“Not Everything was Good, but Many Things were Better”: East German Everyday Life, Material Culture, and the Museum

by

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Abstract

This dissertation draws on the rich context of contemporary Germany for interrogating divisive public debates on Germany's socialist past. Grounded in the analysis of specific places and objects, particularly those relating to museums, it investigates simultaneously three distinct but also closely connected modes of accessing the past: history, memory, and materiality. Fieldwork conducted in Germany between 2008 and 2013 provides the empirical foundation for this work. Through the application and analysis of such concepts and figures as Igor Kopytoff's (1986) biography of things, Svetlana Boym's nostalgia (2001), Walter Benjamin's rag collector (1999) and Michel Foucault's (1984) heterotopia, the dissertation explicates how marginal cultural practices and products invoking history and memory complicate widely circulating representations of the East German past. The thesis argues that these practices conceptualize socialist Germany in ways that dominant discourses reject or omit and thereby gesture towards the possibility of plurality and nuance in constructions of the past, which in turn have ramifications for imagining the future. I formulate the concept past mobilizing to denote cultural activities that put the past to use strategically and tend to the past, present, and future simultaneously. The methodological approach that informs this dissertation foregrounds the relationship between people and things as it illuminates the role that objects play in creating and sustaining meanings. In this context, I propose the term and practice of research-by-making as an investigative tool that through the technique of publically exhibiting scholarly work affords a focus on the material and creative dimensions of inquiry. In my work, this approach consisted of putting on display toys, kitchen utensils, postcards, as well as other objects relating to quotidian

life in a show entitled *East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life*. My central aim in the overall project is to ground the analysis of mobilizations of the past concretely in experiences and, most significantly, things.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Anne Winkler. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board: "Nostalgia and the invention of a nation: Museum representations of East Germany and its politics", No. Pro00015254, June 8, 2010.

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Introduction

Contexts, Questions, and Directions

In the early stages of my dissertation project, when I still was not entirely certain of its parameters and aims, I visited the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum (Contemporary History Forum – ZGF) in Leipzig to begin an investigation into how Germany imagined its recent socialist past. Located on the major pedestrian shopping street of the city, passersby encounter the East German artist Wolfgang Mattheuer's (1927-2004) sculpture *Jahrhundertschrit*t [Step of the Century] (1984) in front of the entrance of this federally sponsored contemporary history museum (see Figure 1). The larger-than-life figure's right hand extends in the Nazi salute. Its left hand clenches in a worker's fist. Whereas in the East German context the work won a national prize for representing the clash during the 20th century between Fascism/Nazism and Leninism/Stalinism, the inscription on the pedestal today describes it as "symbolizing the relationship the German people have with two types of totalitarian systems" as well as

Figure 1: Jahrhundertschritt (1984)

"representing dictatorship and resistance in East Germany." The equating of the Nazi and Socialist past that takes place here has been given tremendous weight with the artwork's placement in front of a publically funded museum dedicated to GDR [German Democratic Republic, or Deutsche Demokratische Republik – DDR] oppression and opposition to it and the presence of the then-chancellor of Germany, Gerhard Schröder, at its unveiling in 1999. In addition to the ZGF's edition, five other versions of the sculpture are on display in public spaces and galleries across the country, further signifying the pervasiveness of its contemporary message, one that grossly oversimplifies the past. As my dissertation will show, this dominant interpretation's focus on state structure erases individuals' complex lives and negotiations of a repressive system, which in turn has given rise to a range of counter-narratives, predominantly in the realm of popular material culture.

Not only state-led, top-down institutions promulgate a particularly narrow version of the past. For example, in 2009, a headline in Germany's largest weekly magazine, *Der Spiegel*, read "Heimweh nach der Diktatur" [Homesick for the Dictatorship] and carried the subtitle "The obscuring of East German has reached new heights. Today, the young and more advantaged too oppose the representation of their old home country as an unlawful state"[i] (Bonstein). Article titles such as this one reflect the tensions that continue to define Germany nearly twenty-five years after the Fall of the Wall. How a united Germany should remember and historicize its socialist era is a focus of divisive public debates and a wide range of cultural responses to Germany's recent past. My dissertation draws on this exceptionally rich context for interrogating these topics sociologically to examine the post-socialist moment through contemporary representations of East Germany. Grounded in an analysis of specific places and objects, particularly those relating to museums, this work interrogates how social institutions and popular

culture construct contesting conceptualizations of history and memory and the implications they have for understandings of the present and future.

My motivation for pursuing the project I present here was the confounding emergence of *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for the East, the seeming romanticisation of life under socialism that has taken various cultural forms since the early 1990s. In milder forms, dominant discourses dismiss the phenomenon as the symptom of lacking historical awareness. More extreme responses often portray *Ostalgie* as a dangerous expression of a desire to recreate the GDR, and with it, an oppressive regime which relied extensively on its citizenry to operate. Scholarly works have introduced complexity and nuance into the debate. For example, Slavoj Žižek (2002) interprets *Ostalgie*, farther reachingly as mourning for political possibility, defining it as "longing, not so much for the communist past, for what actually went on under communism, but, rather, for what *might have happened* there, for the missed opportunity of another Germany" 23-24). Žižek's description hints at the ambivalence that continues to characterize appraisals of East Germany.

Reflecting on *Ostalgie* as the manifestation of a sense of estrangement and dislocation, Peter Thompson (2011) also broadens understandings by placing the phenomenon more concretely into a global and historical context, arguing that it is "merely a sharpened example of a general [unease in modernity] that afflicts us as a species that finds itself on the way from settled community to flexible society without, in many cases, having to venture past one's own front door" (254). In addition to complicating *Ostalgie*, Žižek and Thompson indicate that what upon initial consideration appears to concern only the specificity of eastern Germany, in fact reaches far beyond a historical moment and geographical region as it relates to imaginings of past, present, and future, as well as experiences of fragmentation and alienation in the contemporary era on a global scale.

One of the reasons for why *Ostalgie* remains a hotly debated topic, particularly in Germany, is its perceived undermining of German unity, which Bonstein's article in *Der Spiegel* emblematizes. Here, Bonstein reports that in 2009, twenty years after the Fall of the Wall, 57% of eastern Germans believed that the GDR had more good than bad sides. Moreover, 49% of the participants believed that there were a few problems but that is was possible to live a good life there. The author supplements these statistics with quotes from former East Germans who despite academic and financial success express dissatisfaction with life in today's Germany. For example, a thirty-year old business school graduate who was born in East Germany states "Most GDR citizens had a good life. […] I certainly do not think that it is better here".[ii] Others offer general critiques of capitalism, especially inequality, and point to the dishonesty of politicians, increase in crime and unemployment rates, a lack of social cohesion, a reduction in social welfare, as well as western cultural hegemony. Bonstein, citing an historian and a political scientist, dismisses these viewpoints as misguided, concluding that despite many comments concerning the present, they appraise the past incorrectly, the motivation for which is a form of saving face. She writes: "The trivialization of dictatorship is accepted as the price for maintaining one's sense of self-worth." I would like to suggest that Bonstein's article not only reflects the mass media's complicity in neutralizing critiques of late-capitalist neo-liberalism. It a also exemplifies the dominant discourse on the GDR and with it the difficulty Germany is experiencing in coming to terms with the legacy of the GDR.

The museal representation of East Germany, particularly relating to everyday life, mirrors the polarization evident in the *Der Spiegel* article and is one of the dissertation's central foci. Immediately following the collapse of East Germany, museums, amateur and private, as well publically funded ones, emerged as a battleground in the public debate over how East Germany

should be remembered and historicized. Not only do these sites render visible the mechanism by which museums link ideas and things with authoritative effect and thereby reveal the medium's powers and limitations. These representational hot spots are also fertile ground for studying the nuances, contradictions, and politics of post-socialist cultural practices. Moreover, museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany highlight how cultural practices attempt to insert themselves into main-stream consciousness and thereby contribute to a diversity of narratives on what life was like under socialism, an approach that Fuchs and Cosgrove (2006) in their analysis of the representation of the Third Reich since 1990 describe as shedding light on the "emerging pluralism of memory cultures" (18). Their aim, like mine, is not to analyze dominant perspectives but rather to investigate contesting pasts that are claiming their space in public discourse, even if they fail to correspond to what hitherto stood as the governing ethical narrative.

Survey of Chapters

Each chapter of this dissertation, although connected by subject matter and underlying preoccupation, has a life of its own. Borrowing Howard S. Becker's (1998) words, the work "is a network or web rather than a straight line" (8). It experimentally deploys microscopic and macroscopic levels of analysis, as the emphasis on the empirical and the theoretical shifts from one to the other throughout. My central aim has been to ground the analysis concretely in experiences and, most significantly, things.

Chapter 1, "Methodological Notes," describes the methodological underpinnings that shape my project. It situates the empirical focus of this dissertation within theoretical debates on history, memory, and material culture while proposing this triad as a constellation that

illuminates invocations and uses of the past. The chapter also explicates how the principles of the sociological imagination, cultural studies, and qualitative inquiry guide my work. I present the dissertation as a creative undertaking that draws extensively on multiple disciplines to interrogate complex and frequently contradictory cultural phenomena. I argue that I am primarily interested in describing and theorizing tensions and power struggles in meaning making that emerge from variations in the interpretation of the past.

Chapter 2, "Conceptual Frameworks: History, Memory, and Heritage," outlines and critically reflects on scholarly debates on history, memory, and their relationship. It isolates theoretical discussions that underlie analyses in subsequent chapters as it situates contemporary cultural practices engaging East Germany within a broader cultural and theoretical context. Here I propose the concept "past mobilizing" to address some of the conceptual challenges that the terms history, memory, and heritage pose. "Past mobilizing" conveys the processual social construction of the past through a broad range of phenomena and practices, which can operate at the level of individuals and groups who share a past. Moreover, the term encompasses both popular and high culture, while also including subversive and dominant uses of the past.

Chapter 3, "'Not Everything was Good, but Many Things were Better': Nostalgia for East Germany and Its Politics," establishes the premise of the empirical and discursive problematic that the remainder of the dissertation interrogates. It demonstrates the capacity of nostalgia to offer an alternative, affective reading of history and a consequently constraining or liberating vision of the future. Using as a starting point a porcelain mug, a seemingly banal everyday object, the chapter considers what remains after historical rupture and ask how *Ostalgie* as cultural practice complicates historicizations of the former GDR. In addition to outlining the forms that *Ostalgie* takes, this chapter has two further goals. It highlights the politics of this

contemporary form of nostalgia, both in its practice and scholarly analysis. Furthermore, it complicates the future-oriented claims that *Ostalgie* and other historicizing discourses make. A study of *Ostalgie* that takes into consideration its relationship to other narratives constructing what kind of a place East Germany was offers possibilities for nuanced understandings of the politics of nostalgia.

Chapter 4, "Remembering and Historicizing Socialism: The Private and Amateur Musealization of East Germany's Everyday," presents an analysis of a particular museum configuration, one dedicated to everyday life in the East. It proposes that amateur and private GDR museums operate as a distinctive site of cultural practice, which emerged in the context of a profound caesura in German history, a transformation whose aftershocks continue to be felt. Their construction of the past relies significantly on accessing memories of life under socialism. A manifestation of a struggle over the kind of history that is carried forward, the museums respond to and reject hegemonic discourses on everyday life in East Germany. I suggest that the intimate relationship between the museums and their publics, which GDR museums enact, entail democratic curatorial processes that are uncommon in mainstream musealization efforts. Although the near absence of interpretative texts at most sites could be understood as reflecting amateurism, this characteristic plays an integral part in the memory work that the GDR museum affords its visitors. Moreover, the prominence of objects, particularly industrially produced ones, relates to their capacity to affirm East German identities, including those relating to industrial production. A further focus is the sensuous encounter with the past that unfolds at these sites, that even though often accidental, leads visitors to perform the GDR, creating unexpected possibilities for the production and consumption of memory.

Chapter 5, "Research-by-Making: Exhibit Curating as Investigative Tool," traces my own process of constructing an exhibition, which was based on two distinct modes of representing East Germany in museums. I outline in detail the experimental curatorial project to demonstrate how material practice can facilitate social research. Moreover, I describe how my fashioning of a public exhibit, which involved a continuous oscillation between theory and practice, supported the ongoing analysis of collected data. The central contribution of the piece lies in its theorization of research-by-making, an approach that the chapter proposes as a methodological tool for social research that can be applied more broadly than arts-based forms of inquiry. I consider how material practice outside of the artistic domain can support research endeavors while also highlighting the creative and subjective elements of scholarly work.

Chapter 6, "*Kept Things*: Heterotopic Provocations in the Museal Representation of East German Everyday Life" offers the second of two close readings of cultural products. After the analysis of the *Ostalgie* mug in Chapter 2, I undertake a reciprocally informed analysis of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*, which was on display in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany from March 28, 2010 until May 5, 2011. The foundation for this project is an interrogation of the Foucauldian concept heterotopia. I argue that when used methodologically, heterotopia can illuminate how real places, which appear to correspond to the dominant order, in fact have the capacity to reveal knowledge that undermines ruling ideas. The application of dimensions of heterotopia explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts shape meaning. I maintain that *Kept Things* questions fundamentally how other contemporary museum and dominant discourses represent East German everyday life and at the same time renders visible the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge.

The concluding chapter, "East German Refuse and Past Mobilizing," focuses on material culture, a central theme in my overall project. It examines more closely than the previous chapters how artifacts function as objects of knowledge, operate as evidence for the past, and act as agents of memory. The contextualization of objects within the museum supports a pointed discussion on the epistemology of things as I examine how objects embody the past and render it tellable. The musealization of East Germany serves as a uniquely rich case for studying these topics, in part because it highlights how objects shift in value. Museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany illuminate what is at stake when material culture transforms from being a commodity, to trash, and subsequently museum artifact within a short span of time. Thus, the chapter interrogates closely the limits and possibilities of using discarded objects to make meaning of the past and present.

Methodological Notes

This chapter describes the methodological underpinnings that shape my project. It situates the empirical focus of this dissertation within theoretical debates on history, memory, and material culture while proposing this triad as a constellation that illuminates invocations and uses of the past. The chapter also explicates how the principles of the sociological imagination, cultural studies, and qualitative inquiry guide my work. I present the dissertation as a creative undertaking that draws extensively on multiple disciplines to interrogate complex and frequently contradictory cultural phenomena. I argue that I am primarily interested in describing and theorizing tensions and power struggles in meaning making that emerge from variations in the interpretation of the past.

Framings: Sociological Imagination, Cultural Studies, and Ethnography

To explore aspects of the German memory contests in depth, an eclectic and, in part, inventive methodology has guided this project, one that is grounded in the sociological imagination. C. Wright Mills (1959) describes the sociological imagination as an analytical tool that invites the laying bare of the intricacies of social complexities. It

> enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues. (5)

Thus, the sociological imagination offers the possibility of rendering intelligible the relationships between history, social structure, and personal biography, explicitly linking the micro and macro levels of society, as it interrogates the taken for granted.

Recently, Hector Raul Solis-Gadea (2005) has reemphasized the significance of the sociological imagination, stressing the necessity to ground work in the constellation of the contemporary era and responsiveness to contemporary theoretical developments. For him,

> the new sociological imagination does not aspire to be a corpus of knowledge but, rather, grounded thinking in the service of questioning reality. It creates conjectures that are always provisional but consistently scrutinized. … [T]he new sociological imagination uses theory, history, empirical facts, logical formalization, systematic analysis, creativity, local knowledge, moral judgment and inspiration. Any element that can be useful to explain and make sense of a historical situation is part of its tool kit. (118)

Thus, Solis-Gadea calls for a sociological imagination that foregrounds creativity and imagination, while recognizing the situated, political and subjective character of the undertaking.

My dissertation applies the new sociological imagination with particular emphasis on culture. To clarify the parameters of my project and its central concerns, I outline briefly how

elements that define cultural studies shaped my work. The field emerged in the 1970s as a project that welded together humanistic, structuralist, and New Left Marxist philosophies (Hall 1980). Most fundamentally, the approach takes as a given an expansion of the concept of culture, where culture is "any expressive activity contributing to social learning" (Aggar 1992, 2). Moreover, it refuses the separation of high and low culture and thereby engages popular culture as a legitimate object of academic investigation. In the context of my project, this equality yields the assertion of an unproblematic inclusion of a great variety of museums in one analysis. For example, while some museums are professionally curated and government funded, others are amateur owned and operated one-room collections of thematised artifacts with strong nostalgic flair. The former category strives for preservation, education, and interpretation. The latter has more in common with the curiosity cabinets of the sixteenth to eighteenth century than contemporary museums of influence.

Taking up culture as a site and practice of contest and conflict over meaning further distinguishes cultural studies (Agger 1992, 9). This focus is the main organizing principle of the data collection and analysis in this project. Throughout, I am primarily interested in describing and theorizing tensions and power struggles in meaning making that emerge from variations in the interpretation of the past and the relationships that they attempt to establish with the present and future.

Interdisciplinarity also defines cultural studies, for "traditional specialized disciplines do not afford a sufficiently broad perspective on a complexly interrelated cultural life" (Aggar 1992, 17). The approach itself entails a critique of disciplinarily in that it calls for investigations that consider totality and complexity in favor of the separation of interconnected phenomena (ibid). Consequently, cultural studies projects employ whatever relevant useful theories and methods in

order to gain insights (Alasuutari 1995, 2). In other words, the methodological starting point of cultural studies is one defined by *bricolage*, that is, a pragmatic and strategic approach to collecting and analyzing data relating to lived experience, representation, and context (see Lincoln and Denzin 2003, 5). In my project, this strategy involved the deployment of a variety of data gathering strategies and analytical techniques that were responsive to emerging findings and questions while lending themselves to examining the construction of meaning in a way that highlighted contradictory and competing ideas. Moreover, this approach invited developing my own methodology, research-by-making, which involved the construction of a public exhibit, which I describe in detail in Chapter 6.

While a general orientation toward cultural studies and the sociological imagination informed the research process, I more concretely drew extensively on ethnography (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). As such, the project placed a strong emphasis on exploring the character of the socio-cultural phenomena under investigation, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them. I collected data in 'natural' settings, such as museums and coffee shops, as opposed to ones set up for research purposes. Furthermore, the work investigated a small number of cases and gathered unstructured data, which means that I did not apply previously formulated analytical categories in the collection process. The themes that this dissertation explores crystallized and transformed over time. For example, while nostalgia was initially the primary focus, attention shifted to the broader investigation of expressions of history, memory, and the contests that define them. Finally, the analysis of the data involved explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, producing detailed descriptions. Specifically, between March 2008 and June 2013 I visited 15 museums whose topic was East German everyday life. The majority of my fieldwork took place between May and July 2010 during

which I collected, constructed and analyzed the following data: (a) websites of museums, (b) museum information leaflets, (c) publically available visitor logs, (d) photographs, films and drawings of the material content and structure of the museum, (e) 16 interviews with museum visitors, employees and owners/curators/managers (f) popular and scholarly texts and audio-recordings relating to the key themes and sites, (g) notes based on participant observation, and (h) the self-curated exhibit "East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia and Everyday Life".

Ethnographic work necessitates close encounters with people, processes whereby "our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others" (Denzin 1997, 27). In the case of my dissertation this entanglement was particularly acute due to my biography. In March 1990, I immigrated to Canada from East Germany, which contributed not only to the simultaneous insider / outsider status, especially as I conducted my fieldwork but also brought with it unanticipated autobiographical elements in this research report. In the context of ethnography and qualitative research generally, one strategy for accounting for the relationship a researcher shares with the world under investigation is the application of the notion of reflexivity. Sandelowski and Barroso describe reflexivity as the

> the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge. Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share. (Sandelowski and Barroso 2002, 222)

Thus, attention to reflexivity involves awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process, and recognition of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research. Ideally, one of the outcomes of reflexivity is that readers can use the description of the ethnographer's ideas and

experiences to understand how her subjectivity shaped the research processes as well as outcomes.

The significance of tending to reflexivity in my project emerged during a museum visit in Tutow in October 2009. I had considered the extent to which research participants may consider me like and unlike them and thought of myself as an insider insofar as I spent my childhood and early youth in East Germany and also speak German. At the same time, I recognized that I am outsider because I have lived in Canada for the past twenty years and pursue academic work. This mixture of insider and outsider status provide contextual understanding and a degree of distance that I thought of as helpful and potentially productive. However, a conversation with a museum visitor undercut this naively unproblematic conceptualization of the relationship between my biography and the research topic. Trying to communicate to me how much she missed her life in East Germany and feeling that I did not quite understand, she said, "You don't know what it's like. Your parents left." I asked her to explain and she responded that I could not share her feelings for East Germany because to leave, my parents must have opposed the East German regime. Consequently, I could not be entirely sympathetic to her mourning for the past. This exchange compelled me to consider more deeply my assumptions about how participants' perception of me might shape the content of interviews and more casual conversation. In some conversations, I found myself disingenuously agreeing with interviewees in an attempt to elicit rich material, putting critical thoughts aside for analysis. At the same time, the interaction reminded me that people censor themselves and would likely not always share their true thoughts, particularly ones that were nostalgic for East Germany and negative toward contemporary realities.

Throughout the writing of the dissertation text, I sought to attend to my relationship with the process of scholarly inquiry, in part to explicitly acknowledge its subjective character. The most overt and effective strategy for inserting myself into the text explicitly was the use of first person singular and referencing my biography when relevant. More subtly, as I progressed through the work, my voice changed, which reflects my involvement in the project over the course of several years. This development is visible in the shifting tone of progressive chapters, as well as a substantive moving from discussions on foundational concepts to attending increasingly to materiality in specific places and time as well as the relationship between theory and practice.

The Museum and Everyday Life

This dissertation tends predominantly to representations of everyday life in East Germany, particularly in museal form, because they illuminate the struggle over memory and the construction of history in a highly focused way. Museums frequently interpret everyday life not in terms of banality and repetition, but rather as relating to the imagined life of imagined ordinary people and sites related to their daily routines. Thus, in addition to displays on the domestic realm, these sites also portray work, manufacturing, hobbies, sports, youth organizations, as well as institutions, such as daycares and schools. Economic and political processes and structures recede into the background, appearing as nearly unrelated to daily life. As I will discuss below, many museums articulate the everyday as non-political, which ironically stands in stark contrast to East German socialist ideology that instilled in the general public the idea that everything is political, including every facet of everyday life. The overt framing of museum displays as nonpolitical nonetheless creates a space for seemingly contradictory

subdiscourses, the politics of which social theory brings into focus. For example, Michael Gardiner (2000) points out that "everyday life evinces an irreducible imaginative and symbolic dimension, and it cannot simply be written off as the realm of the trivial and inconsequential. It is the very 'messiness' of daily life, its unsystematized and unpredictable quality, that helps it escape the reifying grip of nomothetic social science and technocratic planning" (16). Michel de Certeau (1984) similarly describes the possibility of resistance, but in terms of bureaucratic powers not always registering the presence and character of the everyday due to its inchoate fluidity and symbolically dense practices and thoughts, which render it a "'black rock' that resists assimilation" (60). In the context of East Germany, this understanding of everyday life allows for asserting a life outside of the confines of a repressive system, an idea that this dissertation considers in detail. What is at stake here is not only the possibility that East Germans negotiated a life under socialism. Daily life also presents opportunity for subversion and resistance, for as Carmello Gambacorta (1989) suggests, it entails "the most obstinate channel of the emergence of resistance, the perception of possibilities and the reawakening of the conscience" (130).

The topic of the representation of everyday life within the museum necessitates tending to the particularities of the museum, including the centrality of materiality and its pedagogic function. Moreover, museums remove objects from circulation and use in daily life, and thus from their 'candidacy' to participate as such (Appadurai 1986, 13). Connectedly, the placement of objects into the museum and disconnection from use involves a sacralizeation and a concretization of their meaning. At the same time, as Annette Weiner (1994) argues, these processes enable museal representation to act as "stabilizing forces" in social relations (9).

On a more overtly political register, contemporary work in cultural studies, art history and museum studies examines the museum as "often rife with crucial legitimating activities affirming dominant cultural and concomitant powers of state" (Wasson 2005, 70). While describing how the sites I analyze enact ruling ideas, this dissertation also challenges this perspective by highlighting how they oppose, or at least supplement, dominant ideas about the East. As Huyssen points out "no matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds ideological boundaries and opens spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory" (1995, 15). Chapter 6 in particular investigates memory contest through the application of the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia in the analysis of a temporary exhibition at the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR (DOK) [Documentation Centre for the Culture of East German Everyday Life].

The configuration of everyday life and the museum creates more than the sum of its parts. Sharon Macdonald (2013) places the musealization of everyday life in the broader European context and describes it as a response to time and space compression as well as fragmented and disembedded identity, which define the contemporary era (160). She suggests that here, the museum of everyday life must be understood as involving the "'irreducible materiality' of object fetishism" that defines our time. Macdonald writes: "The emphasis on *everyday* things (and lives) is an ultimate extension of […] 'commodity fetishism' and 'materialism,' [the] undue concentration upon superficial material things [where] everything can be *salvaged*, everything turned into a collectors' item, and all lives given recognition" (ibid.). Given these characteristics, the museum of everyday life emerges as a site that supports the construction of personal and

social identity through object-based narratives, which create a sense of belonging, historically and geographically.

History, Memory, and Materiality: A Constellation

This dissertation interrogates simultaneously three distinct but also closely connected modes of accessing the past: history, memory, and materiality. For the moment, before considering the terms with more nuance in Chapter 2, history refers to the work of historians and the kind of history that circulates more broadly as authoritative, relatively unified narrative about the past and appears in such media as school textbooks. Memory denotes culturally shared but also individuals' remembrances of the past. In my analysis, materiality most often means consumer products. Throughout the following chapters, the triad of history, memory, and materiality stand in relationship of generative tension as they articulate themselves in the context of contemporary preoccupations with the meaning of East Germany. My work places particular attention on the epistemological significance of materiality in the formation of historical consciousness, one which Lowenthal's (1985) conceptualization of relics, signifying both natural and human-made materialities, illuminates. He writes:

> Memory and history both derive and gain emphasis from physical remains. Tangible survivals provide a vivid immediacy that helps to assure us there really was a past. Physical remains have their limitations as informants, to be sure: they are themselves mute, requiring interpretations; their continual but differential erosion and demolition skews the record; and their substantial survival conjures up a past more static than could have been the case. But however depleted by time and use, relics remain essential bridges between then and now. They confirm or deny what we think of it, symbolize or memorialize communal links over time, and provide archaeological metaphors that illuminate the processes of history and memory. (Lowenthal 1985, xxiii)

Here, Lowenthal describes the tremendous power and weight materiality carries in our relationship with the past despite meaning making having to activate it; relics shape our perception and understanding of the past, for they stand as absolute proof of what was.

Patrick Wright (2009) considers the illuminative capacities of material traces in their articulation as refuse. Theorizing heritage in contemporary Great Britain, he draws on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to interrogate the history, memory, materiality triad, "in which a sense of the past is maintained in the present " (197). The novel defines history "in the archival sense – the records on which analytical understanding of past and present must depend" (ibid.). For example, the protagonist, Winston Smith, rewrites old editions of *The Times* to meet the political needs of the new regime. In parallel, in Orwell's dystopia, memory "has been brutally dislocated as its intersubjective cultural basis is destroyed" (198). However, "objects and remaining *presences*", including "old buildings" and "the cherished bits and pieces from the junk shops in the [working class] quarter" are "valued as residues of a more humane order of society" (198 - 199). More strikingly, they have "therapeutic and rehumanising power – as if a person coming into contact with such traces can be reintegrated to an extent, with memories beginning to make sense again and eternally repressed or uprooted feelings coming back to life" (199). Thus, despite *The Party's* efforts to rewrite the archive and memory rendered unintelligible by omnipresent messages that make experiences, which produced them inconceivable, material remnants of the past carry the capacity to undo these efforts.

While I do not wish to equate Orwell's superstate Oceania with contemporary Germany, it serves as a cogent, if extreme, example of the mechanisms that shape historical consciousness under many different types of regimes. For example, in post 1990 Germany archival history instead of being rewritten, has been elevated to carrier of ultimate historical truth. The files of the

Ministerium für Staatssicherheit [Ministry for State Security], or the Stasi, stand as undisputable and most important evidence of the unforgivable guilt of individuals who formally or informally spied on their fellow citizens and thus as the primary indictment of East Germany as dictatorial regime. To this day, revelations of Stasi activities, most prominently in the form of newspaper exposés, remind a united Germany of the ills of the recent socialist past. Connectedly, as this dissertation will show, dominant discourses deem positive memories of life in East as remembering incorrectly or incompletely, reducing them to nostalgic revelry. In this environment of irrefutable and condemning archival history, and the implication of false memory, objects, in many cases ones that have been discarded, are assigned the task both of underlining and countering the messages of these modes of accessing the past.

2. Conceptual Frameworks: History, Memory, and Heritage

This chapter outlines and critically reflects on scholarly debates on history, memory, and their relationship. It isolates theoretical discussions that underlie analyses in subsequent chapters as it situates contemporary cultural practices engaging East Germany within a broader cultural and theoretical context. Here I propose the concept "past mobilizing" to address some of the conceptual challenges that the terms history, memory, and heritage pose. "Past mobilizing" conveys the processual social construction of the past through a broad range of phenomena and practices, which can operate at the level of individuals and groups who share a past. Moreover, the term encompasses both popular and high culture, while also including subversive and dominant uses of the past.

> *I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on.*
>
> Winfried Georg Sebald[iii]

The starting point of this chapter is the proposition that we live in an era that obsesses with the past. In his tracing of the historian's craft, Geoff Eley notes that "for historians … 'history and memory' has become an *idée fixe* of the discipline. But that interest massively exceeds any professionalized discourse, saturating large sectors of entertainment, popular reading, commercial exchange, and many other parts of the public culture." (149). The representation of East Germany almost one quarter of a century after the nation's collapse illuminates theorizing and everyday practices relating to this obsession. Here, I trace the scholarly attempts to decipher our relationship with the past, focusing on those that interrogate the concepts history, memory, and heritage. This exploration situates contemporary cultural practices engaging East Germany within a broader cultural and theoretical context while providing a foundation for the themes that weave themselves through the entire dissertation. Moreover, the chapter clarifies what is at stake and what processes are at work in efforts to apprehend, understand, and shape the past. Sharon Macdonald (2013) describes her recent project *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* as "an addition to the memory mountain; or, more specifically, to that part of it concerned with trying to understand the memory preoccupation itself" (1). This project contributes to the same mountain, albeit with a more political lens as it focuses on contests over the content and meaning of the German socialist past.

I begin this chapter with a description of a central analytical movement, albeit not a unified or complete one, from history to memory in postmodernity in the scholarly literature. It includes a theoretically informed description of the shift, examples of its articulations, and an exploration of deeper reasons for its occurrence. In the second part, I turn to more concrete explorations of the relationship between history and memory to identify useful conceptualizations for my overall project. Here, I examine dissimilarities, overlaps, and reciprocities, concluding that in my empirical context the latter is the most relevant understanding. I also point to factors that constrain moving forward in the debate and propose the terms heritage, past presencing, and past mobilizing as alternative frameworks.

From History to Memory

Much of the scholarly literature on the relationship between the then and now as it expresses itself in contemporary cultural practices identifies a crisis in how we connect to the past (Huyssen 1999, 2003; Lowenthal 1985; Nora 1989). It characterizes the contemporary era as defined simultaneously by an obsession with, and a loss of, an awareness of what has come before the present moment. Connectedly, many recent contributions to the memory literature assume that the significance of the past, and with it the relationship between history and memory, has changed dramatically in the transition from pre-modernity to (post)modernity. In this context, I begin my analysis of the relationship between history and memory by elaborating on the nature of this shift, one that most consistently pertains to a turn toward memory.

At the broadest theoretical level, a heightened interest in memory emerged as part of recent transformations in ontological and epistemological orientations, or the paradigmatic turn towards postmodernity. This transformation includes a suspicion of grand explanatory narratives,

a questioning of singular truths, the rejection of traditional authority, and the decentering of the subject. More concrete changes associated with this increased interest in memory consist of the rise of multiculturalism, the fall of communism, and decolonization (Olick and Robbins 1998, 107; Klein 2000, 143).

A looking backward rather than toward what is to come as a framework for understanding signifies this break with the preceding period. In Huyssen's words,

> [o]ne of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity. (Huyssen 2003, 11)

This temporal reorientation is evident in the popularity of autobiography and amateur genealogical research, as well as in the proliferation of memorials, monuments, and museums in many parts of the world. As Sharon Macdonald (2013) puts it, "Europe's land- and city-scapes have filled up with the products of collective memory work … to remind us of histories that might otherwise be lost" (1). In Germany, this looking to the past has been particularly pronounced, most visibly in its capital city, where the ubiquity of material reminders of the Third Reich and the country's socialist past in public spaces in such forms as memorials and monuments stand as testament to a collective preoccupation to critically appraise the past, or engage in what Germans describe as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the process of coming to terms with the past (see Till 2005).

The operation and deployment of the past in postmodernity is paradoxical in that two modes of accessing the past emerge in juxtaposition to one another. Huyssen (1995) describes this transformation as "[t]he undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness, the lament about political, social and cultural amnesia and the various discourse, celebratory or apocalyptic, about posthistoire have been seen accompanied in the past decade and a half by a

memory boom of unprecedented proportions" (Huyssen 1995, 5). Pierre Nora (1989) juxtaposes memory and history similarly, although a reversal of order takes place; history transplants real memory. Nora understands memory as holistic and organic. In contrast, history is a representation and reconstruction of the past. Nora situates real memory in the distant past and modern memory as consisting only of historical traces. It is these traces that embody the shift from how memory operated long ago to modern memory. With the onset of the dominance of history, *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memories), out of which memory arises spontaneously, can no longer be sustained. Consequently, memory needs to be artificially created, fixed, and represented in the form of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), which are material, symbolic and functional at the same time. Nora characterizes evocatively the nature of these sites of memory as "moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (Nora 1989, 12).

One of the most compelling explanations for understanding the increased significance of memory and waning of historical consciousness is as a response to changes in the structures of temporality. Huyssen (1995) argues that the time compression that characterizes (post)modernity brought about a turn toward memory in an effort to reduce the speed at which time appears to pass. The obsession with memory

> represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload. (Huyssen 1995, 7)

This seeking to counteract current temporal structures has an affective dimension, which takes the form of fear of the future and anxiety in the present. Thus, Huyssen interprets the

proliferation of museums and memorials as evidence of "the fear of some imminent traumatic loss" (Huyssen 1995, 5). Lowenthal, articulating a similar affective dimension, albeit in a slightly different tone, writes: "The rage to preserve is in part a reaction to anxieties generated by modernist amnesia. We preserve because the pace of change and development has attenuated a legacy integral to our identity and well-being" (Lowenthal 1985, xxiv). In other words, what underlies the turn towards memory away from history is the urge to establish a sense of continuity and order.

Considering this impulse, Huyssen proposes that what is sought is not the comfort of the stability and apparent permanence of the past. For him, the "issue is rather the attempt, as we face the very real processes of time-space compression, to secure some continuity within time, to provide some extension of lived space within which we can breath and move" (Huyssen 2003, 24). Here, the turn to memory transforms into a pushing back and a making space for the expression of agency. "The memory boom … is a potentially healthy sign of contestation: a contestation of the informational hyperspace and an expression of the basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality, however they may be organized" (Huyssen 1995, 9). This conceptualization of the turn toward memory thus transforms into a critique, one that entails optimism and hopefulness that is absent in much of the memory literature.

In *Urban Palimpsests* (2003), Huyssen extends this theme of contestation as he engages more explicitly the politics of memory studies. In the context of imagining a more just and equitable world, he calls for a reorientation towards the future, albeit one that does not forget the past. For him, "[i]t just will not do to replace the twentieth century's obsessions with the future with our newly found obsessions with the past. We need both past and future to articulate our political, social, and cultural dissatisfactions with the present state of the world" (Huyssen 2003,

6). From this perspective, the material for political consciousness today lies in understanding the past and having a progressive vision of the future.

History/Memory: Divergences

The discussion thus far has left unexamined two central terms: history and memory. The Oxford Dictionary defines memory as "the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information" and "something remembered from the past" and history as "a continuous, typically chronological, record of important or public events or of a particular trend or institution." Here, these modes of accessing the past appear as distinct and separate; memory rests in the domain of individuals while history refers to linear and institutionalized modes of engaging the past. However, in everyday use and scholarly discussion the meanings of the terms range from signifying vastly different phenomena to denoting the very same ideas and practices. Some scholars elaborate extensively on the difference between history and memory and/or similarity, while others use them synonymously or combine them in a single term. Historical tracings of the uses of the words reveal initial great propinquity, followed by a divergence and a more recent increasing proximity (Kansteiner 2002; Misztal 2003; Olick and Robbins 1998). To highlight the central arguments in the two positions, I examine briefly key elements of the debate, beginning with the assumption of a fundamental dichotomy between history and memory.

In *On Collective Memory* ([1941] 1992), the first sociological treatise on memory, Maurice Halbwachs not only de-psychologizes memory but he also presents collective memory and history as contrasting ways of approaching the past. In his analysis, "[h]istory is dead memory, a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an 'organic' experiential relation" (Halbwachs in Olick and Robbinson 1998, 110). Thus, history starts when social

memory and tradition cease to operate and dissolve. Moreover, history is scholarship and as such the domain the very few, while the collective memory of the past is shared by entire communities. Halbwachs goes on to argue that there is only one history, but there are as many collective memories as there are human communities.

