

**Bulletin of the
German Historical
Institute**

Supplement 7 (2011)

East German Material Culture and the Power of Memory

Edited by Uta A. Balbier, Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, and Joes Segal



GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON DC

**Bulletin of the German Historical Institute
Washington DC**

Editor: Richard F. Wetzell

Supplement 7

Supplement Editor: Patricia C. Sutcliffe

The *Bulletin* appears twice and the *Supplement* once a year; all are available free of charge.

Current and back issues are available online at:
www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin

To sign up for a subscription or to report an address change, please contact Ms. Bärbel Thomas at b.thomas@ghi-dc.org.

For editorial comments or inquiries, please contact the editor at sutcliffe@ghi-dc.org or at the address below.

For further information about the GHI, please visit our web site www.ghi-dc.org.

For general inquiries, please send an e-mail to info@ghi-dc.org.

German Historical Institute
1607 New Hampshire Ave NW
Washington DC 20009-2562

Phone: (202) 387-3377

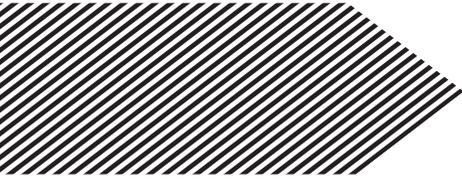
Fax: (202) 483-3430

© German Historical Institute 2011

All rights reserved

ISSN 1048-9134

Cover: "Ebba Ghyczy Carlborg," sitting in a Garden Egg Chair designed by her future father-in-law Peter Ghyczy, in the garden of her grandmother's Josef Frank home in the south of Sweden, 1985. Photo by Björn Carlborg, used courtesy of Felix Ghyczy and Ebba Ghyczy.



Bulletin of the German Historical Institute

Supplement 7 | 2011

East German Material Culture and the Power of Memory

03 Editors

05 Introduction

Joel Segal and Uta A. Balbier

SOCIALIST ARCHITECTURE

15 Whose Schlossplatz? Architecture and the “Materialization”
of German Identities in Berlin’s Historic Center, 1945–2009

John V. Maciuika

29 Concrete Utopia: Everyday Life and Socialism in Berlin-Marzahn

Eli Rubin

CULTURAL TRANSFERS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

49 “Even Under Socialism, We Don’t Want to Do Without Love”:
East German Erotica

Josie McLellan

67 Boom Boxes and Backward Caps: Hip-Hop Culture in the GDR

Leonard Schmieding

87 Shifting Narratives of Things: The East/West German Garden
Egg Chair

Jana Scholze

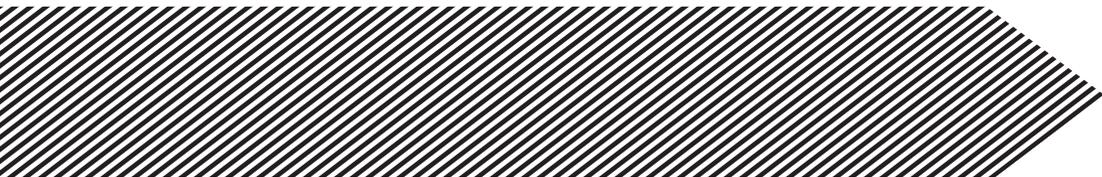
THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AND DISPLAY

101 Disturbing Things: The Interpretation of East German Artwork
in Reunified Germany

Joes Segal

113 "GDR on the Pacific": (Re)presenting East Germany in
Los Angeles

Justinian Jampol



EDITORS

Uta A. Balbier is the coordinator of the Institute of North American Studies at King's College London, a lecturer in North American history, and was a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, from 2006-11. She has published widely in the field of German contemporary history, especially on East and West German sports. She is now working in the field of transatlantic religious history after 1945.

Cristina Cuevas-Wolf is the manager of collection development at the Wende Museum in Los Angeles. With a Ph.D. in Modern Art History, she has published in the field of German modern and contemporary photography, especially on John Heartfield and Worker Photography from the 1930s to the aftermath of this movement in the postwar period.

