emphasize Weissenbach's dominance further (15:28). Later in the dormitory, Maier's comrades see the lacerations from the rope (17:05). His shame at his weakness is demonstrated by his shouting when his wounds draw attention and by the long pause before he admits that he cannot swim. A comrade declares, 'it'll be gone again in two or three days' (17:47–17:49), but the difference between Maier's untoned torso and Weissenbach's muscles suggests that such injuries are in fact a lasting part of the rewriting of conscripts' bodily narratives during military service.

The second example of conscripts' bodies being marked by their subordinate positions highlights the disruptive effect of military uniform on conscripts' individual masculinities in the film. The incident occurs later in the same scene, when Soldat Helmke is beaten by Weißenbach for standing up for Maier. Weißenbach explicitly relates the beating to Helmke's transgression of masculine ideals by creating a contrast between his artistic civilian identity as a violinist and his role as a soldier: 'Your future with the violin, Helmke, only starts when you take off the uniform. For now, you'll be made into a soldier. And quickly' (18:47–18:55). Weißenbach's tone and his movements in squaring up to Helmke makes clear that this is a threat, and the tight framing on the two men displays Helmke's vulnerability and subordinate masculinity: his slim and boyish physique appears fragile alongside Weißenbach's strong, hardened body. Helmke's beating itself is edited out of the narrative. Weißenbach takes him outside the dormitory and the action moves outside the frame, which zooms in on the soldiers still in the dormitory before the door closes leaving a black screen (19:45–19:48). Dobberke shows only what Riedel sees the next morning: a black eye that even Helmke is unwilling to explain: 'I don't want to talk about it, Comrade Leutnant' (20:42–20:45). Although the black eye hints at further physical or psychological damage, the layers of uniform make it impossible to know the extent of Helmke's injuries. The uniform edits the rest of his body out of the field of vision, just as the violence is edited out using cuts and Helmke's silence. The gaps in the film's representation of Helmke's beating gesture towards the profound psychological effects of uniform, military violence and the conflict between existing and military identities.

Dobberke's film explores strategies to disrupt the narrative of hegemonic and anonymizing masculinity applied to the male body through military uniform. However, the film ultimately shows the place of an authentic individual self within military service to be fraught with difficulties. As in *Der Reserveheld*, Riedel's individuality is compromised by the artificiality suggested by his shifting roles and uniforms. Dobberke's costume metaphor associates individual identities with a more or less constant body, but his focus on soldiers' bodies also reveals them displaying positions within military hierarchies. Over time, the bodies of Dobberke's soldiers are shaped by the body-reflexive practices of military training, which aim to overwrite their civilian identities with ideal military masculinity. The film associates this process with uniform and the constant requirement to change and regulate it according to different contexts. Dobberke depicts the resulting individual negotiations of the military's ideal, particularly in the form of Riedel's continued attempts to find space for civilian masculinities within his military identity. Soldiers' vulnerable bodies rarely offer any alternative constancy that might guarantee the authenticity of civilian masculinities, but they do

encourage a focus on individual masculinities and on those that do not fit with the military's ideals.

Jürgen Fuchs, *Fassonschnitt* (1984)

By contrast with *Der Reserveheld* and *Ein Katzensprung*, Fuchs's 1984 novel-cum-memoir, *Fassonschnitt*, uses representations of uniforms to foreground psychological dissonances in its narrative treatment of Fuchs's memories of his own military service.⁴⁰ Fuchs served in the Border Guard from 1969 to 1971 and again as a reserve in 1972. He was arrested, interrogated and exiled in 1977 after protesting against the forced exile of Wolf Biermann, and died aged forty-eight from a rare form of leukaemia, amidst speculation that the Stasi exposed him to radiation.⁴¹ Published only in the West, *Fassonschnitt* is his first longer prose text, building on shorter prose and poems dealing with the NVA published after his exile.⁴² Fuchs gains greater freedom to write about his military service once in exile, so that *Fassonschnitt* focuses substantially more on brutality than either *Ein Katzensprung* or *Der Reserveheld*. Fuchs's formerly unpublishable memories even gained currency in the West German market as evidence of NVA brutality, especially in the aftermath of the 1983 crisis in relations between West and East and the increased arms race that followed.