Similarly, Pierre Nora (1989) argues in his study of *les lieux de mémoire* that memory and history operate entirely differently; "[m]emory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition" (8). They emerge as diametrically opposed, one being part of the domain of the living and the other as dead: "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. ... History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (8). Nora goes on to describe "the terrorism of historicized memory" which today leaves no room for a positive interpretation of history (14).

Less emphatically, yet arguing in support of the same point, Allan Megill (1998) expresses concern over "the troublesome tendency in our time – deriving from memory's valorization – […] to eliminate history in favor of memory, [and] even worse, to identify history with memory" (Megill 1998, 56). Subsequently, he reemphasized the need to distinguish between history and memory, suggesting that there "remains a boundary between history and memory that one can cross from time to time but that one cannot, and should not wish to, eliminate" (ibid). For Mehill, the boundary acknowledges the degree to which memory and history pertain to actual pasts and the impact this difference has on reliability and truthfulness.

History/Memory: Proximities

The differences between history and memory as Halbwachs, Nora, and Megill describe them are not representative of the dominant views in the contemporary literature. More

frequently, scholars point instead to how much they share, of which the work of Ross Poole (2008) and David Lowenthal (1985) are examples. Both describe differences and overlaps in history and memory, preliminarily proposing that they diverge in the kind of knowledge they embody. However, they conclude that even this difference can be conceptualized as a similarity. Lowenthal writes:

> History and memory are distinguishable less as types of knowledge than in attitudes toward that knowledge. Not only original memories but all the history they include is normally taken as given and true; not only historical but memorial sources are on occasion scrutinized for their accuracy and empirical validity. (1985, 213)

Here, Lowenthal (1985) first states that memory and history have different epistemological statuses. However, he reverses this statement by positing that neither is immune from questions about their veracity.

Poole (2008) follows precisely the same rhetorical movement as Lowenthal (1985), first identifying difference on epistemological grounds and then renouncing the very same.

> [T]he difference between memory and history is not so much its content, but it perspective: what distinguishes memory from its historical analogue is its first-person character. If the goal of history is that it be written in the third person, memory is always written in the first person. Just as an individual memory is 'my' story, or perhaps it is 'yours', a collective memory is 'our' story, or perhaps it is 'theirs'. (158-159)

Poole overturns this juxtaposition of first and third person accounts by considering how history operates in the non-academic realm, pointing out that "[i]n its academic existence, [history] often strives to speak in the third person and to achieve a certain value neutrality. In its public role, however, it adopts the first person, and cannot escape the values and commitments implicit in this identification" (Poole 2008, 161).

At the center of Lowental's and Pool's arguments lies the insight that both history and memory are socially constructed; neither can overcome the limitations of being the product of meaning-making or having been mediated. They recognize, as Gillian Pye (2008) articulates, that

“history is composed of the remains of a once more complete body of evidence: it is necessarily reductive, compressed and imbued with loss” (263). This insight leads to an overlapping of history and memory. For example, conceptualizing both as socially constructed, Kansteiner proposes “history should be more appropriately defined as a particular type of cultural memory” (Kansteiner 2002, 184). Writing four decades earlier, C. Wright Mills (1959) similarly describes history as articulation of memory on the basis of the effect of social construction.

> The historian represents the organized memory of mankind, and that memory, as written history, is enormously malleable. It changes, often quite drastically, from one generation of historians to another – and not merely because more detailed research later introduces new facts and documents into the record. It changes also because of changes in the points of interest and the current framework within which the record is built. These are the criteria of selection from the innumerable facts available, and at the same time the leading interpretations of their meaning. The historian cannot avoid making a selection of facts, although he may attempt to disclaim it by keeping his interpretations slim and circumspect. (144 -145)

The historian Peter Burke (1989) echoes this understanding, stating “neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases we are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases this selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned" (98). In this perspective, history and memory appear as the same.

Yet simply maintaining that like memory, history is constructed erases nuance from the debate, of which Rüsen, who is unwilling to present history simply a social artifact, reminds us.

> Those who work on the meaning of the past called history, whose interpretations give the past a specifically historical meaning, are determined and conditioned by the circumstances of their work, which in turn are results of past developments. … Thus history is always more than only the past. It is a relationship between past and present, that has a realistic nature as a temporal chain of conditions and at the same time and ‘idealistic’ or symbolic nature as an interpretation that bears meaning for the purposes of cultural orientation and charges it with norms and values, hopes and fears. (Rüsen 2008, 1-3)

In addition to considering that conceptualizations of the past rely at least in part on the idea that something did or did not occur, a recognition of the differences between history and memory allows for the consideration of their relationship, which generates further possibilities for analytical depth in the study of modes of accessing the past. Although arguing firmly for the distinct character of history and memory, Megill (1998) describes history as corrective to memory, for "[t]he claims that memory makes are only *possibly* true. In its demand for proof, history stands in sharp opposition to memory. History reminds memory of the need for evidence coming both from eye-witnesses (autopsy) and from material remains" (56-57). Here, memory appears as the weaker mode, which is not the case in other articulations.

For example, Paul Ricoeur (2008) conceptualizes the relationship between history and memory as one shaping the other, albeit not equally. He establishes the following tri-elemental configuration:

> First, memory establishes the meaning of the past. Second, history introduces a critical dimension into our dealings with the past. Third and finally, the insight by which history from this point onward enriches memory is imposed on the anticipated future through the dialectic between memory's space of experience and the horizion of expectation. (10)

Alaida Assmann (2007) articulates a more equal relationship between history and memory, one in which each mode of engaging the past brings with it its own limitations. One of these limitations relates to the material with which to construct narratives. Specifically, "the positivistic writing of history reaches its boundaries where its sources turn silent"[iv] (Assmann 2007, 47). Given that more sources exist than the ones historians traditionally draw upon, Assmann ascribes to history and memory different yet complementary roles:

> Our present situation is not defined by the omnipotence of history or memory, but rather by the complexity of the proximity of two competing, reciprocally correcting and complementing forms of reference to the past. In the interrogation of the past, we must access all capacities, memorial and moral, that connect history and memory, in addition

> to the critical capacity that each demands from the other, especially in the case of the traumatic past. (51)[v]

Here, Assmann's articulation of a reciprocal relationship signals a productive moving towards such theorizing, one that places history and memory into a reciprocally correcting dialogue. History and memory not only rely on one another, but rather, they can only function in reference to one another. On one hand, historical research depends on memory for meaning and as its moral compass. On the other hand, memory relies on historical research for verification and correction of factual errors.

Conceptual Challenges

A conscientious and complex response to the question of the relationship between history and memory requires from the onset an elaboration of the meaning of both individual terms. Yet, one of the greatest critiques is that this area of inquiry lacks conceptual clarity that would support such an undertaking. For example, Zelizer (1995) and Kantsteiner (2002) point out that collective memory has not been sufficiently distinguished from individual memory. This critique does not mean that new terms have not been conceptualized, for several such attempts have already been made, including in the work of Jan Assman (1992), Aleida Assman (2007), and Wulf Kansteiner (2002), which offer a language that allows for more precision when analyzing memory. They theorize such concepts as communicative, cultural, social, and material memory.

In addition to conceptual rigor, the issue of the broader theoretical language used to write about memory arises. For example, Huyssen opposes the overemphasis of trauma because it "would unduly confine our understating of memory, marking it too exclusively in terms of pain, suffering, and loss. It would deny human agency and lock us into compulsive repetition" (2004, 8). Kerwin Klein (2008) traces the academic and popular use and understanding of the term

memory and calls for a more nuanced and critical awareness of the discursive shift toward memory. He is concerned with the political tone that has emerged with the change in the linguistic practice he identifies. More specifically, Klein argues that the quasi-religious and conservative tone underlying the use is not taken into consideration consciously. He objects in particular to psychoanalytic terminology such as witnessing, testimony, piety, and ritual that according to him have "strong theological resonances" and establish a "therapeutic discourse" (Klein 2000, 141).

Returning to Huyssen, a final critique I wish to point to is farther reaching than terminology in that it relates to broader politics of the debates on history and memory, which lie in the possibilities for imagining a more just and equitable future. Formulating this potentiality, Huyssen calls upon his colleagues "to discriminate among memory practices in order to strengthen those that counteract the tendencies in our culture to foster uncreative forgetting, the bliss of amnesia, and what the German philosopher Peter Slterdijk once called 'enlightened false consciousness'" (Huyssen 2003, 10).

Heritage, Past Presencing, and Past Mobilizing

While lingering with the nuances of the concepts of history and memory illuminates how they operate and highlights their complexity, it can also obstruct a movement from the theoretical and abstract to the concrete and empirical. A strategy for circumventing conceptual challenges may thus lie in a shift of terminology. Here, I propose heritage, past presencing, and past mobilizing as alternative categories for attending to the nuances of historical consciousness within the context of the representation of East Germany. Heritage in particular appears to lend itself to investigation, most notably in its museal form. The many small, private and amateur

museums dedicated to everyday life in the GDR in particular share similarities with the countless European regional museums displaying the artifacts of a just-bygone or just-about-to-disappear era that collect and display artifacts of daily domestic and workplace existence, which fall under the category of heritage museum, at least in the British context.

However, for several reasons, heritage is an uneasy fit. First, the term does not work well in German. The closest phrase *Erbe* or *Erbschaft* translates back to inheritance, which implies the passing on of some*thing,* thereby emphasizing the material or monetary, both at the social and individual level, rather than fully taking into account the dimensions of tradition, culture and broadly shared ways of life. Furthermore, as Macdonald points out, in the specific instance of heritage developments, the term *Denkmal* [monument], is used in German, which emphasizes "material and public heritage" (2013, 18). Consequently, scholarly discussions on German heritage in English often use the term in the narrow sense of cultural heritage in the form of tourism sites (see Hausmann 2007) or do not tend to the linguistic specificities and their repercussions (see Eidson 2005). A more general factor that undermines the relevance of "heritage" relates to Germany's controversial and difficult history in the twentieth century, which begs the question: What is German heritage?

Despite the challenges it poses, 'heritage' as an analytical category does hold illuminative potential. It subsumes history and memory but is farther reaching, thereby broadening the discussion of how the past articulates itself in the present. At the same time, 'heritage' provokes a different kind of analysis, for the concept brings into relief a constellation of themes that distinguishes it from discourses on memory and history, in part because, as Sharon Macdonald points out, it "directs attention to *materiality, durability* over time and *value*" (Macdonald 2013, 17 [emphases added]). As I pointed out in the introduction, materialities bridge the then and now.

"They confirm or deny what we think of [the past], symbolize or memorialize communal links over time" (Lowenthal 1985, xxiii). The focus on consumer goods in today's engagements with East Germany underlines this point. In the more specific context of amateur museums the presence of few interpretive texts and the abundance of artifacts are suggestive of an insistence that the past did indeed exist.

A sense of continuity and permanence in conjunction with aspects of the past being deemed worthy of being carried forward calls for a consideration of its normative dimension that entails a positive appraisal. As Lowenthal points out, heritage is not like history; "it is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it … , a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes" (Lowenthal, 1997, x).Thus, the lens of heritage highlights how the past serves the present, which implies its contructedness, and in turn points to the existence of struggle over how it should be composed. In Rodney Harrison's words, heritage is a "dynamic process which involves competition over whose version of the past … will find official representation in the present" (Harrison 2010, 8). Here, 'official representation' references all the ways in which political powers define heritage, most notably though access to public funding.

A more critical reading of this characteristic regards heritage as reduced and pacified history, a form of entertainment. For example, Patrick Wright (2009) proposes that in heritage, "[a]bstracted and redeployed, history seems to be purged of political tension; it becomes a unifying spectacle, the settling of all disputes" (65). Thus, heritage, even more than history and memory, overtly calls for a critical analysis, which the differentiation between official and unofficial heritage supports. The former refers to the "largely 'top-down' approach to the classification and promotion of particular places by the state as an embodiment of regional, national or international values" (Harrison 2010, 8). The latter entails the "'bottom-up'

relationship between people, objects, places and memories … (usually) at the local level" (ibid.). Critical Heritage Studies positions itself at the intersection of the two as the field investigates the struggle over what is carried forward in time that unfolds between official and unofficial heritage. My dissertation could be interpreted as a critical heritage project, for it investigates the representation of East Germany from the perspective of the different interests of various publics and locations. At the same time, I emphasize small-scale, local efforts, which pursue a kind of bottom-up, unofficial heritage or practice heritage as popular culture as they attempt insert themselves into dominant discourse to construct a more complete past. As Raphael Samuel (1994) proposes, heritage does involve potentially democratic and social practices, which carry the possibility to promote change. Reflecting on contemporary British heritage projects, he writes:

> a new attention is now lavished on life 'below the stairs' …. Family history societies, practicing do-it-yourself scholarship and filling the record offices and the local history library with searchers, have democratized genealogy, treating apprenticeship indentures as a symbolic equivalent of the coat of arms, baptismal certificates as that of title deeds. They encourage people to look down rather than up in reconstituting their roots, 'not to establish links with the noble and great. (160)

The investigation into how some sites might democratize heritage benefits from the literature's distinction between tangible and the intangible heritage. Here, tangible refers to touchable materialities, such as physical objects, buildings, artworks, and landscapes. In contrast, intangible heritage describes practices that people pass on through generations, including language, song, stories, food preparation, and rituals. Although this separation is analytically helpful it is also artificial. Thus, the terms call for an interrogation of their relationship because as Harrison (2010) points out "[f]or every object of tangible heritage there is also an intangible heritage that wraps around it" (10). Applied to my project, the significance of the abundance of tangible traces in the form of East German consumer products and other types of material culture

lies in their power to evoke intangible aspects of the past, such as ways in which people related to one another and negotiated an oppressive system. At the same time, I explore how the contemporary political climate, the unavailability of required resources in the case of amateur museums, as well as the untellability of aspects of the past shape the meaning of these intangibilities. This focus also raises questions about what happens when the intangible is not articulated in words and only the material traces of the past remain as individual memories fade.

However, given the difficulties that arise with the use of heritage, I briefly introduce an alternative concept or at least one that could serve as a summative term. Sharon Macdonald (2012) coins the phrase "past presencing" to overcome the limitations of the terms history, memory and heritage, both in their scholarly and everyday uses. She describes the notion as being "concerned with the ways in which people variously draw on experience, negotiate, reconstruct, and perform the past in their ongoing lives" (234). Here, "past presencing" accounts for a wider ranging set of practices than those implicated in discourses that focus on history and memory, while highlighting the role that the present plays in constructing the past. Moreover, according to Macdonald, the term avoids the dilemma of the 'analytic double-take', where those being studied use the same language as that being used to frame analysis. The differentiation, so Macdonald, not only challenges the research process, but also raises "questions about concepts and models that might otherwise be taken for granted" (ibid).

While "past presencing" overcomes some of the constraints of the concepts history, memory, and heritage, in large part by subsuming them, it also brings with it new difficulties. For example, the term suggests a neutrality that undermines the political character of constructing the past, a dimension that is particularly pertinent in the context of cultural practices that engage East German everyday life. It evokes a past that is brought to the present with little

sense of agency, purpose, or tension for, as MacDonald admits herself, the term is presentist (2013, 16). "Past presencing" examines the historical from the vantage point of the present, seemingly rendering the future irrelevant.

To address the limitations of "past presencing," I propose a modification of the term: "past mobilizing." Parallel to MacDonald's neologism, this phrase conveys the processual social construction of the past through a broad range of phenomena and practices. Moreover, "past presencing" and "past mobilizing" can operate at the level of individuals and groups who share a past, encompass both popular and high culture, while also including subversive and dominant uses of the past. The modification of the second part of the phrase, however, removes emphasis on the present, while signaling political processes and practices as it signifies activation for a purpose and suggests future directed practices. It denotes a deciphering of contemporary narratings of the past that includes their political intent, which always implicates what is to come, even if this orientation is implicit; they contains hopes, aspirations and dreams of the good life, for individuals and collectivities.

This dissertation describes "past mobilizing" of individuals and institutions to signify a wide range of active making use of the past in pursuit of various goals that have relevance beyond the present. Like "past presencing," "past mobilizing" sidesteps the conceptual muddiness of theorizing on history and memory, but in turn distances itself from a rich literature and the specificities of each term. Thus, I employ "past mobilizing" when distinctions between history and memory fail to be fruitful and when I refer to cultural practices that engage the past but do not seem to fit comfortably with either term. However, the concepts history and memory continue to be relevant, in great part due to their ubiquity in scholarly and popular analyses, everyday use, as well as their usefulness in specifying particular types of dealings with the past.

Contemporary representations of East Germany articulate a heightened struggle over how to remember the past; they are exceptional examples of what Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove (2006) call memory contests, practices that "set the personal and the historical, the private and the public, fact and imagination in dialogue with one another" (6). Here, Fuchs and Cosgrove juxtapose "personal memories of eyewitnesses that are passed down in family legends [that] are highly malleable and subject to multiple practices of editing and historical revisionism" with historiography, which "emphasizes structural or functional perspective on history that takes little interest in personal life stories" (ibid). While, as in this case, in some scholarly texts and everyday speech the terms history and memory evoke different modes of accessing the past, the contemporary cultural practices relating to East Germany, such as the ones that I investigate in the next chapters, disrupts these boundaries. As I have indicated above, this blurring corresponds to recent theorizing in the academic literature. However, the bleeding into one another does not mean that the terms are dispensable. Instead, I would like to suggest that they provoke a nuanced investigation into the contemporary uses of the past. Thus, rather than pinpointing precisely how they function similarly or in opposing ways, or theorizing each in detail, I pursue in my project an investigation into how discourses with the label history and memory emerge as hegemonic, what political implications they have in the present, and how groups and individuals disrupt them through material past mobilizing.

The central concern of this dissertation is the role that material culture plays in establishing relationships with the past, be they described as relating to history or memory. As Andreas Huyssen points out, "[t]the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory" (Huyssen 1995, 2). While arguing that embodied remembering is one of the

ways in which the past renders itself present, Hannah Arendt ([1958] 1998) specifies this articulation in terms of materialization:

> The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfillment and which makes it, … the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been. The materialization they have to undergo in order to remain in the world at all is paid for in that always the 'dead letter' replaces something which grew out of and for a fleeting moment indeed existed as the 'living spirit.' They must pay this price because they themselves are of an entirely unworldly nature and therefore need the help of an activity of an altogether different nature; they depend for their reality and materialization upon the same workmanship that build the other things in the human artifice. (96)

The relationship that unfolds here is one that requires human bodies who remember and create physical forms to remind themselves and generations to come of what they remember. The latter, however, must always be imperfect because it involves a translation from one ontological mode into another, which comes with the cost of abstraction, and thus a reduction in complexity and elimination of completeness.

Benjamin (1969) proposes a further perspective on how we encounter and carry forward the past. According to him we come to know aspects of the past through use today when we realize that it has relevance for us. He writes: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. … For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). Here, what lies behind us is only with us if we connect it to that which meaningful to us now.

The museum renders the imperfections that Arendt identifies highly visible, despite being conventionally understood as the maker and displayer of objective history. Yet they also are involved in more subjective-seeming processes, for as Beier-de Haan points out "historical

exhibitions are not only compelling because they compensate for uncertainty, they serve at the same time to restore memory" (Beier-de Haan 2006). This restoring of memory that unfolds at museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany may occur like the flashes Benjamin describes as former East Germans encounter objects that once were part of their everyday lives, for the character of those lives have been fundamentally altered. Gerd Kuhn and Andreas Ludwig's (1997) designation of such museums as social memory supports this interpretation. For them,

> [t]he everyday life perspective opens up new thematic possibilities beyond the viewpoint of domination related history. The function of the museum as social memory is the consequence of this perspectival change and may at the same time be a corrective to other sites of memory that orient themselves toward domination.[vi] (22)

Significant here is the possibility of supplementing and supplanting ruling ideas about the past.

Before turning to museums in Chapter 4, the following chapter interrogates a single object, a coffee mug that I purchased at a Berlin souvenir shop, to describe the relationship between things and stories about the past. This discussion provides the foundation for the remainder of the dissertation as it describes political and cultural contexts and problematizes *Ostalgie*, the seeming romanticized longings for the East German past, both from the perspective of scholarly and everyday understandings.

3. "Not Everything was Good, but Many Things were Better": Nostalgia for East Germany and Its Politics

This chapter places at the centre of investigation a single, seemingly banal cultural product, a ceramic coffee mug. Oscillating between the material, theoretical and autobiographical, it investigates past mobilizing that points to both simultaneity and plurality of meanings of nostalgic practices. The analysis demonstrates the capacity of nostalgia to offer an alternative, affective reading of history and a consequently constraining or liberating vision of the future. The chapter considers what remains after historical rupture and asks how Ostalgie *as cultural practice complicates historicizations of the former DDR. In addition to outlining the forms that* Ostalgie *takes, this chapter has two further goals. It highlights the politics of this contemporary form of nostalgia, both in its practice and scholarly analysis. Furthermore, it troubles the future-oriented claims* Ostalgie *and other historicizing discourses make. A study of* Ostalgie *that takes into consideration its relationship to other narratives constructing what kind of a place East Germany was offers possibilities for nuanced understandings of the politics of nostalgia.*

Prologue

During a recent trip to Berlin, I wandered through the shops of Alexanderplatz in search of objects invoking the East German past. This square, once the symbolic centre of the German Democratic Republic, is tied inextricably to one of the most vivid memories of my East German childhood. It was early in 1990, and I was about to begin a new life with my family in Canada. My grade eight class was in Berlin on *Jugendweihefahrt*, a trip we took as part of a secular rite of passage celebrating our transition into adulthood. Before returning to our hometown, we visited Alexanderplatz with its soaring Fernsehturm (Television Tower) and futuristic Weltuhr (World Clock), and the nearby Rote Rathaus (Red City Hall). My classmates and I knew with certainty that this place embodied our nation's technological superiority, worldliness, and commitment to socialism, a socialism that, ironically, was crumbling into non-existence at that very moment. I remember distinctly our excitement when we spotted a vendor who was selling Coca-Cola at the base of the television tower. Many of my classmates spent a significant portion of their allowance on their very first can of Coca-Cola, a drink most of them knew only from western television and magazine ads. Eighteen years later, again at the base of the television tower, I entered a souvenir shop looking for items that would help me think about what ideas about the East circulate in today's Germany. What I found was a coffee mug, a mug so kitschy that I was a little embarrassed to buy it (see Figure 2). Large red letters on the rim of the mug read "*Ostalgie*," "In

Figure 2: Ostalgie Mug

memory of East Germany," and "Not everything was good, but many things were better." Eleven cartoon images "memorialize" lost facets of East German life. This chapter explores why and how this mug matters.

In the aftermath of the collapse of socialism in Europe, nostalgic framings of the recent past emerged unexpectedly. In Russia, Poland, the nations of the former Yugoslavia, and other countries, cultural practices appeared that dwelled on ostensibly positive aspects of everyday life under socialism. In this chapter, I examine this phenomenon's German variant, *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East). Broadly, *Ostalgie* is the preoccupation with unique facets of the former German Democratic Republic (DDR). It consists of such diverse articulations as the popularity of consumer goods that mimic those that were available in the DDR, television variety programs exploring the nation's oddities, and the "museumification" of East German everyday life. Cultural analyses[vii] place the origin of *Ostalgie* in a collective sense of loss and dislocation that resulted from the unequal merging of two cultures (e.g., Bach 2002; Berdahl 2005; Betts 2000; Blum 2000; Boyer 2006; Cooke 2004a; Cooke 2004b). These works explore the ways in which *Ostalgie* entails counter-hegemonic practices that give voice to aspects of the East German past that dominant discourses fail or refuse to address.

In addition to outlining the forms that *Ostalgie* takes, this chapter pursues two further goals. I highlight the politics of this contemporary form of nostalgia, both in its practice and scholarly analysis. Furthermore, I am concerned with the future-oriented claims *Ostalgie* and other historicizing discourses make. A study of *Ostalgie* that takes into consideration its relationship to other narratives constructing what kind of a place East Germany was offers possibilities for nuanced understandings of the politics of nostalgia.

This chapter has three parts. I begin with descriptions of ostalgic practices and products. In addition, I conduct a cursory reading of a self-designated nostalgic object; I consider an *Ostalgie* coffee mug's form and content and relate its messages to cultural and socio-economic changes that the unification of Germany brought with it. The mug serves as a departure point for the analysis that follows, while also grounding it. Throughout the text, I return to this object to illustrate my developing argument. I do so sparingly and hesitantly, however, because I do not wish to propose that the mug can stand in for *Ostalgie* in all its variation. I would merely like to suggest that this example of ostalgic material culture hints at the contradictions, complexities, and political character of the practice.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn from describing to theorizing *Ostalgie* in an effort to make explicit the practice's politics. I begin with the possibilities and difficulties that arise when conceptualizing *Ostalgie* as nostalgia. How socio-economic relations of power shape *Ostalgie* becomes increasingly clear in reflections on why it articulates itself primarily through consumer goods. In turn, the purchasing of things and its interpretation as authentic and subversive practice pose questions about the political limitations of consumption as resistance.

The third part of the chapter concludes that today, more than two decades after the unification of Germany, understandings of *Ostalgie* must situate themselves within the context of other narratives about the East German past, especially as they relate to mythologizing the contemporary German nation.

Articulations of *Ostalgie*

A single definition of *Ostalgie* is difficult to formulate because it entails numerous practices and products that have changed over time. In addition, although the academic literature

offers extensive descriptions, it does not provide clear boundaries of the phenomenon. Thus, I begin with examples of *Ostalgie* and subsequently focus on one specific material expression.

The rise of *Ostalgie* included the dramatic increase in the availability of consumer products packaged to look like those that were available in the GDR (see Figure 3). Ironically, many former East Germans preferred the one type of laundry detergent or lemonade that mimicked the product once produced by the centrally planned socialist economy to the many western product alternatives available on store shelves. In related occurrences, the German entertainment industry began making films and television programs that focused on the peculiarities of East Germany and its citizens. One example is the internationally acclaimed film Good Bye, Lenin! (2002), in which a son recreates the former East Germany for his mother who had been in a coma during the collapse of the GDR (see Finger 2005). Every major television network produced an *Ostalgie* show, usually hosted or co-hosted by an East German, demonstrating the various ways in which the GDR was a different, laughable, and backward place.

Figure 3: Replicas of East German Candy

Ostalgie also has an experiential component. For example, many of the DDR or *Ostalgie* museums invite guests to relive the East by walking into a typical kitchen, living room, or bathroom (see Scribner 2000) (see Figure 4). Visitors can open drawers to touch everyday consumer goods and sit on sofas, imagining themselves as East Germans. The Berlin *Ostel* hotel offers GDR theme rooms, a store carrying *Ostprodukte* (products of the East), and an in-house gallery exhibiting East German art (see Rethmann 2009). Meals that have disappeared from other restaurants can be ordered at the Berlin *Mauerblümchen* (Wallflower) pub. For those visitors of the capital city who are interested in its recent history, the Berlin Tourism website (2008) suggests they take *Ostalgie* tours, claiming that this activity will "show both sides," "the difficult historical discussion and the (n)ostalgic mood." Even the hobby of belonging to Trabant car clubs cannot escape the *Ostalgie* label. Rituals such as *Jugenweihe*, the rite of passage marking transition from childhood to adulthood, are also entangled with the notion of romanticizing the East.

Figure 4: East German Lavaratory. DDR Museum, Berlin

Ostalgie products that I have received or purchased include chocolates wrapped in East German–like currency, a Trabant toy car, jars of pickles made in the Spreewald, and the children's musical instrument Triola. While some of the examples of *Ostalgie* I have listed here and ones I have described above may seem banal to the uninitiated and meaningless outside the

context of direct experience, combined they raise the question of why the same term labels so easily such a variety of objects and practices. The fact that *Ostalgie* expresses itself with great diversity, or conversely, that the phrase is so broadly applicable, begins to hint at the phenomenon's politics. This observation raises questions about the significance of naming cultural practices nostalgia, a type of affect that from a quotidian perspective refers to a romanticizing and consequently historically falsifying backward gaze in time. In an effort to respond to these questions and thereby render the underlying politics of nostalgia more apparent, I offer the following reading of the ostalgic mug. In the absence of definitions, this cursory reading also offers a deeper consideration of what *Ostalgie* entails in terms of cultural practice.

Three quasi-headlines title the mug: "*Ostalgie*," "Not everything was good, but many things were better," and "In memory of the DDR." Equally as prominent as these texts are a portrait of Karl Marx and the GDR flag's emblem composed of a hammer, a sickle, and a wreath of wheat. Combined, these words and images guide the reading of the remainder of the surface; the mug addresses itself to its reader as an obituary to an Arcadia, albeit a slightly imperfect one, a time and place when life was easier and more fulfilling than it is now.

On the outside the mug features ten caricatures illustrating written statements that represent ostensibly no longer existing facets of GDR life. The majority of the messages indicate economic security and well-being. "Affordable rents" and "Coffee or beer for 50 Pfennig once again" point directly to a low cost of living. Along with the statement "Work and post-secondary education for everyone," the mug also proclaims that in East Germany employment and employment training were universally accessible. "Pensions were secure" speaks to state support for the elderly and alludes more broadly to a generous welfare system. Even the words "The children were looked after" and the accompanying image of a woman caring for four children

conjure the organization of the socialist economy. This message points to the role of the state as caregiver, and with it, indirectly to women's high participation in the workforce. Together, the five scenes paint daily life in the GDR as not only affordable but also worry free, in large part owing to a benevolent state.

In addition to economic well-being, several statements allude to a sense of community, belonging, and connectedness once experienced and now lost. "We still had neighbors and colleagues" and "More time for love" evoke harmonious interpersonal relationships that by implication the individualism of capitalism now undermines. The image of an East German athlete standing at the top of a podium and the phrase "Those were the days" also hints at togetherness, albeit at the level of the nation. The scene suggests that winning international sporting events was closely entwined with national identity and pride (see Fisher 2002; Magdalinski 1999).

"We looked forward to our dearest, our car, for a long time" is the most sarcastic and critical statement. In the DDR, the average wait time for a new car was fifteen years, which from the standpoint of East Germans was a great annoyance and from the perspective of a capitalist economy was a clear indication of the flaws of a centrally planned economy. This assertion recognizes scarcity in the realm of consumer goods while also suggesting a dramatically different relation between people and products compared to contemporary western consumer culture. At the same time, similar to the other phrases of the mug, being unable to purchase certain types of products when wanted and needed emphasizes the difference between the East and the West.

For those outside of Germany, perhaps the most peculiar statement on the mug reads "Nude beaches—No problem." The idea that East Germans had unique attitudes toward nudity

has emerged as a dominant identifier of difference between East and West. In fact, nude bathing *was* more popular in the GDR at the time of unification. However, why this practice has become so central in the insistence of dissimilarity is not entirely clear. One conceivable explanation is that nude bathing entailed a form of resistance to state control. However, McLellan's (2007) history of nudism and nude bathing in East Germany brings forth no evidence that would warrant such a conclusion. In her work on media representation, Hörschelmann (2001) interprets this cliché as shorthand for East Germans as exotic, wild, less civilized, more natural, and more naive compared to their western counterparts. From this perspective, the aim of the mug's statement is primarily to exoticize the Other and devalue easterners. Yet, because the mug implies a reader "in the know," one who understands its messages because he or she experienced personally life in the DDR, the reference to nude bathing might function primarily as an identifier of difference.

In its totality, the most striking aspect of this *Ostalgie* object is the contrast between style and subject matter. In form, the mug stands as an ephemeral, laughable, kitschy[viii], and therefore dismissible artifact that in its self-representation as obituary lays no claim on the future. When bracketing the banality, the mug's content simultaneously offers a multi-faceted, ironic, and comprehensive system critique. Five of the ten statements refer explicitly to perceived socio-economic deteriorations that appeared with transformations in economic organization. On an emotive level, the loss of a sense of identity and belonging dominate. The mug's mode of address reinforces this affective dimension, for it declares the messages as experientially based truths as opposed to more objective truths.

A consideration of the veracity of the object's claims highlights two fundamentally different understandings of the politics of nostalgia in the eastern German context. The cultural studies–oriented literature published predominantly in English and outside of Germany tends to

treat Ostalgic expressions primarily as subversively playful, emphasizing the active and critical capacity of those who engage in its practice (e.g., Boyer 2006; Cooke 2005; Jozwiak and Mermann 2006). Within this framework, the mug does not represent understandings accurately or falsely, but rather displays authentic sentiments, even if profit interests have co-opted them. In contrast to this agency-centred analysis, much of German literature, academic and popular alike[ix], approaches *Ostalgie* as promoting an incorrect understanding of the past that interferes with the "accurate" historicization of East Germany. For example, Neller (2006) painstakingly gathers evidence that she argues demonstrates clearly that many of the purportedly positive aspects of GDR society, several of which the mug references, have their origin more in a manipulative East German regime than in what truly occurred. Concerned primarily with *Ostalgie*'s false assertions about the past, Neller concludes that politically, GDR-nostalgia[x] undermines democratic thought and the inner unity of Germany, because it romanticizes totalitarianism.

The descriptions of the diversity in the expression of *Ostalgie* and the reading of one example I have undertaken above begin to bring into focus the politics that are at stake in both ostalgic practices and their analysis. I now turn to three theoretical approaches that underscore the phenomenon's political dimensions.

Ostalgie as Nostalgia

All analyses of *Ostalgie*, even those that claim that the phenomenon may not exist (e.g., Boyer 2006), take as a given the neologism's root in the word nostalgia. Nostalgia itself is part of how scholarly discussions define *Ostalgie*. For example, Betts (2000) describes it as a "(n)ostalgia among ex-GDR citizens for the relics of their lost socialist world, be they everyday

utensils, home furnishings, or pop culture memorabilia" (734). The starting point for deliberations on *Ostalgie* as a cultural practice is frequently a consideration of the term's etymological root in longing for the past (nostos: homecoming; algia: pain or longing). For example, Boyer (2006) and Neller (2006) return to the origin of the word in Johannes Hoffer's 1688 dissertation that medicalizes the vernacular term homesickness (Heimweh). For Neller this starting point leads to framing *Ostalgie* as embedded in psychological and medical discourses; consequently, *Ostalgie* is understood as a practice that is fundamentally regressive (41). Referencing a more recent text, Berdahl draws on Stewart to emphasize and support her assertions about *Ostalgie*'s character as nostalgia: "Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossible pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward future-past, a past which has only ideological reality" (Stewart 1993, 23, cited in Berdahl 1999, 201). In other words, identifying *Ostalgie* as nostalgia entangles the practice inescapably with the overarching failure to consider how the past truly unfolded.

Nostalgia's incongruence with history is part of a larger discourse on postmodernity. For example, Fredric Jameson (1991) and Linda Hutcheon (2000) equally condemn nostalgia's failures. For Jameson, nostalgia entails "an elaborate symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (21). Hutcheon also deems nostalgia a poor indicator of what has been:

> Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power …. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. (195)

In contrast to Jameson, Hutcheon, and Neller, cultural analyses of *Ostalgie* struggle with this negative connotation of the term, for the approach principally celebrates the practice as productive and counter-hegemonic. Consequently, several authors have developed typologies of nostalgia in an attempt to account for the tensions in how it articulates itself, especially its politically contradictory manifestations. For example, Bach (2002) juxtaposes modern and postmodern nostalgia; Berdahl (1999) differentiates *Ostalgie* in terms of "mere" nostalgia and socially sanctioned commemorative practices, and Boym (2001), examining contemporary nostalgia beyond its German variant, contrasts restorative and reflective nostalgia. While these differentiations identify successfully opposing tendencies of nostalgia by acknowledging both its productive and regressive character, these separations may also obscure just how much these aspects function interdependently.

For Bach (2002), *Ostalgie* consists simultaneously of two forms of nostalgia: a modern and postmodern one. The former is a version grounded in easterners' experience, while the latter is the domain of westerners. In its modernist articulation, the "consumption of *Ostprodukte* [products related to the East] appears as a form of production itself—a re-appropriation of symbols that establishes 'ownership' of symbolic capital" (547). Moreover, this type of *Ostalgie* entails a "longing for the fantasies and desires that were once possible … longing for a mode of longing that is no longer possible" (ibid.).

With postmodern nostalgia, Bach attempts to account for the fact that western Germans and young eastern Germans, both of whom have no direct experience of living in the DDR, purchase Ostprodukte. Here, "Ostprodukte constitute floating signifiers of 'neokitsch' that undermine consumption as an oppositional practice by at once turning the consumer into the market and the goods into markers of personal ironic expression" (Bach 2002, 547). Postmodern

nostalgia, or nostalgia of style, involves no sense of loss, makes no reference to embodied memory, and consequently does not entail an appeal to recreate the past. Rather, individuals use material signifiers of *Ostalgie* arbitrarily as expressions of hipness.

Bach's typology of nostalgia dichotomizes the features of *Ostalgie* to the point where it erases the phenomenon's puzzling complexity, especially its contradictory nature. In the context of consumer products, the dualism implies ignorant easterners who fail to recognize that they are not purchasing the same products that they reincarnate and that with unification the relations of productions have changed entirely. What Bach labels modernist nostalgia is potentially just as playful as postmodern nostalgia. In both instances, *Ostprodukte* can function as floating or even empty signifiers. Moreover, Bach's dichotomy of modern and postmodern nostalgia leads him to an ahistorical conclusion. He writes, "As direct memories of the GDR fade" all that remains is "highly aestheticised and decontextualized sense of camp" (554). In other words, no meaningful trace of the past will exist once those who experienced life in the GDR are no longer alive. I would suggest that Bach's conclusion is implausible in part because *Ostalgie* does not operate as unidimensionally as Bach proposes. However, it does hint at a politics of historicization to which I will speak in the last part of this chapter.