Joel Segal is Assistant Professor of Cultural History at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He has published extensively on German cultural history, art history, and the cultural Cold War and has been a guest professor at UCLA, as well as a guest curator at the Wende Museum on the basis of a Fulbright senior research grant.

INTRODUCTION

Joel Segal and Uta A. Balbier

Having existed for forty years, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) produced a unique socialist material culture. Whether described as modern, socialist modern, or just as kitsch, it defined East German identity, structured everyday life in the GDR, and became a contested feature in the process of unification. West Germans had to come to terms with the fact that East Germans did not just remember the Berlin Wall and the state security apparatus, or Stasi, but also the different streetlights, jars of Spreewald pickles, and yellow plastic egg cups. Studying the material culture of the GDR today makes it possible to highlight a part of the GDR's history that lies behind the history of the state, the party, and the secret police. It enables access to the history of people living, working, consuming, writing, painting, discussing, making love, and dreaming on the east side of the Wall. Their histories unfolded in the midst of things they used and designed. These things, lying at the crossroads of private and public life, communicate traditions of the past and symbolize visions of the future.

Like all states, the GDR used things to stage its own version of modernity and to construct the everyday practices of its subjects and communicate its political power. Likewise, regime opponents used things to convey their political resistance by means of appropriation or subversive reinterpretation. The material world was where political, cultural, sexual, and social identities intertwined, where the identity of the socialist state was shaped and contested. Consequently, the history of material culture and art in the GDR is now fiercely debated, as is its preservation and display. The public disputes about *Ostalgie* only touch the surface of a much deeper controversy over the place of East German heritage in reunified Germany.

The essays collected in this volume explore both the history of things in the GDR and the ways they have been collected, curated, and remembered. They represent a selection of the presentations held during the conference "Germans' Things: Material Culture and Daily Life in East and West, 1949-2009," which the Los Angeles-based Wende Museum hosted and jointly organized with Bob Moeller (University of California, Irvine), UCLA, and the German

Historical Institute, Washington, DC, in October 2009. Bringing together social, cultural, and art historians, as well as musicologists and museum curators, the conference probed the relations between history, collective memory, and material culture in Cold War-era Germany. We focused on the material record with the aim of better understanding the complexities of German postwar life, especially in the GDR. By taking East German material culture—against the backdrop of the extensive GDR collections of the Wende Museum—as a starting point and comparing it to parallel or diverging trends in the West, we hoped to produce relevant insights into aspects of GDR culture and daily life that textual sources alone largely fail to disclose. Moreover, we hoped to critically assess and qualify the rather one-sided and sometimes heavily politicized perspective that has dominated academic and public debate on East German cultural history since the 1990s. The site of the conference near Los Angeles provided the critical distance from the politics that informs historical debate in Germany, which enabled us to address the material record anew.¹

1 For the complete conference program, see http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/pdf/2009/conferences/germanthings/program_germanthings_final.pdf. See also the conference report by Benita Blessing and Leonard Schmieiding, "Germans' Things: Material Culture in Daily Life in East and West, 1949-2009," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 46 (2010): 150-51, available online at <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu046/150.pdf>.

2 See several of Foucault's works, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London, 1973); *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York, 1973); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, 1977). See also David C. Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1986).

3 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984); Jeremy Ahearn, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and Its Other* (Cambridge, 1995).

The meaning of material culture

The study of material culture has not always been part of the standard toolbox of cultural historians. During the 1980s, this approach got a strong impetus from fields as diverse as cultural philosophy, economic history, archeology, and anthropology. Most famously, philosopher Michel Foucault analyzed the everyday practices of power and their implications for the material organization of social institutions like prisons, mental asylums, schools, and hospitals.² Partly in his wake, cultural historians started to take a fresh look at museum arrangements and exhibition displays, the organization of public festivals and spectacles, city planning, and interior design as windows to public and private mechanisms of control and power exertion. In Foucault's philosophy, people play a rather passive role, being powerfully determined by the power structures and corresponding "truth regimes" that surround them. In Michel de Certeau's philosophy, by contrast, people in their everyday environment are much more active and creative, giving meaning to their own lives in a variety of ways, in spite of the hegemonic power structures and disciplinary strategies from "above."³ For instance, consumers have the (limited) power to make their own choices but also, more importantly, to invest the products they acquire with new meanings, to appropriate and "re-employ" them. This includes the

power to subvert the “official” meaning of things and to counter power strategies, consciously or unconsciously, with individual tactics from “below.”