Fassonschnitt is narrated in the first person and depicts the first thirteen days of the autobiographical narrator's military service, chronologically and in meticulous detail. The detail in Fuchs's text, fifteen years after the fact, is partially explained by the integration into the novel of shorter pieces written in the 1970s. On the whole, however, the obsessive detail and rigidly chronological structure point to conscription's profound effects on Fuchs, while also suggesting that elements of fictionality are mixed with Fuchs's memories. Indeed, the novel is not presented as memories, but as a present-tense narrative, giving Fuchs's style immediacy and allowing for fictionalization in part. Fuchs hinted at his artful construction, explaining that he chose the early stages of military service, bracketing out other important aspects, to foreground the sudden imposition of the military world on the conscript.⁴³ Fuchs's style is modernist and many passages recall his earlier prose poetry. However, stylistic aspects were originally neglected by critics, who focused on its honesty and authenticity, and even cited it as historical evidence for the NVA's impact on conscripts.⁴⁴ More recent criticism has focused on Fuchs's language and on the text's canonical function in post-reunification military writing, but close textual analysis of the novel is still limited.⁴⁵

Fuchs's text acknowledges the tendency for uniform to appear artificial, as in *Der Reserveheld* and *Ein Katzensprung*, but Fuchs's narrator experiences the

uniform in bodily terms from the outset. The film-like effect of thoughts of uniform and weapons gives the narrator a thrill as he awaits the train to the barracks:

There is also a thrill [*ein Kitzel*]: uniform, weapons, shooting ... Maybe it will be like in crime films, like in war, only without wounds, without death and dying. (29)

The narrator seems reluctant to acknowledge this apparently naive thrill, presumably because it jars with his anxiety regarding conscription. Yet he highlights the incongruity of this sensation by placing his comparison to film and television alongside an ironic comparison to a war ‘without death and dying’. The word ‘Kitzel’, or ‘thrill’, also resonates with ‘kitzeln’ (*to tickle*) or ‘kitzelig’ (*ticklish*), a sensation caused by an external irritant that in German has less pleasant connotations than in English. The idea of uniform as an external irritant is developed when the narrator first dons his uniform, which is awkward, preworn and unclean: ‘in the pockets crumbs, tobacco’ (53). The narrator’s unpleasant uniform recalls the ungainly combat dress in *Ein Katzensprung*, but instead of the homogenizing effect of Dobberke’s scenes, Fuchs offers an intimate tactile experience that foregrounds the uniform’s embodied qualities. Fuchs’s narrator reads his uniform less as a representation of ideal military masculinity than as a document of previous wearers, whose physical needs and pleasures are preserved in pieces of food and tobacco. Framing the narrator’s experience of the uniform as unpleasant and foreign gives the sense that the close physical contact between body and uniform is oppressive and influences the conscript’s experience of his body.

The narrator’s training in a gas suit demonstrates the oppressive effects of uniform not just on the body, but also on conscripts’ control of language. First, conscripts are fitted with masks, with Unteroffizier Pohl standing on the hose to check the fit: if the conscript struggles to breathe, the mask fits. The narrator is helpless as Pohl cuts off his air: ‘The air runs out; I start floundering and can see, blurrily, through the steamed-up glass of the goggles, Pohl’s laughing face’ (148). As the men practise getting into and out of the suits, the narrator watches Pohl and observes bitterly: ‘the enemy attack with chemical weapons does not apply to him’ (151). Once the company commander arrives, training with gas suits begins. This time, the narrator is ‘no longer as agitated as at the start’, instead describing the mask’s stifling effect in smothering his voice (155). The commander has a mask with a loudspeaker to issue orders, and his power consequently manifests itself not just in the uniform, but in his control of language, as the conscripts cannot speak through their ordinary masks. The uniform cuts off the soldiers’ ability to assert themselves verbally, which the narrator describes ironically: ‘Our struggle under these

cloaks has nothing to do with language. We have no say [*Wir haben nichts zu sagen*]. If we try to say anything, it becomes an incomprehensible coughing or barking, and ultimately you run out of breath' (156). Unlike other soldiers whose bodies react physically – one soldier vomits and clings speechlessly to a fence – Fuchs's narrator experiences the gas suit's oppressive effects in linguistic terms. The sentence 'Wir haben nichts zu sagen' describes literally having nothing to say or being ordered to say nothing, but also idiomatically having no influence or 'no say'. Fuchs's irony and wordplay create distance from the narrator's helplessness and speechlessness, as well as highlighting Fuchs's reassertion of narrative power over the commander through writing.