Attempting to account for *Ostalgie* as practices and products that both contest and affirm the new order, Berdahl (1999) distinguishes between "mere" nostalgia and socially sanctioned commemorative practices (193). Here, "mere" nostalgia is "embarrassing, irritating, puzzling, or laughable to many western and eastern Germans alike.… [They are practices] readily dismissed in popular, political and academic discourse … as the questionable products of 'GDR romantics,' former Communist Party loyalists … and clever entrepreneurs" (ibid.). What transformed into "mere" nostalgia first appeared as a challenge to discourses and socioeconomic changes that

undermined the foundations of easterners' identity. In the examples Berdahl provides, this type of authentic practice emerged from the people, outside of the commercial arena. These articulations subsequently transformed into *Ostalgie*, which she characterizes as an increasingly profitable industry that entails the revival, reproduction, and commercialization of GDR products as well as the "museumification" of GDR everyday life (Berdahl 1999, 193).

Juxtaposed to this mere nostalgia are the more historical and authentic practices of collecting, displaying, and cataloguing of GDR everyday life in public and private commemorative contexts. Berdahl (1999) highlights the emergence of immensely popular informal museums, galleries, and displays in community centres, which, she argues, "strive to preserve, instruct, and dignify" (201). The purpose of these collections is to "counter the dominant images of the GDR as an economy of scarcity" and to "categorically contrast … 'historical' objects from widespread nostalgia for an 'allegedly better past'" (ibid.).

Similar to Bach, Berdahl aims to distinguish the publically and academically ridiculed aspects of *Ostalgie* from the perspective of the role the phenomenon plays in remembering the past in uncommercialized terms that recognize lived experience. Yet Berdahl's conclusion that *Ostalgie* functions both hegemonically and counter-hegemonically renders her differentiation meaningless. Socially sanctioned commemorative practices can always also have elements of "mereness" and vice versa. The *Ostalgie* card game to which she refers is on its own "mere" nostalgia, but it also elicits personal, "authentic" reflections on the past in the players. On the contrary, what began as grassroots collecting of everyday objects has in some communities turned into profit oriented *Ostalgie* museums that distribute products mimicking East German wares.

In contrast to the frameworks Bach and Berdahl propose, Svetlana Boym's (2001) typology begins to allow nostalgia to be highly complicated and contradictory. She distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia by differentiating their relation to time. The former invokes the present and future, while the latter lingers in the past.

> Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.… Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstruction of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time. (Boym 2001, 41)

As opposed to Bach's and Berdahl's classifications, Boym accounts for the tensions and complexities of nostalgia without disavowing its etymological roots and use in everyday speech. In the context of Germany, restorative nostalgia can be understood as a hegemonic reading of *Ostalgie*, comprising those perspectives that reject it for its banality or apparent unwillingness to face historical facts, while reflective nostalgia pertains to any practice that takes on the past in any manner but its condemnation. This form does not exclude the purchasing of commercialized *Ostalgie* products, enjoying a pint of beer in the Mauerblümchen restaurant, or in Boym's case, spending time at Ljubljana's Nostalija Snack Bar. Most significantly, Boym recognizes that reflective nostalgia can articulate itself as playful and deeply meaningful simultaneously, for it "can be ironic and humorous. It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection" (59). Yet despite capturing the complexity of nostalgia, Boym's typology cannot fully account for *Ostalgie* because *Ostalgie* and nostalgia are not synonymous, even though she and most others do treat them as interchangeable. Linking a broad range of cultural practices and products to the notion of nostalgia has implications for how we can come to know them. Thus, I would like to suggest that the politics of the deployment of the term require further investigation.

Notwithstanding my critique, it is possible to ask how Bach's, Berdahl's, and Boym's typologies illuminate an interpretation of the *Ostalgie* mug. From Bach's perspective, the mug embodies modernist nostalgia because it addresses the person "in the know" and to be understood it requires direct experience with life in the DDR. The dimension that is lost in this classification, however, is the silliness of the mug that Bach reserved for the uninitiated who are permitted to play with meaning infinitely. Thus, the example of the mug makes apparent that the separation of modern and postmodern nostalgia might shed little light on what *Ostalgie* is, for it clearly entails both characteristics. The mug's appearance points to Berdahl's definition of "mere" nostalgia, for its commercial, kitschy aesthetics indicate triteness and banality. Yet, as mentioned several times, the mug also displays politically sensitive subjects. Consequently, does an understanding of these topics as meaningful, a purchase based on this comprehension, and agreement with the messages classify as "socially sanctioned commemorative practice"? Although perhaps not quite so deep or profound, the mug surely entails something more than "mereness." Again, as in Bach's typology, Berdahl's differentiation dichotomizes a phenomenon that its contradictory articulation does not support. *Ostalgie* as embodied in the mug is also not "restorative" in the manner in which Boym describes it, for the object reads like an obituary or a postmodern tombstone; the past is irrevocably dead and has no hope of resurrection. In contrast, reflective nostalgia provides a framework that can decipher and describe the contradictions for which the other categories cannot account. The mug's banality, irony, and lamentation and even its critique of capitalism can operate in synergy.

On the one hand, Boym's "reflective nostalgia" proves to be useful for the analysis of *Ostalgie* and suggests that other works that consider in depth this type of affect could illuminate understanding of the phenomenon further (see Davis 1979; Wilson 2005). On the other hand, too

much emphasis on nostalgia in the study of *Ostalgie* is troubling. It presupposes that everything labelled such is inextricably tied to the complex notion of nostalgia, the consequence of which is a tendency to reify the phenomenon and with it neglect an investigation of what exists a priori. Scholars interested in cultural responses to German unification may benefit from remembering that an artist coined the term *Ostalgie*[xi] (Cooke 2005; Neller 2006). While the phrase undoubtedly refers to something operating in the world, reflections on this origin open up possibilities for alternative conceptualizations of the cultural practices that emerged with German unification. It does not suffice to describe how the kitschy mug operates as nostalgia. Rather, the question why it labels itself *Ostalgie* demands asking. Thus, I would suggest that what must be analyzed in more detail are the contexts in which nostalgia is invoked and deployed, by whom, and with what degree of power. Ideas on how and why *Ostalgie* emerged begin to respond to these questions.

Origins of *Ostalgie*

The most astonishing aspect of the unification of the Germanys is how rapidly it occurred. The consensus in the literature is that this abrupt and complete change is the origin of *Ostalgie*. For example, Betts (2000) writes, "No doubt this East German nostalgia is directly linked to the fact that the GDR has literally vanished from the political map" (734). More specifically, integration of West and East took the form of an unequal partnership with the consequence that "cultural ideals once underpinning the GDR's cosmology had all been rudely relegated to the dustbin of history" (743). Broken promises and the realities of living in late-capitalist society, such as individualism, unemployment, uneven wages, and deep cuts to state subsidies, also rapidly confronted many eastern Germans. Consequently, Berdahl (2005) argues

that practices of *Ostalgie* have to be understood "in the context of feelings of profound displacement and disillusionment following reunification, reflected in the popular saying that we have 'emigrated without leaving home'" (165).

While this idea that historical rupture is the foundation of *Ostalgie* is relatively self-evident, why it articulates itself the way it does is a more difficult question to answer. After unification, Ostprodukte emerged rapidly as visual shorthand for German–German dissimilarity and as most common articulations of *Ostalgie*. The unchanging design of East German consumer goods over the course of decades, or their "aesthetics of sameness" (Betts 2000, 754), makes them "particularly effective lieux de memoire" (Berdahl 2005, 163). The dominance of products in the practice of *Ostalgie* raises the question of why engagement with the eastern German past/present/future occurs so prominently in this particular realm. Betts posits that consumption is the only safe domain in which to express positive sentiments because negative discourses about the former East Germany implicating both the public and private spheres leave no opening for alternative and more conventional sites. For him, "the long-running Trauerspiel of serialized Stasi disclosure about state corruption, widespread denunciation, and personal betrayal effectively blocked any real positive identification with the past" (743). Blum (2000) extends this idea: "[D]iscourse on consumer products is not fraught with nearly as many anxieties as, for instance, the discussion of political or cultural issues. The undeniable moral bankruptcy of the political nomenclature of the DDR, reiterated countless times, forecloses even the possibility of a productive, unemotional engagement with the past" (232). Although both Blum and Betts make a significant contribution by pointing to the existence of barriers to more traditional avenues for negotiating history, a necessary next step must be to examine what forms these barriers take, whose interests their erecting serves, and how they are experienced in the everyday.

Boyer offers some insight in this regard. In his study of eastern media organizations (2006), he found that eastern Germans were excluded from speaking to Germany as a nation and were rather called upon only as experts of regional matters. When eastern Germans "dared to transgress a past-oriented regional identity … they were disciplined as 'nostalgics' for the GDR" (373). Boyer also claims that eastern journalists whom he interviewed expressed an inability to speak critically about a unified Germany because their western colleagues interpreted their views as "a lack of commitment to democracy and as a yearning for a return to the GDR" (ibid.). In other words, some of those who could produce knowledge to counter dominant discourses find themselves unable to do so.

In addition to journalists, the role not afforded to the intelligentsia suggests why material is so significant in producing narratives about what kind of place East Germany was. Betts (2000) observes that "intellectuals played no leading role in the reconstruction fever of 1989 [or] in shaping the demands and sentiments of the people after the Fall" (744). He explains the causes for their absence as a function of their role within the socialist regime:

> Not only do intellectuals have little to offer for the present or future; they have also lost … their former credibility as spokespeople of their liquidated past. The scandalous revelations about the Stasi complicity of prominent GDR intellectuals … only deepened this widespread sense of betrayal and disillusionment.… This was all the more disheartening insofar as intellectuals were long regarded both inside and outside East Germany as the very embodiment of what little pluralism and counter culture existed before 1989. (746)

Here, the irrelevance of intellectuals, combined with limits placed on eastern German journalists, points to how groups traditionally charged with constructing discursive frameworks for understanding social change did not play this role as commentators and interpreters of the collapse of socialism and the unification of Germany. Moreover, the broader context of abrupt system transformation and the peculiarity of East German consumer goods begin to hint at the

complex context in which *Ostalgie* emerged, why objects such as the *Ostalgie* coffee mug circulate, and what its political significance may be. To shed more light on *Ostalgie*'s politics in the sense of what is at stake and what struggles are at play, I will now examine the phenomenon from the perspectives of agency and authentic cultural practice.

From the People and for the People

Much of the literature describes *Ostalgie* implicitly or explicitly as authentic resistance to dominant discourses, particularly in its less commercialized articulations. An example of this understanding is Berdahl's (2005) juxtaposition of two museums that focus on the DDR: the Leipzig Zeithistorisches Forum (Forum of Contemporary History - ZGF) and the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR in Eisenhüttenstadt (Museum for East German Everyday Life Culture - DOK). The explicit focus of the ZGF is on "the history of resistance and opposition during the dictatorship of the Soviet occupation zone and the GDR.… Images of suffering, repression, and state violence are foregrounded alongside a narrative of resistance and opposition" (Berdahl 2005, 159). In contrast, the project of the DOK entails the "museumification of the world of GDR objects as an active and mutual communication that allows for reflective thought in a period of individual and often painful reorientation" (162).

Berdahl asserts that the ZGF houses and propagates inauthentic, hegemonic history while the Museum for East German Everyday Life Culture makes accessible a more authentic version of the past, one based on life experience. At the same time, Berdahl situates the DOK within the context of *Ostalgie*, which she defines as the production of counter-memories and identities. The combining of *Ostalgie* with "more authentic" history becomes problematic when considering that the museum presents itself as functioning outside of the political. Berdahl (2005) writes,

"My hosts repeatedly stressed that they did not want to glorify the GDR, that this was intended as a completely 'apolitical exhibit.' As evidence of this, they cited their 'strategic decision' not to include political memorabilia like pins, medals, uniforms, or FDJ scarves [sic—Free German Youth members wore blue shirts]" (164). This refusal to recognize the overtly political indicates a denial of something that is unavoidably part of the museum's endeavour. Although Berdahl suggests comments left in the museum's guest book indicate the political nature of the exhibit, she does not consider further the impact of the official apolitical status. Her descriptions lead to a conceptualization of the ZGF's project as political, inauthentic, and hegemonic and the DOK as authentic, subversive, yet apolitical. As indicated above, the latter's subversive and apolitical character is incongruous, which poses an analytical and political problem. This contradiction puts into question the DOK's status as a site that articulates counter-narratives. More importantly, the example highlights a much greater problem for attempts to engage with the GDR past and the eastern German present and future. *Ostalgie* is permissible as long as it is not political. Here, the political and a glorification, or at least uncritical appraisal of the GDR, are equivalent.

The assertion of *Ostalgie* as authentic resistance also emerges in deliberations on the popularity of Ostprodukte. This type of discussion often links resistance and identity by way of stating that eastern Germany's second-class status is preventing an affirmation of eastern German identity in a more political forum. For example, Bach (2002) writes, "Articulating an East German identity … is a precarious task, since the East firmly occupies the discursive space of inferiority and practically speaking, western Germans dominate the economic, cultural, and political landscape of the East" (548–49). He concludes that purchasing consumer goods that mimic East German products is one of the only options for resisting this dominance. Advertisers

take advantage of this assertion of eastern identity by marketing Ostprodukte as symbolizing the real and the natural. Many ads play on easterners' wish for their products, and by extension themselves, to be perceived as "normal" and "down-to-earth" (Hogwood 2002, 50).

Yet the triad of consumption, resistance, and authenticity is unavoidably also a contradictory and uneasy one. Berdahl (1999) calls upon Michel de Certeau (1984) to support her dawning suspicion that what appears to be an act of resistance is in fact a form of complicity. Here, she paraphrases de Certeau, thereby highlighting the entanglement of the hegemonic and the subversive. She writes, "[C]onsumers of *Ostalgie* may escape the dominant order without leaving it" (206).

Figure 5: *Ampelmann* store and Fernsehturm, Berlin

A concrete example of *Ostalgie* allows specific elaboration on the practice as authentic and subversive. One of the most successful efforts to save GDR iconography from oblivion is the Ampelmann (traffic light man), a pedestrian traffic light in the shape of a chubby, masculine figure wearing a hat. Attempts to replace it with traffic lights according to European standards in the early 1990s quickly met with outrage in eastern Germany. Opposition to removal led not only to the Ampelmann's survival

but also to a highly lucrative business. Today, souvenir shops and specialty Ampelmann stores (see Figure 5) carry countless products featuring the character, including purses, towels, pencils, erasers, T-shirts, and drinking glasses. Its commercial success and ubiquity have imbued it with such symbolic power that it stands in loosely for the entire contemporary East. For example a cover of the popular German weekly *Der Spiegel* features a green Ampelmann half-submerged in water and the headline "Jammertal Ost" ("The East: Landscape of Misery"). Yet, here also emerges one of the central problems of *Ostalgie*, particularly in reference to authenticity and resistance. Although the mere survival, and more significantly the commercial success of the Ampelmann, may point to triumphant resistance to attempts to assimilate the East, not all might be as it seems. Today, the figure is stripped of any specific reference to the former East; it is an empty signifier that alludes merely to some kind of difference. Souvenirshops sell them without explicitly stating their origin and historical meaning.What this difference entails is unclear, as is how purchasing it might oppose dominant understandings of the GDR past.

Returning to the *Ostalgie* coffee mug, questions about how it might embody authenticity and resistance can also be posed. Its kitschy aesthetic and the location of its purchase, that is, the souvenir shop, would suggest it entails neither. However, unlike the Ampelmann, the mug displays politically controversial and potentially potent ideas. Does this mean that buying the mug is an authentic act and a form of resistance? Perhaps this question is not particularly relevant because attempts to answer it yield only the conclusion that *Ostalgie* can be simultaneously hegemonic and counter-hegemonic and that it is sometimes an authentic form of resistance and other times is not. In addition to the theoretical framing of *Ostalgie* as nostalgia, questions about authenticity and resistance, although providing fascinating descriptions, frequently leave unexamined the wider politics of the phenomenon. Here, I wonder in particular

about the ongoing implications of the practice, especially in reference to other, more powerful historicizing discourses.

What Remains: Historicization and *Ostalgie*

With its emphasis on agency, cultural studies–oriented literature places nostalgia in the contexts of contemporary socio-economic conditions. Here, *Ostalgie* emerges politically as a "critical tool to promote and enable an active engagement with the present" (Enns 2007, 478), and as resistance to colonization by western Germany and globalization more broadly (Jozwiak and Mermann 2006). In contrast to this focus on the present, perspectives such as Neller's (2006) emphasize the relevance of the past by describing nostalgia as dehistoricizing and depoliticizing. Here, nostalgia impedes an objective and truthful appraisal of the past and jeopardizes the unified and democratic Germany.

Yet, the collapse of the European socialist nations highlights the impossibility of objectively true understandings of the past, for it has rendered the social construction of historical discourses blatant, particularly as they articulate themselves in public spaces. As was the case during the denazification following World War II, the swift renaming of cities and streets and the removal of monuments that occurred nearly overnight seemed inevitable and almost natural. Although the majority of overt public markers of the socialist past disappeared rapidly and without much fanfare, fierce public struggles over what traces would continue to project themselves into the future also erupted. For example, for over a decade citizen groups actively attempted to rescue the *Palast der Republik* (Republic's Palace) in Berlin, former seat of the East German parliament and venue for major cultural events, by attempting to reframe its political symbolism. This project included expensive asbestos removal, renaming the building

Volkspalast (People's Palace), and staging successful art exhibits and theatre performances. Restoration funds and energy were invested to no avail. In 2006 the federal government prohibited any further delay of demolition and with this decision made room for the long-planned rebuilding of the Berliner Stadtschloss [Berlin City Palace], principal residence of Prussian regents since the eighteenth century. The palace had been damaged during the final days of the Second World War and the new East German government subsequently tore it down, for it deemed reconstruction politically undesirable. According to the project's proponents, the building anew of the Stadtschloss structure entails a symbolic spatial and historical restoring of order (see Boym 2001, 180–90; Till 2005).

While this example illustrates public resistance to top-down reshaping of the material historical landscape, it also provides evidence of a government-sanctioned process that overtly moulds understanding of the East German past. In this case, the destruction of a structurally sound building and its replacement with a costly copy of a Prussian palace points toward ideologically motivated construction of what kind of a place East Germany was and what the new Germany imagines itself to be. The demise of the Palast der Republik signals clearly that symbols of the East have no place in a unified Germany and that tomorrow's Germany will be part of historical trajectory that leads back to its imperial past. It is in this context of the mythologizing of the new Germany that *Ostalgie* as a memory-based cultural practice appeared and continues to operate today.

What is the significance of the *Ostalgie* coffee mug, belonging to a Trabant car club, celebrating Jugendweihe, purchasing replicas of East German consumer goods, and visiting GDR museums, objects and practices so easily characterized as *Ostalgie*? While the authenticity

and subversive character of *Ostalgie* is not as evident as some commentators claim and hope, the phenomenon projects forward aspects of the East German past that other discourses reject or omit. At the same time, the association of these object and practices with the notions of nostalgia and kitsch renders them dismissible and usually insignificant in comparison to more traditional and government-sanctioned commemorative practices and framings of the GDR as a dictatorship and Unrechtsstaat (illegitimate state). Analytical frameworks that replace or work alongside the concept of nostalgia are one possibility for bringing together these contradictory aspects of this cultural response to post-socialism.

Another strategy is to "keep up" with *Ostalgie*. Although the literature traces extensively the emergence of this phenomenon, in recent years few contributions examine how it has transformed with over time, how it articulates itself today, and how it relates to other discourses staking an interpretive claim on the past. An approach that considers these factors not only can bring to the fore competing interests in the interpretation of the GDR but can also illuminate the struggle over mythologizing the unified Germany. Broader contextualization of *Ostalgie* renders visible hegemonic discourses attempting to create new narratives about a unified Germany in which the GDR can play only a very narrow role. These types of stories intersect and collide with more marginal and popular efforts to mobilize the past on the part of individuals and small interest groups which are highly localized. In addition, placing *Ostalgie* into the context of specific sites and material expressions will further contribute to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary cultural responses to post-socialism. Thus, the remainder of my dissertation embarks on an analysis of museum representations of Germany's recent history, such as in the popular GDR museums that can be found in many communities of the former East, which frequently receive the label *Ostalgie*.

4. Remembering and Historicizing Socialism: The Private and Amateur Musealization of East Germany's Everyday Life

This chapter presents an analysis of a particular museum configuration, one dedicated to everyday life in East. It proposes that amateur and private GDR museums operate as a distinctive site of cultural practice. Their construction of the past relies significantly on accessing memories of life under socialism. A manifestation of a struggle over the kind of history that is carried forward, the museums respond to and reject hegemonic discourses on everyday life in East Germany. I suggest that the intimate relationship between the museums and their publics, which GDR museums enact, entail democratic curatorial processes that are uncommon in mainstream musealization efforts. Although the near absence of interpretative texts at most sites could be understood as reflecting amateurism, this characteristic plays an integral part in the memory work that the GDR museum affords its visitors. Moreover, the prominence of objects, particularly industrially produced ones, relates to their capacity to affirm East German identities, including those relating to industrial production. A further focus is the sensuous encounter with the past that unfolds at these sites, that even though often accidental, leads visitors to perform the GDR creating unexpected possibilities for the production and consumption of memory.

Whilst the reality of life under socialist rule severely undermined official socialist propaganda during the DDR, the tables have now turned, and instead today's official image of socialism undermines the reality east Germans remember.

Anna Saudners[xii]

The musealization of East German everyday life takes place largely on the margins, outside of dominant institutions. Throughout the former East Germany, retirees, unemployed men and women, novice entrepreneurs and passionate collectors have for the past twenty years established museums displaying material traces of life under socialism. These exhibits have many names besides "DDR Museum" (Museum of the German Democratic Republic – GDR Museum), although colloquially, they are often referred to by this term. Their number is difficult to estimate; new ones continue to be established, some have ceased to exist and others are private collections that open their doors to the public only occasionally. I am aware of twelve to sixteen that are in operation today, depending on inclusion criteria.[xiii]

The museums' owners are typically amateurs, having neither formal curatorial training nor prior museum experience. The museums receive little or no government funding, many struggle to survive financially, and all rely on similar, rudimentary representational strategies. These approaches include classificatory displays, or what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls "in-context displays" (3), such as televisions of various models in a room or coins and award plaques in a display case in a hallway. Their hallmark are mimetic "in-situ displays" (ibid.) that attempt to simulate the lived past as closely and completely as possible. Recreated living rooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, bedrooms, and even institutional spaces, such as school classrooms, daycare rooms and offices are examples of this exhibition technique. While vitrines hold the in-context displays of small items, such as coins and toy cars, frequently only a rope separates the

visitor from the objects and mimetic displays. In some cases, there are no barriers at all. Simple interpretive strategies also define GDR museums. Although some descriptive signage does exist, and in the case of the "Olle DDR"[xiv] exhibit in the Thuringian town of Apolda an audio recording guides the visitor, didactic panels that reflect conceptual frameworks are largely absent. Moreover, typically, professional conservation and research does not take place at the museums, which means that according to definitions by such organizations as the International Council of Museums, these sites fail to classify as museums[xv].

Despite the overall amateur character of GDR museums, their number and similarity in form and content begin to suggest that they must be understood within the wider context of dominant ideas about Germany's socialist past. The analysis I present below, which is based on extensive field research, locates these sites firmly within the struggle over the meaning of history and memory. I argue that as a group, GDR museums point to an exciting democratization of traditionally privileged representational practices. Here, individuals and small groups establish frameworks for the exploration of the quotidian past, aiming to access experiential knowledge through the display of objects, ones that hegemonic discourses cannot, fail or refuse to address. Indeed, they put into question not only the authoritative and legitimizing status of other museums that represent the East German past but also museums as institutions more broadly.

The exhibits also point to what Andreas Huyssen (2003) describes as the contemporary "fundamental disturbance not just of the relationship between history as objective and scientific, and memory as subjective and personal, but of history itself and its promises" (2). GDR museums offer themselves to the visitors unapologetically as DIY "for the people by the people" sites that attempt to salvage and reanimate the past by taming the fringe, all the things and memories that have little room elsewhere in such a concentrated, visceral and approachable

manner. Their visitor logs suggest that going to the museum entails processes of identity affirmation, particularly for Easterners with memories of living in the East. Unlike other, state-funded museums that highlight resistance and opposition to the totalitarian East German regime, the popular musealization of the GDR refuses to let these categories be the only interpretive lens through which to examine the past.

The empirical foundation for this chapter are four research trips to Germany between March, 2008 and July, 2013, during which I visited twelve GDR museums and interviewed museum professionals as well as visitors. When discussing amateur and private GDR museums as a group, my observations exclude Berlin's DDR Museum, the DDR-Geschichtsmuseum im Dokumentationszentrum Perleberg, the Eisenhüttenstadt Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR (DOK), and the Wittenberg Haus der Geschichte. While in subject these museums overlap significantly with the sites in which I am particularly interested here, several characteristics set them apart. Berlin's DDR Museum, the best marketed and by all appearances the most successful of the GDR museums, employs trained staff, including renowned museologists and historians, such as Stefan Wolle. The fact that it has been twice nominated for European Museum of the Year Award also points to the high quality of this professionally curated exhibition. While other GDR museums are located in small cities and towns—many not easily accessible to domestic and foreign visitors—the Berlin museum is located in a tourist hotspot on the banks of the Spree River near Museum Island and in walking distance to the Alexanderplatz. A more subjective reason for why the Berlin museum does not fit is that when asked to reflect on the work of similar sites, curators/owners of popular GDR museums agreed that the Berlin DDR Museum "does not get it right." They objected to a Westerner having initiated the project as a business venture, the presence of insufficient exhibit objects, both in

kind and number, and the wrong overall feeling. Although the curators/owners did not specify the latter, I would like to suggest that this sentiment of "not feeling right" likely stems in part from the museum's professional character, which with its polished displays, interpretive signage, and overall concept has the effect of distancing the visitor from the subject matter.

The analysis that I present here also does not apply well to the Perleberg museum, neither in exhibit content nor from the perspective of the motivation of its founders, a retired Lutheran minister and his wife. For example, the owner/curator Hans-Peter Freimark described in his interview with me that the displays focusing on everyday life are not the main purpose of the museum, but rather that they serve to give "people space to breathe and recover from the material evidence of an oppressive system." Moreover, he offers detailed guided tours to as many visitors as possible in order to explain the museum's intention of highlighting the atrocities and injustices that took place under the GDR regime. At the DOK in Eisenhüttenstadt, historian and professional museologist Andreas Ludwig employs strategies that artistically and skillfully walk the tightrope between condemning and condoning the GDR, a topic to which I return to in Chapter 6, although I will refer to it for comparative purposes to highlight specific characteristics of private and amateur museums. The Wittenberg museum takes visitors on guided tours through mimetic displays in the form of period rooms that historians created.

This chapter offers an interrogation of the private and amateur musealization of East Germany' everyday life that although in most cases points to repressive elements of the GDR regime, also refuses the interpretive primacy of totalitarianism. Despite the significant potential of this narrative to illuminate contemporary cultural practices relating to the construction of memory and historical knowledge, this topic has received little focused attention in the academic literature. Therefore, this analysis stands as an invitation to a scholarly conversation about

popular museums dedicated to East Germany and the broader mechanisms by which the past moves forward. A description of the political and cultural context in which these museums emerged and continue to thrive situates the subsequent discussion. A detailed examination begins with an exploration of the unique visitor/museum relationship that unfolds at these sites; guests and curators co-mobilize the past. Second, I investigate possible reasons for why interpretive texts are nearly absent in GDR museums. A discussion on the centrality of materiality and the significance of embodied museum-going further underline the distinctive approach these museums take in their representation of East Germany's socialist past.

Political and Cultural Context

The idea of the GDR museum began at a particular juncture, one that defines the museums' practices and reflects contemporary political circumstances within Germany, part of which arose from the rapid collapse of the GDR in 1989 and the unexpected and swift unification of Germany in 1990. Moreover, these museums must be understood as a symptom of what Huyssen describes as the crisis of temporality and the double movement of collective amnesia and obsession with memory. Borrowing from Huyssen (1995), the GDR museum in this context emerges as "an attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time […] to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload" (7). The musealization of the GDR can also be understood as a cultural process of compensation, for, as Hermann Lübbe suggests, "Through a progressive musealization we compensate for the burdensome experience of a loss of cultural familiarity brought about by change" (qtd in Korff 1988, 268). Borrowing Beier-de Haan's words, in addition to attempting to find grounding and address this sense of a disappearing

world, GDR museums attract visitors because like other "historical exhibitions [they] serve at the same time to restore shared memory" (196). Moreover, the popular musealization of East Germany exemplifies the processes that John Urry (1996) argues shape museums in contemporary societies, societies that he defines as disjointed, sped up, hybridized and fractured. For him, these characteristics culminate in a changing hierarchy of modes of remembering in that they "undermine many auratic and authoritative traditions such that there is no remaining single, autonomous essence" (62). Simultaneously, "there is the proliferation of many new heritage sites, which are often started and run by enthusiasts who contest once-dominant traditions" (ibid.). Although Urry speaks to British heritage museums, these processes apply similarly to GDR museum because these sites challenge hegemonic musealizations of East Germany by not conforming to dominant representational strategies and conceptual frameworks. In addition, as I have already established, amateur curators and collectors own and operate these museums rather than trained museologists. GDR museums emerged within the context of the processes and changing hierarchy of modes of remembering that Urry describes while their operation also exemplifies, propels, and develops them further.

To specify this broad description of how the popular musealization of East Germany fits within broader cultural trends, I now examine the overarching interpretative position GDR museums take in their representation of the everyday. The overall orientation of the GDR museum might be summarized best by the phrase "Nicht alles war schlecht" ("Not everything was bad"), words that gain poignancy in reference to what I consider its opposite, "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" ("Wrong life cannot be lived rightly"). These expressions correspond to diametrically opposed interpretations of the GDR. The latter, "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly," a quotation from Theodor W. Adorno's (2005) *Minima Moralia* (39), is now an

adage that in the context of discussions about East Germany refers to the mechanisms of dictatorship permeating and shaping all areas of life. To illustrate, in Christa Wolf's (2010) novel, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (City of Angels or The Overcoat of Dr. Freud), the protagonist reflects on a presentation entitled "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" that explores how writers in East Germany had not been able to live a meaningful life (70).

"Nicht alles war schlecht," the phrase that summarizes the overall message of GDR museums, rejects dictatorship as prime and sole explanatory framework. Simultaneously, it refuses a direct comparison between National Socialism and East German socialism. Instead, these words imply an insistence on valid, real past lives lived by locating the mundane everyday greatly outside of the purview of state politics. This position has consequences for the relationship between the GDR museum and other history and memory-making agents. For example, private and amateur museums are largely excluded from taking part in public and scholarly discussions on the musealization of the GDR. When the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig (Historical Museum of the City of Leipzig) and the Bundeststiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED Diktatur (Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the SED Dictatorship) organized a three day conference in June 2010 entitled "Die Musealisierung der DDR: Wege, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Darstellung von Zeitgeschichte in Stadt- und regionalgeschichtlichen Museen" ("The Musealization of the GDR: Ways, possibilities and limits in the representation of Contemporary history in city and regional history museums"), none of the 27 scholar and practitioner speakers represented amateur and private GDR museums. Their absence seems peculiar in the context of the five sentence summary statement describing the conference topic:

> For city and regional history museums, the scientifically based collection, preservation and the documentation of objects from GDR history hold a great potential. This has been

> little used until now. At the same time, the increasing number of privately run, commercial GDR Museum suggests a public interest in this topic. The conference takes this circumstance as starting point. Various dimensions of the musealization of the GDR will be discussed as will the possibilities and limits of the representation and communication of contemporary history in the museum. (Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig)[xvi]

In other words, the conference organizers and participants recognize the popularity of representations of the everyday in GDR museums but are unwilling to consult and collaborate with those who run and own them. This refusal to work together relates to hegemonic discourses on the historical significance of the GDR, which federal government funding structures that attempt to shape and stabilize the past exemplify. For example, the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* (Conceptualization for Historical Sites) that the German federal government put into place in 2008 outlines funding guidelines for the musealization and memorialization of the Nazi era and the East German past. I quote one section of the document extensively, for it provides a concrete example both of museum funding and the federal government's position on the historicization of the GDR. The text signifies hegemonic strategizing that works unrelentingly at shaping a singular interpretive framework, one that leaves little room for nuance and the presence of diverse voices:

> Everyday life in the GDR is taken into consideration to prevent a romanticization and trivialization of the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of Germany and to decisively work against all kinds of nostalgia for the East. For this purpose everyday life must by necessity be placed in the context of the dictatorship. It must be made clear that people in the GDR were subject to extensive control by the state and were exposed to intense pressure to assimilate while the dictatorship also derived its power from the collaboration of the general public. The instruments and mechanism that the SED employed to ideologically penetrate the entire society and the life of people in all domains should be identified—from nursery school to grade school and from university to working world and recreational activities. At the same time it must be documented how and where people in the GDR attempted to remove themselves from the pull of the Party. (Deutscher Bundestag 9)[xvii]

These guidelines in effect block any funding for the musealization of the everyday outside of the

context of dictatorship, both directly through the federal government and other agencies that use them as model. Particularly troubling is its vilification of the general public as perpetrators of undefined crimes.

Moreover, the framework, which reflects a dominant discourse, declares that all museal engagement with East German everyday life outside of the context of dictatorship is nostalgic in the pejorative sense of romanticized longing. Several English-writing scholars counter the negative connotation of this type of nostalgia, or *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East), as they theorize its deeper socio-cultural significance (see Chapter 3). For example, Paul Cooke places the origin of *Ostalgie* in a collective sense of loss and dislocation that resulted from the unequal merging of two cultures (Cooke 2004a; Cooke 2004b). With her term "reflective nostalgia," Svetlana Boym 2001) explores the contradictory character of the phenomenon. Nostalgia emerges as ironic and humorous and reflects longing as well as critical thinking (59). Dominik Bartmanski (2011) describes *Ostalgie* as a practice that assists memory processes, linking the past and the present instead of lingering uncritically in a bygone era. For him, "nostalgic icons are successful because they play the cultural role of mnemonic bridges *to* rather than tokens of longing *for* the failed communist past" (213).

Private and amateur museums dedicated to the GDR emerged despite of, and at the same time because of, the socio-economic and political climate of the post-unification years. As a group, their undertaking speaks to this context, in part by subverting dominant representational practices. For example, unlike most museums, they enact a uniquely intimate visitor/museum relationship, a topic to which I turn now.

The GDR Museum and its Publics

It is difficult to access information on the types of visitors the GDR museum attracts and what experiences they have. Henrietta Riegel (1996) points out that museums are sites that are intimately involved in the accumulation of social and cultural capital. Museum-goers "look to museums as the arbiters of 'high class' taste, a source to be relied upon when it comes to matters of culture" (87). Yet, GDR museums do not exude the kind of authority that underlies such a role, which suggests that the groups of people who traditionally seek out museums are unlikely to deem the GDR museum appealing. A more direct approach to accessing visitor experience is to interview them. However, during my fieldwork I found it difficult to initiate conversations and when I did, people were generally unwilling or unable to articulate what had brought them to the museum and what they thought of the exhibits. I suspect that the museums' tendency to elicit memory, both cultural and personal, and their political ambiguity may have contributed to this challenge. Guestbooks could potentially also provide insights, but they typically indicate only broad impressions. For example, Susan Crane (1997) notes that although she is an "inveterate reader of museums guest books, […] [g]enerally, one finds school groups' scribbles and drawings, inscriptions of names and hometowns, often only single words of approval or disapproval" (45). I too encountered this absence of detailed and thoughtful reflection in the dozens of guest books that I analyzed. Yet a general pattern did emerge. The ubiquity of phrases such as, "It was nice to be reminded of everything,"[xviii] and, "This was our favorite exhibit so far. One finds memories from every arena. Thank you for this nice exhibit and continued success,"[xix] suggest that many visitors are former East Germans and that for them the museum functions as a site of memory that evokes processes of identity affirmation.

When I asked who their visitors were, curators/owners echoed these comments. They thought that most of them were former Eastern Germans and their friends and family. Requesting that they state how they knew this to be to be true, several replied that easterners stay much longer than westerners because they linger in front of displays and begin to reminisce. The processes of memory that unfold at these sites indicate that the museum/visitor relationship operates differently at GDR museums than at most other museums. As Crane (1997) points out in reference to mainstream museums: "Visitors are interlocutors without discussion partners in the museal conversation: they usually have only objects and text to respond to, rarely curators, historians, or experts" (48). Within the context of the popular musealization of East Germany, the role boundaries between those who look at displays and those who create them are blurred, which brings with it lively exchange among those involved.

The curators/owners of GDR museums aim to capture a way of life, one with which they are intimately familiar. Memory, and the *sense* that something is presented correctly or incorrectly, guides the curatorial process. Several curator/owners commented in interviews that their personal experience of living in the former East informed how they shape the museum. At the same time, they are never alone in determining what is on display and how because the making of the exhibits involves dynamic, collective and democratic processes. Employees, volunteers, visitors, other museum owners/curators, friends and family members play the role of expert consultants as they serve as sources of ideas and the correction of existing displays. They might even contribute objects to create more "authentic" exhibits. For example, Frau Müller, the curator/owner of the Gelenau GDR museum recounted in her conversation with me a visit by her counterpart from the Pirna GDR museum, Herr Kaden. He noticed that the ceramic Mitropa[xx] cups did not fit into her Kindergarten display and consequently supplied her with the

authentically peppermint-tea-stained plastic cups, which both deemed more appropriate. Not only those directly involved in running GDR museums contribute to other museum exhibits. The museums that opened in the ten to fifteen years following the fall of the Wall relied almost exclusively on donations for their displays.[xxi] Several visitors pointed me towards items such as a toaster, schoolbooks and toys they had given to the museum. They explained to me that although the items were out of use in their homes, they were connected to their East German biographies, which had no relevance in contemporary Germany and therefore deserved to be preserved. By handing over their belongings to the museum, they sought to participate in what André Malraux (1967) describes the "museum effect," where the very placement of the object within the museum creates its importance and validity. The donation of items by individuals to the exhibit also suggests why visitors lay claim to authorship in the curatorial process and why they may be attracted to the GDR museum. In fact, many visitors may feel like their involvement makes the museum theirs, through the donation of objects, the advice they give, the great familiarity they have with all objects or because they bring them to life when they visit and reminisce about life in East Germany.