Whereas economic historians traditionally study material culture in terms of production, distribution, and consumption figures, as well as markets and the relation between supply and demand, cultural historians are typically more concerned with the symbolic meaning of “things.” Inspired by archeologists and their ways of extracting all kinds of information from material sources, and by cultural anthropologists and their interpretation of “things” in the context of social networks and ritual meanings,⁴ cultural historians analyze material culture to find how it is used to represent values, beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles and to form individual and collective identities. In the 1980s, for instance, the field of cultural history witnessed the rise of the British “History Workshop Movement” (Raphael Samuel) and the West German “Geschichtswerkstätten,” which were characterized by a bottom-up (instead of top-down) perspective and a great interest in oral history and material culture.⁵ In Germany, Alf Lüdtke and others popularized “Alltagsgeschichte,” the history of everyday life. His concept of “Eigen-Sinn,” the ways in which people assert their subjectivity and create meaning in their own social environment, corresponds closely to the philosophical ideas of de Certeau.⁶ These trends inspired a new approach to GDR history, which helped to counterbalance the strongly politicized approaches of the 1990s.

During the 1990s, a great deal of historical research on the GDR focused intently on the structures of power and the mechanisms of suppression and dissent in the totalitarian SED regime. The Bundestag established two commissions of historical inquiry to study these, as well as human rights violations, with the explicit aim of identifying and eliminating the anti-liberal heritage of the SED state. Between 1992 and 1998, the commissions published two multi-volume reports highlighting the various means of suppression and ideological indoctrination the regime employed to achieve absolute control over all facets of public and individual life.⁷ Especially during the early 1990s, there was remarkable agreement among historians and the parliamentary commissions concerning this interpretation of the East German past.

Useful and revealing as this approach proved to be for understanding state power mechanisms, it was less suitable for gaining insight

4 See, for instance, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

5 Examples include Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981); Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig, eds., *Die andere Geschichte. Geschichte von unten, Spurensicherung, ökologische Geschichte, Geschichtswerkstätten* (Cologne, 1986).

6 Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995).

7 Deutscher Bundestag, ed. *Materialien der Enquete Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (Study Commission for Working through the History and the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany), 18 vols. (Baden-Baden, 1995); *ibid.*, *Materialien der Enquete Kommission "Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit"* (Study Commission for the Overcoming of the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in the Process of German Unity), 13 vols. (Baden-Baden, 1999).

into the various productive and creative ways people dealt with the realities of life. Over the course of the 1990s, a counter-narrative stressing the more positive qualities of East German culture and society—which came to be associated with the term *Ostalgie* (a nostalgia for the East)—did develop: it compared the GDR’s real or alleged idealism, solidarity, social welfare, women’s emancipation, and children’s daycare favorably to the merciless individualist and materialist society of the Federal Republic. However, this approach did little to produce a more balanced understanding of GDR history. On the other hand, some social and cultural historians in the 1990s—among them Jürgen Kocka, Martin Sabrow, Konrad Jarausch, and Thomas Lindenberger—started to combine political, social, economic, and cultural perspectives in their studies, incorporating analyses of the everyday experiences of East German citizens.⁸ More recently, scholars have begun to research the material record of the GDR in myriad ways, including its ambivalent modernity.⁹