Fuchs uses the motif of the haircut to show the socialist soldier personality colliding with conscripts' existing self-narratives, as the haircut applies uniform regulations to the body itself. 'Fassonschnitt' denotes a military-issue crew cut, the point where dress codes are extended to the body.⁴⁶ Fuchs begins with his narrator's first crew cut, locating the beginning of military socialization not when he enters the barracks or dons the uniform, but when he visits the barber in his hometown as instructed in his conscription order. This causes a crisis of identity: 'Who am I? Who will I be in a few hours? Who is that, on the day of conscription, in this barber's chair?' (8). The string of unanswered questions is the first of many, as the coherence of the narrator's self-narrative is unsettled by entry into the military and the uncertainty and anxiety he experiences. This questioning is gradually internalized: 'What is going to happen [*Was wird werden*]?' This anxious, cowering question mark is inside me' (26). The narrator's acquiescence in the haircut triggers a spiral of self-scrutiny as he fails to reconcile this complicity with his previous dissident identity: 'I went to the barber. To me, I seem good and cowardly, obedient and shitty [*beschissen*]' (13). 'Good' and 'obedient', which are desirable masculine values in the military, are challenged by being used pejoratively and coupled ironically with the traditionally unmasculine 'cowardly' and the self-accusatory 'shitty'. Fuchs's language articulates the tensions between the narrator's and the military's conceptions of masculinity, presenting a conflict between mere acquiescence and what the narrator truly considers 'good'.

Fuchs's focus on the feel of the uniform on the skin and on the hair as an interface between military rules and soldiers' bodies draws attention to the surface of conscripts' bodies. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the body's surface is closely related to the psyche and especially to the ego, the largely conscious part of the psyche associated with self and identity. The surface of the body is central to Sigmund Freud's link between body and the ego: 'The ego is above all bodily; it is not merely a surface phenomenon, but rather is itself the projection of a surface.'⁴⁷ In other words, a subject's self-image and their understanding of their body and its boundaries are essential parts of ego formation. J.C. Flügel, an early psychoanalyst following Freud, developed

the ego's relationship to the bodily surface to account for the form and meaning of clothes. Flügel argues that consciousness is extended beyond the body to its clothes, which can either increase the subject's sense of power or overwhelm the subject's body and sense of self.⁴⁸ In this understanding, the ego is not only a projection of the body's surface, but is also influenced in its structure and even stability by the clothes that adorn the body's surface. Uniform's imprint on psyche and self stems from its complex transformative effect on the bodily surface: it alters symbolic readings of this surface, affects and mediates the soldier's sensory perception, and leaves lasting physical traces that influence bodily meaning after the uniform is discarded. Fuchs's depiction is more explicit than *Ein Katzensprung* or *Der Reserveheld* in rejecting the idea that the body could remain unchanged by military service, and *Fassonschnitt* associates these physical changes to the surface of the body with lasting psychological damage.

In line with Freud's and Flügel's ideas, Fuchs explores conscripts' psychological vulnerability during military service by depicting forced exposure of the body's surface, showing how it is part of the NVA's use of body-reflexive practices to construct masculinities. Nakedness is a source of disturbance for Fuchs's narrator. Whilst describing the medical examination before conscription, the narrator relates a childhood fear of nakedness: 'I could not bear being exposed in front of others, was scared of "surprises", comments and strange eyes' (23). The manipulation of his naked body renders it part of the military's costuming of its recruits: 'Dressing and undressing, like in prison films. With the difference that I was playing along' (ibid.). Dressing up and participating in the body-reflexive practices involved with the uniform does not give the narrator strength or allow him to suddenly excel like Horricht in *Der Reserveheld*. Instead, he describes himself as a prisoner, who 'plays along' not just as an actor in costume, but also as someone complicit, having inescapably entered the military's influence via its assessment of his naked body. The 'prison films' evoke films of concentration camps in light of the frequent parallels Fuchs draws between the GDR and Nazi Germany, and between the NVA and the Wehrmacht. Although the narrator elsewhere relates his conscription to his father's Wehrmacht service, comparing himself to a prisoner suggests that he is simultaneously identifying with the victims of Nazism. Fuchs's narrative struggles throughout with his narrator's complicity, but identifying with victims here conflicts with and risks undoing the ethical gesture of his otherwise self-accusatory tone.