The overlap in roles between those who curate and those who visit the GDR museum begins to indicate the ways in which this type of site operates differently than most mainstream museums. A consideration of interpretive texts further underlines their particular approach to representing the past.

Where are the Words?

Unlike most art, historical and other exhibitions, GDR museums present few text panels and labels that would orient visitors to the overall aims of the museum, interpret artifacts through

defined conceptual lenses, or indicate precisely what is on display. Pragmatic reasons for this absence include a lack of clearly formulated frameworks for the exhibits that would guide the texts' content as well as limited financial resources and professional capacities to create them. A second reason for this absence is that they would undermine the aims and raison d'être of the museums. Henrietta Riegel's (1996) report of a visitor study of an historical exhibit that purposely had no textual guides illustrates this point. The project she reflects upon recreated scenes that exemplified life immediately following the Second World War and included a bombed-out cellar and a room that demonstrated the living conditions of displaced people. Riegel suggests that the absence of textual framings contributed to the great discomfort that many older visitors experienced as they were confronted with a part of their biography to which they had not attended for a long time. Visitors commented that they "felt too 'close' to the exhibit, that it brought back a whole host of unpleasant memories" (87). While in Riegel's example the evocative power of the displays was problematic for those who found that their life was on display in a way that prohibited disengagement, this potential to unleash memory is precisely the objective of the GDR museum, for it functions, at least in this historical moment, predominantly as a site of memory. Visitors' memories can be accessed and formed unmediated by texts that prescribe or at least narrow the meaning of the objects and environments the visitor encounters.

The third, connected factor that could explain the near absence of labeling is that text concretizes meaning. Not unlike a caption of a press photograph, words that accompany the objects narrow interpretive possibilities. Paraphrasing Roland Barthes (1977), though recognizing the profound epistemological difference between press photographs and objects in museums, "it is not the [object] which comes to elucidate or 'realize' the text, but the latter

which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the [object]" (25). The power of the text to (re)define meaning poses a great difficulty in the context of the GDR museum, for it would require its authors to put forth a political stance on the past. The majority of these sites claim explicitly that they operate outside of the political realm because they merely *display* the everyday and thereby neither condone nor condemn East Germany's political system. This position appears to narrow the "political" to pertain only to statements on the overt workings of the state and its agents rather than the ordinary life of ordinary people. At the same time, conversations with some museum visitors and curators/owners suggest that they are acutely aware of the political nature of the museums' endeavor and the fact that their projects operate outside of dominant discourses, even threatening hegemonic efforts of writing the East German past. For example, during interviews, one museum owner and several museum visitors did not wish to be identified, either by divulging their last names or consenting to a recorded interview. Another museum owner/curator insisted on meeting in a public space. Once we arrived at the agreed upon café, she chose a table far removed from any other customers and spoke only in a whisper, as though she was afraid someone could overhear our conversation.

The claim of apolicality is particularly curious given the pervasiveness in the GDR of the doctrine that all realms of life are political. Such a self-description on part of the museums involves an extraction from the difficult project of representing the East German past in ways that simultaneously recognizes its repressive character and leaves room for accounts of individual and group accomplishments or simply valid, worthy lives lived. While the majority of GDR museums do reference repressive elements of the socialist regime, they do so in an unfocused manner or as an aside.

Yet another possible reason for little textual interpretation in the GDR museum is that it is clear to visitors what they are seeing, regardless of background: a living room, a kitchen, a television—all objects of the everyday—do not require a statement on what they are because their significance appears self-evident. Nonetheless, the problem arises of how objects constitute meaning. Reflecting on broader trends, Gottfried Korff (1999) observes that many of the museums founded since the 1970s are dedicated to the preservation and presentation of *Alltagskultur* (everyday culture), a development he describes as the "musealization of the popular" (12). Within this context, Korff warns of the "auratization of the banal" where popular objects and objects of the everyday operate out of contexts, concluding that "With a hairnet, a cheese slicer and sausage stuffing device […] one cannot represent the history of social movements and historical transformations" (13).[xxii] Given this critique, he argues for connecting these objects of the everyday to larger socio-cultural and political developments to produce meaningful historical engagements.

This situating of the everyday object within a bigger picture does occur in government-funded museums where East German *Alltagskultur* exemplifies elements of a dictatorship. However, the existence of GDR museums suggests that this approach alienates many former East Germans. Thus, questions arise about the possibility of musealizing the everyday in a way that reflects and respects peoples' experiences, remains highly evocative in terms of memory and recall, while providing a sense of macro-historical trends and transformation. The DOK in Eisenhüttenstadt has made these links and could serve as a model to popular musealization attempts that aim to contextualize *Alltagskultur* historically.

Like other GDR museums, the *DOK* is concerned with the material traces of East Germany's everyday life. However, unlike them, until 2012 various levels of governments

funded it and professional staff supported its director, a trained historian and museologist, all of which contributed to the possibility of putting in place innovative representational strategies. The first display of the permanent exhibit which was installed until 2012 and was entitled *40 Years—40 Objects*, featured a room filled with glass boxes stacked on top one another forming a cube. Each box contained one to three objects and had affixed to it a label that first stated the year to which it spoke and secondly related the object to the history of the GDR in one or two sentences. Notably, the boxes were not grouped chronologically, which reflected the curators' awareness that such an arrangement is nonsensical given the shape of the display, while also acknowledging and working within the limitations of it serving merely as a synoptical device. Nonetheless, the display spatially and organizationally harnessed historical change, providing an overview of social, political, cultural, and economic transformations in a tangible manner. Four examples from the display provide a sense of the range of themes. A travel bag accompanied by the words "Minimum holiday time is increased to 15 days" marked the year 1967. The 1952 box contained a hairdryer. Its text read "Married women receive a paid domestic work day once a month." A map of Prague and the text "More and more GDR citizens flee via West Germany's Prague embassy and Hungary" stood in for the year 1989. In 1978, the song "Am Fenster" [At the Window] by the rock group *City* is the best song of the year, an event that an album cover of the band signified. Although the limitation of 40 objects and their captions standing in for 40 years of a nation and its people are considerable, this display hints at the complex political, cultural and economic transformation that took place in the 40 year history of the GDR, the range of which GDR museums do not tackle.

At the same time, simply providing words to connect objects to larger historical trends, which the DOK did in its *40 Years—40 Objects display,* may not overcome fundamental

problems in historical representation that lie with the objects themselves. Urry (1996) suggests that artifactual history "partly obscures the social relations and struggles which underlay that past" (52). For example, the simulation of a past that GDR museums offer their visitors creates powerful and persuasive, but also deceitful and dishonest exhibitions, not unlike mimetic displays in other museums. Although the aim of this type of display is in large part that of Easterners recognizing themselves, this approach is reductive not only in its oversimplification of the complex realities of the past but also in its inability to approximate how people actually lived. Because the aim of the GDR museum is to display the essence of everyday life and many involved in its project have to agree on its content's typicality, at the material level any object that has unique qualities is amiss, such as inherited antiques, original art, crafts and most goods produced outside of the GDR, especially the West. For example, Milena Veenis (2011) observes, "East Germans proudly displayed empty cans of Coca Cola in their living-room cabinets as visible emblem of western consumer society" (490). More problematic yet is that mimetic representations such as these effectively wipe out all socio-cultural difference, such as those relating to gender, sexuality, age, religion, ethnicity and regionality, thereby replicating the socialist doctrine of the equality of all. Other types of GDR museum displays also largely fail to account for these types of differences. While visitors may engage in diverse readings, the reduction of the East German object world to the agreed upon or a perceived essential, which in this constellation seems particularly narrow, raises questions about what type of things and ideas move from past to future. A reduction of the past may be inevitable as its traces project themselves forward. However, if the GDR museum is understood as putting on display that which is left out in dominant representations, an analysis of what *it* leaves out must also take place. Despite these limitations, East German artifacts have an enormous potential to connect

museum visitors to the past, the topic with which the next section occupies itself.

The Thingness of Things

As I noted in the introduction, GDR museums offer up the past primarily by way of objects; the exhibits' narrative usually relies exclusively on things arranged in-situ, or categorically, rather than on ideas. The organizing principles are the objects themselves and the notion that they bore witness to everyday life in East Germany. Many of the GDR museums seem to be spilling over with things and the majority of the owner/curators mentioned in my conversations with them that their archives contain many more displayable items. Combined, the museums evoke the sense that if those in charge had available to them the pertinent resources, the entire material culture of the GDR would be on display, impossible as that may be, and only the lack of resources, such as space, time and money impede this project. Although likely not intended, the abundance of things counters the hegemonic interpretation of East Germany as an economy of scarcity.

The thingness of the objects on display in the GDR museums plays a key role in the their operation and in the practices people enact at these sites. In fact, materiality, and its relationship to memory, is a key reason for why they exist, a topic this section explores. The phrase "objects cannot speak for themselves" (Alfrey and Putnam 2004, 187) has almost an axiomatic quality. For example, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states, "Individual objects have shifting and ambiguous relationships to meaning. Being themselves mute, their significance is open to interpretation" (3). Yet, the emphasis on the primacy of human interpretation does not fully appreciate the factuality of objects, particularly in reference to the accessibility of the past within the contemporary context. Korff (1988) writes: "The importance of things is grounded in their

materiality, permanence, visibility, and concreteness. This materiality is an important facet of the creation of a sense of history and appears to be part of an overall social dynamic in a time of the transitory and the fugitive" (268). This unique relationship between objects and the past, one that occurs beyond interpretation and is grounded in the thingness of things, arises from the lifelessness of objects. In Susan M. Pearce's (1994) words, the object "which carries meaning is able to do so because, unlike we ourselves who must die, it bears an 'eternal' relationship to the receding past, and it is this that we experience as the power of the 'actual object'" (25). From this argument follows the conclusion that although human beings bring meaning to objects, it is the object that carries more weight in this relationship. As Pearce puts it, "The meaning of the object lies not wholly in the piece itself, nor wholly in its realization, but somewhere between the two […]. The balance is held by the object itself, with its tangible and factual content" (26-27). In an era in which museums place greater emphasis on conceptual frameworks than objects, it is striking how object-bound GDR museums are.

Igor Kopytoff (1986) applies to the process of commoditization the notion of the biography of things, that is, the idea that an object has a complex, variable, and sometimes, contradictory life story. He is interested in how things become (un)fit for exchange as they move between singularity and commodity. Considering the "biography of things" in the context of GDR museums illuminates why GDR museums are object centered. Items on display at these sites began their life outside of a collection. Although their biographies vary as much as that of individual human beings, I would like to suggest a generalized life story. The objects now located and framed through the museum were manufactured in a collectively owned plant by union members under the directive of a central economic plan. As commodities, they were sold and made their way into homes and institutions. Before becoming museum artifacts, many made

a stop at sites of refuse, such as cellars, attics, and often the literal rubbish heap. While this biographical outline might not be unusual, the scale and speed at which financial and use value fluctuated between objects being part of everyday life and display items in the museum is astonishing (see a more detailed discussion in Chapter 7). With monetary union in 1990, the material possessions of an entire nation with 17 million citizens became outdated and undesirable overnight, which brought with it their rapid expulsion from homes and other settings. Almost simultaneously, collecting and placing these items in museums began.

Considering this particular biography of items that are now on display in GDR museums provides a starting point for examining the mechanisms that connect objects, interpretation, and memory. The content of the GDR museums that I have visited and my interviews with their owners/curators suggest that one of the museums' primary aims is to put on display not only the mundane but also the typical. They seek to bring together the material traces of the average person's past, things that all those who lived consciously in the GDR would recognize. The GDR museum in Apolda near Erfurt in Thuringia epitomizes this pursuit of the typical. Here, an extensive mimetic display that encompasses an entire apartment is entitled "Familie Jedermann" [The Everyman Family.] At a site such as this, multiple factors relating to the culture and politics of post-socialism converge. One pertains to manufactured materiality taking a central role in the processes and practices of remembering. Examining the relationship between materiality and memory, Alan Radley (1990) argues:

> Remembering is something which occurs in a world of things, as well as words, and that artefacts play a central role in the memories of cultures and individuals […] In the very variability of objects, in the ordinariness of their consumption and in the sensory richness of relationships people enjoy through them, they are fitted to be later re-framed as material images for reflection and recall. (57)

I would also assert that the unchanging design of East German consumer goods over the course of decades, or what Paul Betts (2000) calls an "aesthetics of sameness," amplifies this role of objects in recall (754). Moreover, according to Daphne Berdahl (2005), this characteristic renders them "particularly effective *lieux de memoire*" (163). Thus, in the context of GDR museums, assemblages of consumer goods function as environments of memory. Visitors are invited to remember their past, and more specifically, to access and (re)formulate their experiential memory. The visitor sees a living room, recognizes a couch that she or someone she knows owned and begins to reminisce about life in East Germany. Reflecting on a past exhibit at the *DOK* that employed mimetic displays extensively, Berdahl describes this process as follows: "The display items elicit what the exhibit organizers describe as an 'Aha effect,' a reaction that connects personal biographies to collective memory as visitors recognize and tell stories about familiar but forgotten cultural objects" (ibid).

To specify the discussion on the link between materiality and memory further, I now return to the beginning of the biography of the museum artifact, that of industrial production. My field work suggests that one of the dominant discourses operating in amateur and private GDR museums is that despite the limitations that the socialist system placed upon individuals, East Germans led valid and productive lives. They were agents who knew how to help themselves in difficult situations and who made things, something Berdahl (1999) has taken up in the context of theorizing *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East) as "mourning for production" (198). She suggests that nostalgia for the former East, and particularly its articulation through *Ostprodukte* (products of the East), relates to Easterners' loss of identity due to their fundamentally altered relationship to products and the processes of production in the transition to capitalism. The idea of "mourning for production" highlights that GDR museums are not concerned merely with putting the past on

display. Rather, they interpret the present and past in relationship with one another; historical knowledge and cultural memory emerge as serving the needs of the present. These needs are entangled with contemporary realities of post-socialism, which social, economic, cultural and political differences and inequalities between eastern and western Germany partially define. At the same time, the museums also speak to the more global process of deindustrialization in the western world.

"Mourning for production" articulates itself on several connected registers in GDR museums, three of which emerged as dominant themes in my field research. First, the museum narratives *assert productive capacities and capabilities in the industrial realm*. The objects on display and the stories curators/owners tell about them centre on East Germany as a nation that manufactured consumer goods and workers who produced them. The most extreme example of this assertion is the now closed Erfurt GDR museum, which displayed only consumer goods produced in the region, as opposed to East Germany as a whole. As is the case for all GDR museums, the vast majority of the plants from which the museum pieces came no longer operate. The assertion of productive capacities and capabilities tells the story of East Germans producing things and the high rate of unemployment that became an unexpected reality in the early post-unification years when many factories became obsolete and closed their doors.

A second and connected dimension of "mourning for production" consists of the museums' establishing a *relationship between the product and producers of the East with consumers of the West*. Curators and signage point out that many of the objects on display in GDR museums, including furniture and small household appliances, were manufactured in the East, exported to the West, and consumed by Westerners who were unaware of their origin. The story of a successful and well-functioning industrialized nation that the museums tell contradicts and

rejects dominant discourses that classify East Germany as a failed economy, primarily in the realm of industrial production. In this case, "mourning for production" extends itself from the actual producing of things that involve individual producers to the GDR as a nation in relationship to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Moreover, these narratives are inextricably tied to the idea that the easterner occupies a second-class status within the unified Germany.

At a third register, GDR museums express a "mourning for production" by *asserting agency beyond the walls of factories*. While curator/owners speak of the high quality of manufactured goods, they also acknowledge the limitations of the East German centrally planned economy. The museums construct narratives of East Germans as knowing how to be resourceful in the face of consumer good shortages, thereby rejecting discourses that characterize Easterners as lacking self-motivation and an entrepreneurial spirit. East Germans emerge as having been creative and clever problem solvers, qualities that dominant discourses seemingly fail to recognize or undervalue. While this dimension of "mourning for production" focuses on the DIY culture of the GDR, it also mourns the now outdated bricolage approach to making everyday life work.

While I have unpacked Berdahl's notion of mourning for production in light of my research to show a mechanism for how objects provoke memories and tie the past to the present, this exploration has sidelined the idea that the power of the object lies in its materiality and in our ability to encounter it sensuously.

Embodied Visiting

During our interview, the director of one of the federal government sponsored museums

lamented the disrespect for objects that takes place in GDR museums, for these museums care too little about conservatorial matters by letting visitors touch their exhibits and thereby failing to protect them from unnecessary decay. I would like to suggest that it is precisely the embodied encounter, this ability to feel things that sets apart the GDR museum from other museal engagements with the East German everyday.

Unlike most typical museums where the sense of vision dominates as the mode of engagement (Riegel 1996, 83-104), the GDR museum animates its visitor through many, if not all five methods of perception: hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. It expresses itself in such ways as being able to procure typical East German food, driving Trabant cars, being able to open kitchen cupboards and drawers, sitting on sofas in recreated living rooms, and being invited to feel the texture of polyester housecoats and uniforms. The sensory dimensions of museum experiences arise not only because owners/curators create them intentionally. Rather, the lack of vitrines and other means of distancing observer and observed invite sensuous engagement. Moreover, olfactory encounters are more likely to be accidental than purposely constructed. For example, mimetic displays of grocery stores and laundry rooms invariably include cleaning products. For the purpose of authenticity, these types of display items often still hold their original content. However, decaying packaging lets seep out what they hold.

In addition to the absence of much overt interpretation by means such as text, the sensory experiences that that GDR museums afford the visitor are tied inextricably to the past mobilizing unfold at these sites. Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke (2002) observes that, "After the *Wende* the physical environment in eastern Germany, including its sights, sounds and smells, underwent a radical transformation" (166). More specifically, she describes how, with the demise of the GDR, East Germans found themselves suddenly in an environment in which their memories of habitual

practices, daily routine and customs of speech which had ruled their everyday lives, had become entirely irrelevant. She argues that this "rupture of memory" (ibid.) was the basis of the existentialist crisis of disorientation, which many former East Germans experienced after the fall of the Wall. Ten Dyke writes, "The future was irrevocably transformed; its relationship to the past severed. East Germans were cast adrift in an utterly foreign present; they were strangers in their own land. As a result it was as if East Germans had lost their memories" (ibid.). The sensory landscape that the museum offers animates these memories; the sites signify that memories are not lost. The sensory possibilities invite the visitor to perform the GDR. The spaces provoke those with personal memory of living in the East and those who do not pretend to be an East German. Possibilities of enacting East Germanness include sitting in a living room where the coffee table is set for an afternoon of "Kaffee und Kuchen" ("coffee and cake)" and the television is broadcasting an episode of "Der schwarze Kanal,"[xxiii] eating Soljanka soup or simply sitting at a desk in a class room and looking through schoolbooks. For those who lived in East Germany, these embodied practices can evoke memories that seemed to be forgotten. The sensory landscape that GDR museums offer intentionally and inadvertently also offers visitors without direct knowledge of the GDR what few traditional historical museums do: the smell, taste, touch, and sound of the past.[xxiv]

This chapter has argued that amateur and private GDR museums operate as a distinctive site of cultural practice that emerged in the context of a caesura in German history; a transformation whose aftershocks continue to be felt. Their construction of the past relies significantly on accessing memories of life under socialism. Manifesting a struggle over the kind of history that is carried forward, the museums respond to and reject hegemonic discourses on

everyday life in East Germany. The intimate relationship between the museums and their publics, which GDR museums enact entail democratic curatorial processes that are uncommon in mainstream musealization efforts. Although the near absence of interpretative texts at most sites could be understood as reflecting amateurism, I have suggested that this characteristic plays an integral part in the memory work that the GDR museum affords its visitors. Moreover, the prominence of objects, particularly industrially produced ones, relates to their capacity to affirm an East German identity. The sensuous encounter with the past, even if often accidental, leads visitors to perform the GDR.

Emphasizing what engages, seems to work well, and operates uniquely, this chapter has provided a relatively generous reading of the GDR museum. Although this type of museum represents and hints at that which is forgotten or refused elsewhere, it too omits and distorts. In addition to displaying a limited range of artifacts, it accounts poorly for social, economic, political, and cultural transformation that occurred over the course of the entire existence of the GDR. Materially, it offers most frequently those artifacts that have been readily available and affordable. In addition, mimetic displays tend to represent the material cultural landscape of the later years of the nation. Reasons for the ubiquity of artifacts from the nineteen eighties include that more of the material traces of the recent past survive and that visitors may want to see what they remember best. Moreover, constructing content that speaks to different periods within the history of East Germany, such as contrasting the eras of Walter Ulbricht's and Erich Honecker's rule, exceeds the professional and financial capabilities of private and amateur museums. Despite these limitations, popular museums that dedicate themselves to the history of East Germany raise significant questions about the possibility of joining together museal narratives that simultaneously address repression and resistance while representing everyday life in such a way

that it respects and recognizes the experiences of most or all East Germans. What is at stake is how diverse the voices of the past can be as they move forward in time.

5. Research-by-Making: Exhibit Curating as Investigative Tool

This chapter describes an experimental curatorial project to demonstrate how material practice can facilitate social research. It traces how my fashioning of a public exhibit illuminated my ongoing dissertation project's focus on the representation of East Germany in museums. The central contribution of this piece lies in its theorization of research-by-making, an approach that this chapter proposes as methodological tool for social research that can be applied more broadly than arts-based forms of inquiry. I consider in detail how material practice outside of the artistic domain can support research endeavors while also highlighting the creative and subjective elements of scholarly work.

> *If research implies finding something that was not there before, it ought to be obvious that it involves imagination. If it claimed that what is found was always there (and merely lost), still an act of creative remembering occurs. As a method of materializing ideas, research is unavoidably creative.*
>
> Paul Carter[xxv]

From September 4th - 28th, 2012, The Intermedia Research Studio (IRS) at the University of Alberta's Department of Sociology hosted *East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life*. This exhibit interrogated themes and questions that emerged from my doctoral research on the historicisation and musealization of East Germany. Layering objects from my childhood, music, written text and personal narrative, the experimental museal representation enriched and complemented my developing written dissertation. Moreover, before, during and after the exhibit, the IRS functioned as laboratory, as a space and place for tentative reciprocal material practice and theorizing. In pragmatic terms, by curating a show, I mobilized the past as I engaged in a specific and located mode of representation that my work interrogates but with which I was also experientially unfamiliar from the perspective of its construction. With the aim of demonstrating how material practices can facilitate theoretical developments in sociologically informed scholarly writing, this chapter describes the curatorial process that culminated in the exhibit and establishes theoretical links to my larger project. The central contribution of this piece lies in its theorization of research-by-making as a methodological tool for social inquiry that crosses disciplinary boundaries.

> ***East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life - Exhibit (Panel 1 of 5)***
> *Die GDR im Museum - East Germany in the Museum*
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> *The musealization of East Germany began in 1990, when the socialist nation took its last breath. East German manufactured goods, such as furniture, small appliances, clothing and home electronics became instantly obsolete; they transformed from*

useful objects to refuse nearly overnight. This rapid expunging coincided with their frantic and almost indiscriminant collecting and archiving, albeit not always their conservation.

Two distinct modes of museal representation emerged in the 1990s. Federally funded museums present East Germany through the lens of dictatorship. Here, artifacts illustrate facets of a repressive system. In contrast, amateur and private museums foreground objects of everyday life and the memories they evoke. Critics frequently dismiss the latter as nostalgic, romanticizing backward gaze in time (in German Ostalgie, nostalgia for the East) because they address political questions inadequately.

This exhibit juxtaposes my interpretation of these distinct approaches to highlight their characteristics, explore the tension between them and suggest that combined they tell a richer and more complete story than on their own.

Inspirations

My understanding of what produces a captivating public display of ideas and art derives in great part from my own encounters with museums and galleries. These personal experiences shaped significantly *East Germany on Display's* form, content, and the questions it raised. To situate and provide a deeper background for my project I briefly describe below four exhibitions that communicated compellingly ideas relating to my work, influenced my curatorial approach and aided in the formulation of specific research directions.

As part of my fieldwork in Germany in 2010, I visited the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur DDR (DOK) [Documentation Centre of East Germany's Culture of Everyday Life] in Eisenhüttenstadt, which is located east of Berlin on the Polish border. Its temporary exhibit *Aufgehobene Dinge: Ein Frauenleben in Ost-Berlin* [*Kept things: A woman's life in East Berlin*] displayed the personal belongings of a single person, an approach that no other museum I encountered during my research had taken. Ms. P., an unmarried, childless secretary living in East Berlin accumulated, or arguably hoarded, over the course of her life small consumer goods, many of which she never used. These items included hats, scarves, notebooks, and shoes. The

exhibition supplied no information on the objects themselves but framed these ordinary, essentially value-less artifacts with only a general outline of her biography and queries on loosely defined possibilities for interpreting the reason for their collecting. As historical representation, this exhibition raises questions about the potentialities and limitations of museal displays that aim to make definitive statements about the past using the personal belongings of one individual without situating them within broader, social, political, economic, or cultural contexts. For example, what insights can one woman's unexceptional things provide into the reality of everyday life in East Germany? How much information must didactic panels provide to generate meaning for the visitor? In addition to serving as a precedent for *East Germany on Display* the DOK's work also prompted the more detailed analysis of one of its temporary exhibitions in Chapter 6.

At the Tate Modern in London, UK two years later in May 2012, already thinking about using material traces from my childhood to create an exhibit for research purposes, I came upon Lamia Joreige's *Objects of War.* These installations interrogate how personal belongings, such as a cassette tape, a guitar, a teddy bear, and a radio can embody memory and trauma. Joreige's work includes these objects and video documentaries of testimony on experiences of the Lebanese Civil War and the recent thirty-day war in Southern Lebanon. Each interviewee discusses an artifact they own that reminds them of aspects of these events. Joreige describes the installation in terms of a historiographical problem, arguing that the testimonies "while helping to create a collective memory, also show the impossibility of telling a single history of this war" (Joreige, 2012, para. 1). She further clarifies her work's preoccupation with the construction of singular historical facts. "Only fragments of this history are recounted here, held as truth by those expressing them… The aim is not to reveal a truth but rather to gather and confront many

diverse versions and discourses on the subject." With the exception of the DOK, I found little evidence of multiplicitous history telling in musealizations of East Germany. Instead, museums offered distanced, de-personalized and generalizing stories that presented themselves as singularly true, thereby erasing the complexity of the past. In addition to the DOK's temporary exhibit, Joreige's installations affirmed my developing idea that the presentation of mundane objects of ordinary individuals and the stories they tell about them can not only functions as alternative historical accounts to these monolithic representations. If they also vary sufficiently from dominant discourses or from one another they gesture toward the existence of countless, even opposing, accounts of the past and by extension, endless possibilities for imagining the future.

An exceptionally unusual exhibition focused my interest in the embodied elements of exhibition going. Ernesto Neto's 2010 *The Edges of the World* show at the Hayward Gallery in London provided a heightened corporeal experience. Encouraging shared spatial and social experiences, Neto's immersive, sensory installation allowed visitors to walk through, climb, touch, smell, create sound, linger, and bathe in artistic creations reminiscent of elements of nature. My own experience of this work contributed to the incorporation into *East Germany on Display* of components that encouraged physical engagement with the purpose of investigating further its role in museums that represent everyday life in East Germany.

While the above discusses innovative contemporary examples, the University of Oxford's Victorian era Pitt Rivers Museum, founded in 1884, takes visitors on a journey back in time, to a moment when curiosity cabinets were just transforming into museums as public institutions. This anthropology and world archaeology museum has from its inception arranged artifacts thematically by combining them according to how the objects were used, rather than by their age

or origin, which is a typical strategy today. This approach to categorization, the original custom-built space, the high density of often strange seeming objects on display in vitrines and the handwritten labels that are attached to artifacts with a thread produce what the collective imagination would describe as the quintessential museum. In my exhibition project I drew on these culturally shared ideas, to create a space and genre that visitors would recognize.

Exhibit Framings

Approximating Genre Conventions

East Germany on Display evolved as a response to limitations that arose when I attempted to compose a written dissertation whose focus is the visuality, materiality, creativity, and spatiality of museal communication. I felt that a textual working through and representation of my work alone would not address sufficiently the themes with which I was engaging, nor would a more conventional approach allow me to explore satisfactorily emerging questions. At the same time, the process of materializing theoretical ideas, and in turn describing them linguistically led to conundrums, articulating themselves initially in such challenges as naming the project in a way that would offer a meaningful and definitive frame for the work in progress. Given that I was interested in how museums, which are public spaces, represent East Germany, I decided early in the project on sharing the work with academic and non-academic audiences. The available terms for such an endeavor "installation", "exhibit," and "exhibition" seemed not to capture adequately the project's process and product. On one hand, I sought to create an historical representation that laid claim on a 'real' past, one that would invite viewers to time-travel to East Germany by way of examples of its material culture, sound and image world. On

the other hand, as research-in-process, the project simultaneously questioned overtly the possibility of the very same.

Although the problem of labeling was part of the project from its inception, the need for a descriptor became critical when I began designing posters that announced its public display. The term "installation" would have referred to the theoretical and experimental aims of the project, yet it suggests site-specificity and a focused interrogation of the space it occupies, as well as the sensory experience of the viewer. While *East Germany on Display* positioned artifacts to facilitate movement through a room, encouraged touch, and included sound recordings, the project addressed only superficially these facets in relationship to space and the embodied. Moreover, despite being an abstract and creative undertaking, the categorization of the project as art, which "installation" implies, interfered with its intentionally representational character and its aim to render ideas about the past explicitly concrete.

Given the unsuitability of "installation", the labels "exhibition" and "exhibit" remained as alternatives. I decided upon the latter because although in everyday speech theses terms are often used interchangeably, they can be interpreted as differing in scale, where "exhibit" connotes a single or small assemblage of items and "exhibition" signifies a larger project. In addition to corresponding with my sense of the magnitude of the project, the verb "to exhibit" alludes to the purpose of the project in its sense of offering up proof of something real, to make manifest or explain, and to present for inspection.

More fundamentally, my dissertation interrogates the "exhibit" as a genre, a distinctive mode of representation, whose defining characteristics establish frameworks for the creation and interpretation of cultural products. In relationship to film, which also applies to public

exhibitions, Denis McQuail (1987) emphasizes genre's social dimensions as he defines the construct:

> The genre may be considered as a practical device for helping any mass medium to produce consistently and efficiently and to relate its production to the expectations of its customers. Since it is also a practical device for enabling individual media users to plan their choices, it can be considered as a mechanism for ordering the relations between the two main parties to mass communication. (200)

Thus, with the intention of establishing a situation that facilitated communication between visitors and *East Germany on Display*, I relied on shared codes, or genre conventions, that define the exhibit to provide a parameter for my project that defined simultaneously what falls within and outside the cultural practices associated with it. Consequently the project began with what I imagined to be an exhibit's most central and recognizable signifiers: artifacts assembled thematically and in a display case, didactic panels and a bench to connote a place of contemplation. Selecting these elements immediately required more detailed considerations, however, including how many artifacts should be on display as well as what would be an appropriate reading level and length for didactic panels. At this register of curatorial decision-making, genre conventions and professional practice meet. While the former relate to culturally circulating notions, the latter codifies specific forms institutionally in such publications as Environment Canada's *Design Guidelines for Media Accessibility* (1993) and the Smithsonian Accessibility Program's *The Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design* (1996). These texts provide detailed instructions on how exhibition texts should be formatted, arranged in space, and written, both in form and content. More abstractly, yet still genre bound, my project also tended to the material and textual construction of a unifying narrative. Visitors expect to be offered a singular story that weaves itself though the exhibition elements and thus holds them together thematically. In this case, the title *East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia &*

Everyday Life fulfills this function in part. It signals that a particular time period is presented and alludes to tensions in its representation.

Practice-as-research

While a definitive genre for the project provided a general framework for selecting relevant communicative strategies, it failed to capture its relationship to my developing dissertation. As indicated above, part of the motivation for my approach was to create a situation that would allow me to learn about the curatorial process, an approach that John Dewey (1938) and David A. Kolb and Ronald Fry (1975) have theorized as experiential learning. Their conceptualization of coming to know prioritizes active, hands-on, concrete experience of ideas over only thinking about them. Although methodologically, experiential learning describes an aspect of why making an exhibit became one of my research activities, the project extended beyond coming to know how to do something. I also sought to account for and explore a form of research that focuses on process, materiality, as well as the interplay between practice and theorizing.

While the social sciences literature, both substantive and methodological, provides little guidance for this type of work, university departments and faculties that are explicitly performative and creative have in the past two decades begun to explore deeply the relationship between theory and practice in the academic research setting. These debates are separate from contributions on art-based-research, a qualitative research method, which Shaun McNiff (2009) defines as the "systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (29). Here, art emerges as a strategy to access and construct knowledge. A more complex relationship between

doing and knowledge construction emerges in theorizing what the literature refers to most often and interchangeably as practice-as-research, practice-based-research, practice-led research, and creative research. Ben Spatz (2010) uses the acronym PAR to refer to these processes, which I would like to point out is confusing because PAR also abbreviates Participatory Action Research. Thus, I will use in my continued discussion the most widely used descriptor, practice-as-research.

As the number of terms listed above suggests, the practice-as-research literature is neither definitionally nor otherwise unified. Baz Kershaw (2009) ascribes the source of the contestation to the project itself, for "the diversity of practitioner perspectives in practice-as-research has created a compass of a research 'field', the reach and coherence of which is always already beyond them" (3). However, in most cases, common understandings and concerns weave themselves through these writings. Broad definitions such as "the use of creative processes as research methods" (Kershaw 2009, 2), the presence of a "deepened relationship between artistic practice and scholarly research" (Spatz 2010, 490) and "prioritiz[ing] some property of experience arising through practice, over cognitive content arising from reflection on practice" (Biggs 2004, 8) gesture toward a complex relationship with strategies of constructing and representing knowledge within the university. Practice-as-research raises fundamental ontological and epistemological questions. For example, Kershaw (2009) presents the approach as having the "potential to trigger fundamental and radical challenges to well-established paradigms of knowledge making in the academy and beyond" (2). Specifying this potentiality, Estelle Barrett (2007) characterizes practice-as-research as "extending and articulating our capacity to discover new ways of modeling consciousness and designing alternative methods of research capable of generating economic, cultural and social capital", "extending our

understanding of the role of experiential, problem-based learning and multiple intelligences in the production of knowledge" as well as "demonstrate[ing] how knowledge is revealed and how we come to acquire knowledge" (2). This tending to the epistemological derives from more concrete elements that many practice-as-research projects share (see Allegue, Jones, Kershaw & Piccini, 2009; Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Riley & Hunger, 2009). They concern themselves primarily with the unique characteristics of doing rather than thinking. Connectedly, they highlight experiential, subjective, emergent, and collaborative elements of performance, as well as visual and material creativity while tending to the embodied, spatial and temporal. At the same time, as consciously located within the academy and as a method for sharing knowledge, writings on practice-as-research emphasize archiving, documenting and communicating in words what is often ephemeral. Yet this focus on the written text pushes to the margins the unique contributions of the approach. For example, from the perspective of theatre studies, David Whitton (2009) contends that much of the construction of scholarly text in fact entail efforts of legitimation, which overshadows explorations on how the practice leads to new insights (86).

Parallel criticisms emerge from what I would like to suggest is in part a defensive standpoint, the sources of which are having to appeal to funding agencies and more broadly entrenched ideas about the parameters of scholarly inquiry. Paul Carter (2004) describes this relationship between creative endeavors and the university as site of research as fundamentally opposed in the contemporary era. He writes:

> While 'creative research' ought to be a tautology, in the present cultural climate it is in fact an oxymoron. A research paradigm prevails in which knowledge and creativity are conceived as mutually exclusive. … [A] narrowly reductive empiricist notion of research, which, by insisting on describing the outcomes in advance, defines the new in terms of a present 'become more extreme', now influences the framing of research questions across all disciplines. (Carter 2004, 7)

In the *Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990) identifies the source of this knowledge/practice

dichotomy in western thought.

> Plato tips the balance from the very beginning when, through an entirely negative description of the logic of practice, which is simply the reverse side of an exaltation of *skholè,* a freedom from the constraints and urgencies of practice which is presented as the *sine qua non* of access to truth. (27)

This conceptualization of *skholè*, the term Bourdieu uses to refer to the "institutions of higher education" (Reed-Danahay 2005, 13), "in its most extreme forms, defines action as the 'inability to contemplate'" (Bourdieu 1990, 27 – 28). It is this juxtaposition of practice and intellectual thought that situates Spatz's (2010) argument that writings on practice-as-research "unintentionally reinforce the practice/theory binary by aligning practice with action and research with text" (490), which reflects the need to adhere to prevailing norms in the academy and beyond.