Simultaneous to these theoretical developments, material culture from East Germany was finding its way into a number of museums and other public institutions, albeit with clear conceptual differences in the manners in which it was displayed and contextualized. For example, the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn presents German history from 1945 to the present through the lens of political history, and the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig focuses on resistance and dictatorship in the Soviet Occupation Zone (1945–1949) as well as the later GDR (1949–1990). The DDR Museum in Berlin, the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR in Eisenhüttenstadt, and the Wende Museum, by contrast, concentrate on the material record of the GDR to access everyday life and culture. Interestingly, these three museums see it as part of their mission to reconsider existing clichés about East German history or to encourage diverse interpretations from a variety of perspectives.¹⁰

Dealing with material culture

In tune with recent developments in the historiography of the GDR, the seven conference papers selected for this supplement to the *GHI Bulletin* investigate different fields of East German material culture and their relevance for a deeper understanding of the lifestyles, aspirations, and dreams that were marked by *and* helped define the realities of life behind the Berlin Wall. The first two papers by John

8 Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen, 1992); Jürgen Kocka and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Die DDR als Geschichte. Fragen, Hypothesen, Perspektiven* (Berlin, 1994); Konrad Hugo Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, 1999); Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigensinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne, 1999).

9 Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, 2008); David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970* (London, 2008).

10 For the various mission statements, see the respective museum web sites: Haus der Geschichte Bonn: www.hdg.de/bonn, Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig: www.hdg.de/leipzig; DDR Museum Berlin: www.ddr-museum.de/en; Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR Eisenhüttenstadt: www.alltagskultur-ddr.de/pages/home.html; Wende Museum Los Angeles: www.wendemuseum.org. See also Justinian Jampol’s essay on the Wende Museum in this volume.

Maciuika and Eli Rubin deal with the built environment during the GDR and after reunification, the contributions by Josie McLellan, Leo Schmieding, and Jana Scholze discuss objects of everyday life, whereas the last two papers by Joes Segal and Justinian Jampol focus on political and philosophical issues related to the role of material culture in historiography and museum practices after reunification.

John Maciuika discusses the prolonged fight over the seat of the East German parliament, the “Palast der Republik” (palace of the republic, PdR), an architectural symbol that carried a number of social and cultural functions in GDR times. He explores the political considerations and discussions that led the Bundestag, in the end, to decide to tear down the building and replace it with a copy of the Hohenzollern “Stadtschloss” (city palace), which had been damaged during the war and completely demolished in 1950 as a symbol of Prussian imperialism. Maciuika shows that the “politics of memory” that inform part of the academic discourse on East German history have direct repercussions on the way urban realities are dealt with, as well. He demonstrates that, in spite of seeming only locally relevant, the debate on the “PdR” quickly assumed international significance.

Turning from symbolic architecture to a typical living quarter in the city of East Berlin, Eli Rubin analyzes the history of Marzahn, the capital’s biggest *Plattenbau* district, which the state conceived as a total environment reflecting and expressing the blessings of modern socialism. Here the built environment was designed to sever all ties and associations with the past, not unlike many housing projects from the 1960s and 1970s in West Berlin and other cities of the Federal Republic. Rubin discusses the plans for Marzahn and their realization not only from the point of view of the politicians, urban planners, and architects involved but also from the perspective of its residents, who reflect in post-unification interviews on the ways moving to Marzahn changed their lives.

While architecture sets the larger frame for everyday objects, the next section offers close readings of smaller objects and cultural trends that could more easily permeate the East/West border. These essays reveal unexpected intra-German connections and cross-fertilizations. First, in her highly original research, Josie McLellan focuses on the hitherto much neglected topic of nude photography and soft-porn in East German publications. Although the GDR was famous for its nude beaches, which purported to celebrate a very

natural sexuality, some of the published photos nonetheless exhibit a more pornographic character that suggests socialist sexuality was not always so “innocent.” Instead of suppressing these Western-type images as deviations from the socialist norm, the state unofficially permitted and even supported their reproduction as they yielded welcome revenue and distracted citizens from politically more dangerous anti-socialist behaviors—even if this implied tolerating a capitalist “aberration” among the East German populace.