Subsequent scenes of nakedness provoke shame, narrative disruption and feelings of objectification, such as when the narrator is subjected to a medical examination after arrival in the barracks: 'Broad shoulders, large hands ... that's how it seemed to me. I, I, I. What is the matter; what are they doing?' (69). The doctors' features are imposing, and the narrator's ellipsis, repetition

and staccato sentences reflect his feeling of violation. This violation appears to disrupt his sense of self, with the phrase ‘ich, ich, ich’ occurring twice more in this section, reflecting the narrator’s desperation as well as his disorientation and struggle to articulate himself. The only exception is a scene towards the end in the communal showers. The narrator anticipates the experience with horror: ‘I was frightened, thought back to the medical examination’ (331). The passage is still elliptical, implying that the narrator’s shame remains, but the shower experience ultimately appears comradely or even pleasant: ‘Lots of steam, poor vision, washing Jugel’s back, jokes, comments, but friendly ones really, under hot water, we were all naked’ (332–33). The narrator does not comment further on this episode, neither confirming nor denying the potential for homoeroticism inherent in the men washing each other. This ellipsis notwithstanding, the shower scene’s tacit intimacy and solidarity imply that nudity can create a space for emotions and camaraderie outside the restrictions of the uniform.

Like Dobberke, Fuchs also describes a volleyball game, which represents the military’s use of body-reflexive gender practices to construct bodies that conform to the socialist soldier personality. Fuchs plays with the idea that sports might challenge the military’s hierarchies by substituting a hierarchy of physical fitness. During the game, ‘a tall, thin Oberleutnant has kept his grey shirt on with the epaulettes’, as if to remind the soldiers of his superiority (302). In the game, however:

The Oberleutnant is one player among others. The ball does not obey orders. Jugel, a mere Soldat, the red-arse, the upstart recruit who had only just been conscripted, can outfox an officer at the net if he can manage it. (Ibid.)⁴⁹

The narrative undercuts the possibility of this ‘can’ and ‘if’ immediately: ‘He doesn’t manage it. The Oberleutnant is faster and can jump higher!’ (ibid.). As in *Ein Katzensprung*, the military hierarchy reasserts itself in the sporting arena, which draws the narrator and his fellow conscripts into the body-reflexive practice of ideal military masculinity. This process is represented in the narrative itself. Initially, Fuchs preserves distance through an intransitive verb, anonymous object and indeterminate number of players: ‘around ten or twelve players took part’ (ibid.). However, two paragraphs later, a three-word sentence states with resignation the narrator’s incorporation into the hierarchy on the court: ‘We’re playing volleyball.’

One further scene initially suggests that the naked body can disrupt the military’s masculine ideal, but Fuchs ultimately rejects this idealized conception of the body. Rather, he shows the military hierarchy and the uniform itself reasserting themselves through the soldier’s body. In the washroom, naked torsos are the required dress code. One evening there is an altercation

between Soldat Jugel, ‘in undershirt and gym shorts’ and Leutnant Meier, ‘a naked torso [*Oberkörper*], white, delicate, hairless, with freckles’ (79). Without his uniform, Meier’s naked torso cannot convey his power. Jugel fails to recognize that Meier is his superior and snaps, ‘Have you got something to say, or what...’ (ibid.). The narrator’s string of feminizing adjectives for Meier’s ‘naked torso’ further accentuates his emasculation when stripped of his uniform. Meier’s soon reasserts his position, which Fuchs represents in terms of the relationship between uniform and body: “We shall see! I am Leutnant Meier!” shouts the torso ... his shoulders twitch, as if at any moment the gold stars might appear’ (ibid.). Fuchs projects features of the uniform onto Meier’s body, blurring the boundary between body and clothing, and suggesting, as Flügel does, that consciousness of one’s self extends to include garments worn on the surface of the body. In Fuchs’s washroom episode, the body offers little challenge to military hierarchies, as Leutnant Meier’s body assumes the starred epaulettes of his absent uniform.