More foundationally problematic is Spatz's closely connected critique. "[W]hile new interdisciplinary relationships between practice *and* research surely represent a valuable area of exploration, they do not constitute a vision of practice *as* research" (490). His position implies that the possibility for the simultaneity of research and practice arises from the distinct character of creative doing. Here, linguistic explication distorts rather than enriches or complements the artistic. In Robin Nelson's (2009) words,

> the need for additional writing, which might assist in bringing out the research imperatives perhaps by offering an account of process or by locating the practice within a range of influences, conceptual and/or practical, runs the risk of diminishing the status of the product itself, which some believe should stand on its own as a research outcome. (114)

Despite these appraisals, other contributions to this field point to the centrality of exegesis by emphasizing the possibility and necessity of interpreting the creative work linguistically. From the vantage point of material creative work, Carter (2004) contends that those who create it must also explicated it, for their lack of writing about their own work means that others take on this

task, which "perpetuates a Romantic myth about the creative process – that it cannot stand up to rational enquiry – and … cedes the terms of the debate to outsiders" (xi). Thus, practice-as-research projects, such as Carter's, pursue the goal of "put[ing] into words the distinctive character of creative research, to show how the process of material thinking enables us to think differently about our human situation" (xii).

While Carter argues that creative works *must* be explicated, Biggs (2004) argues that they *can* be explicated. He separates experiential knowledge into the explicit, tacit and ineffable to reflect on the extent to which each can be expressed linguistically, particularly in the context of requirements for doctoral degrees.

> Explicit content is expressed linguistically. Tacit content has an experiential component that cannot be efficiently expressed linguistically. Ineffable content cannot be expressed linguistically. It would therefore be necessary to prove that practice-based research only generates ineffable content in order to substantiate the argument that practice-based research *necessarily* demands non-linguistic modes of argument and communication. (Biggs 2004, 4)

Subsequently, Biggs forcefully rejects the idea that only the ineffable is produced and therefore concludes that while aspects of creative works are incommunicable in words, others afford exegesis. With this reasoning, Biggs implies that practice-as-research projects can and already do operate within conventional approaches of knowledge transmission in the academy. Following Bigg's and Carter's arguments, the conflation of practice and research, which Spatz advocates, are therefore neither necessary nor desirable. Moreover, I would like to add that while considerations of their overlapping are important, the simultaneity of the two would erase their important methodological and denotational distinctions.

The brief discussion on research-as-practice situates my exhibit *East Germany on Display* by locating its preoccupations and purpose as they relate to theorizing through practice. This linking of a research approach and a specific project requires an opening up of the term

practice that extends signification from professional creative doing to action more broadly. In contrast to research-as-practice activities, which the literature describes most often as highly specialized and based on their practitioners having *a priori* knowledge of a creative undertaking, my project entailed an amateur construction and a trying out without previous training. Put differently, the former pursues an end in itself and the latter consists of actions that are a means to an end. This characterization and movement from *specified* practice to *general* practice also brings with it the possibility of rendering less relevant the ineffable aspects of creative work, thereby raising the significance of exegesis.

Research-by-making

While with this stretching of practice *East Germany on Display* could be conceptualized as practice-as-research, I propose instead the alternative descriptor 'research-by-making.' Reflecting on Carter's *Material Thinking* (2004), a monograph that the practice-as-research literature has incorporated because it explores the creative making of things for the purpose of working through and developing ideas, Cameron Tonkinwise (2008) uses the term 'research-by-making' as a synonym for material thinking (4). Although Tonkinwise does not theorize the term further, 'research-by-making' captures the material experimentation and the scholarly nature of my project better than the concept practice-as-research. Emphasis remains on research, the systematic and rigorous investigation of a defined topic that strives to arrive at new understandings. In fact, semantically, research gains in significance as the word moves from second to first position and as equality between the two activities is eliminated with the replacing of "as" with "by". To illustrate, as a mode of scholarly research the process of constructing my exhibit, the exhibit itself and its dismantling responded systematically to a central question: How do two distinct approaches to representing East Germany in the museum, one highlighting

political structures and the other emphasizing everyday life, complement and oppose one another? This question arose from ethnographic fieldwork and an extensive dialogue with relevant scholarly literature. This research suggested that informal, private and amateur museums, colloquially referred to as DDR Museums (GDR [German Democratic Republic] Museums), foreground material cultural relating to everyday life and bracket state politics, while publically sponsored museums emphasize the ways in which the structures of dictatorship infused all aspects of life. As research activity, the exhibit also produced findings, which I will discuss below.

In addition to prioritizing research, the proposed term also replaces 'practice' with 'making', thereby signifying a mode of investigation that permits a doing with a greater degree of not knowing, or amateurism, although it still includes the possibility of expertly creating. Furthermore, 'making' connotes a more mundane and wide-ranging type of action than the former, implying a broadly accessible, provisional research strategy, both theoretically and practically. I would also argue that research-by-making can but need not have a coherent internal logic that can stand on its own outside of linguistic interpretation. At the same time, like practice-as-research approaches, research-by-making requires the prolonging of and lingering in a scholarly investigative process that is emergent in character in its pursuit of unforeseeable lines of inquiry instead of testing or extending theory. The choice of the methodological descriptor research-by-making also mirrors the one I made above when selecting as genre the exhibit rather than the installation, thereby again orienting my project away from the artistic toward less specialized doing, which coincidentally characterizes the amateur curating that defines the majority of museums that my study focused upon.

Simultaneously, the "making" in research-by-making stresses the production of

some*thing*, the bringing into existence or material creating, which in my project included designing and physically fashioning displays and panels, as well as arranging an environment conducive to engagement, for both visitors and myself as researcher. Barbara Bolt (2004) turns to Martin Heidegger to explore the epistemological relevance and pedagogic potentialities of material engagement. In *Being and Time* (1962/1996) Heidegger examines the form of knowledge that arises from the handling of materialities. He argues that we do not come to know the world theoretically through contemplative knowledge but rather that we come to know it theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling. Here, the primary relationships we have with the world are those things that we deal with. Heidegger writes: "The kind of dealing which is closest to us … is not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use…. Such entities are not thereby objects for knowing the 'world' theoretically" (Heidegger 1962, 95 quoted in Bolt 2004, 64). For Heidegger it is through use that we gain access to the world. He thereby distinguishes between theoretical conception and practical understanding. Deploying the example of the hammer, Heidegger posits that active use establishes original relationships with things.

> The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as a useful thing. The act of hammering itself discovers the specific 'handiness' of the hammer…. No matter how keenly we just *look* at the 'outward appearance' of things constituted in one way or another, we cannot discover handiness. When we just look at things 'theoretically', we lack an understanding of handiness. (Heidegger 1996, 99-100 quoted in Bolt 2004, 65)

As a research-by-making project, *East Germany on Display* not only materialized a research question, but also created affordances for the handling of things through the selection, manipulation and arranging of things. Thus, the prolonged putting to use of spaces and artifacts for the duration of the endeavor bridged the gap between professional and academic practice

while creating openings for different modes of knowledge construction than nonmaterial engagements. For example, the making of the exhibit facilitated theorizing on the operation of history and memory within museal spaces by establishing a situation where objects shifted in value and deteriorated through handling; objects that were stored in cardboard boxes in a basement for many years, became part of a display, were thought and written about, and then returned to storage or permanently disposed of. The exhibit also passed on this possibility for material knowing to visitors by asking them to handle artifacts, a process I will describe further below. Moreover, the exhibit located and concretized a specific practice in place and time, which allowed for such considerations as the role memory plays in a German versus a Canadian setting.

On Childhood and the Singular

With the research-by-making project my dissertation became more outwardly personal than I intended. Although friends and family members made available other artifacts, the vast majority of pieces in the exhibit were material remnants of my childhood. Reasons for using my belongings were based on primary and secondary research questions, concerns relating to wanting to assemble a compelling public display, as well as the limitations set by funding, space and time.

Given that the domain of the GDR Museum, one of the two museum types in which I was interested, is the material culture of everyday life, its work often seems unfinished, for only an impossible bringing together of all that once was would truly lead to completion. The DIY characteristics of these amateur museums amplify the sense that they cannot deliver the grand story they purport to offer. Using my belongings, and by extension my own biography, not only mirrors and thereby interrogates the DOK's temporary exhibit *Kept Things* that I described

briefly above, they also provided the project with clear boundaries, which contrasts with the GDR Museums' vast topic. Defining as 'the collection' the things I already owned narrowed the thematic possibilities.

Even without imposing a unifying narrative, my own biography tied together the artifacts at a foundational level. Moreover, my ownership of the objects provided me with the sense that I could authoritatively construct a publically tellable story about them. Thus, in addition to creating a sense of cohesion, this specificity circumvented the expectation of having to construct a generalizing discourse on the kind of place East Germany throughout its history. Using my things and my biography bracketed such challenges in historical representation as tending to differences relating to generation, gender, ethnicity, as well as transformation over time.

> ***East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life - Exhibit Panel (2 of 5)***
> *Die Sammlung – The Collection*
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> *An archive is a collection of historical documents or records that provides information about a place, institution, or group of people. Museum archives are usually inaccessible to its visitors and contain many more artifacts than are ever on display.*
> *The monitor beside this poster shows the archive from which objects that are part of the exhibit were selected and invites viewers to imagine how they might have drawn from it differently.*
> *How would you curate your own past?*

In an attempt to disperse to a degree the attention on my past and simultaneously raise broader questions about processes that unfold in museums, the exhibit casted viewers as curators. Beside the entrance to the main exhibition room, the didactic panel entitled "The Collection" and the large LCD screen beside it that played a slideshow of all items in my personal 'collection' hinted at the fact that museums store many more items than are usually visible to the public, for

they indicated that *East Germany on Display* could have included different artifacts. Having access to the collection thus also allowed viewers to imagine how they might have curated the exhibit differently. To concretize this idea of the visitor as curator further, the panel encouraged its readers to think about how they curate their own lives when putting on display, storing in boxes and throwing out our own belongings that are material remnants of their past.

In addition to exploring the representational strategy of constructing material histories with the personal belongings of one person's past everyday life, using my own things also allowed *East Germany on Display* to interrogate the overrepresentation of childhood in GDR museums, which I observed during my fieldwork. The abundance of child-related artifacts is striking given the many thematic absences, suggesting that they differ in character from other types of things. One possible explanation for this ubiquity might be the sentiments such objects awaken, explaining both their ubiquity in private homes, even if stored in basements and attics, and within the museum. In *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Walter Benjamin (2006) recollects in material culture focused vignettes through the lens of the present and the future his childhood days that witnessed the coming of modernity. On the first page, he describes his projects as a preemptive strike against expected melancholy. Here, object and places he remembers ground approximations of a social past. Benjamin (2006) writes:

> In 1932, when I was abroad, it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth. Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body. I sought to limit its effect through insight into the irretrievability - not the contingent biographical but the necessary social irretrievability of the past. (37)

Benjamin seeks out and lingers in memories of childhood places and things not with the intention of recreating them but rather to convince himself of their pastness within the context of

their social embeddedness. The immersion, so he hopes, will bring with it the lessening of the impact the impending inaccessibly of all traces of the past will have on him as he leaves his home, or 'Heimat'.

More specifically, Benjamin draws on children's affinity with everyday things and places and the sense of safety they provide, which Howard Eiland (1990), Benjamin's translator, describes.

> The child is collector, flâneur, and allegorist in one. He lives in an antiquity of the everyday; for him everything is natural and therefore endowed with chthonic force. His relation to things is wholly mimetic. That is, he enters into the world of things (Dingwelt) with all his senses … . With his gift for dawdling and waiting around, the child insinuates himself into the keeping of things, mimics the things and masks himself with them …. Everything is alive, full of eyes and ears, as in the animistic world of fairy tales. Just as a spinning wheel, slipper, or mirror sets up a force field in the tale, drawing characters and events into a pattern, so the child is initiated into the secret life of ordinary objects, of the most minuscule. (xiv)

This relationship between children and everyday things doubtlessly plays out in GDR museums, as they do in my own collecting and motivation for constructing an exhibit. The concept of nostalgia could illuminate that from which Benjamin attempts to protect himself, as well as the ubiquity of childhood in GDR museums. Both cases involve a longing for and a retreating into a less complicated and more secure world. However, as I have argued in Chapter 3, nostalgia provides an inadequate framework for complex phenomena, including the popular responses to the Fall of the Wall. Moreover, ironically, childhood related artifacts also render highly visible the ideological workings of a totalitarian state at the site of childcare and education, for they render highly visible efforts of socialist indoctrination.

Exhibit Aesthetics

Before discussing directly the material components of *East Germany on Display,* I now turn from considerations of ideas that shaped the exhibit to its overall design. Although these three aspects are inextricably connected, foregrounding each allows for deliberation of their unique contribution to the project as a whole. In addition to creating visual coherence through repetition, aesthetic decisions underline the overall narrative of the display by tying together individual objects. They also subtly point to secondary themes with the intent of creating multiple layers of meaning.

The actual making of the project began with painting the exhibit space turning the walls from neon green to gray, which the manufacturer Behr labeled "Anonymous." As the name connotes, the intention behind this transformation was to begin with a neutral background that would serve as a blank canvas and complement bright colors in other design elements. Although the exhibit's aim was to counter clichés about the dreariness of East Germany, in part by selecting fuchsia and a yellow as primary colors, an unintended consequence of this selection was that some visitors commented that the grayness of the walls suited the subject matter.

Five large 34'' x 34'' bright yellow didactic panels, four in the main room and one outside its doors, printed on heavy fabric mounted to the grey walls with roofing nails through grommets visually dominated the exhibition space. Their material composition is suggestive of manual labor and banners at political rallies or other types of mass gatherings. The text typefaces, Drescher Grotesk, the most widely used lead-type sans-serif substitute for Futura in East Germany, and Stentor, designed by Heinz Schumann in 1964 at VEB Typorart Dresden, not only correspond with the subject matter of the exhibit. They also allude to the rich typography tradition in East Germany, whose contemporary relevance and value the political realities after

the Fall of the Wall put into question. To specify, Grant Carruthers and Joyce Yee (2004) recognize the taintedness of all things East German, including typography, regardless of how far removed they are from the oppressive workings of the political system. In response they ask that the craft and its products are appraised on their own merit rather than be dismissed for the context of their creation.

> It is important that the legacy of the Leipzig-Dresden School of typography is not forgotten and destroyed like many of the few remaining symbols of the GDR have been in the last decade and a half. At least some contemporary designers recognize the weight of skill, experience and knowledge the old typographers retained, and some believe that the typographic standards were much higher in the East than the West as a result. (Carruthers and Yee 2004, 8)

At the same time, the particular form typography took in East Germany is linked inextricably to the political and economic context in which it was created and used. The absence of a commercial advertising sector, a well-developed book publishing industry, the prohibitive cost of licenses held in the west and shortages in materials for the design process gave rise to a uniquely artistic practice (Carruthers and Yee 2004). While *East Germany on Display* did not share this history with visitors directly, it contributed to the exhibit's overall integrity. In addition, from a research perspective, the topic of typography allows for the interrogation of how diverse artifacts and practices lend themselves to a telling of a past and to what extent their East German context contaminates them.

Figure 6: *East Germany on Display* - MP3 Players

In addition to the didactic panels, other design repetitions included artifact tags mimicking those of the Pitt Rivers Museum and two cardboard suitcases. Two of the four suitcase halves served as shelves for mp3 players (see Figure 6). The others provided focal points for the two main displays by holding objects. In addition to these uses, the suitcases were exhibit artifacts; they travelled with my family when we immigrated to Canada from East Germany and held childhood belongings in subsequent years. Given these functional and design roles as well as rich symbolic meanings, including travel, migration, liminality, and containability, the figure of the suitcase served well as illustration on exhibit announcement posters and mini-postcard advertisements.

> ***East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life***
> ***Exhibit Panel (3 of 5)***
> *Der Koffer - The Suitcase*
>
> *On March 9, 1990, my parents, my sister, and I arrived in Canada as Landed Immigrants. We left East Germany at a time when the immanent unification of the two Germanys was still inconceivable.*
> *The two flimsy, inexpensive cardboard suitcases that are part of this exhibit made the journey across the Atlantic with us. The material traces of my East German childhood that have survived six moves in 22 years all fit into one suitcase. Although I have forgotten why I once thought some of the keepsakes meaningful, all of them now carry the aura of the past that makes them seem precious.*
> *Many museums have created mobile museums housed inside suitcases so they can be brought into classrooms. In this form, the boxed-up past appears containable, definable and knowable. Here, the suitcase underlines the pedagogical function of historical exhibits.*

Central Juxtaposition

The centerpiece of the exhibit consisted of one Plexiglas covered display case and one large table. As a pair, they directly interrogated the primary research question: How do two distinct approaches to representing East Germany in the museum, one highlighting political

structures and the other emphasizing everyday life, complement and oppose one another? As I have stated, this question emerged during my field research when I visited amateur and private museums as well as publically funded museums. Although both types of museums represent everyday life in East Germany, I observed that in the former, dictatorship serves as sole analytical lens for the interpretation of objects or connectedly, artifacts illustrate themes within dictatorship. Although oppressive characteristics in the East Germany state are often acknowledged, in the latter, everyday life appears as though it can operate at least in part outside of the direct influence of the political system.

East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life - Exhibit Panel (4 of 5)
Erziehung zur sozialistischen Persönlichkeit - development of a socialist personality

By law, the federal government of Germany provides funding for museums dedicated to East German everyday life only when dictatorship is the overriding analytical framework. This exhibit's display case demonstrates this requirement while adopting a conventional museal practice that protects artifacts from visitors and the environment. Meaning emerges predominantly from ideas rather than objects.

In East Germany, schools operated as principal sites for socializing young people into their socialist identity. The indoctrination extended beyond curricula and teaching materials, pervading organized sport, children's and youth organizations as well as evaluation and award structures. The artifacts presented here speak to how the East German government deployed its propaganda across the country through the centralized education system.

Jugendgesetz der DDR § 1. (1) Vorrangige Aufgabe bei der Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft ist es, alle jungen Menschen zu Staatsbürgern zu erziehen, die den Ideen des Sozialismus treu ergeben sind, als Patrioten und Internationalisten denken und handeln, den Sozialismus stärken und gegen alle Feinde zuverlässig schützen.

Youth Law of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) § 1. (1) The overriding task in the shaping of the developed socialist society is to educate all young people as citizens who are faithfully devoted to the ideas of socialism, think and act as patriots

and internationalists, strengthen socialism and staunchly protect it against all enemies.

Figure 7: *East Germany on Display* - Display Case

As components of a research-by-making project, the Plexiglas covered display and the table, located on opposite ends of the exhibition room, interrogated the tension between these representational modes as ideal types. Much like a research question, they helped to structure and simplify a complex problem by concretizing it in physical form. The objects in the display case held such items as badges recognizing sports performance and contributions to socialist society, membership cards and statutes of children's and youth organizations, report cards, textbooks and a class record book (see Figure 7). Along with the accompanying panel these artifacts highlighted how socialist ideology pervaded the education of young people. The making of the display was possible because a great portion of the remnants of my childhood were school related items, which points to my primary identity as student at the time of leaving East Germany in March 1990 at age fourteen and my having had the sense that an era was coming to an end, both biographically and politically. Placing these objects under glass underlined the authoritative narrative it constructs. In the tradition of

conventional museum practice, the artifacts appear as embodiments of singular truths that are worthy of protection in perpetuity.

In contrast, the table display favors tactile experience over the conservation of artifacts. It invited visitors to handle objects, the majority of which were toys but also included objects that evoke ordinary life, such as handkerchiefs, a rooster-shaped egg cup and cutlery (see Figure 8). Unlike typical museums, amateur and private GDR museums allow for a close proximity between object and visitor by separating them using only a rope or allowing visitors to handle objects, a feature the table-display mimicked. From a research perspective, this characteristic allowed me to investigate the consequences of handlability, such as how visitors reacted to it and the effect the degradation of artifacts had on me over the course of putting together exhibit and during its showing. At the same time, it posed questions about the museum as conserver of material culture and how the touchablility of objects shapes perceptions of the sophistication and professionalism of a museum.

Figure 8: *East Germany on Display* - Rooster Eggcup & "Please Touch" Sign

Although a didactic panel provided the visitor with a framework for encountering the touchable artifacts (see panel 5), the display offered little information on individual items beyond a descriptive label on the attached tag. The absence of detailed descriptions or interpretations directs the visitor to animate the objects. Whereas many who come to GDR museums lived in East Germany and are therefore able to activate the objects' meaning with

their memories, in the Canadian context visitors had to find other ways of engaging with the material. However, just as in GDR museums, embodied interaction was one avenue for activating the artifact. In addition, the panel's offering of parallel narratives in the form of provocation also offered meaning. For example, it asked visitors to contemplate museal practices by questioning what belongs in a museum, for it included atypical items such as ones that continue to be in use (silverware), were broken (a toy train), came from nature (a collection of flint stones with holes), were replicas (a rooster-shaped eggcup), or whose origin was unknown (a doll).

> ***East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life - Exhibit Panel (5 of 5)***
> *Aufgehobene Dinge - Fragmente einer Kindheit in der DDR*
> *Kept Things: Fragments of an East German Childhood*
>
> *Private and amateur museums dedicated to East Germany's everyday life are the table display's point of departure. This display amplifies aspects of their representational strategies and questions what belongs in a museum.*
>
> *Unlike typical historical exhibits, the objects do not aim to capture an essence or illustrate the central characteristics of a socio-political system, a significant event or change. Rather, the artifacts are remnants that gesture towards an irreducible and diverse past that is at once familiar and strange.*
>
> *Most of what is on display was manufactured in the GDR, has been in disuse for many years and is in good condition. Some items are handmade, are broken and continue to be part of ordinary life. Others mimic East German products and icons. The doll was a present from relatives in Canada.*
>
> *This display extends an invitation to interact physically. It asks whether the touchable things on the table appear less valuable than the ones that the case protects and what distinguishes them from refuse.*

While findings from the research-by-making project permeate the entire dissertation, I now briefly point to central outcomes that relate directly to the juxtaposition. From the placing

side by side two representational modes, implicit dichotomies became apparent that point to why the two approaches seem incongruent: the table display foregrounded agency, memory, and the body while the covered display emphasized structure, history and the mind. Yet despite these differences, a richer story emerges than each tells on its own, for the realities of a dictatorship are recognized but simultaneously space for how people operated outside of the system are opened up. By extension, this argument suggests that the presence of further modes would produce an even more complex story that could capture the past more fully. For example, in my research I did not encounter any representation that communicated the workings of the East German socialist system from the perspective of how people made it work for themselves by negotiating its limitations and tolerances. Such an approach would recognize the impact dictatorship has on individuals and groups while also acknowledging explicitly their agency.

Entertainment, Depth, and Atmosphere

In addition to the two displays, didactic panels and other design elements, *East Germany on Display* created interest with the inclusion of components that corresponded to museal genre conventions as well as multimedia offerings. A bench of minimalist design stood in the center of the room to signify a space of contemplation, intellectual engagement, and active viewing. A large photograph in an

Figure 9: "DDR Lebt" [GDR lives] Bus Shelter, near Leipzig, Germany

ornate frame was positioned across from it (see Figure 9). The image depicts a dilapidated bus shelter with a symbol of a heart and the words "DDR lebt!" [East Germany lives!"] spray-painted in red on one of is short outside walls. With a label informing the viewer that I took this photo in 2010 while driving to a research interview outside of Dresden, this piece situates the exhibit as part of a research project. It also creates a focal point because its meaning is elusive. Given the rural setting, the graffiti seems out of place. At the same time, the heart and the exclamation mark in the colour red could indicate an expression of affection. Yet, the scene also evokes sarcasm. The dilapidated bus shelter has no windows, plaster has fallen off the brick walls and as a whole, the structure looks like it may soon be demolished or collapse, much like what some argue was the state of the GDR at the time of its demise. At the same time, the question must be raised whether the graffiti relates to East Germany at all; perhaps the letters "DDR" in fact refer to a person. Yet the photograph's placement in the exhibit context concretizes meaning for its inclusion in a show on East Germany implies that it pertains to the same subject. Moreover, the photographs' ornate frame underlines its relevant contributions as it transforms documentary evidence into art and thereby elevates its perceived value for it suggests meaning beyond the articulable.

In additional to the printed image, digitally projected photographs of my childhood that appeared as a slideshow on the wall emphasized the specificity of the artifacts' origin while evoking the sense that what the exhibit presents is not entirely different from what viewers likely encounter as they leaf through their own photo albums. Combined, the photographs and the table display with its toys and books suggest that the socialist past was not a "foreign country" (see Lowenthal 1986), a time and place entirely unrecognizable to those without direct experience of it. Rather, it is a familiar, imaginable, and decipherable time and place. In addition to interrupting

the othering on which historical representations typically rely, the digitally presented photographs offered viewers a different mode of engagement than text and objects.

Including auditory components in the exhibit had the same aim but expanded sensory perception from seeing to hearing. Brief mp3 recordings in my voice established links between objects on display and constructed narratives that hinted at the past that does not leave material traces (see Appendix 1). The recording's conversational tone stood in contrast to the formality of the environment: the display case, the large professionally printed panels as well as the room and institution that hosted the exhibit. A soundtrack offered a second auditory entry into the subject matter. While a more essentialist music selection would likely have included only East German music, perhaps that of socialist children's and youth organizations, the soundtrack consisted of songs that I remember hearing in the nineteen eighties at home, on the radio and at dances, including West German artists like Juliane Werding and Nena as well as the Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel and Bruce Springsteen.

The Vertical – Show Panel
"Dissertation?"
"Dissertation?" is composed of artifacts from the September 2012 IRS exhibit "East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life".
This monstrous piece towers over the viewer, taking up the entire space between floor and ceiling. It is precarious, messy and parts of it seem to fly away. Objects appear to be suspended in the air; perhaps they are connected, perhaps they do not belong. The monstrosity threatens to swallow up all that crosses its path. It has consumed ideas and objects that make it nauseous.
At the same time, the vertical spreading out of things suggests an airing out of ideas. The wire holding together the structure signifies the tentative connections between them. It is not all hopeless: with time, the monster is surely tamable. The suitcase halves that are still spread out along the vertical will migrate to the top and bottom and, like book covers, will contain all that lies between. The ideas and things, which do not belong, will fall away and new ones will find a place within. This monster is not running amok. It stands timidly still in a corner, thinking about wanting to make friends.

The Vertical, a pop-up exhibition curated by Elena Siemens and Andriko Lozowy that followed *East Germany on Display* at the IRS in the fall of 2012, afforded my research-by-making project an epilogue. In the process of dismantling my exhibit, I reconfigured and repurposed several of its artifacts and didactic panels to produce a single form as a critical response to their original display: *Dissertation?* (see Figure 10). Whereas *East Germany on Display* interrogated conventional and idealized museal practices through their emulation, this second stage of the project created an abstract structure that forgrounded the challenges of writing a dissertation while continuing to interrogate questions relating to materiality and methodology. As in the process of curating the *East Germany on Display*, the issue of the erosion of artifacts arose. After allowing visitors to expand their conventional visitor role by encouraging them to handle and thereby potentially damage artifacts, I purposely destroyed artifacts and exposed photographs knowing that they would deteriorate by fading, cracking and curling in an effort to help me think about how artifacts degrade while in the museum. *The Vertical* also signaled the transition from a focus on material practice to exegesis.

Figure 10: The Vertical "Dissertation?"

The entire research-by-making project, which included both *Dissertation?* and the exhibit

East Germany on Display, draws attention to the creativity processuality of scholarly inquiry. The fashioning of an exhibit slowed down the analytical process, allowing for a lingering with ideas. Here, the concretization of a research problem through material making, taking up physical space and temporal stretching entailed a methodologically informed and directed practice. In addition developing a form of scholarly inquiry, the project interrogated how knowledge is revealed, acquired and expressed. Moreover, it created unexpected possibilities for the emergence of dialogues between myself, as social researcher, and those who are often excluded from this process. Conversations with members of the university and wider community about the project arose in part because I depended on the help of others. For example, I borrowed a bench from the University of Alberta's (UofA) FAB gallery and a display case from UofA's Museums and Collections. Graphic design and printing related matters connected me with professional staff at UofA's Academic Information and Communication Technologies as well as fellow PhD students with experience in these areas. Other users of the IRS as well as academic and non-academic visitors to the exhibit contributed to the project by offering feedback in the form of comments and questions. In addition to the actual fashioning of the exhibit, these interactions created a public forum that built into the research project non-traditional mechanisms of accountability and rigor into my analytical work. At the same time, the making public of my work was a risky endeavor. It exposed aspects of a process and my biography that usually remain hidden.

6. Kept Things: Heterotopic Provocations in the Museal Representation of East German Everyday Life

This chapter undertakes a reciprocally informed analysis of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin, on display in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany from March 28, 2010 until May 5, 2011. The exhibition emerges as site and practice that questions fundamentally how other contemporary museums represent East German everyday life. At the same time, Kept Things renders visible the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge. The foundation for this argument consists in an interrogation of the concept of heterotopia that emphasizes its methodological possibilities and capacity to reveal knowledge. The application of dimensions of heterotopia explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts shape the exhibition's meaning while simultaneously gesturing towards the possibility of more nuanced representations of the East German past than circulate currently.

[H]heterotopias make legible the ground on which knowledge is built by complicating that ground.

Robert Topinka[xxvi]

Between March 28, 2010 and May 5, 2011, the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR (DOK) [Documentation Centre for the Culture of East German Everyday Life] in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany presented the temporary exhibition *Aufgehobene Dinge: Ein Frauenleben in Ost-Berlin* [*Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*]. It had a brief, more condensed second showing from June 10, 2011 until October 2, 2011 at the Heimatmuseum Falkensee. This historical exhibition put on display the meticulously and arguably obsessively collected and documented personal belongings of Ilse Polzin, or Frau P., whose household effects her family donated to the DOK after her death in 2004. None of these objects, the majority of which fit into the three categories of writing utensils, women's accessories and home decorations, had notable artistic, monetary or even exemplary value. Most of the items had never been used, likely in part because Frau P. owned far too many of them. The show exhibited artifacts, such as shoes, hats, and pens in glass cabinets, while shopping bags and purses were suspended from ceilings. It also displayed how Frau P. stored these things tightly cramped in boxes and suitcases on shelves in her bachelor apartment.

Detailed and explicit interpretive frameworks that typically link the material content of historical exhibitions to larger events and processes were absent from the show. More specifically, curators did not situate the shoes, hats, and pens within a social, cultural, economic, or political context. At the same time, Frau P. herself, despite having kept a detailed inventory of her belongings, provided no clues as to what these items meant to her. This lack of information about specific and broader significance, in addition to the unexceptional character of the

artifacts, suggest an unimaginative curatorial project that has little relevance for understanding East Germany's past and its contemporary representation. However, this chapter explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts take the place of clearly stated exhibition themes and instructive didactic panels. Meaning further emerges as *Kept Things* is placed into relationship with other exhibitions and more broadly circulating discourses. Extending this argument, I suggest that the DOK's approach to presenting Frau P.'s belongings questions fundamentally how other contemporary museums represent East German everyday life and at the same time renders visible how museums function, thereby unsettling their enterprise.

Museums predominantly approach ordinary life in East Germany from two distinct and conflicting perspectives (see Chapter 4). One focuses on how the elements of dictatorship shaped all aspects of quotidian life, dividing citizens into perpetrators, victims, and consenters. This interpretive mode reflects and reinforces broader dominant discourses on East Germany as they operate in today's united Germany, which legitimate the contemporary order. The other, which marginal and amateur practices define, brackets political structure by foregrounding quotidian and domestic life, implicitly suggesting that East Germans negotiated the socialist system rather than simply being controlled by it. This type of museum is frequently labeled *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia of the East, both in its pejorative and more playful and reflective sense (Chapter 3). *Kept Things* fits into neither museum category: it does not cast its subject, Frau P., as an actor in a political system, nor does it represent routinized and negotiated everyday life. Moreover, the temporary exhibition's perspective differs from the principal strategy that both museum types deploy. Instead of approaching its subject from a macroscopic, societal level, one that implies collective experience, and correspondingly displays the abstracted average, the show shares the material traces of a single woman's life that does not fit the imaginary norm.

However, while *Kept Things* considers everyday life in East Germany differently than comparable museums and thereby complicates them, it enacts mainstream museal practices. This chapter applies Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and its six principles to address the tensions and provocations that this coming together of the unconventional and the expected elicit. Foucault theorizes heterotopias as discourses or spaces that mirror other elements in culture and in relationship with them appear different in that they enact, contest, and reverse taken-for-granted order. In doing so, they facilitate the emergence of subversive ideas about society. Here, these ideas guide an exploration into how *Kept Things* unsettles dominant notions about life in East Germany, and by extension, the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge.

Heterotopia: A Methodology

Foucault discusses heterotopia on three occasions in three different media: in the preface to the monograph The Order of Things ([1966]) 1994) first published as *Les Mots et les Choses* in 1966, in a 12-minute radio address on utopia and literature broadcast the same year and in a 1967 lecture to a group of architects in Paris entitled "Des Espaces Autre," translated as both "Of Other Spaces" (1986a, 1986b, 2008) and "Different Spaces" (1998). In The Order of Things, Foucault explicates heterotopia after describing his response to the reading of Jorge Luis Borges' depiction of an imaginary Chinese Encyclopedia that classifies animals into seemingly absurd categories. In this instance, Foucault considers heterotopias as discourse that reveals the limits of language, for they "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks [and] contest the very possibility of grammar at its source" (Foucault [1966] 1994, xiv). As phenomena that interrupt nomenclatures, heterotopias are also "disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine

language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names" (Foucault [1966] 1994, xiv). In the subsequent two deliberations, the radio broadcast and the lecture, Foucault considers social space rather than discourse. Heterotopias, although embedded firmly within society, emerge as 'different' or 'other' spaces that mirror those around them, while simultaneously challenging or contesting established order as they relationally disrupt time and space.

The Paris lecture has received the majority of scholarly attention, likely because here Foucault describes the term most extensively and didactically. For the same reasons, as well as the fact that Foucault identifies the museum as heterotopia, the focus of this chapter will also be this text[xxvii], specifically in the form of Hurley's 1998 translation "Different Spaces." As he had already done in The Order of Things, in "Different Spaces" Foucault compares heterotopia with utopia. He proposes that unlike utopias, which are "emplacements having no real place," heterotopias exist (Foucault 1998, 178). Foucault describes these existing utopias sweepingly:

> There are … probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places 'heterotopias.' (ibid.)

This conceptualization identifies heterotopias' double logic, which entails both the socially homogeneous and the breaking from dominant order, a characteristic that renders them *other* in that they "splinter the familiar" (Johnson 2006, 85). Put another way, "a heterotopia is a space of difference, a space that is absolutely central to a culture but in which the relations between elements of a culture are suspended, neutralized, or reversed" (Lord 2006, 1). Hence, heterotopias' representational practices give rise to the possibility of reflection and the

problematization of dominant norms because the simultaneity of opposites contains revelatory power. In Hetherington's words, "[h]eterotopic places are sites which rupture the order of things through their different mode of ordering to that which surround them" (Hetherington 1997, 46). Reflecting on Foucault's description of heterotopias as site where we are "drawn outside ourselves" (Foucault 1998, 177), Johnson (2006) describes this rupture as a reorientation: "Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the space in which we may feel at home. These emplacements exist out of step and meddle with our sense of interiority" (84). Thus, heterotopias unsettle in their combining of the incongruous in spaces that, although familiar, are made to appear other.

Foucault develops a typology as he defines the 6 principles of heterotopia, thereby specifying his opening summary statements and illuminating its workings. Johnson (2012b) points out that while all principles can be found in each heterotopia, "some are more 'fully functioning' or 'highly heterotopic'" (8 quoting Foucault 1998, 182). The didactically laid-out principles, the recognizable sites that exemplify them, the wide applicability of the notion, as well as the text's brevity render heterotopia deceptively enticing. Yet attempts to understand the concept deeply while applying it to empirical phenomena also raise significant challenges. For example, Edward Soja, despite working with the term, characterizes Foucault's analysis as "frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent" (Soja 1996, 162). Benjamin Genocchio's (1995) critique focuses on the definition of heterotopias as "utterly different" (Foucault 1998, 178) as he questions the very possibility of otherness. "[I]n any attempt to mobilize the category of an outside or absolutely differentiated space, it follows logically that the simple naming or theoretical recognition of that difference always to some degree flattens or precludes, by definition, the very possibility of its arrival as such" (39). Connectedly, Genocchio poses a

reasonable question: "[W]hat cannot be designated a heterotopia?" (39). Foucault's broad descriptions and wide-ranging examples open the possibility for labeling any site as heterotopia. David Harvey extends this critique of boundlessness to its implications.

> It presumes that whatever happens in such spaces of "otherness' is of interest and even in some sense 'acceptable,' or 'appropriate.' The cemetery and the concentration camp, the factory, the shopping malls and Disneylands, Jonestown, the militia camps, the open plan office, New Harmony, 'priatopia,' and 'ecotopia' are all sites of alternative ways of doing things and therefore in some sense 'heterotopic. (Harvey 2000, 185)

For Harvey, the breadth of the concept that allows for the equal treatment of radically different emplacements puts into question the possibility of identifying spaces of hope and the construction of alternatives to the oppressive elements in contemporary western society.