In his essay on the East German hip-hop scene, Leo Schmieding presents an excellent example of what can be called the re-employment model of material culture. Schmieding raises issues of transnational influence and local appropriation of musical forms, dance, fashion, hairdos, and spraypaint in his discussion of the youth who carved out a social and cultural niche for themselves in the GDR of the 1980s. Hip-hop was not just about dancing and making music, nor was it all about political resistance against a communist dictatorship. The hip-hop scene created a parallel universe with its own social conventions and cultural practices. Paradoxically, the East German state had made this scene possible in the first place by allowing the distribution of the American hip-hop film *Beat Street*, with the aim of advertising the downsides of capitalist society. Thus, the youth endowed this film with a meaning that was by no means intended by the state and imitated its culture in their own “eigen-sinnige,” or willful, way.

A further instance of cultural border crossings between East and West can be found in Jana Scholze’s case study of the “Garden Egg Chair.” Scholze tells the story of this West German designer chair that was mass-produced in the GDR following a secret cross-bloc business agreement. Having been assistant curator of the exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2008), Scholze tells the improbable story of the chair’s production and reception in East and West largely with information gathered from eyewitnesses, whose perceptions do not all line up together. She uses this example not only to consider the role and value of material culture in history-telling and memory, but also to reflect more broadly on the politicized discussions that arise when museums and other institutions deal with East German material culture, suggesting that we still have a long way to go before we can approach this history free of ideological biases.

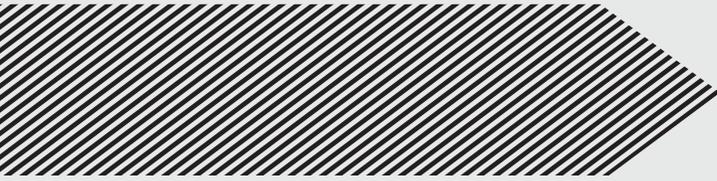
Scholze’s paper builds the bridge from the everyday life of objects to the contested field of their collection, memory, and display. The last

two papers of this volume address the role of East German material culture in German historiography and museum displays and exhibitions after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The potentially unsettling role of “things” in relation to preconceived views of East German history is the topic of Joes Segal’s text. He discusses the clash of East and West German historical and art historical narratives during the 1990s and argues that a “truthful” interpretation of material objects cannot be arrived at through the lens of ideologically biased convictions. Many art historians, art critics, and politicians simply rejected forty years of East German art as state propaganda. Yet this broadly accepted perspective grossly underestimates the power of creativity and “Eigen-Sinn,” even in a dictatorial state like the GDR. Artworks and other material objects relating to collective memory, such as monuments and street signs, can force us to reconsider our prejudices about the world we claim to know.

In the final contribution to this volume, Justinian Jampol ponders the unique position of the Los Angeles Wende Museum of which he is the founder and executive director. Jampol argues that, strange though it may seem to have a Cold War museum focusing on the GDR on the Pacific coast, the geopolitical aspect actually benefits the museum. On the one hand, the Wende Museum continues a tradition of keen interest in German history and culture in the city of Los Angeles, which accommodated a number of famous German artists, writers, and intellectuals who had fled Nazi Germany during the 1930s. On the other hand, and even more importantly, Los Angeles proved to be a safe haven for objects, artworks and documents in the 1990s, when they were being deaccessioned, discarded, or actively destroyed in Germany and other Eastern European countries following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet communism. Whereas these material sources, especially at that time, excited uncomfortable or disturbing associations with the recent past, or were suppressed as symbols of a hateful regime, the Wende Museum was and remains able to display them in a depoliticized context, where they can be perceived as historical sources contributing to a deeper understanding of the past.

Like the Wende Museum itself that hosted this conference, the seven essays of this book, spanning from John Maciuika’s description of the political debates behind the decision to destroy the Palast der Republik to Justinian Jampol’s insights into the political role of space when it comes to shaping historical memory, certainly attest to the highly politicized nature of GDR historiography and memory.

Yet they also evince the analytical gain of rewriting history from below through the lens of material culture and the use and memory of everyday objects. By discussing various aspects of everyday culture in the GDR on the basis of “things,” this volume aims to contribute to a more differentiated view of the East German past that challenges political narratives and gives rise to a more nuanced conception of the complex and multiform crossroads between political reality and everyday experience.