The body’s assumption of the uniform’s narrative is mirrored in the language of this scene. At first, neither soldier is named, referred to metonymically in terms of uniform or synecdochically as a ‘naked torso’, so that the uniform or body part replaces the soldiers’ identities. Fuchs recapitulates Meier’s initial disempowerment by decapitating him in his description, but Fuchs’s representation never fully disrupts Meier’s power any more than he is emasculated by his slim physique. Meier’s authority is implied by the resonance of ‘*Oberkörper*’ with ranks such as ‘*Oberleutnant*’ that use the prefix ‘*Ober-*’ to signal power within the masculine hierarchy. Fuchs makes frequent use of such synecdochic or metonymic substitution for names, staging in narrative form uniform’s claim to offer a self-contained narrative representation of a person. When the conscripts first obtain the uniforms, for example, Fuchs refers to them only as ‘track suits running by’ (50). Fuchs’s consistent use of such substitutions is deliberately ironic, but also recalls the identity crisis set in motion by the haircut at the opening of the novel, with any existing narrative of self or masculinity unsettled and even replaced by the uniform.

Fuchs’s novel picks up briefly on the costume motif from *Der Reserveheld* and *Ein Katzensprung*, but soldiers’ experience of uniform is always embodied and there is no suggestion that the uniform might be merely temporary or artificial. Whereas Dobberke focuses on the physical effects of the military’s imposition of its masculine ideals, the body in *Fassonschnitt* is used to represent the narrator’s psychological disturbance, as his existing self-understanding as a dissident poet is challenged and overwritten through body-reflexive practices and even through the assumption of the uniform’s narrative details. The depiction of uniform and its extension to hair and the naked body bring the physical and psychic effects of military service

together, recalling Freud's description of the ego as a projection of the surface of the body, in this case a surface transfigured by uniform. The efficacy of these psychological changes is perhaps encapsulated by a scene in which Fuchs's narrator informs on a struggling comrade to a Stasi representative. The narrator's actions are naive, almost inadvertent, and show the effects of disorientation on his ability to sustain resistance to state institutions. The profound effects of military service on the narrator are reflected in the difficulties of narration that pattern the text, and that Fuchs later picked up in his next novel, *Das Ende einer Feigheit* (*An End to Cowardice*, 1988).⁵⁰ Together with his other works, *Fassonschnitt* seems to represent an ongoing struggle to narrate military service that highlights Fuchs's lasting need to engage with and negotiate the military's imposition of its masculine ideals, even twenty years after his own military service.

Conclusion

The films I analysed in the previous chapter showed how physical vulnerability potentially unsettles the connection between the military body and ideal forms of military masculinity, while at the same time proving a man's commitment to these ideals and justifying the need to develop a hardened exterior. In those films, the coherence of ideal military masculinity depends on soldiers constantly negotiating situations that threaten that coherence, so that even in GDR-era films, the body shows the limits and careful construction of the socialist soldier personality, in physical as well as symbolic and psychological terms. The uniform is an important means of projecting certain masculinities onto soldiers' bodies, which in *Der Reserveheld*, *Ein Katzensprung* and *Fassonschnitt* has particularly profound effects because of the nature of conscription. Most of the NVA recruits depicted in these works are forced into enlistment, most clearly in *Der Reserveheld* and *Fassonschnitt*. The uniform symbolizes the masculine ideals governing conscripts' new environment, but in these works uniforms are usually applied to bodies that do not correspond with any ideal of a strong, hardened body, especially in the early stages of military service. These three works suggest ways of unsettling the hegemony of ideal military masculinity by showing the uniform being removed and changed or by associating it with the spectacular quality of military masculinity, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Although the narratives denaturalize the ideals by presenting the uniform as costume, bodies themselves are shown to be vulnerable. Soldiers are injured, bruised, scarred and suffocated by interactions with the uniform, and their bodies shaped through these enforced body-reflexive practices during training. Their bodies never wholly live up to the socialist soldier personality, but nor do

these works hold out hope for the body to preserve symbolic associations with civilian or dissident masculinities.