Reflecting on critiques and applications of the concept, Johnson (2012a) concludes his summary on heterotopia with the suggestion that "[h]eterotopia is more about a point of view, or a method of using space as a tool of analysis" (9). Also considering the usefulness of the notion, Daan Wesselman (2013) frames it as a device that facilitates scholarly exploration rather than as descriptive term. For him, the concept is "neither a label for any nondominant space, nor a theoretical 'yardstick' to measure actual spaces against; rather, it enables the discussion of how parts, aspects, or qualities of spaces fit in and establish conventions, structures, and orders" (Wesselman 2013, 22). Reflecting on diverse contributions on heterotopia in an edited collection of essays, Hilde Heynen (2008) likewise concludes that despite the term being "slippery," "[p]ursuing the idea of heterotopia offers a productive strategy to investigate [ongoing transformations of urban and social life], because it introduces a third term in situations where strict dichotomies – such as public/private; urban/rural or local/global – no longer provide frameworks for analysis" (Heynen 2008, 312). Following Johnson's, Wesselman's, and Heynen's conclusions, which recognize but find use in the ambiguous and provisional elements

of the concept, this chapter applies Foucault's ideas pragmatically as methodological tool that supports the analysis of a specific site and its perplexingly contradictory cultural practice. It does so through a close reading of Foucault and scholarly interpretations of his work. Thus, the aim of this chapter is not an exploration of the extent to which *Kept Things* and other museal representations operate as heterotopias, but rather, the application of Foucault's theoretical framework to render a situated practice intelligible. Conceptualized methodologically, the concept affords the containment and framing of a wide range of observation, while providing guidance for a detailed investigation.

The use of heterotopia as methodology first necessitates a consideration of the concept's political possibilities. Scholars are divided on the issue of whether the type of emplacements Foucault describes are sites of resistance or places that replicate and solidify dominant ideas. I will argue that neither categorization reflects Foucault's framework. Rather, sites, such as *Kept Things*, illuminate epistemological structures, which may or may not lay the foundation for progressive change.

Heterotopia: From To-Be-Corrected Place to a Site that Reveals Ordering

The museum is a sense-making place, a site that attempts to impose order so convincingly that to visitors its interpretations and classifications seem natural, coherent, and non-imposed. Merely placing an object into a museal space, regardless of status, be it the collection or a display, elevates it to valuable cultural artifact. Miriam Kahn (1995) describes this quality as "a kind of magic or trick, a means that museums have devised for taming the objects that would otherwise remain resistant to easy consumption" (325). Yet this conjuring is imperfect and thus potentially jarring, a response which Kahn ascribes to the incongruence of materiality and

interpretation. "[D]issonance arises from the tension created between the imposed ordering system, whether a taxonomy or narrative, and what it represents. The tension between the two structures of rationality … is the reason why museums, however genuine in their attempts to engage and educate are capable of disorienting and exhausting their visitors" (Kahn 1995, 325). Kahn goes on to equate dissonance with the heterotopic character of the museum, which subsequently leads to a curious conclusion in her critique of two anthropological exhibitions dedicated to pacific peoples. She argues that the representational failures of both sites, including the application of a biological evolutionary paradigm to cultural analysis, exemplify their problematic status as heterotopias. Kahn widens this critique to museum representations more generally and writes: "[I]t is the commonplace nature of heterotopias that is most disturbing. The greatest fear, perhaps, is that the commonplace, unremarkable nature of heterotopias will numb us to their existence. They will settle so comfortably in our midst that they will avoid our attention and alteration" (Kahn 1995, 336). For Kahn, what is at stake here is the possibility of the emergence of critical understandings and more accurate museum displays. Consequently, heterotopias emerge as spaces that must be corrected by aspiring to more 'truthful' interpretation or approaches that "acknowledge the heterotopic nature of exhibits" (Kahn 1995, 336).

A more conventional reading of heterotopia inverts the conceptualization Kahn puts forth through the identification of heterotopias as sites of resistance to the dominant culture, although this reading has been widely criticized. Johnson (2006) argues that such an understanding typically fails to interrogate carefully the notion's theoretical premise (81). I would like to suggest that Foucault's characterization of heterotopias as 'other' and 'different', which many interpretations emphasize, have led to this assumption. Johnson (2006) further contends that authors, such as Hetherington (1997) and Genochio (1995), refer to resistance heterotopia studies

without citing relevant substantiations. More recently, Topinka (2010) has done the same when failing to provide examples after stating "[t]raditionally, heterotopias are understood as sites of resistance" (55). In these instances, I would argue, the reference to resistance heterotopias serves the rhetorical purpose of providing a contrast to the author's own argument.

My own literature searches have yielded few studies that explore heterotopias as sites of resistance[xxviii]. The works that describe this relationship provide a superficial reading of Foucault's works and rely on other concepts to make their case. For example, in her analysis of Australian Indigenous cultural performance and cultural activities, Deirdre Howard-Wagner (2011) contends that practices that are entirely indigenous are more heterotopic and at the same time truer sites of resistance compared to mainstream ones that merely incorporate indigenous elements. In addition to outlining insufficiently how these activities constitute a heterotopia, she conflates heterotopia and resistance. Moreover, her concern about the cooptation of alternative voices within dominant activities sidesteps Foucault's understanding of power relations embedded in his theory on heterotopia that conceives of resistance as always already integral to dominant structures. In *The History of Sexuality* he describes this relationship, stating "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978, 95). In other words, power is omnipresent, relational, and inseparable from resistance.

Yael Allweil and Rachel Kallus (2008) apply the notion of heterotopia to account for and describe practices of resistance in Tel Aviv's Independence Park and Dolphinarium, places they argue challenge hegemonic ideas about Israeli masculinity. Their emphasis on heterotopias as "sites of 'absolute otherness', distinctly disconnected from the dominant spatial order" raises questions about the possibility for the complex relationships that Foucault ascribes to hetrotopias

to unfold, which the authors themselves identify (Allweil and Kallus 2008, 192). Allweil and Kallus conclude that this otherness "severely limits [heterotopias'] ability to affect 'hegemonic society'" (192). To overcome the problem of 'absolute otherness' they modify heterotopias to "public-space heterotopias", which they define as "[residing] within the domain of the open-to-all public space and [holding] no permanent physical borders" (193). With the coining of a term, Allweil and Kallus attempt to address a problem that Foucault's theory does not in fact pose, for heterotopias' difference or otherness is limited to the possibility of their standing in relationship with other sites.

In these two examples, heterotopias remain undertheorized as the concept provides only a label for practices and sites rather than provoking a close analysis of how they operate. Both acknowledge insufficiently heterotopias' ambivalent relationship with power. Not tending to the seemingly opposing simultaneity of being part of the system and standing in contrast to it is surprising given Foucault's clear articulation and secondary analyses' emphasis on this characteristic. For example, for Johnson (2006) a heterotopia "lights up an imaginary spatial field, a set of relations that are not separate from dominant structures and ideology, but go against the grain and offer lines of flight" (87). Hetherington (1997) similarly emphasizes this concurrence but from the perspective of the effect they have on agency. He writes: "The paradox is that heterotopia can be either or indeed both. Spaces of total freedom and spaces of total control are both spaces of social ordering" (Hetherington 1997, 42). Boyer (2008) employs the useful term 'double logic' as she describes heterotopia's generative capacity. "Foucault's theorization of space … operates a double logic: by their very imaginations and illusions heterotopias sustain the normality of everyday space and yet they negate these illusions, replacing them with other imaginary, but more static places" (Boyer 2008, 54). Conceptualizing

heterotopias as "sites in which epistemes collide and overlap," Topinka (2010) specifies what occurs more concretely as "creating an intensification of knowledge" (Topinka 55). In each of these examples, the simultaneity of replication and inversion of the dominant order within heterotopia holds productive capacities: it 'lights up an imaginary spatial field,' involves 'spatial ordering,' creates other 'imaginary places,' and 'intensifies knowledge'.

Insisting on the double logic of heterotopias and suggesting that it contains possibilities for creating something new does not entirely resolve the issue of resistance and transformative action, for as Wesselman (2013) points out in his analysis of The Highline Park, "heterotopias cannot simply step out of the dominant … system" (24). Consequently, Johnston (2006) rejects unequivocally the idea that heterotopias are sites of resistance. For him "the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation. … [T]here is no inevitable relationship with spaces of hope" (Johnson 2006, 84). Topinka (2010) reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that the contestations that unfold in heterotopias "make visible the formations of received knowledge, and thus represent a confrontation with knowledge production that promises new formulations of knowledge. Yet these formulations will not shed the dominant order" (Topinka 2010, 60). Here, Topinka suggests that heterotopias in themselves do not entail practices of resistance in terms of dramatic system transformation. However, his understanding does not preclude the possibility that an application of the knowledge gained through the revealed order could lead to the establishment of other formations. As Hetherington points out, heterotopias "facilitate acts of resistance and transgression" (Hetherington 1997, 46).

To clarify this idea of facilitation, I return to Topinka's theorization of heterotopias in relationship to the construction of knowledge, an approach that I carry forward in the remainder

of this chapter. In his analysis he "shift[s] the focus from resistance to knowledge intensification to examine how heterotopias make order legible" (Topinka 2010, 56). This making legible involves a rendering visible of the structures of knowledge. Put differently, heterotopias "map the space of existing knowledge" and thereby in their particular emplacement "not so much resist order as it reveals order" (Topinka 2010, 56; 63). The capacity of heterotopias to reveal order rests on the assumption that they are sites where ideas and practices are ordered differently than elsewhere, which according to Heatherington it its central characteristic. He writes: "I do not define heterotopia as sites of resistance, sites of transgression or as marginal spaces but precisely as spaces of an alternate ordering" (Hetherington 1997, 9). To summarize, I borrow Topinka's words, which recognizes heterotopias' double logic while acknowledging their capacity to come to know otherwise. "By juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by revealing and destabilizing the ground … on which knowledge is built" (Topinka 2006, 56).

In accordance with this interpretation, my investigation into the *Kept Things* temporary exhibition at the DOK thus involves exploring how the site reveals structures of knowledge. This task necessitates a focus on how the exhibit is embedded in dominant ways of doing things, organizes knowledge differently than the spaces surrounding it and how it stands in relationship with other sites. I begin this process by placing *Kept Things* in time and space.

Placing Kept Things

The absence of definitive curatorial interpretive statements complicates the task of making sense of *Kept Things*. While visitors' prior knowledge and possible experience of life in East Germany inevitably contribute to their understanding of the exhibition, contextual

information, such as the cues the setting provides, gain heightened significance. More specifically, the physical location establishes a historical backdrop that couches the display. Given the specificity of place, the life of Frau P. becomes part of broader socio-cultural imaginings about the East German past. Thus, before proceeding with the elements of *Kept Things* in relationship with the principles of heterotypology, I begin by tending to Foucault's presentation of heterotopia as a relational concept by emplacing it.

The city

Concretely, the temporary exhibition as I experienced it was held at the DOK in Eisenhüttenstadt, a model socialist city in eastern Germany, which is located 80 kilometers west of Berlin on the Polish border and was founded under the name of Stalinstadt (Stalin City). The visible structures of this young city framed *Kept Things* most prominently. They stand unambiguously as testament to the ideological and economic aftermath of World War II, including the GDR being cut off from the center of steel production in the Ruhrgebiet, the industrial heartland of Germany located in west, burdens of reparation payments to the Soviet Union and the trade embargos issued by western countries. Ideas for the model socialist city emerged in 1950 to meet the housing needs of workers at the planed EKO ironworks (Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost). The urban centre that was built from scratch was the first to embody the sixteen principles for urban development, which the GDR government ratified in 1950. These guidelines include such imperatives as a city having to express structurally and architecturally the political and national consciousness of the people, as well the necessity of a center that would serve as focal point for political gatherings (Howest 2006, 7). In addition to housing workers, Stalinstadt was to signify the GDR's brotherhood with other socialist countries as the ironworks would produce "peace-steel" from Soviet ore and Polish coal (Lötscher, Howest and Basten

2004). Moreover, these sites of industrial production were to provide a development impulse for the regional economy by creating jobs for the local rural population and for incoming German refugees from eastern Europe (Lötscher et al. 2004). Housing Complexes I to V, with their nearly 8,000 apartments and civic infrastructure such as schools, daycare facilities, a hospital, and grocery stores, were largely completed in the 1950s (Howest 2006). To meet rising needs, Housing Complexes V to VII were added between 1970 and 1987, although the industrialized construction techniques and prefabricated components that were used yielded aesthetically, spatially, and qualitatively inferior structures in comparison to the first phase of development (Lötscher et al. 2004, 363).

Today, Eisenhütenstadt is a city in decline; the population has decreased from 50,200 in 1990 to 28,200 in 2011 (Citypopulation). Demographic shrinking has occurred in tandem with economic decline. While the ironworks employed 12,000 workers in 1989, in 2004 it had only 3,000 employees (Lötscher et al. 2004, 364). In February 2013, the official unemployment rate of the region was 10.2% (Groneberg 2013). Given the surplus of housing, dereliction, as well as poor structural and aesthetic characteristics, apartment buildings in Housing Complex VII have been demolished in recent years. At the same time, however, the regional government has also continued to protect large sections of the city, including industrial structures and Housing Complex I to III with its civic buildings, such as the former daycare center that houses the DOK. These areas make up the largest urban monument in Germany, which is likely the reason for why it has attracted international attention from such celebrities as the American actor Tom Hanks, who toured the city in December 2011. Much to the delight of residents and politicians of Eisenhüttenstadt, he shared this experience for several minutes on the David Letterman Show. The availability of inexpensive or free spaces has also lead various artists to launch projects in

the city, many of which have been conceptualized as efforts to revitalize the city (Bangel 2012).

The museum

The more immediate context of the *Kept Things* exhibition was the DOK itself (see Figure 11) When the DOK was founded in 1993, only three years after the unification of Germany, it was the first museum dedicated to the material culture and everyday life of East Germany. Today, its collection includes over 170,000 objects and documents (DOK). The DOK is located in one of the two daycares built in first phase in the construction of Stalinstadt. Developed between 1953 and 1954 in Housing Complex II, it served as a childcare facility until the mid-1990s. Its large size and columned entrance give it a classically institutional appearance, which combined with the internal structure, provides a fitting frame for the construction of authoritative discourses of the kind museums aim to produce. The central staircase features a large stained-glass window entitled "Aus dem Leben der Kinder" [From the life of children], a work by Walter Womack, one of the East Germany's most prominent artists, designed in 1954/1955 (see Figure 12). The display of children with varying skin colors and types of dress are suggestive of the ideological idealism that characterized the GDR, including international solidarity, worldwide peace, and the great promise of future generations.

Figure 11: The DOK

Whereas the main floor holds a reception area, offices, and a library, the floor above it is reserved for temporary and permanent and exhibitions, each taking up one of the two wings. In addition to the *40 Years – 40 Objects* display, where one object corresponds to each year in the history of the GDR, the permanent exhibition[xxix] provided an overview of East German life and society with artifacts relating to policies concerning women and children, the education system, holidaying, youth festivals, shopping, and industrial production. The introductory statements of the *Leitbild* that introduces the permanent exhibition communicate the overall orientation of the DOK:

Figure 12: Element of "Aus dem Leben der Kinder"

> The GDR was a closed society, its end and its beginning precisely staked and guarded over, with a wide, sky-blue horizon behind and above. A country for dreamers and a sad country, an exclusive and poor country, a country of technological and social progress, a country that its people described and thought of as their country, a country that finally rid itself of its own people, a country rife with contradictions that were never carried out, a humanitarian country, that simply disappeared, without a trace, a country that is incomprehensible.[xxx]

Here, East Germany and its representation emerge as topics that are complex and rife with contradiction, implying that they must be approached with nuance. Moreover, the *Leitbild* recognizes the existence of repression, the significance of ideals and processes of negotiation, yet at same time acknowledges the impossibility of comprehending and representing the past as it was.

Under the leadership of Andreas Ludwig, the DOK's director from 1993 to 2012, the DOK sought to accumulate the material witnesses of East Germany from those who used them and

deemed them sufficiently important to preserve them. In a conversation with me in June 2010, Ludwig describes his approach to the museum's collection and exhibitions as "history from below." [xxxi]

> The collection conception is … very simple. As opposed to most other museums, we said, please give the museum that which was important in your everyday life in East Germany, that which had significance for you. This means that we now have a collection that reflects the historical consciousness of their own historical existence in the GDR. The idea is to collect the things from below and because of it not determine in advance that this is the history of the GDR in ten chapters and now we need material evidence to visualize this history in an exhibition. Rather, we actually built up the collection from the bottom, to have an archive of material culture that has been brought together by the many[xxxii]. (Personal communication June 20, 2010)

For Ludwig, the collection of ordinary artifacts brings with it the possibility of vibrant engagement with the past in the future. This object-centered approach of the DOK is visible most acutely in *Kept Things* were, given the absence of a definitive discursive framework, the exhibition seems to ask the artifacts to speak for themselves. At the same time, the presence of very few interpretive written texts could be understood as corresponding to a broader trend. For example, Beth Lord (2006) argues that "[m]any new museum displays are rich in object and light on interpretation: this appears to be based on the dual aims of reducing didactic content and returning power to objects" (355). I would like to suggest that such an approach raises questions about the limits of the power of things, as well as the sources of meaning in contexts where it appears as though things have a voice.

Currently, the future existence of the DOK, particularly in its form as site of research and periodic renewal through such mechanisms as temporary exhibitions hangs in the balance. The city of Eisenhüttenstadt withdrew its funding of the museum in late 2012 and subsequently the Deutsche Kulturrat [The German Council for Culture], a politically independent national umbrella organization for cultural institutions, has included it on their list of facilities that are in

danger of closure. The four permanent staff and the director received their termination notices for January 2013 and there are currently no plans for new exhibitions (Rennefanz 2012).

The locating of *Kept Things* has several purposes. First, it provides contextual information for the analysis that follows. Second, the description entails a starting point of the analysis itself, for the meaning of the exhibition relies on elements that lie outside of the bounds of the exhibition walls. Third, the emplacing of the temporary exhibition speaks to a fundamental trait of heterotopias: their character is inextricably defined by where and how they are located as they always stand in relationship to other emplacements. In the next section of this chapter, I tend more closely to the individual principles that Foucault lays out in his theorization of heterotopia.

The Principles of Heterotopia vis-à-vis *Kept Things*

Heterotopia as changing through time and space

The first principle of heterotopia concerns its existence across time and space. Foucault writes: "there is probably not a single culture in the world that does not establish heterotopias: That is a constant of every human group" (Foucault 1998, 179). Although this principle does not directly elucidate my analysis, I mention it here for the purpose of being complete and to provide an overall sense of the typology. Moreover, it is suggestive of the wide applicability of the term and thus its significant potential to illuminate socio-cultural phenomena, or conversely, the analytical problem its breadth poses.

The second element of the heterotopology gestures towards meanings of the DOK's temporary exhibition, as well as its relationship to understanding museal processes, such as representations of East Germany at other sites. Foucault posits, "in the course of its history, a

society can make a heterotopia that exists and has not ceased to exist in a very different way" (Foucault 1998, 180). Put differently, heterotopias transform over time and societies alter them actively. Foucault constructs a brief genealogy of cemeteries, describing their relocation from the center of cities to their edges at the end of the eighteenth century to illustrate this principle (Foucault 1998, 180–181). The shift correlates with the "individualization of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery" which is reflective of the emergence of "an obsession with death as a 'disease'" (Foucault 1998, 181). In *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), Tony Bennett similarly, albeit much more extensively, conducts a genealogy of the museum that places the site into the broader context of the "transformation in the arrangement of the cultural field over the course of the nineteenth century" (6). He sets apart museums, along with international exhibitions and modern fairs, as institutions that are "involved in the practice of 'showing and telling,': that is, of exhibiting artifacts and/or persons in a manner calculated to embody and communicate specific cultural meanings and values" (6). These institutions regulate visitors unobtrusively and self-replicatingly. Bennett also traces the museum's beginnings to the curiosity cabinets and amusement parks of the late eighteen hundreds, highlighting how the developing museal mode of representation distinguished itself from other cultural expressions.

The *Kept Things* exhibition connects visitors to this origin of museums in private collecting, preserving, interpreting, and displaying. Specifically, the products that Frau P. accumulated and their placement into the museum gesture towards this movement from collecting and presenting cultural artifacts in the private sphere to a public, museal setting. At the same time, the ordinary and therefore familiar character of the objects raises the possibility for the visitors' contemplation of their self-musealization, which may consist of their keeping and arranging souvenirs and other mementoes on shelves and on desks or their fashioning of photo

albums and scrapbooks. From this perspective, the *Kept Things* exhibition holds the capacity to raise historical consciousness, particularly as it pertains to how museums came to be, which illuminates how they function today. Simultaneously, it offers visitors insight into how the material and image-based documenting of their own life connects to the work that museums do.

Re-placing

The third principle of heterotopia emphasizes places, their combined representation or re-emplacement in other places, and the transfiguration that this process brings with it. Here, Foucault characterizes heterotopias as having "the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves" (Foucault 1998, 181). Examples that highlight this quality are cinemas, theatres, as well as traditional Persian gardens and the carpets that are based upon them. The DOK temporary exhibition presents an unusual case in this respect. While the full title *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin* lays no direct claims on people, places, and times beyond those relating to Frau P., this representational purpose is nonetheless expected or implied given the museal frame. For example, in a newspaper interview, Andreas Ludwig states that the topic of the exhibition is "a typical woman's fate in the Berlin of the 60s to 80s"[xxxiii] (Schreiber 2010). However, the exhibition itself interrupts this very notion of representativeness, or the standing in for something greater, due to the implausibility that many other women in Berlin in the 1960s to 1980s also lived alone and horded consumer products with little monetary and seemingly no sentimental value. One possibility for explaining Ludwig's statement is the contradiction with which the exhibition presents him. Perhaps with the exception of culturally deemed important figures, a museum's task arguably is to abstract the past, to overcome the idiosyncrasies of places, people, and times. *Kept Things,* however, concerns itself with the singular and unusual, an idea to which I will return below. This tension between the

specific and the generalized exposes how historical narratives, such as those museums construct, exclude marginal people and places. Paradoxically, the stories that exhibitions tell by necessity exclude others, most frequently those not aligned with dominant forces. More specifically, *Kept Things* unsettles the narrative of East Germany as a socialist dictatorship that structured everyday life forcefully and completely as it relies on the categories of perpetrators, victims, consenters, and resisters to describe the relationship between the limited agency of individuals and tremendous power of state-shaped structures. The strength of the exhibition lies not in suggesting that other single women who hoarded consumer products lived in East Germany, but rather in subtly proposing that many different types of people made their lives there, whose experience cannot be reduced to broad macro-structural forces. This possibility of the imagined out-of-the-norm, such as the exhibit presents, creates affordances for exploring differences, finding ways of inserting them into mainstream historical consciousness, and thereby complicating the past, and with it, the present and future.

Foucault's example of the cinema provides the opportunity for further consideration of the transformation that re-presentation and re-placing brings with it. He points out that this type of emplacement "is a very curious rectangular hall at the back of which one sees a three-dimensional space projected onto a two-dimensional screen" (1998, 181). Although Foucault does not explicate the implications of this dimensional reduction, *Kept Things* sheds some light on to what he might refer. Here, the footprint of Frau P.'s bachelor apartment appears in wide red lines on the exhibition floor to indicate the small size of her home. Visitors are thus asked to wonder about how all of her possessions fit into such a compressed space and imagine how cramped the living conditions must have been. Yet, much information on Frau P.'s home is also lost in this translation of three- to two-dimensional space. For example, the flattening cannot

account for the height and depth of rooms and with it the spatial configuration within the apartment as well as the larger context of an apartment building in which it was housed. Subsequently, the visitor does not see how Frau P. arranged her everyday life within space. Moreover, the objects that were not on display in her home and therefore invisible because they were packaged in boxes and suitcases piled on top of each other in shelves are made visible and expanded through their placement in vitrines and as they are suspended from ceilings (see Figure 13). Further separating the original from its museal representation, the spacious exhibition rooms stand in stark contrast to the cramped space in which Frau P. kept her belongings. This transformation of place that *Kept Things* undertakes, involving dimensional reduction, as well as rendering visible and magnifying, begin to illuminate Foucault's ideas on the role place plays in heterotopias, an argument that the concept of virtuality further underlines.

Figure 13: *Kept Things* Display

Frau P. was an actual person who lived in an actual place, surrounded by many consumer products. The DOK, as a museal space, is also an actual place, one whose task it is to summarize, abstract, interpret, and render meaningful the complex. Despite these constitutive real elements,

the exhibition operates in the realm of the imaginary. Put differently, as Frau P.'s things are placed into the museum, she is virtualized. The musealization and curatorial processes involved recontextualize, institutionalize, compress, abstract, decontextualize, and cleanse of contradiction the material traces of her life. In the museal setting, the actual Frau Ilse Polzin has to be imagined. Rob Shields' (2003) theorizing of the virtual help to clarify the relationship between the historical figure Frau Polzin, who lived in an apartment in Berlin-Karlshorst, and the representation of her and her home in the museum. From the perspective of a binary relationship, the virtual juxtaposes the actual, which is "concretely present" (Shields 2003, 29). While both the virtual and the actual are real, that is, they exist, the virtual is a "real idealization" (Shields 2003, 28), or an idealization of the real. Shields points out that all engagements with the past operate in this mode, for "the past never recurs literally, it has a virtual existence as narrative, a memory, an ideation" (Shields 2003, 40). At the same time, as a virtuality, Frau P. and her home in the *Kept Things* exhibition are "in a dependent relation to the actual" (Shields 2003, 29). In other words, what the visitor encounters is not made up or conjured. Although profoundly transformed, the display references the actual past predominantly through the use of material objects that are removed from their original, emplaced life as they are re-emplaced and thereby virtualized.

Heterotopia as heterochronia

With the fourth principle, attention shifts from place to time. Foucault writes: "More often than not, heterotopias are connected with temporal discontinuities [*découpages du temps*]" (Foucault 1998, 182). Here, heterotopias emerge as heterochronias, for they break with traditional time, cut up time, and reassemble time in ways that do not correspond with experience in everyday life. As in principle two, the cemetery illustrates this quality. Foucault suggests that this site exposes "the

strange heterochronia that loss of life constitutes for an individual, and that quasi eternity in which he perpetually dissolves and fades away" (Foucault 1998, 182), emphasizing that heterotopias as heterochronias unsettle how human beings sense and understand time.

Foucault differentiates between heterotopias that accumulate and abolish time. Libraries and museums appear to collect time and are thus instances of the first variation, for they "constitute a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion" (Foucault 1998, 182). In contrast, festivals and fairs demonstrate the latter category. These emplacements only occupy temporarily the spaces that are reserved for them; ephemerality defines them. Upon initial consideration, a third type of heterochronia, the vacation village, shares characteristics with fairs and festivals, for their visitors remain only for a limited amount of time, during which they suspend the familiar rhythm of life. Yet, Foucault posits that this example also points to the possibility of the simultaneity of accumulating and abolishing time. In vacation villages that strive to provide the experience of primitive life "the whole history of humanity goes back to its source as if in a kind of grand immediate knowledge" (Foucault 1998, 183). The conceptualization of heterotopic emplacements as disrupting the experience of time in everyday life in two opposing ways illuminates significantly how temporality operates in *Kept Things* and other musealizations of East Germany.

Given their overt topic, the historical existence of the GDR delineates the timeframe with which museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany occupy themselves. Even though this period covers only the forty-one years between 1949 and 1990, Foucault's characterization of the museum as an emplacement "in which time never ceases to pile up" reflecting the "desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place" nonetheless applies (Foucault 1998, 182). In this instance, the "piling up of time" takes the form of the accumulation of a

particular type of material culture. Industrially produced consumer goods are the primary mode of engagement with the past at these sites (see Behrdahl 1999, 2005; Betts 2000). The combination of the relative absence of monetary value of most of these items, in conjunction with former East Germans' enthusiasm for donating their belongings[xxxiv], have provided museums dealing with East Germany with collections rich in number of objects. Museums continue to call for the donation of artifacts, even in the face of limited storage and conservation capacities (see Figure 14) [xxxv].

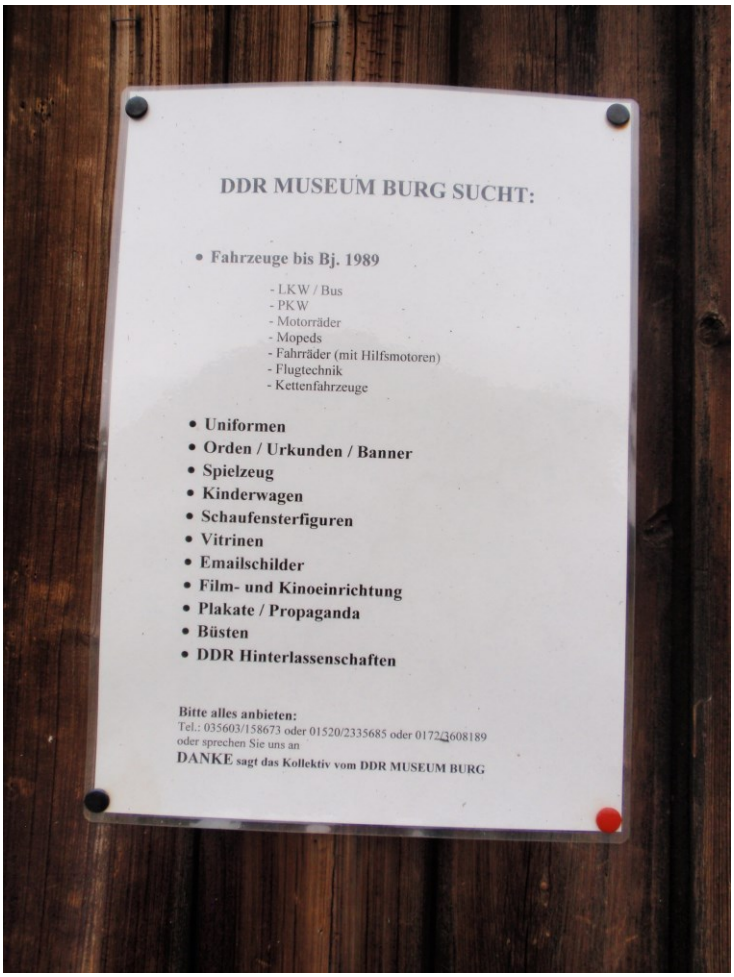

Figure 14: GDR Museum Burg is Searching for: Vehicles, Uniforms, Badges, Toys, Buggies …

The vastness of the DOK's collection also reflects this object-centered approach to musealizing the East German past. For Ludwig, what is at stake in the accumulation of material culture is the answerability of questions that the future may pose about the past. Having witnessed the rapid removal of East German consumer goods from private homes and public spaces in the early 1990s, he understands the DOK's project to be the preservation of objects for future investigation. For him, the urgency to collect and preserve as much of the physical traces of East Germany as possible is "to have the source material to always think about and debate new topics. But this cannot be done

when the sources are not available"[xxxvi] (personal communication June 10, 2010). In other words, Ludwig's concern is the continued active engagement with the past and the possibility of approaching it from hitherto unconsidered perspectives.

Kept Things takes this focus on material culture to an extreme. It put on display nearly 1,000 items, twenty percent of Frau P.'s effects that are part of the DOK's collection, with little textual guidance on their broader significance. The design of exhibition-related materials further underscores the centrality of objects (see Figure 15). For example, dozens of miniature photographic tiles depicting items in the collection on a white background dominate the show's poster and catalogue. In addition to this piling up of time through the accumulation of objects that ostensibly display the material traces of Frau P.'s life, the exhibition pays little attention to the temporal, thereby, using Foucault's term, abolishing time. With the exception of a few instances where original product labels include a date stamp, the artifacts on display lack information on when they were made. As the exhibition catalogue indicates, where many of the objects were manufactured or purchased also remains unknown (Ludwig and Schütze 2011, 13). Given the absence of these types of information, the artifacts in the exhibition seem to float in time. Merely Frau P.'s biography frames them temporally.

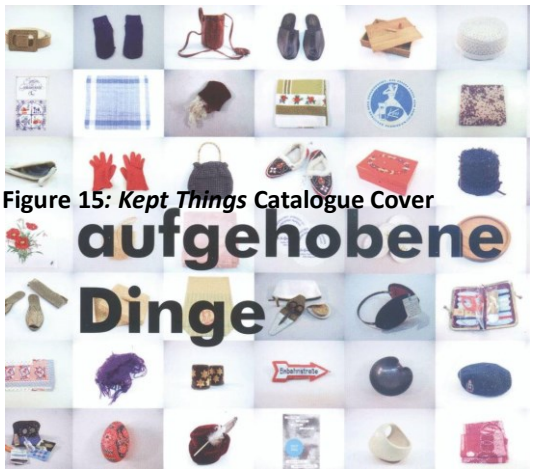

Figure 15*: Kept Things* Catalogue Cover

However, Frau P.'s lifetime as outlined in her biography also presents a disjuncture when placed in relationship with her belongings, one that further exemplifies how *Kept Things* undoes time. At the DOK, visitors are first introduced to Frau P. through a brief outline of her biography in the main foyer, at the bottom of the first floor stairs. Upon entering the exhibition rooms on

the second floor, they are presented with the things she accumulated. Yet a significant disconnect arises in the conceptualization of temporality between time as outlined in the biography and time as expressed in the remainder of the exhibition. Having lived between 1919 and 2004, Frau P. experienced three vastly different political systems. She worked full-time for the Third Reich's social welfare organization, the National Socialist People's Welfare. Until she retired in 1985, she was employed as an administrative assistant in a publically owned plant in East Germany. When she passed away in 2004, Germany had been unified for 14 years. Despite these dramatic shifts, interpretive panels make no reference to the time before and after her life in East Germany, nor do artifacts discernibly stem from either of these periods. Connectedly, the material traces of Frau P.'s relationship with her sister, who lived in West Berlin and who visited her on occasion also remains nearly invisible. Thus, while the ostensible premise of the exhibition is the representation of Frau P.'s life through her belongings, the curators edited heavily what is on display. Not only does this approach reduce Frau P. to seemingly random objects, whose meaning remain elusive—it also de-historicizes her as a person and the objects she once owned. At the same time, this inattention to longer-term historical stituatedness parallels the absence of considerations of social, economic, and cultural transformations that the GDR underwent during its existence, further underlining atemporality, which is a curious characteristic of a site that purports to represent the past.

To summarize, museums representing everyday life in East Germany, including the exhibition *Kept Things* at the DOK, accumulate time in the form of objects, a strategy that implies that the past is embodied and can be understood through material presence. Like all museums, these emplacements are culturally assigned the task of preserving the past. As keepers of time, however, they also abolish time through representations that de-temporalize and

correspondingly de-historicize their subject matter, a characteristic that is particularly apparent in the *Kept Things* exhibition. This simultaneity of collecting and destroying time reveals the structures of how museums communicate, which the application of heterotopia clarifies and renders acutely apparent.

Openings and closings

Heterotopia's fifth principle demonstrates one of the concept's methodological strengths. Whereas the previous two draw attention to place and time, this element affords a shift to an entirely different register of analysis. The fifth principle provokes thinking on how the delineation of emplacements defines patterns of behaviour and with it, structures meaning and the emergence of site-specific knowledge. According to Foucault (1998), "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time" (183). Moreover, either "[o]ne can enter only with a certain permission and after a certain number of gestures have been performed" or "by the very fact of entering, one is excluded" (ibid.). Foucault provides a wide range of examples to demonstrate that openings and closings define heterotopias. They include barracks, prisons, saunas that purify the body religiously and hygienically, large South American farms that in the past have featured rooms that although appearing to be part of the home, prevented certain visitors from gaining access to more intimate areas, as well as motel rooms where illicit sexual encounters take place. I would argue that what unites these seemingly disparate sites is that each is a demarcated place that differentiates itself clearly from other places. This setting apart includes site-specific pre- and proscriptions for the expression of agency within them. In other words, heterotopias enable, facilitate and make possible some processes and in turn shut down, impede and obstruct others.

Typical museums require visitors, composed of the general public, to enter a building and pay an entrance fee. In completing the former or both, visitors consent to a museal code of conduct, which includes being quiet, taking on a contemplative gaze, and respecting exhibits. In exchange, they are offered access to materially mediated, trustworthy knowledge, which entails a kind of opening. At the same time, walking into the museum implies a deferring to museum experts in that it requires accepting that what is on display holds truth-value and is worth knowing about. Yet these representations can ever only consist of a limited range of instructive narratives, which inevitably narrow and close off possibilities for understanding phenomena differently. Here, the presentation of ideas as factual and authoritative constricts visitors' involvement in meaning-making activities. Another facet of this exclusion lies in that with few exceptions, visitors have no access or even awareness of the much larger collection museums hold, thereby obscuring the subjective curatorial processes that produce the seemingly objective.

Immediately apparent closings in *Kept Things* include a reduction of Frau P.'s complex life to 1,000 consumer products. Moreover, with the exception of entries in an exhibition guestbook, the majority of which points to the memory-invoking capacity of the artifacts, visitors leave no lasting trace of the sense-making in which they engaged while visiting the exhibition. At the same time, the very display of objects also entails an opening. Museums have the effect of imbuing things with cultural value. Simply placing an object into the context of the museum elevates its value and renders it representative of something greater than itself. In an effort to transform the seemingly unremarkable objects into markers of cultural significance, *Kept Things* relies extensively on this process, in part by following genre conventions of exhibition design. It presents artifacts predominantly behind glass and thereby signifies the existence of sufficient cultural or monetary value to warrant protection, even though outside of this context the objects,

such a notebooks, hats, and scarves, are arguably worthless. As is common in contemporary museums, the accompanying minimalist panels are brief and use black lettering in an easily readable font style and size. Furthermore, the exhibition is housed in clean, airy, and white-walled rooms. This design, in addition to paying an admittance fee and entering a building with institutional architectural character, sets the stage for the public to slip into the visitor role, one that includes approaching museum content as objective representation that has didactic importance.

These processes do not unfold smoothly in *Kept Things*, however. Tension arises as the museum attempts to deploy authoritative meaning-making discourses, exposing the simultaneity of heterotopic openings and closings. In fact, Frau P. and her belongings seem to resist musealization in the sense that their meaning remains ambiguous. The presence of a conflict expresses itself prominently in the following description of *Kept Things* that appears on one exhibition panel.