These works show the uniform as a means of tailoring ideal masculinity to individual soldiers, so that their bodies are read primarily as representatives of the military institution. I have described this using the image of two competing narratives of masculinity. However, the works stage misreadings and misinterpretations that unsettle the link between the soldier and ideal masculinity, most notably for comic effect in *Der Reserveheld*. Above all, this technique reveals the uniform's role in constructing and communicating military masculinities. Inasmuch as the uniform is represented as constructed and artificial, these three works direct attention to the wearer's vulnerable body and explore its potential to communicate individual, even deviant masculinities that might disrupt the military ideal. Ultimately, the hegemony of the socialist soldier personality is not substantially disrupted and its lasting power is suggested by Fuchs's writing fifteen years after his service. Instead, military masculinities are shown being negotiated as a dialogue between the uniform's ideal, soldiers' existing ideal selves from civilian life, and the physical and psychological demands of the military's body-reflexive practices.

One way in which military masculinity is negotiated in relation to uniform is through care and maintenance, which can be viewed as body-reflexive practices in their own right. Cleaning, folding, ironing and polishing items of uniform help constitute the soldier's appearance. Because failure to live up to the required appearance can be punished, the soldier's appearance can be regulated directly and immediately, even though bodies themselves only change gradually. *Der Reserveheld* bases much of its comedy on the fact that Horricht conforms to the military's requirements through his comrades' efforts rather than his own. His appearance is thus uncoupled from the physical effort that goes into perfecting the masculine image displayed by the uniform. However, the uncomfortable-looking combat uniforms in *Ein Katzensprung* suggest that no amount of maintenance can disguise the fact that many uniforms are awkward and cumbersome. Dobberke renders the uniform inconvenient, focusing on the problems it creates for identifying individual soldiers in a group. The narrator's more intimate and bodily encounter with uniform in *Fassonschnitt* further disrupts the spectacle of ideal masculinity, in this case not because the uniform can be easily removed or because it has no physical effect, but because it is dirty and passed on from other soldiers.

Uniform can be understood through Fuchs's portrayal as an irritant, which the conscript must tolerate and maintain to avoid punishment, but which never entirely fits the body physically or symbolically. Yet in all three works, body and uniform are never as separate as my metaphor of two competing narratives of masculinity might at first glance suggest. On a symbolic level, *Der Reserveheld* reveals the simultaneous construction of meaning for

the uniform and the body through body-reflexive practices associated with certain forms of masculinity. On a corporeal level, the way in which the body fills out the uniform is easy to see; in addition, *Ein Katzensprung* and *Fassonschnitt* suggest that the uniform's symbolism profoundly influences the body. Fuchs's narrative goes one step further and focuses on the psychological effects of the military's attempts to overwrite existing identities by covering the surface of the body with uniform.

Despite the uniform's symbolic, physical and psychological impact on conscripts, particularly in *Ein Katzensprung* and *Fassonschnitt*, none of the three works accepts that military uniform is entirely homogenizing or that soldiers' existing identities become subsumed by the power associated with the uniform. Rather, they show a complex relationship, with body and uniform influencing each other in the construction of military masculinities, particularly in the early stages of conscription. *Ein Katzensprung* suggests that even career soldiers such as Riedel continue to negotiate identities that incorporate civilian masculinities and degrees of nonconformity. The psychological effects emphasized by Fuchs appear to be the result of the impossibility of entirely resisting the imposition of military ideals associated with the uniform. Only occasionally, as in the shower scene in *Fassonschnitt*, does nakedness provide spaces for tactile intimacy among the military's incorporation of the body into its disciplinary routine. As in Connell's account of body-reflexive practices or Butler's discussion of queer performativity, then, the potential for 'recalcitrant' bodies to subvert or challenge military ideals appears to be limited. Nonetheless, these representations suggest that the socialist soldier personality is sustained through a range of military masculinities that inevitably embody the ideal only imperfectly. The conflict between masculinities associated with the body and the uniform forces soldiers to negotiate conformity and resistance to the military's ideals, using body-reflexive practices to construct individual masculine identities that are complex, relational and dynamic.

Because the uniform offers an outward projection of one of the state's principal masculine ideals, the relationship between body and uniform offers useful insights into citizens' negotiations of the GDR dictatorship more widely. *Der Reserveheld*, *Ein Katzensprung* and *Fassonschnitt* correspond with recent social history of the GDR that complicates previous assumptions that citizens could feign conformity in public life and otherwise withdraw into a separate private sphere or a so-called 'niche society'.⁵¹ The relationship between body and uniform offers a visualization of the effects of such participation on citizens' sense of self. Even though certain acts of limited conformity could appear or be intended as insincere and self-aware, acts of accommodation to GDR institutions nonetheless shaped citizens' daily lives and affected their identities just as the uniform affects soldiers' bodies and

masculinities. Moreover, these works illustrate men's participation in the state's institutions and show that this participation was gendered: the military represents one context in which men negotiated institutions in substantially different ways from women.

Notes

An earlier version of this chapter appears as 'Narrative and the Body in Uniform: East German Military Masculinities in Claus Dobberke's *Ein Katzensprung* and Jürgen Fuchs's *Fassonschnitt*', *Modern Language Review* 110 (2015), 204–21. Used with permission from the Modern Humanities Research Association.

1. Connell, *Masculinities*, 52–53.
2. *Ibid.*, 57.
3. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 61.
4. Luderer, *Der Reserveheld*; C. Dobberke (dir.), *Ein Katzensprung* (DEFA, 1977); Fuchs, *Fassonschnitt*.
5. On the cultural coding and symbolism associated with bodies, see P. Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
6. Niemetz, *Das feldgraue Erbe*, 292.
7. A. Bickford, 'Male Identity, the Military and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic', *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 19 (2001), 65–76 (at 66).
8. N. Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms: Communication through Clothing* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 2.
9. Butler, 'Introduction', 2.
10. *Ibid.*, 244, note 7.
11. See Michael Lucey on first-person narration and identity: *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
12. J. Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', in J. Gaines and C. Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 180–211.
13. Luderer, *Der Reserveheld*: hereinafter referenced in the text.
14. F.-B. Habel, *Das große Lexikon der DEFA-Spielfilme: Die vollständige Dokumentation aller DEFA-Spielfilme von 1946 bis 1993* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2000), 482–83; Anon., 'Kinoprogramm vom 8.8. bis 14.8.1980', *Berliner Zeitung*, 7 August 1980, 10.
15. E.g. ch, 'Ein Komiker in Uniform: "Der Reserveheld" – ein Filmschwank der DEFA', *Neue Zeit*, 2 March 1965, 4.
16. Anon., 'Kontakt mit "Falstaff"', *Neue Zeit*, 3 March 1965, 4.
17. 'Wehrpflichtgesetz 1962', 2–6.
18. R. Strahl, 'Der Reserveheld: Bemerkungen eines Autors über "seinen" Film', *Neues Deutschland*, 28 February 1965, 9.
19. G. King, *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower, 2002), 35.
20. P. Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We are What We Wear* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 4; Joseph, *Uniforms*, 183–84.
21. I discuss the theatricality of military masculinities further in Chapter 4.
22. B. Edwards (dir.), *The Pink Panther* (United Artists, 1963).