> Initially, the estate of Frau P. leaves one at a loss. Alone the number of objects that she accumulated suggests an obsession to own things she desired and to surround herself by them. The things belonged to her and to her home. Are they a representation of 'typically feminine' collections? Did Frau P. want to prepare herself for a 'bourgeois life', with a large house and a corresponding personal appearance? Did she want to reward herself by purchasing objects of her desire and taking them home? Did she want to surround herself by things that she considered commensurate with her personality? The more possible explanations one considers, the clearer that a singular interpretation is impossible. It is this mixture of astonishment and being left at a loss that also characterizes this exhibit. Again and again it poses questions about what the collection means.[xxxvii]

The four propositions in this text that also stand as unanswerable questions demonstrate the curators' inability, or at least unwillingness, to provide clarity on what the exhibition actually put on display. Frau P.'s impulse to collect is not the only unknown in *Kept Things*. The significance of the artifacts is difficult to discern, in part because even information on the source of the majority of objects in terms of time and place are absent. In addition, the objects are also

strangely detached from the person who gathered them. Judging by their unmarred appearance, Frau P. used few of them. In fact, many of the items on display look like they could just have been picked off the store shelf of a bygone era; in some instances sales tags are still attached to them. Put differently, the things in the exhibition were intended for everyday consumption but did not realize their use value. Moreover, an internal logic that might have held together the types of items Frau P. accumulated is also not apparent. As the exhibition catalogue points out, what *Kept Things* displays "is an accumulation of the gathered, not a collection. It only becomes one in the museum"[xxxviii] (Ludwig and Schütze 2011, 5). Connectedly, the objects Frau P. collected have no obvious connection to her identity, nor do they seem to be reminders of her own past; they do not appear to be personal treasures. In their study on the kinds of things women keep, Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Silverman (2004) describe treasures as items that "build a record of personal development, a history that places them in time and place, and confirms their most deeply held values and sources of meaning" (12). Given the absence of indicators that would suggest a close connection between the objects and Frau P.'s identity, the significance that the objects may have held for her beyond their mere accumulation remains elusive.

Despite the ambiguity of meaning and the juxtaposition of heterotopias' openings and closings on the level of the object and the visitor's encounter of it, *Kept Things* provides a different type of opening at a higher level of analysis. The exhibition makes significant contributions to thinking about both the representation of everyday life in East Germany and the work in which museums typically engage. By explicitly posing questions about meaning, *Kept Things* highlights the interpretive work museums undertake. The failure of constructing a clear narrative thus disrupts visitor expectations and in turn undermines the idea that the museum

disseminates objective and authoritative knowledge. Moreover, from the perspective of the artifacts as an aggregate, the abundance of consumer products that seem superfluous—in the sense that they are not needed for basic survival—disrupts the globally operating discourse that portrays socialist economies, including that of the GDR, as economies of scarcity. In fact, it suggests the existence of consumer culture not entirely unlike that operating in non-socialist western countries.

Relational spaces

With the sixth and last principle of his heterotypology, Foucault considers emplacements vis-à-vis other emplacements, stating that heterotopias "have a function in relation to the remaining space" (Foucault 1998, 184). As is the case in several other principles, he identifies two different articulations.

> Either the heterotopias have the role of creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space, all real emplacements within which human life is partitioned off, as being even more illusory. … Or, on the contrary, creating a different space, a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged and muddled. (Foucault 1998,184)

According to Foucault, brothels of the past exemplify the former while colonies the Jesuits founded in South America exemplify the latter. Although he does not describe how brothels function in relation to the remaining space, the exploration of colonies provides some insight into this dimension of heterotopias. Foucault emphasizes how extensively they structured life for the people who lived within them as "existence was regulated in every particular" (Foucault 1998, 184).

Foucault's general statement emphasizing the relationality of heterotopia, the specification that follows, and his examples do not align well. Thus, for the purpose of my analysis, I focus on the relationship between emplacements and the creation of spaces that are

highly organized. For an examination of the historical museum through the lens of heterotopia this interpretation draws attention to how the complex, convoluted, and largely unknowable past is transformed into something representable and understandable. Scholars, such as Elizabeth Ten Dyke (2002), have argued that the founding of museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany entailed a response to the disorientation the Fall of the Wall and Germany's unification brought with them. Here, this type of museum emerges as compensatory in that it represents the past through the object world of East Germany neatly arranged through such methods as recreated rooms in private homes. These museums put on display not only the mundane but also the typical; they join the material traces of the imaginary average person's past, things that all those who have memory of living in the GDR would recognize. Contrary to the pursuit of the typical, *Kept Things* concerns itself with the singular, abnormal, and exceptional. Far from presenting the ordinary and "normal," the exhibit even suggests the possibility of neurosis. It is explicitly gendered, as it displays the material traces of a particular, arguably odd woman with a unique biography. Yet the DOK's temporary exhibit does not pursue women's history overtly; it does not specifically deal with what it was like to be a woman in East Germany. For example, unlike the exhibition on the East German fashion magazine Sibylle entitled *Sibylle: Modefotographie und Frauenbilder in der DDR* (*Sibylle: Fashion Photography and the Representation of Women in the GDR)* that was on display between May 13, 2010 and August 22, 2010 in Potsdam, Germany, *Kept Things* does not raise issues relating to the rights of women and gender equality. However, a farther-reaching definition suggests that the exhibition could be identified as women's history. As Gaby Porter points out,

> Women's history has added its own particular concerns to mainstream history, and has shifted emphasis from the objective to the subjective, from the narrative to the first person. It has questioned the generalized boundaries of public and private, respectable and depraved, dependent and independent, which have previously been used to

> circumscribe and diminish women's role in history, by examining the local and specific characteristics of women's work. (Porter 1990, 70)

In light of this broad description, *Kept Things* contributes to the museum landscape a representation of East German everyday life that although enigmatic demonstrates women's history, one that purposively seeks out the unusual, unknowable and distinctly singular. The exhibition appears superficially orderly and precise, yet accentuates profoundly how the focus upon a seemingly historically insignificant woman provides unexpected insights into the past and its representation.

This chapter has undertaken a reciprocally informed analysis of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition Kept Things. Although the principles of heterotypology operate simultaneously, albeit to varying degrees, in isolating each, the concept afforded a concentrated tending to place, time, how places structure agency and knowledge, as well as how emplacements operate in relationship to other emplacements.

To conclude, I return to the full title of the exhibition, *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*. Even after a detailed analysis, it remains striking how little the visitor/researcher comes to know about the woman whose life is purportedly on display. Moreover, the absence of historical contextualization, the failure of addressing change over time, as well as missing linkages between the personal and the socio-cultural and political undermine the DOK's broader project of interpreting everyday life in East Germany. For example, the temporary exhibition sidesteps several relevant topics, such as how Frau P. might have experienced personally the de jure and de facto status of women in the GDR and to what degree living under a socialist regime shaped her life.

Despite these limitations, I have argued that *Kept Things*' central contribution lies in its

provocations. The exhibition complicates how museums represent everyday life in the GDR; it creates possibilities for imagining difference in the past, and with it, in the present and future. The mechanisms that produce this effect include the display of the out-of-the-ordinary rather than the typical from the perspective of the subject, as well as the banal as opposed to the exceptional in terms of materiality. Moreover, the show poses questions in place of providing distanced, professional, and objectifying statements about the past, thereby creating interpretive openings. *Kept Things* presents a single woman's life and her things concretely and abstractly in parallel. On one hand, the visitor encounters the material traces of an actual person through the consumer products she once owned. On the other hand, the context of the museum abstracts them, asserting that they stand in for something greater than themselves, even if this something else is difficult to discern. Unlike more traditional historical exhibits, *Kept Things* hybridizes the mode of museal historical representation and what could be conceptualized as installation art, displaying artifacts playfully, with attention to aesthetics, and without rigid and definitive textual frameworks. Thus, the exhibition disrupts museum genre conventions, thereby offering the possibility of approaching the musealization of East Germany in ways that complicate rather than replicate convention. From the perspective of a heterotopic framework, *Kept Things* thus articulates a "reservoir of imagination" (Foucault 1998, 185).

7. East German Refuse and Past Mobilizing

This chapter focuses on material culture, a central theme in my overall project. It examines more closely than the previous chapters how artifacts function as objects of knowledge, operate as historical evidence, act as agents of memory, and mobilize the past. The contextualization of objects within the museum supports a pointed discussion on the epistemology of things as I examine how objects embody the past and render it tellable. The musealization of East Germany serves as a uniquely rich case for studying these topics, in part because it highlights how objects shifts in value. Museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany illuminate what is at stake when material culture transforms from being a commodity, to trash, and subsequently museum artifact within a short span of time. Thus, the chapter interrogates closely the limits and possibilities of using discarded objects to make meaning of the past and present.

> *I needn't* say *anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.*
>
> Walter Benjamin[xxxix]

This description of *The Arcades Project*'s (1999) methodology captures strikingly how curators of amateur GDR museums mobilize the past. Here, visitors often find artifacts, positioned side by side with little or no linguistic interpretation, that appear to have been, and in many cases actually were, rescued from the rubbish heap. In fact, contemporary GDR museums are unimaginable without trash; this type of site would not exist, were it not for the abundance of rejected objects from which it draws its material content. With its reliance on rescued and re-valued things, the musealization of East German everyday life undermines the hierarchical ordering of human-made objects as it upsets their conventional classification. It blurs the boundaries between waste, materials that have lost their commodity value or have otherwise been socially constructed as obsolete, and its opposite, things that possess symbolic or exchange value.

Connectedly, the process of musealizing East German everyday life provides insight into how human-made objects can hold multiple statuses simultaneously. During my research trips to Germany it not only struck me that the same objects, such as dishes, glassware, and egg cups that were still in use in private homes were on display in museums. Surprisingly, flea markets and junk shops at museums also offered identical goods for sale. This simultaneity of statuses illustrates Appadurai's (1986) theorizing on material culture, which points out that commodity candidacy is "less a temporal than a conceptual feature as it refers to the standards and criteria (symbolic, classificatory, and moral) that define the exchangeability of things in any particular social and historical context" (14-15). Here, it is not the passage of time but the situatedness of objects, including the concrete place in which they are located, that define their value and

potential to be bought and sold. The same eggcup in a museum, in a home, at a flea market, or the museum shop at the same moment in time all have dramatically different symbolic meaning and monetary value.

The manufacturing of replicas and updated versions of East German consumer goods adds a further layer to considerations of the mutability of object value. Whereas many conventional museum and gallery shops sell copies of displayed items, they rarely sell originals, and if they do, these objects are much higher in price than their replicated version. This is not always the case at GDR museums, where the 'authentic' and its copy, including mugs, books, and household wares, can be on offer at similar cost (see Figure 16). The original can even be less expensive than the replica. For example, while a newly manufactured Triola, which is a children's musical instrument that was popular in the GDR, has a current price tag of over 20 Euro, the owner of the Gelenau DDR Museum sold me a GDR produced one for 5 Euro in 2010, 20 years after unification. Individuals also continue owning the instrument from GDR times.

Returning to Benjamin's quotation: he describes his *Arcades Project* as selecting refuse and putting it to use it through parataxis to create conditions for illuminating the past. GDR museums' use of rubbish provokes questions on the possibility of this methodology. In addition to analyzing the vicissitude of the value of commodities, exploring the capacity of rubbish to render the past meaningful will be the purpose of this chapter.

Figure 16: GDR Cream Dispenser with Original Label (0.95 Marks) and Price in Euro (€ 1), DDR Museum Radebeul Gift Shop

The Lure of Western and Eastern Things

The musealization of ordinary East German consumer goods cannot be understood without consideration of the history of the relationship between East Germans and western material culture. East Germans generally had little access to western goods due to limited trade relations between the GDR and western nations. In addition, although citizens did not experience shortages in terms of necessities of life for most of the existence of the GDR, scarcity did exists in respect to consumer wants. Dissatisfaction with the availability and quality of domestic products was coupled with virtual exposure to western ones. Jonathan Bach (2002) argues that the desire for western goods in the East arose mainly from exposure to them on TV. Betts identifies the same role of this mass medium. "[T]he ever present television images of the West German consumer bonanza … pointed up the demoralizing differences in the availability and quality of GDR consumer articles" (Betts 2000, 750). This perception was met by actual experience with products from the west, although these did not always correspond to the existing high expectations. Western goods trickled into the East by such means as relatives sending parcels, Eastern seniors who were permitted to travel relatively freely to the West, western relatives visiting the East, and in some instances, non-seniors traveling to the West, usually for family-related matters. Regardless of how they made their way to the East, western goods were imbued with a special status, which the eastern German psychiatrist Maaz describes in relationship to subsequent consumption patterns:

> [T]here was nothing that could beat the fetish value of western goods. Empty western beer or cola cans were placed as ornaments on the shelves of the wall unit, plastic bags bearing western advertisements were bartered, western clothes made the man. Real shortages and inferior merchandise in our country, and the surplus of items and quality luxuries in the West were the emotional background for a never-ending and never-satisfying spiral of consumption. (cited in Betts 2000, 741)

From the perspective of the Soviet context, Alexei Yurchak (2003) provides a more nuanced account of the relationship with western goods as he conceptualizes them as representatives of the imaginary West. He points out that in many instances "these symbols were not 'real' commodities, but stripped-down versions of the latter, empty husks, from which the original literal meanings were drained. The 'emptiness' of these commodities is clearly seen [in the display of] empty beer cans [and] empty cigarette boxes" (204). The meaning of this type of material culture lay in their signification of having access and being somehow in touch with the west, be it in the most superficial and far-removed way. "These symbols were desirable, first and foremost, not as authentic brands, real drinks, or literal values coming from the West but as links to imaginary worlds that were spatially, temporally, and meaningfully 'distant,' as 'fingerprints' of these imaginary worlds on the surface of Soviet life" (203-204).

Eastern Germans were able to express their fetish and desire to realize the imaginary west in full force soon after the Fall of the Wall, particularly when currency unification made it possible for them to convert their East German Marks to Deutsche Mark. In a consumer frenzy, they bought the more aesthetically pleasing and often better quality products of the West and rejected things East German, which they removed from their homes as used up and replaced with western consumer goods. Describing this process, Berdahl writes, "There was an element of truth in the images of East Germans on a frantic, collective shopping spree following the conversion of their eastern marks into western currency" (1999, 194). Bach suggests that the reason for this shopping mania was that eastern Germans behaved "too much like the ideal consumer" and "fell for advertisements" (Bach 2002, 552).

This consumption pattern transformed again as East Germans were confronted with the realities of capitalist consumer culture; the West did not completely live up to how it was

imagined. In Bett's words, "[o]nce purchased, many of these coveted articles lost their nimbus of symbolic capital and political magic and returned to the 'disenchanted' world of hyped exchange value, credit payments, and planned obsolescence" (Betts 2000, 742). Put differently, after East Germans acquired the relevant cultural fluency, they moved beyond the consumer good fetish that Maaz describes above. Many even turned back to what was familiar to them. However, these consumer goods quickly became unavailable as factories in the GDR shut down, Eastern foodstuffs rapidly disappeared from grocery store shelves, and the majority of other consumer products became unavailable in department stores.

This historical moment coincided with efforts of rescuing the disappearing object world of East Germany. Andreas Ludwig, founder of the first GDR Museum, the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR [Museum for East German Everyday Life Culture – DOK] in Eisenhüttenstadt, describes his encounter of the de-valuing of things East German and his developing sense that they would have to be saved:

> I'm a West-Berliner. 1990 opened new ways for us to go on weekend excursions. We had a son. He needed to be physically active and in West-Berlin he knew every tree personally. Then we always drove across the old border, what we call the surrounding areas, that is, the former East Germany and because one always took the same roads leaving the city. I noticed the immense piles of household effects in front of the houses. Those were then gone and fourteen days later there were new immense piles in front of the same house, but different piles. In other words, the people systematically rid themselves of them and bought western products, for as much money as they had, and threw away all the East German things. This was a compensatory reaction of shortage, or perceived shortage, and for me as historian it became clear that now the working foundation for museums was disappearing. I then thought that this must be kept, someone has to be responsible for it. (Personal communication, June 20, 2010)[xl]

Over twenty years later, this impulse to seek out and re-value the discarded continues to express itself. On the website dedicated to his private collection that he calls *Ostdeutsches Design Museum* [East German Design Museum] and others simply refer to as DDR Museum, Uwe

Jähnig summarizes his reason for starting a collection of East German material culture and recently sharing it occasionally with the public.[xli]

> After the Fall of the Wall everything from the GDR was worthless. A lot was just carelessly disposed of with the bulky refuse removal. Even then I felt bad that all these nice things from the GDR were surrendered to the compactor. That is why I have collected everything from the GDR times since the Fall of the Wall. I can't walk past any rubbish heap without taking a look to see if there is something among it from the GDR time. Out of my passion for collecting grew the idea of starting my own little exhibition about GDR design objects.[xlii] (Ostdeutsches Design Museum)

This inclination to save the quickly disappearing material culture of East Germany, in great part by saving them from the garbage dump, subsequently led to the proliferation of museums dedicated to everyday life. However, this salvaging likely only entails a temporary reprieve for many East German things. The objects that have been placed in formal and informal collections have continued their inevitable decay, particularly the ephemeral ones, such as those made of paper or consumables, including foodstuffs and cleaning products. Given the lack of public funding, professional conservation work does not usually take place. Moreover, several GDR museums are located in old structures that are in some disrepair or are otherwise not entirely suitable to house museum collections due to high humidity and the absence of heaters. Objects on display are also often not protected from human touch by barriers and glass (see Figure 17). Combined, these factors lend some GDR museums a precarious quality and produce the sense that they are unsustainable, both in terms of a private enterprise and the preservation of artifacts. I would like to suggest that in addition to

Figure 17: Display at DDR Museum Tutow

Figure 18: DDR Museum Burg - Exhibition Room (left); Rummage Room Sign (centre); Items for Sale at Rummage Room (right)

their non-conformance to dominant discourses on everyday life in the GDR (see Chapter 3) the dismissal of GDR museums stems in great part from the sense that the artifacts on display are of little or no value, which the structures that house them underline. Relatedly, their disruption of object categories also challenges conventional understandings of what museums do. For example, Figure 18 shows an exhibition room at the Burg GDR Museum on the left, which is virtually indistinguishable from the junk shop that is also part of the museum.

The Limits of Garbage

Trash as metaphor and metonym

Amateur GDR Museums are not the only site where the boundaries between garbage and cultural artifact are blurred. Exploring the uses of trash to investigate memory and everyday life in the GDR, Gillian Pye (2008) begins with a brief description of the entrance of the Deutsches Historisches Museum [German Historical Museum – DHM] 2007 exhibition *Parteidiktatur und Alltag in der DDR [Party Dictatorship and Everyday Life in the GDR*]. "[V]isitors were met with

two curious objects: an empty yoghurt pot and a margarine tub" (261). Pye is struck by the choice of these artifacts.

> The curators of the exhibition had placed in glass cases items which would ordinarily have been consigned to the rubbish bin. … In their banality, they are purported to have been plucked from the everyday life of the average East German citizen, bringing past directly into present. At the same time, they appear woefully inadequate to the task of representing a complex 'Alltag' [everyday life], which has shifted from everyday reality to the realms of memory in a very short space of time. (ibid.)

Here, Pye appraises the DHM's display of the empty yogurt pot and margarine tub as meaningless garbage. The proliferation of GDR museums, which display similar objects, suggests that such a dismissal is an oversimplification that fails to tend to the complex meaning this type of object can have. Moreover, this conceptualization ignores that objects transform fundamentally once they enter the museum; they become representative of a historical moment and culture. If the meaning of objects did not change with their placement into the museum, the institution would not exist. Given her classification of museum artifacts as rubbish, Pye contemplates why the containers are part of the exhibition.

> It is clear that rubbish offers a seductive potency, particularly in the context of the cultural memory processes surrounding the fall of the Wall. Whilst the trash objects may well offer a Proustian memory trigger for those who experienced them first hand, operating on some level as a genuine metonym for personal history, this necessarily remains a largely private and isolated experience. Their primary potency is, however, metaphorical: the margarine tub and the yoghurt pot are in fact metaphors for remembering and as such operate less as material witnesses of history than as aesthetic vehicles. (277)

Although Pye recognizes the power of these seemingly banal objects, she is unwilling to classify them as museum-worthy, which a closer consideration of the functioning of the rhetorical tropes of metonym and metaphor at the site undermines.

Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 5). From the perspective of semiotics, a

metaphor involves one signified acting as a signifier referring to a different signified. In literary terms, a metaphor consists of a 'literal' primary subject expressed in terms of a 'figurative' secondary subject (Richards 1932). Whereas a metaphorical term is connected with that for which it is substituted on the basis of similarity, metonymy is based on contiguity or closeness (Jakobson and Halle 1956, 91 and 95). Moreover, while metaphor is based on apparent unrelatedness, metonymy involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is directly related to it or closely associated with it in some way. To illustrate concretely, the phrase "museums are mausoleums" is a metaphor, while "Berlin is not funding GDR museums" (Berlin stands in for the German federal government) is an example of a metonym.

For Pye, the rubbish object as metonym offers itself as repository of memory only to those who recognize it from their own personal lives, as "largely private and isolated experience," which can thus have little meaning for others (277). Consequently, "[u]nless the viewer has intimate knowledge of the lost other […] the rubbish object as metonym must lead toward emptiness and absence" (264). I would like to suggest that this critique dismisses not only the significance of the many individual visitors who remember consuming these products but also their capacity for evoking and affirming cultural memory. It is not unreasonable to assume that many who do come to the DHM alone or in groups in fact have conscious memory of living in East Germany and experience them not only individually but also collectively. With this minimizing of the metonymic function of items related to everyday life in East Germany Pye's analyses also diminishes the potency, intensive work, and value of memory, which Gert Selle describes eloquently.

> Remembering is a tentative, difficult searching motion in a space of the already transformed, continuing to alter reality. It aims far beyond all recognition. Something is gone that was just still present. The loss is all the more painful the clearer the awareness that what is missing will never return. This is precisely why memory is valuable. ...

> Memory is the opposite of nostalgic mawkishness, a hard, also skeptical searching for foundations, on which new identity can develop. Thus it is a matter of exertion, not a resting among the old things. The senses and the intellect must open themselves to the past and the present.[xliii] (1997, 90)

Devaluing the significance of museum objects to illicit memory, for Pye, the empty yoghurt pot and a margarine tub remain at best a very limited emotional and memory trigger and at worst "allerlei Geschichtsgerümpel" [all kinds of historical trash] for it lacks sufficient "interpretation by a cultural historian" (264; 261). For her, the shortcomings of the museum display of trash as cultural mediator of memory and identity lies in its narrow metonymic function and the museums' failure to support its potential metaphoric function through extensive professional discursive meaning making.

I would like to suggest that in addition rejecting the significance of memory work this interpretation undermines the power of the object and its aesthetic value as possible dimensions of accessing the past. Kevin Hetherington (2010) conceptualizes the evocative capacities of the ruin when not discursively constructed.

> A chance encounter with the past through the figure of the ruin rather than the discourse of the ruin can have a powerful, evocative effect but only for the person who was there. To broaden knowledge of that effect requires that it be communicated discursively in some way. Therein lies the betrayal of its transformation from something evoked, a distant voice from the past, into something known and curated. (17)

Pye fears that rubbish objects, as a kind of ruin, takes on the primary function as "aesthetic vehicles" when sufficient interpretation of political context is absent. Aside from the problematic casting of political context and aesthetics as opposing forces, it is precisely the topic of aesthetics that has been excluded from publically funded musealizations of East Germany. For example, a long public battle is being fought over the Sammlung Industrielle Gestalltung [East German Industrial Design Collection], which is comprised of over 160,000 items. The archive has been inaccessible to researchers for many years and recently only a small fraction, about 180 artifacts,

has become part of a permanent exhibition at the Kulturbrauerei [Culture Brewery] in Berlin, which rather than focusing on design, presents them as part of everyday life in East Germany. Christa Meixner, commenting on a panel discussion of how to display the collection more effectively, laments that exhibition plans fail to be able to move beyond the artifacts as illustrations of a repressive system.

> Preißler [Director of Collections, Haus der Geschichte {House of History}[xliv]] talked several times of the 'contextualization' of the objects of everyday life. This approach leads one to fear that design from GDR times will be demonstrated in those 'historical and political contexts' as is done in the House of History in Bonn. The discussion of aesthetic value, qualities of design and the form consciousness of those objects would then be concluded before it has truly begun[xlv]. (Meixner 2012)

Having argued that the empty yogurt pot and margarine tub and fail both metaphorically and metonymically, Pye reaches the conclusion that in the context of the DHM exhibition, the "metaphorical and metonymic are conflated in such a way as to mask the dislocations of experience in the GDR, ultimately constructing a sentimental and consumer-driven image of harmony" (261). For her, the danger lies specifically in suggesting similarity rather than focusing on difference. The rubbish items'

> claim seems to be that we are all united by consumption, by the 'little things' of our everyday lives. However, this is to re-present these trash objects as objects for consumption, but what is being consumed this time is 'history lite'. By purporting to connote the everyday, the margarine tub and yoghurt pot mask the separation of object from experience, obscuring the real locus of that which has been discarded. This not only masks the differences in our historical and political experiences, but also imposes a consumer-mediated image of reconciliation. (277)

Here, 'history lite' implies the possibility of a *real* history of substance and depth. Yet what might this kind of history entail? Pye seems to suggest that it is the professional framing of artifiacts within the context of a political system, like all publically funded museums which display everyday life in East Germany already do, forgetting that given the title, the entire exhibition theme is everyday life in a dictatorship. I would like to point out however, that the

notion of presenting an exhibition that highlights how East and West was united by consumption is ironically not so far-fetched. A complex web of consumer products was manufactured in the East for the West (Veenis 2012, 164). Although to this day, the co-dependent economic relationship between the two German states remains largely unrecognized, over 6,000 Western companies manufactured their goods in East Germany, where labor was cheap (Birkenstock 2012). The clandestine trade provided the East with much-needed hard currency and since some of the manufactured goods that went to the West also stayed in the East or were resold to the East, unbeknownst to many, Easterners and Westerners consumed many of the same products. I would like to suggest that great potential lies in this historical fact. Instead of emphasizing difference, such as the permanent exhibit at the DHM does, where visitors walk different paths to learn about the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) and the GDR, putting on display a shared object world would challenge dominant representations fundamentally. Moreover, the metonymic dimension of such an approach would be much expanded, for both those who have memory of living in the FGR and GDR would recognize their past.

Affording things their own death in use

In addition to inadequate curatorial interpretation as well as the resulting aestheticization and the meaninglessness of objects, a further critique of the DHM exhibit pertains to temporality. It addresses the conundrum of assessing the everyday life of the recent past, to which Michael Pilz alludes in his description of the exhibition: "One comes too late to view the lived everyday life. The person who is just forty and finds implements of his or her own youth behind glass comes too early"[xlvi] (Pilz 2007). While this comment speaks to the impossibility of representing past everyday life as it was, it also draws attention to the distancing and alienating effect of museums. Placing objects into a museum locates them in the past, thereby assuring their pastness. In Gert

Seele's words (1997), "that which has been located in a museum appears to no longer has use in life"[xlvii] (87).

Selle connects this devaluation of things and to the devaluation of people in the context of the opening of the DOK, whose approach he criticizes severely:

> [The DOK] puts on display things that continue to be in use. The natives of the culture of real Socialism encounter in the museum those things that they have at home – the chair, the cooking pot and others. As soon as they enter this museum, these people turn into its living inventory because gazing upon their own dislodged things tells them that they belong there.[xlviii] (Seele 1997, 87)

Seele goes on to argue that the musealization of East Germany immediately following the country failed "to afford things their own death in use; it puts them to sleep to conserve them,"[xlix] (ibid.). Here, he suggests that they should have become garbage first before being recategorized as museal artifacts. The untimely placement of GDR material culture into the museum perverts the entire musealization process, and with it, its purpose of constructing history systematically and scholarly. Seele thus dismisses comprehensively the enterprise of the DOK. "The gesture of 'this is how it was, obligingly look!' is a falsification of the historical under the guise of museology as science"[l] (91). The mere putting of objects into the frame of the museum emerges as insufficient in creating museal representation.

Selle thus concludes that "artistic approaches must counter or disrupt the museal strategy" (91), ones that correspond to transforming historical realities and lead to complex understandings. Concretely, Selles proposes historically grounded temporary installations and provides the example of his own work at an abandoned surface coalmine. The project involved gathering the traces of a once thriving workplace, such as discarded work gloves, broken dishes from an abandoned cafeteria, worker name-tags retrieved from the dump, and photographs of a decaying industrial landscape.

Although Seele's description of a thoughtful arts-based historical investigation and installation promises the possibility of nuanced and dynamic engagements with the past, I would like to suggest that in 1997 Selle offered a premature and to some degree unfounded critique. His argument reflects an unwillingness to consider that the musealization of East Germany began in a qualitatively different constellation than had existed before, one that was marked by a rapid succession of unprecedented political events and subsequent social transformations. Moreover, an art project and the museum exhibit cannot be evaluated with precisely the same tools for each is entangled with and depends on different temporalities, levels of abstraction, funding structures, cultural roles, and pedagogical function.

I would also argue that as time passes, Seele's criticism becomes less founded. Nearly one-quarter century after the demise of East Germany, the nation's object world has had sufficient time to turn into garbage by outliving it use. Today, its placement into the museum no longer seems untimely. As most significant accumulation phase has ended, new types of engagements with things East German are emerging. For example, as I have argued in Chapter 6, with its temporary exhibition *Kept Things* the DOK has moved toward artistic representation with its introduction of ambiguity and singularity, blurring the boundaries between art installation and museum exhibition. However, questions about the musealization of GDR things persist, particularly when they are ephemeral, have little monetary value, and appear to be value-less refuse. An investigation into the uses of rubbish in other contexts, a topic to which I turn next, sheds light on the potential of this object category to illuminate the social, past and present.

Refuse: Illuminating Past and Present

The range of cultural practices that draw on garbage to construct understandings of who we are as human beings are indicative of the significant role rejected objects play in museal engagement with the recent German past. They also point to the overlap between museological work and artistic concern for the intersection between refuse, history, and memory. For example, the scholarly pursuits of archeology and anthropology are unimaginable without garbage; this type of thing lies at the heart of the disciplines. As William Rathje and Cullen Murphy (2001) point out, "[t]o an archaeologist, ancient garbage pit or garbage mounds, which can usually be located within a short distance from any ruin, are always among the happiest of finds, for they contain in concentrated form the artifacts and comestibles and remnants of behavior of the people who used them" (Rathje and Murphy 2001, 10). This reality means of course that the objects on display in ethnographic and history museums have often been gleaned from rubbish pits of the past.

A more present-oriented anthropology, deploying the tools of archeology, is also founded on the interrogation of refuse. The Tucson Garbage Project was a thirty-year archaeological and sociological study instituted in 1973 by William Rathje at the University of Arizona. The project consisted in great part of "systematically collecting, sorting through, and recording household refuse as it was put out at the curb" (65). Rathje explains the reason for his material approach in epistemological terms: "what people have owned -- and thrown away -- can speak more eloquently, informatively, and truthfully about the lives they lead than they themselves ever may" (Rathje and Murphy 2001, 65). This conceptualization assumes that an unmediated object, the discarded holds truth potential, a notion which Kevin Hetherington maintains in his

understanding of the non-discursively constructed ruin, (see above) and Alaida Assmann (1996) reflects upon when she discusses the "uncoded life." (see below)

An innovative current example of garbage in scholarly research is the University of Michigan based Undocumented Migration Project, led by Jason De León. This anthropological study of undocumented migration between Mexico and the United States applies ethnography, archaeology, and forensic science. Much of the data consists of the refuse that the migrants leave behind along their arduous journey, including specialized water bottles, camouflage clothing, backpacks, and rosaries. One of the strategies for interrogating the artifacts and sharing this work has taken the form of an exhibition at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities Gallery in 2013, which bears a striking resemblance to amateur GDR museums given its focus on artifacts, small size and "lack of much explanatory text (there are no labels, only an introduction outside and a brochure)" (Steinhauer 2013).

It is not only scholarly disciplines that make use of garbage. Since the early 20th century, artists have used refuse to interrogate conventional practice of art-making and with it construct critical social comment. John Scanlan (2005) identifies Marcel Duchamp's Fountain of 1917, a turned upside down urinal declared art by the act of naming it, as " the point of departure for so-called junk art" (96). Although the contemporary art-world provides countless examples of garbage-related work (see Scanlan 89–119), one of the best known is Andy Warhol's 612 *Time Capsules,* a dated and boxed collection of ephemera from the artist's daily life. Warhol (1977) describes his process of accumulating items that are usually discarded in terms of the tensions that arises from an awareness of the range of object statuses and the constant possibility that the useless can once again become useful.

> Tennessee Williams saves everything up in a trunk and then sends it out to a storage place. I started off myself with trunks and the odd pieces of furniture, but then I went

> around shopping for something better and now I just drop everything into the same-size brown cardboard boxes that have a color patch on the side for the month and the year. I really hate nostalgia, though, so deep down I hope they all get lost and I never have to look at them again. That's another conflict. I want to throw things right out the window as they're handed to me, but instead I say thank you and drop them into the box-of-the month. But my other outlook is that I really do want to save things so they can be used again someday (145).

Warhol's *Time Capsules* blurs the distinctions between garbage, art, historical artifact, and commodity. His September 30, 1986 diary entry reads: "Took a few time capsule boxes to the office. They are fun—when you go through them there are things you really don't want to give up. Some day I'll sell them for $4,000 or $5,000 apiece. I used to think $100, but now I think that's my new price" (1989, 762). The Andy Warhol Museum's website reflects the challenge of defining the boxes and their content. It describes them as the "most extensive, complex and personal work," yet the museum categorizes them as part of the "archives collection" rather than the "art collection."

A more recent example of the intersection between art and refuse, yet one that was more intentionally conceptualized as an aesthetic undertaking, is the *Tate Thames Dig*. During the summer of 1999, U.S. artist Mark Dion and a team of volunteers searched for fragments of individual and ephemeral histories on two beaches of the Thames River in London. They cleaned and classified the found items, which included clay pipes, shards of delftware, oyster shells, and plastic toys. Working in tents on the Tate Gallery's lawn, the team organized the objects according to type, such as bones, glassware, pottery, and metal objects, in unhistorical and uninterpreted arrangements. The found items were subsequently displayed in a double-sided old-fashioned mahogany cabinet according to the location where they were found. Antique items were positioned alongside contemporary artifacts and ephemera and detritus were placed next to objects of value. The online catalogue describes the significance of the project as follows:

> Each [object] is a material witness, performing the same function as a historical proof. This lack of distinction is an important aspect of Dion's approach and he resists the reading of history as a necessarily linear progression. The only differentiation is a geographical one, the two sites retaining their individual identities. The lack of historical categorization suggests a subversion of standard museological practice. Viewers are free to create their own associations, to trace histories across time, not necessarily in a linear direction. (Tate)

The example of the *Tate Thames Dig* again illustrates the crossing paths of art and museal historicizing. Their merging provokes contemplation of our relationship with the past, particularly in terms of knowledge construction and the meaning of material culture.

East German Rubbish Revisited

This chapter has thus far described how scholars and artists use gathered and value-less objects to connect to the past. I would like to suggest that one useful strategy for making sense of this process and thus illuminate further the relationship between persons and thing, including detritus, is the process of objectifying. Human beings make the world knowable by expressing ideas in material forms. The objects we produce reflect who we are. In Daniel Miller's words: "We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us" (Miller 2005, 8). However, this process of objectifying is only one part of the equation; the objects we create also shape us.

This reciprocal and generative relationship between subject and object is captured in the concept of objectification. It is the realization that what people make also makes people. The most significant aspect of objectification is its inherent political character; it potentially enables progressive social change for its conscious realization entails the recognition that we produce and are the products of historical realities. Here, I quote Miller extensively, for he summarizes eloquently the sequence of Hegel's process of objectification, which highlights its politic.

> Everything that we create has, by virtue of that act, the potential both to appear, and to become, alien to us. We may not recognize our creations as those of history or ourselves. They may take on their own interest and trajectory. A social order, such as a hierarchy, may come to us as immutable and one that situates us as oppressed. It does not appear to have been created by people; it is experiences as sui generis. Even a dream may be attributed to some other agency and literally 'haunt' us. But once we appreciate that these things are created in history or in imaginations, we can start to understand the very process which accounts for our own specificity, and this understanding changes us into a new kind of person, one who can potentially act upon that understanding. (Miller 2005, 8-9)

Thus, objectification emerges as a framework that rejects the object/subject dualism and thereby creates the possibility for imagining different futures based on the understanding that the present is of our own making.

Miller pushes this argument further. He posits that a true understanding of objectification requires a recognition of "the tyranny of the subject," that is, the acknowledging that most theorizing entails a privileging of the agent and sociality. Thus, Miller calls for a "dethronement of the subject," which entails a refusal of social relations as primary explanatory categories. In this approach, he does not envision that objects take the place of subjects but rather he proposes a fundamentally dialectical relationship between subject and object, one in which one continually constitutes the other and in which neither is privileged. Miller offers his own work as an example of anthropological investigation that unprivileges social relations and instead puts objects and subjects on equal grounds. In his study on modernity in Trinidad he traces historically how kinship expressed systems of value. With an increase in the significance placed on commodified objects brought about by the oil boom, expressions of value moved from kinship to objects. Miller maintains that people's turning to objects to express value in the context of consumer culture does not mean that they are "losing their authentic sociality as they become more obsessed with material things" (Miller 2005, 39). Rather,

> [a]s consumer goods started to take over more of the burden for objectifying and this created the way values were visualized and understood, there was less

> of a tendency to use people as, in effect, the objects for objectifying such values. To indicate transience one referred to the unreliability of car parts rather than the unreliability of women. (Miller 2005, 39)

In foregrounding objects and refusing to seek answers predominantly in social relationship, Miller is able to argue that commodification and consumerism are not only lamentable.

Also considering the centrality of material culture in the functioning of the social, Charles Tilley (1999) draws attention to the fundamentally shared encounter of the object, which I would contend undermines Pye's argument on the meaningless emptiness of the yogurt pot and margarine container at the DHM. Things have a power that lies outside of their discursive construction of them, which at its most basic level is shared by all who encounter them.

> Words provide no substitute for the power of things, for it acts synesthetically and simultaneously along a whole series of dimensions such as sight and sound and touch and smell. In producing and experiencing artefacts people are producing and experiencing themselves in the deepest sense. Artefacts permit people to know how they really are by virtue of the fact that artefacts always assume specific forms or images in the minds of the viewer in a manner impossible to convey with words. Material images, like words, may be substituted for each other in a succession of analogies. Your mental image of the moon or of a fox from the word may be very different form mine, relatively unconstrained. By contrast, we experience a *material* representation of the moon from a starting point that is the same image, empirically constrained, taking a particular form, although we may still 'see' very different moons or foxes in it. (Tilley 1999, 268)

In GDR museums, curators mobilize the past by relying on this thing power as they put to use material remains (see Chapter 3). I would suggest that the absence of significant mediation that would defines these sites and their meaning concretely opens up possibilities for the experiences of the objects as objects, regardless of whether individuals are familiar with them from their everyday life. Consequently different stories about the past than can circulate with a greater range.

As a type of object, garbage also carries the object power that Tilley describes. Walter Benjamin and Alaida Assmann's theorizing proposes that within rejected items lies a particularly

potent power, specifically in its potential to access and make sense of the past. Douglas Smith (2010) describes Benjamin's entire body of work and in particular his unfinished *Arcades Project* in terms of a "redemption of the refuse of official history, a recuperation and rehabilitation of the defeated and the obsolete" from which springs historical knowledge and emancipatory potential (124). Textual fragments that consist of descriptions and reflections, as well as quotes from critics, commentators, and historians make up the *Arcades Project* (1999), a work that sets out to interrogate Paris city life in the 19th century, and particularly its glass-roofed shops, the arcades, as exemplar of the emergence of consumerism and product of solidifying capitalism and with it, the coming of the modernist era.

In the *Arcades Project,* Benjamin casts "himself as a chiffonnier or Lumpensammler or ragpicker, someone who recycles waste or discarded materials and so exists outside the utilitarian world of bourgeois capitalist production and consumption" (Smith 2010, 113). Methodologically, Benjamin (1999) proposes a paratactical approach that illuminates a totality through the presentation of its fragments:

> The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. ...{Refuse of History} [N2,6] (460-461)

Benjamin borrows this technique of montage from the surrealist movement, whereby he reconfigures meaning through the processes of decontextualization and defamiliarlization with the intent of offering a new historiography and a new philosophical concept of history.

Thus, the meaning Benjamin sought to disclose in his materials lay not in replicating academic historiography and the application of theory but was to be found in many sudden realizations and "dialectical images," which juxtapositions would trigger. "The dialectical image," so he argues, "is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held

fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability" (473 [N9,7]). These images do not simply establish relationships between the past and present, or even reciprocally illuminate one another, but rather bring together dialectically the 'then' and the 'now.'

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For a while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. (462 [N2a,3])

The dialectical image consists of seeing something that could not be seen before; elements that have been there all along are suddenly connected, forming a recognizable form and thus generate insight into the aggregate of past, present and future.

This cursory overview of *The Arcades Project* and the dialectical image suggest the richness but also obscurity that defines Benjamin's proposed mode of historical interpretation and subsequently the great difficulty that is involved in attempting to work with these ideas. For example, Max Pensky (2004) regards several of the textual fragments in *The Arcades Project* as "theoretical promissory note[s] that would prove difficult if not impossible to redeem" (177). Likewise, Susan Buck-Morss describes the concept of the dialectical image as "overdetermined" (1989, 67) and Rolf Tiedemann maintains that the notion "never achieved terminological consistency" (Tiedemann 1989, 284). Pensky portrays the dialectical image as "a dark star, indeed a kind of theoretical and methodological black hole, a 'singularity' following its own extraordinary laws and capable, apparently, of absorbing any number of attempts at critical illumination" (178).

Despite the great difficulty that lies in concretizing Benjamin's theorizing, I would like to suggest that the value of his project lies in its challenge of traditional historiography. A paragraph in *The Arcades Project* points to his critique of the authoritativeness of academic

history that constructs singular accounts, leaving little room for a plurality and pacifying critical thought.

> A remark by Ernst Bloch apropos of The Arcades Project: 'History displays its Scotland Yard badge.' It was in the context of a conversation in which I was describing how this work – comparable, in method, to the process of splitting the atom – liberates the enormous energies of history that are bound up in the "once upon a time" of classical historiography. The history that showed things "as they really were" was the strongest narcotic of the century. [N3,4] (463)

More than rejecting history formulated in terms of "how things really were," Benjamin's work sheds light on the role garbage plays in the musealization of the GDR. For him, garbage emerges as important in its relationship to commodities. Carlo Salzani (2009) interprets Benjamin's optimistic conceptualizations of objects that have lost their use value: "The obsolescent, old-fashioned artifact, deprived of both use- and exchange value, defetischizes and demythifies the commodity" (196). Salzani further suggests that the Lumpensammler "is present in any historiographical practice that attempts to rescue lost and forgotten traditions from the rubble of ruined dominant narratives" (189). This interpretation not only casts the curators and visitors of GDR museums as rescuers of the past. It also is decidedly hopeful in that it democratizes the process of making history. If trash can be the foundation of constructing history, then everyone can make history; all those interested can be involved, rather than leaving the undertaking in the domain of historians and museologists in research institutes and universities.

Alaida Assmann's (1996) tracing of the "transforming structures of cultural memory"[li] sheds further light on the relevance of rubbish for accessing and establishing relationships with the past. She conceptualizes historical shifts in the materiality of cultural memory media, beginning with the written word, moving to traces, and culminating in garbage. This development is not linear but rather a transformation in emphasis, consisting of "a complex structure of their simultaneity and crisscrossing"[lii] (109). Assmann's typology hinges on what

she argues is the nineteenth century's crisis of representation that led to the questioning not only of the reliability of the written text but also its capacity to unite past, present, and future. She maintains that new media and vast digital storage capacity "blow up the contours of a cultural memory,"[liii] leading to a profound epistemological transformations (107). "Paradoxically, the ever simpler and more complete possibilities of recording are leading to a new sense of the not digitally storable, that which is forever lost" (Assmann 1996, 110)[liv].

Parallel to Hetherington's discussion on the ruin and discourse, Alaida Assmann draws on the differentiation Jakob Burckhardt (1984) makes between traces and texts, where traces emerge as more precious and authentic than texts (Burckhardt 175). Here, "[t]races fundamentally open up a different entry point into the past than texts because they integrate the non-linguistic articulations of a past culture – the ruins and relicts, the fragments and shards, as well as the residues of oral tradition"[lv] (Assmann 1996, 106). Put more succinctly, in rubbish we find the "traces of an uncoded life"[lvi] (107). The significance of these traces of a life *not* categorized and articulated linguistically lies in their being tangible links to the past, however ephemeral, at a time when "memory dissolves itself in sped-up cycles of production and consumption,"[lvii] which leads to an ever-increasing proximity of remembering and forgetting (Assmann 108).

I would like to suggest that the proliferation and form of amateur GDR museums cannot be understood without consideration of Benjamin's and Assmann's insights on refuse. Concretely present but also full of interpretive possibilities for individual and shared encounters with them, consumer products that have lost their use-value come to embody the untellability of the past and the sense of its immanent disappearance, but also the opportunity to counter ruling ideas. As dominant discourses lay a claim on the past and solidify narrow historicizing

narratives, rubbish offers the possibility of telling otherwise, of making room for complex negotiations and contradictions that unfolded in everyday life under socialism. Despite Pye's (2008) dismissal of the "seductive potency" of rubbish, I would argue that refuse's power lies in its refusal to conform to conventional categorizations (277). Even if operating mainly on the cultural margins, mobilizing the past with rubbish, as GDR museums do, persistently interferes with and thus challenges ruling ideas about East Germany that fail to fully correspond with memories of everyday life there.

This chapter has approached the analysis of material engagements with the East German past from the perspective of garbage. Although my entire dissertation has been concerned with material culture, the focus on this object category illuminates a central characteristic of the amateur GDR museum: the putting on display, and thus re-valuing, of discarded or de-valued consumer products. In taking this approach, I have explored what sets the site apart from other modes of material historical engagement. Moreover, I have argued that the use of rubbish affords GDR museums political possibilities. They include democratizing historicizing processes, pluralizing narratives that construct the past, and the demythifying of the commodity, which provokes a critique of consumer society. At the same time, the empirical focus on GDR museums offers a way into the broader topic of the vicissitude of the meaning and worth of objects across place and time. It also highlights the central role objects play in how we relate to the past.

Conclusion

Using the context of contemporary Germany, this dissertation set out to investigate struggles over the construction of the nation's socialist past. The cultural phenomenon *Ostalgie,* nostalgia for the East*,* served as a starting point for analyzing practices, objects, sites, and ideas that mobilize the past. Rather than seeking out the breadth of this type of nostalgia's articulations, such as television shows, movies, consumer products, and parties that invoke the GDR seemingly uncritically, I have developed in-depth analyses of situated practices and objects. Oscillating between descriptions of the specificity of empirical phenomena and conceptual tools to illuminate them, I have explored the complexities of attempts to render the past tangible and meaningful. I have argued that the culturally marginal practices that I investigate disrupt dominant discourses, for they democratize the process of making the past and contain within them possibilities of multiple accounts, thereby rejecting a single, dominant narrative. In addition to theorizing past mobilizing and research-by-making, the central contribution of this dissertation lies in the rigorous analysis of specific practices that lay a claim on the East German past.

After outlining the methodological approach of my research project, I began this dissertation with an exploration of the pertinent foundational concepts, including history, memory, and heritage, tracing their transformation in scholarly discourse. I conclude that understanding history and memory as overlapping phenomena that rely upon one another rather than emphasizing their distinct characteristics is most productive. Moreover, I propose the term past mobilizing as a notion that not only encompasses history and memory but also emphasizes that people make use of the past strategically and do so with reference to the present and future.

Unlike history, memory, heritage, and past presencing, the term conveys the processual social construction of the past through a broad range of phenomena and practices. It encompasses both popular and high culture, while also including subversive and dominant uses of the past. Moreover, past mobilizing signals political processes and practices as it denotes activation for a purpose and suggests future directed practices.

The concrete work with empirical phenomena began with an investigation of a seemingly banal consumer product, a coffee mug. This single object serves both as an entry point into and the centre of the analysis. The mug provides an anchor that concretized a discussion on dominant ideas about the past and narratives that opposed them. Moreover, it establishes the context for a discussion on what *Ostalgie* is empirically, what historical conditions gave rise to it, as well as how the term is used in everyday speech, politically, and in scholarly discourse. I suggest that even though some academic literature on nostalgia and *Ostalgie* addresses the simultaneous playfulness and critical engagement with the past, it can only ever serve as shorthand for contradictory and complex practices. While the mug provides a tangible way into the problematic of how the East German past is constructed and contested, it does not lend itself well to the task of addressing the phenomenon in terms of farther reaching practices, comparative analyses, and phenomena that do not label themselves as *Ostalgie*.

With the intent of expanding my analysis of struggles over how to construct the past to relationships between people and objects, I turn to amateur museums that are dedicated to everyday life in East Germany, which frequently receive the label *Ostalgie*. I argue that these sites constitute a genre of museum, for they mobilize the past similarly and frame their pursuit as apolitical. Moreover, I posit that although they may be dismissible individually, for they lack sophistication and deploy rudimentary representational practices, combined they point to a

systematic attempt to tell stories about the East Germany that go beyond oppression and resistance to a dictatorship. I examine the dialogical and productive relationship between visitors and curators, how material culture functions within them and suggest that sensory experiences that the museums afford their visitors produces a potent sense of place and has the capacity to evokes memories. Moreover, I explicate how the notion of mourning for industrial production can be used to explain, at least in part, the prevalence of GDR museums.

A key moment in the dissertation research process was the curating of my own exhibition, which I outline in Chapter 5. This project brought to the fore material practices that productively slowed down the research process and made public work that is usually solitary and conducted in private. The chapter describes the experimental curatorial project to demonstrate how material practice can facilitate social research. It also traces how the fashioning of a public exhibit illuminates my dissertation project as a whole. The central contribution of the piece lies in its theorization of research-by-making, an approach that the chapter proposes as methodological tool for scholarly inquiry that can be applied more broadly than arts-based forms of inquiry. I juxtapose research-by-making with practice-as-research (see Allegue, Jones, Kershaw & Piccini, 2009; Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Riley & Hunger, 2009) to suggest that amateur material constructions in the social research situation hold tremendous productive capacities. Material practice outside of the artistic domain emerge as possibility for supporting research endeavors while also highlighting the creative and subjective elements of scholarly work.

The appreciation that I gained for curatorial work while developing my own exhibit led me to the completion of the analysis that I undertook in Chapter 6. This part of the dissertation presents the most prolonged lingering with one theory, an approach that afforded a tending to complexities both in terms of abstraction and an empirical situation. It presents a reciprocally

informed analysis of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*, on display in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany from March 28, 2010 until May 5, 2011. I propose *Kept Things* as site and practice that questions fundamentally how other contemporary museums represent East German everyday life. At the same time, the exhibition renders visible the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge. The foundation for this argument consists in an interrogation of the concept of heterotopia that emphasizes its methodological possibilities, including its capacity to reveal knowledge. The application of dimensions of heterotopia explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts shape the exhibition's meaning while simultaneously gesturing towards the possibility of more nuanced representations of the East German past than circulate currently.

The concluding chapter approaches the dissertation's central topic of material culture from the perspective of waste. It examine the double movement in the 1990s of the rapid, almost instantaneous devaluation of East German material culture through its removal from homes, places of work, and public spaces as well as attempts to auratize or enchant them by indiscriminately collecting them and by placing into informal and formal collections. I draw on Daniel Miller, Walter Benjamin, and Alaida Assmann to argue that the musealization of East Germany cannot be understood without consideration of the power of objects, particularly ones that at a recent moment in their biography had been discarded ones. GDR museums emerge as accumulations of the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life gathered and displayed with the hope that these activities will carry forward in time articulated and unarticulated aspects of the past.

Throughout the dissertation I have argued that marginal practices that seem dismissible because they appear unrefined, operate on the margin, are part of popular culture, or do not

correspond to dominant conventions and understandings, in fact participate in the important process of interrupting and disrupting dominant discourses while provoking multiple understandings of the past. Unlike positions, such as Gillian Pye's (2008), which categorizes the museal display of what to her appears to be garbage insufficiently curated as "history lite" (277; see Chapter 7), I have taken the position that in this use of objects lies the potential to tell *otherwise*. The possibility of constructing multiple and contradictory understandings of the past emerge in marginal practices. Like the phenomena I have investigated, Benjamin's and Foucault's theorizing that I have applied throughout the dissertation afford a tending to the simultaneity of what may appear to be contradictory. Moreover, their approach to interrogating the social involves finding value in the taken for granted or rejected, but also provoking thorough investigation that assumes that there cannot be one correct account of the past.

In addition to suggesting throughout the dissertations that marginal practices that evoke the East German past create conditions that can diversify stories about the past, I have argued more subtly that what is at stake is imagining alternative futures. In a 1956 conversation between Adorno and Horkheimer, Adorno, reflecting on possibilities the future holds, states: "The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one" (70). I posit that alternatives to dominant narratives about East Germany's past are linked deeply to the desire to counter the neo-liberal ideology that purports that life as we live it now in the west, even if not perfect, is the best we can do. It is an articulation of a refusal of a futureless present. To elucidate and conclude, I return to Slavoj Žižek (2002) who describes *Ostalgie* as "longing, not so much for the communist past, for what actually went on under communism, but, rather, for what *might have happened* there, for the missed opportunity of another Germany" (23-24). Here, Žižek captures what underlies the practices that mobilize the past which I have described

in ways that counter dominant notions: the refusal of a blanked rejection of the East German era and the erasure of the possibilities of possibilities.

Notes

[i] All translations from German in this dissertation are my own unless stated otherwise. “Die Verklärung der DDR erreicht einen neuen Höhepunkt. Gegen eine Darstellung ihrer alten Heimat als ‘Unrechtsstaat’ wenden sich heute auch Jüngere und Bessergestellte."
[ii] “Die meisten DDR-Bürger hatten ein feines Leben. Ich denke keinesfalls, dass es hier besser ist."
[iii] Sebald 2001, 24
[iv] “Die positivistische Geschichtsschreibung stoßt an ihre Grenzen, wo ihre Quellen verstummen” (Assmann 2006, 47).
[v] “Unsere gegenwärtige Situation ist nicht durch Alleinherrschaft von Geschichte oder Gedächtnis, sondern durch die Komplexität ihres Nebeneinanders als zwei konkurrierende, sich korrigierende, und ergänzende Formen des Vergangenheitsbezugs geprägt. Wir bedürfen in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit, und zumal der traumatischen Vergangenheit, sämtlicher Funktionen, sowohl der memorialen und moralischen Funktion, die Geschichte mit Gedächtnis verknüpfen, als auch der kritischen Funktion, die beide voneinander fordern.”
[vi] “Die Alltagsperspektive eröffnet neue thematische Möglichkeiten jenseits einer herrschaftsbezogenen Sichtweise der Geschichte. Die Funktion des Museums als soziales Gedächtnis ist eine Folge dieses Perspektivwechsels und mag dabei ein Korrektiv zu anderen, herrschaftsorientierten Orten der Erinnerung sein.”
[vii] German analyses of this subject tend to present a much more negative perspective. I will address this difference below.
[viii] Popular and academic discourses assume that *Ostalgie* expresses itself predominantly through the aesthetic of kitsch. For example, Boyer refers almost in passing to the “lightness and kitschiness of *Ostalgie*” (Boyer 2006, 380). Even texts that would not ordinarily be described as kitsch, such as the literature of the acclaimed East German writer Christa Wolf, has been dismissed as kitsch when its critics deemed it not sufficiently critical of the DDR (Cole 1999, 406). In recent years, particularly in responses to the fall of communism, scholarly discourses have grappled with the tensions between celebrating the creativity of kitsch and its aesthetics’ more retrogressive characteristics.
[ix] Cooke (2005) responds to the German concern that *Ostalgie* threatens German unity. He concludes that “although the way the DDR is used is still worthy of exploration, the vast majority of this use is generally far more mundane than much of its reporting” (203).
[x] Although Neller differentiates GDR-nostalgia and *Ostalgie*, her definition of the former as the “positive Orientierungen gegenüber der ehemaligen DDR” (positive orientation toward the former DDR) does not contradict other descriptions or conceptualizations of *Ostalgie* (Neller 2006, 37).
[xi] According to Cooke (2005, 8), the Dresden cabaret artist Uwe Steimle coined the term. Neller (2006, 42) credits the lyricist Günter Kunert.
[xii] Saudners, Anna 2007, 4-5
[xiii] Currently in operation are GDR museums in Apolda, Burg, Gelenau, Kusey, Langenweddingen, Malchow, Mühltroff, Klettenberg, Pirna, Radebeul, Thale and Tutow. Also included could be museums in Berlin, Perleberg, Eisenhüttenstadt, and Wittenberg. Although

both groups of museums put on display material traces of the everyday, their approach to the subject matter differ significantly. During my research trips to Germany, people repeatedly told me about small collections of East German everyday objects in various locations. One example is a private, one-room collection in Dummerstorf, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, that is open to the public on special occasions.

[xiv] "Oll" is a Low German colloquial expression that means old but has pejorative meanings such as stupid and dense.

[xv] "A museum is a *non-profit*, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, *conserves*, *researches*, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (Emphases added. International Council of Museums. http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/museum-definition.html. Accessed June 12, 2010.)

[xvi] „Die wissenschaftlich fundierte Sammlung, Bewahrung und Dokumentation von Objekten der DDR-Geschichte birgt für stadt- und regionalgeschichtliche Museen ein großes Potential. Dieses wird bislang jedoch nur selten genutzt. Zugleich verweist die steigende Zahl privat betriebener, kommerzieller DDR-Museen auf das öffentliche Interesse an diesem Thema. Diese Situation nimmt die Tagung als Ausgangspunk. Diskutiert werden die verschiedenen Dimensionen der Musealisierung der DDR sowie die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Darstellung und Vermittlung von Zeitgeschichte im Museum."

[xvii] „Das Alltagsleben in der DDR wird berücksicht, um eine Verklärung und Verharmlosung der SED-Diktatur und jeder *Ostalgie* entschieden entgegenzuwirken. Dazu ist das alltägliche Leben notwendigerweise im Kontext der Diktatur darzustellen. Es muss deutlich werden, dass die Menschen in der DDR einer umfassenden staatlichen Kontrolle unterlagen und einem massiven Anpassungsdruck ausgesetz waren, ebenso wie die Diktatur ihre Macht auch aus der Mitmachbereitschaft der Gesellschaft schöpfte. Die Instrumente und Mechanismen, derer sich die SED bediente, um die gesamte Gesellschaft und das Leben der Menschen in all seinen Bereichen ideologisch zu durchdringen, sollen benannt werden – von der Kinderkrippe über die Schule und die Universität bis hin zur Arbeitswelt und zur Freizeitgestaltung. Zugleich muss dokumentiert werden, wie und wo sich Menschen in der DDR dem Zugriff der Partei zu entziehen suchten."

[xviii] "Es war schön, an alles erinnert zu werden."

[xix] "Dies war bis jetzt unsere Lieblingsaustellung. Man findet aus jedem Lebensbereich Erinnerungen. Danke für diese schöne Ausstellung und weiterhin Erfolg."

[xx] Mitropa, a catering and restaurant business, was founded in 1916 and operated as one of the only stock companies in East Germany.

[xxi] In recent years, Made in the GDR products have become more rare and consequently gained in value. Museums now must often purchase potential display items or exchange them for objects they already have in their archives.

[xxii] "Mit dem Haarnetz, Käsehobel und Wurststopfapparat … ist keine Bewegungsgeschichte und Geschichtsbewegung darzustellen."

[xxiii] *Der schwarze Kanal* [The Black Channel] was a weekly political propaganda program that was broadcast on East German television between 1960 and 1989.

[xxiv] Recently, exhibitions and cinemas have begun to incorporated sensory experiences, although this strategy does not define mainstream museal practice beyond visitors being permitted to

handle certain artifacts, which are usually not precious or are replicas. Examples include the Capital Theatre at Fort Edmonton Park, where chairs vibrate to correspond to film content and artificial snow falls from the ceiling during winter scenes. The Harry Potter Exhibition, which has toured the major science museums of the world since 2009, includes olfactory elements.

[xxv] Carter, Paul 2004, 7

[xxvi] Topinka, Robert. 2010, 61

[xxvii] I reference Hurley's 1998 translation of the text entitled "Different Spaces" in response to Jonson's critique of the 1984 translation and Beth Lord's (2006) compelling analysis that builds on the translator's distinct word choices.

[xxviii] Two examples are Peter North's (1999) analysis of Local Exchange Trading as a heterotopia that "enables the realization of resistant conceptions of money and exchange, of livelihood, community, and cooperation" (69) and Deirdre Howard-Wagner's (2011) study of Australian Indigenous cultural performance and cultural activities.

[xxix] A new permanent exhibition constructed with a federal grant of 800.000 Euros was opened in 2012.

[xxx] "Die DDR war eine geschlossene Gesellschaft, ihr Ende und ihr Anfang genauenstens abgesteckt und bewacht, mit einem weiten, himmelblauen Horizont dahinter und darüber. Ein Land für Träumer und ein trauriges Land, ein exklusives und ein armes Land, ein Land technolgischen und sozialen Fortschritts, ein Land, von dem seine Menschen sagten und meinten, es sei ihr Land, ein Land, das sich schließlich um seine Menschen brachte, ein Land voller Widersprüche, die nie ausgetragen wurden, ein humanitäres Land, das einfach verschwand, spurlos, ein Land mit sieben Siegeln."

[xxxi] Andreas Ludwig has been an active member of the Berlin Geschichtswerkstatt (History Workshop), which is part of the broader history workshop movement. This approach focuses on local and everyday life, constructing social history, history from below, or people's history.

[xxxii] "Das Sammlungskonzept ist ... ganz einfach. Anders als die meisten anderen Museen, haben wir gesagt, bitte geben sie diesem Museum das, was für ihren Alltag in der DDR wichtig gewesen ist, was für sie Bedeutung hat. Das heißt, wir haben jetzt eine Sammlung, die ist Abbild des Geschichtsbewußtseins über die eigene historische Existenz in der DDR. Die Idee ist, die Dinge von unten zu sammeln und deswegen auch nicht von vornherein festzulegen das ist die DDR Geschichte in 10 Kapiteln und jetzt brauchen wir Belegstücke um diese Geschichte zu visualisieren in einer Ausstellung, sondern tatsächlich von unten aufzubauen, ein Archiv der materiellen Kultur was zusammengetragen ist von vielen."

[xxxiii] "typisches Berliner Frauenschicksal der 60er bis 80er Jahre"

[xxxiv] Possibilities for explaining this propensity to provide donation include removing culturally outmoded objects from homes and elevating ones past through their placing into the museum context.

[xxxv] For example, the DDR Museum in Burg is seeking items as diverse as toys, uniforms, monuments, and vehicles (retrieved May 27, 2014 http://ddr-museum-burg.de/?cat=1). At a design-focused GDR museum in Schwepnitz, the owner Uwe Jähning is soliciting donations by asking for anything related to the GDR, "egal was es ist" [no matter what it is] (retrieved May 27, 2014 http://www.ostdeutsches-design.de/spenden/).

[xxxvi] "die Quellengrundlage zu haben immer wieder neu Themen zu überlegen und zu debattieren. Aber wenn man die Quellen nicht hat, kann man das nicht machen."

[xxxvii] “Der Nachlass von Frau P. macht zunächst ratlos. Allein die Zahl der Dinge, die Frau P. angeschafft hat, deutet auf eine Obsession, Dinge ihres Gefallens besitzen und um sich herum versammeln zu wollen. Die Dinge gehörten zu ihr und zu ihrem Haus. Sind sie eine Repräsentation 'typisch weiblicher' Sammlungen? Wollte sich Frau P. auf ein 'bürgerliches Leben' vorbereiten, mit großem Haus und angemessenem persönlichen Auftritt? Wollte sie sich belohnen, indem sie Dinge Ihres Gefallens kaufte und mit nach Hause trug? Wollte sie sich mit Dingen umgeben, die sie als zugehörig zu Ihrer Persönlichkeit empfand? Auf je mehr Erklärungsansätze man stößt, je deutlicher wird, dass eine eindeutige Interpretation nicht möglich sein wird. Es ist diese Mischung aus Erstaunen und Ratlosigkeit, die auch die Ausstellung bestimmt. Es stellt sich immer wieder die Frage nach dem Verstehen dieser Ansammlung.”

[xxxviii] “ist eine Ansammlung des Aufgehobenen, keine Sammlung. Das wird sie erst im Museum.”

[xxxix] Benjamin [N1a,8]

[xl] “Ich bin Westberliner. 1990 war für uns so zu sagen der Weg frei neue Wochenendsexkursionen zu machen. Wir haben einen Sohn gehabt. Der brauchte Bewegung und in Westberlin kannte er jeden Baum persönlich. Dann sind wir immer über die ehemalige Grenze gefahren, in das was wir Umland nennen, also die ehemalige DDR und mir ist aufgefallen das, weil man immer die gleichen Straßen aus der Stadt heraus fährt, dass vor den Häusern riesige Haufen von Hausrat lagen. Die waren dann weg und vierzehn Tage später gab es neue riesige Haufen vor dem gleichen Haus, aber andere Haufen. Also, die Leute haben sich systematisch entsorgt, haben versucht Westobjekte zu kaufen, für soviel Geld wie sie hatten, und haben das ganze DDR Zeug weggeworfen. Das war eine kompensatorische Reaktion auf Mangel, oder zu mindestens empfundenen Mangel und für mich als Historiker war klar, dass jetzt die Arbeitsgrundlage für Museen verschwindet. Ich habe dann gedacht, dass müsste man aufheben, dafür muss irgendwer zuständig sein.“

[xli] This personal museum is located in Schwepnitz, 35 kilometers northeast of Dresden, Saxony. Prior to the Second World War and during the GDR era this community had a thriving glass industry, which has collapsed in recent years. One of Uwe Jähnig’s foci is the products that were manufactured at the Glasswerk Schwepnitz.

[xlii] “Nach der Wende war Alles aus der DDR Zeit nichts mehr Wert.Vieles wurde einfach achtlos beim Sperrmüll entsorgt. Mir tat es damals schon leid, diese schönen Dinge aus der DDR Zeit der Presse zu übergeben. Deshalb sammle ich schon seit der Wende alles aus DDR Zeiten. Ich komme an keinen Sperrmüllhaufen vorbei ohne nachzuschauen ob irgendwas aus der DDR Zeit dabei ist. Aus dieser Sammelleidenschaft erwuchs in mir die Idee eine eigene kleine Ausstellung über DDR Designobjekte zu gründen.“

[xliii] “Erinnern ist eine tastende, schwierige Suchbewegung im Raum der schon veränderten, sich weiter wandelnden Wirklichkeit. Sie zielt weit über jedes Wiedererkennen hinaus. Etwas ist fort, das eben noch da war. Der Verlust ist um so schmerzlicher, je klarere zu Bewußtsein kommt, dass das Vermisste nie wieder zurückkehren wird. Gerade darum ist ja das Erinnern wertvoll. … Erinnern ist das Gegenteil von nostalgischer Larmoyanz, eine mühevolle, auch skeptische Suche nach Fundamenten, auf denen die neue Identität sich entwickeln kann. Es geht also um eine Anstrengung, nicht um Ausruhen bei den alten Sachen. Sinne und Verstand müssen sich gegenüber dem Vergangene und dem Gegenwärtigen öffnen.”

[xliv] The House of History is the federal archive of German history, with museums in Leipzig, Bonn, and Berlin (the Kulturbrauerei and the Tränenpalast).
[xlv] "Preißler spricht mehrfach von der 'Kontextualisierung' der Alltagsgegenstände. Sie lässt befürchten, das auch das Design aus DDR-Zeiten in jenen 'historischen und politischen Zusammenhängen' anschaulich gemacht wird, wie es das Haus der Geschichte in seiner Bonner Ausstellung tut. Die Diskussion um den aesthetischen Wert, die gestalterische Qualitäten und das Formbewusstsein jener Objekte wäre dann beendet, bevor sie richtig begonnen hat."
[xlvi] "Man kommt zu spät, um den gelebten Alltag zu besichtigen. Wer gerade 40 ist und hinter Glas die Utensilien seiner eigenen Jugend wiederfindet, kommt zu früh."
[xlvii] "das ins Museum Verbrachte taugt augenscheinlich nicht mehr für das Leben"
[xlviii] "Sie zeigt Dinge, die noch in Gebrauch sind. Die Eingeborenen der Kultur des realen Sozialismus begegnen den Sachen, die sie zuhause haben, im Museum – dem Stuhl, dem Kochtopf und anderem. Sobald sie dieses Museum betreten, werden sie zu seinem lebenden Inventar. Denn der Anblick der dislozierten eigenen Dinge sagt ihnen, dass sie dahin gehören."
[xlix] "Das Museum gönnt den Dingen nicht ihren eigenen Tod im Verbrauch; es schläfert sie ein, um sie zu konservieren."
[l] "Die Geste des 'so war es, seht gefälligst hin!' ist eine Verfälschung des Geschichtlichen unter dem Denkmantel von Museologie als Wissenschaft."
[li] Ich interessiere mich also für die impliziten Grammatolgien unterwandelnden Strukturen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses
[lii] "Vielmehr kommt es zu einer immer komplexeren Struktur ihrer Überlagerung und Durchkreuzung."
[liii] "sprengt die Konturen eines kulturellen Gedächtnisses"
[liv] "Paradoxerweise führen die immer einfacheren und vollständigeren Möglichkeiten der Aufzeichnung zu einen neuen Sinn für das Nichtspeicherbare, das für immer Verlorene."
[lv] "Spuren eröffnen einen grundsätzlich anderen Zugang zur Vergangenheit als Texte, weil sie die nichtsparachlichen Artikulationen einer vergangenen Kultur – die Ruinen und Relikte, die Fragmente und Scherben ebenso wie die Überreste mündlicher Tradition – einbeziehen."
[lvi] "Spuren eines unkodierten Lebens"
[lvii] "In der Welt, wie sie von den westlichen Massenmedien organisiert wird, löst sich das Gedächtnis dagegen in beschleunigten Zyklen von Produktion und Verzehr von selbst auf."

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Appendix 1.
East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia & Everyday Life - *Audio Guide of the Exhibit*

1. **Welcome to *East Germany on Display: Dictatorship, Nostalgia and Everyday Life*** - As I walk through this exhibit now that it is nearing completion, I notice that nowhere does it state clearly that all the items on display belong to me and I wonder whether this omission matters. Perhaps a little. As I planned this exhibit and talked to friends and relatives about it, many offered to lend me things for it. I explained several times that I was not trying to show what life was like in East Germany in any complete way. Rather, I wanted to make do with only what I already had, all the things that for one reason or another I had kept as material reminders of my childhood in East Germany. I wanted to think about one person's, in this case my, memories and things because I also thought that it was important to begin with things and tell stories about them rather than begin with a story and find objects to illustrate this story.

   Now that I stand in front of the display case with the school theme I am astonished that I have held on to enough items to create this part of the exhibit. Unsurprisingly, it suggests that being a student was one of my primary identities at the time my family immigrated to Canada. At the same time, I also remember always knowing that these items were evidence of something unusual, something much bigger than my own biography.

   One of the first persons to see the exhibit when it neared completion asked me if I required ideological deprogramming after she had a close look at the school display case. This question points to the limitations of this kind of historical representation. It leaves little room to imagine that people in the past encountered political systems critically, even as children, and actively negotiated them.

   I created this exhibit for several reasons. Most broadly it is helping me work on a dissertation on the representation of East Germany in the museum. I write about museums but have never worked in one. I have never curated an exhibit. In other words, this exhibit is helping me think about the relationship between theory and practice as I continue writing my dissertation. I am learning about all the things a curator has to consider as she puts together a show.

   I have also created this exhibit because during my field research in Germany, I noticed two very different ways that museums take on East Germany. One foregrounds dictatorship and resistance while **i**n the other, politics and ideology recede into the background as everyday life is highlighted. With this exhibit I am exploring what happens when both approaches are put into the same space.

2. **Hankies and Mouse** - I'd like to draw your attention to the handkerchiefs on the table display. I have dozens of these Chinese-made hankies, the reason for which provides some insight into life in East Germany. According to my mother, these handkerchiefs were a hot commodity. They were of much better quality than East German ones but they were also rarely available. So whenever she found these Chinese handkerchiefs, she bought as many as she could, so many in fact, that the supply will last for another few years. For the same reason, our linen closets also still contain tablecloths and bath towels that my family brought

to Canada 22 years ago, when they seemed precious. You will notice the mouse designs on some of the handkerchiefs. These mice look much like the red stuffed mouse also on the table. Do they remind you of any cartoon character? Mickey Mouse had been banned in East Germany in the 1950s because it embodied anti-communist culture. Addressing consumer wants, different versions of Mickey Mouse and other cartoon characters were created.

3. **Indigenous People** - Native North Americans are a much written about German cultural obsession. I remember being at camp as an eleven or twelve year old, dressing up as a plains Indian and being given the name Rising Sun. The Birthday Card with the tepee and the white children dressed up as Natives as well as the book "The Sons of the Great Bear" that you will find on the table are manifestations of the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. Karl May's novels, Grey Owl's biography and the films based on "Indianerbücher" or "Indian Books" captured the imagination of many East and West Germans.

4. **School** - I have very fond memories of the time I spent at school. One experience, however, troubled me long after it happened. On Monday, October 9, 1989, 2 days after the 40th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the German Democratic Republic, I followed my normal routine by going to school in a village in northern East Germany. It was an unusual day because I, along with the rest of the students, was not allowed to enter the schoolyard behind the school. However, due to the fact that classrooms faced both the front and the back of the school, teachers could not prevent students from looking out the window once we entered the school building to begin the daily lessons. All students were able to read the large white letters on the concrete ground: "DDR, was soll aus Dir werden? N.F." (DDR [German Democratic Republic], what shall become of you? N.F. [signed] by the opposition group "Neues Forum" ["New Forum"]). The fact that we were not permitted to enter the schoolyard until the writing was removed and student's writing samples were collected indicated even to a child that the implications of this question profoundly disrupted the assumed order.

5. **Milk & Cheese** - You might have noticed the milk bag and cheese container on the table. I have included them here because they remind me of my grandmother, who lived in Karl-Marx-City, were the cheese was made and my aunt, who lived in Dresden, where the milk was bagged. Like all East Germans, my family saved these plastic products because heavy plastic bags and plastic containers were difficult to come by. Thus they were kept and reused as much as possible to store sandwiches or household items instead of being thrown away.