23. On uniforms and phallic symbolism, see V. Steel, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 180.
24. C. Klötzer, 'Der militärische Bereich unserer Gesellschaft in der Filmkunst: Soldatengestalten der NVA im Spielfilm', unpublished thesis, Film and Television Academy of the GDR, Potsdam-Babelsberg (1970), 53.
25. The film's screenplay gives more detail, but lacks the comic effect of the final edit. The director explains: 'Because you'd need a whole pioneer regiment to build the bridge you've described.' BArch, DR 117/550, *Der Reserveheld*, screenplay I, 16 June 1964, 36.
26. Strahl, 'Der Reserveheld'.
27. Dobberke, *Ein Katzensprung*: hereinafter referenced in the text.
28. W. Flegel, *Ein Katzensprung* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1976).
29. ADN, 'Theodor-Körner-Preis 1978 für verdienstvolle Künstler', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 March 1978, 3.
30. See the interview with Dobberke in Kahlau, *Volksarmee*, 162–84.
31. E.g. G. Sobe, 'Hauptsache, die Karre rollt...? Der neue DEFA-Spielfilm "Ein Katzensprung"', *Berliner Zeitung*, 6 July 1977, 4.
32. Dobberke describes his career-long interest in the conflict between the individual's values and social reality: Kahlau, *Volksarmee*, 179.
33. HU, 'Cowboys, Räuber und Rebellen: Blick auf das Programm der Sommerfilmtage', *Neue Zeit*, 6 July 1977, 4.
34. See Fenimore, *Sex*, 138; and films such as N. Ray (dir.), *Rebel without a Cause* (Warner Bros, 1955).
35. For a full history, see J. Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 21–50.
36. E. Hackspiel-Mikosch, 'Uniforms and the Creation of Ideal Masculinity', in P. McNeil and V. Karaminas (eds), *The Men's Fashion Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 117–29 (at 122–23).
37. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', 11.
38. I have discussed Flegel and the NVA's interest in popular music elsewhere: Smith, 'Music, the GDR Military and the GDR Today'.
39. Joseph, *Uniforms*, 2.
40. Fuchs, *Fassonschnitt*: hereinafter referenced in the text.
41. P. Wensierski, 'In Kopfhöhe ausgerichtet', *Der Spiegel*, 17 May 1999, 42–44.
42. J. Fuchs, *Gedächtnisprotokolle* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1977); J. Fuchs, *Pappkameraden: Gedichte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1981).
43. E. Loest, 'Inhaftierte Eroberer: In "Fassonschnitt" protokolliert Jürgen Fuchs den Alltag der Nationalen Volksarmee', *Die Zeit*, 30 November 1984.
44. M. Rogg, *Armee des Volkes? Militär und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Berlin: Links, 2008), 390; H. Zaunstock, 'Die Zeit bei der "Asche": Erinnerungen von NVA-Soldaten als Gegenstand und konzeptionelle Herausforderung der zeitgeschichtlichen Forschung', *Hallische Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte* 18 (2008), 63–79.
45. U. Fix, 'Widerständige Sprache in der Literatur der DDR am Beispiel Jürgen Fuchs', in M. Hermann and H. Pietzsch (eds), *DDR-Literatur zwischen Anpassung und Widerspruch: Tagungsband zum Jürgen-Fuchs-Literatureseminar am 26. und 27. November 2010 in Jena* (Jena: IKS Garamond, 2011), 67–95; A. Plowman, 'Experience, Military Fiction and the Shameful Self in Ingo Schulze's *Neue Leben*', in D. Clarke and A. Goodbody (eds), 'The Self in Transition: East German Autobiographical Writing before and after Unification: Essays in Honour of Dennis Tate', special issue, *German Monitor* 75 (2012), 253–66.

46. The haircut is a common trope in military narratives: S. Kubrick (dir.), *Full Metal Jacket* (Warner Bros, 1987), opens with close-ups of resigned recruits while their hair is shaved.
47. S. Freud, *Das Ich und das Es* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1923), 28: 'Das Ich ist vor allem ein körperliches, es ist nicht nur ein Oberflächenwesen, sondern selbst die Projektion einer Oberfläche.'
48. J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth, 1930), 34–37.
49. 'Red-arse' (in German 'Rotarsch') was usually a derogatory nickname for soldiers in their penultimate six months of service, who more experienced soldiers initiated with a blow to the buttocks. Here, Fuchs applies it to a new recruit.
50. J. Fuchs, *Das Ende einer Feigheit* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1988).
51. See G. Mueller, 'Re-imagining the Niche: Visual Reconstructions of Private Spaces in the GDR', in A. Saunders and D. Pinfold (eds), *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 197–213.