Socialist Architecture

WHOSE SCHLOSSPLATZ? ARCHITECTURE AND THE “MATERIALIZATION” OF GERMAN IDENTITIES IN BERLIN’S HISTORIC CENTER, 1945-2009

John V. Maciuika

On September 3, 2008, the *Berliner Morgenpost* newspaper recounted an event in Long Island, New York, of considerable significance to Berliners: 150 donors, guests, and “deutschlandfreundliche Millionäre” interested in supporting the reconstruction of the Berlin castle had assembled for a gala benefit at the estate of New York businessman and antique porcelain collector Richard Baron Cohen. Among the guests admiring Baron Cohen’s collection (which included porcelain models of the castle from the Königliche Porzellanmanufaktur of Berlin) were George H. W. Bush senior, cosmetics mogul and art collector Ronald Lauder, and former secretary of state and Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger.¹

In his introductory address to the group, Kissinger observed that the rebuilding of the Berlin castle (Stadtschloss) represented “the reconstruction of an important part of the heritage of Berlin and of Europe, a heritage that transcends geographical and ideological boundaries.”² Kissinger’s reference to a geographically and ideologically transcendent “heritage,” with its pan-European flavor, framed the historic Berlin castle as many “pro-Schloss” historians have: as a contribution to northern baroque architecture and as the oldest symbol of the city.³ Historic Berlin’s first family, the Hohenzollerns, after all, had commissioned the palace in 1450 following the promotion of Frederick I in the Holy Roman Empire to the rank of Elector in Berlin-Brandenburg. After relocating from their ancestral home in northern Bavaria, the Hohenzollerns built and expanded the castle numerous times over the next four centuries. The building’s increasing scale and architectural grandeur across centuries essentially followed the elevation of the Hohenzollern patriarchs from Elector and Grand Duke to King of Prussia and, eventually, Emperor of Germany. Heavy wartime damage in 1945 destroyed some 75 percent of the building, while GDR leader Walter Ulbricht sealed the castle’s fate by ordering its demolition in the fall of 1950, one year short of the building’s 500th anniversary.

At Baron Cohen’s Long Island residence, itself modeled on a pleasure palace in Versailles, Kissinger and other board members of the

1 The article “Zusammenarbeit mit den Friends of Dresden, New York” reports that Lauder, Kissinger, and David Rockefeller all sit on the board of the American group “Friends of Dresden,” which, after organizing the donation of millions of US dollars for the reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche, pledged in February 2007 to officially back the reconstruction of the Berlin castle as well. See the Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V. newspaper, *Berliner Extrablatt* 54, Nr. 4 (2008), 46.

2 “Reiche Amerikaner sammeln für Berliner Schloss,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 3, 2008, online edition [http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article872187/Reiche_Amerikaner_sammeln_fuer_Berliner_Schloss.html]. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

3 See, for example, the arguments for and against Berlin castle reconstruction in Wilhelm von Boddien and Helmut Engel, eds., *Die Berliner Schlossdebatte - Pro und Contra* (Berlin, 2000). A strongly pro-reconstruction view is manifest in Hela Zettler and Horst Mauter, eds., *Das Berliner Schloss: Eine Fotodokumentation der verlorenen Stadtmitte* (Berlin, 1991). A nuanced historical analysis of the Berlin castle and its role both as royal residence and center of royal administration can be found in Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Residenz-Verwaltung- Repräsentation: Das Berliner Schloss und seine historischen Funktionen vom 15. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Potsdam, 1999).

newly expanded “Friends of Dresden” recruited donors to help finance the reconstruction of three historic façades of the Berlin castle to house a new “Humboldt Forum.” The architectural evocation of the Hohenzollerns’ past baroque glory, in its new incarnation as a public institution devoted to learning and culture, would achieve for Berlin what the “Friends of Dresden” had accomplished in their aid for Dresden’s “Frauenkirche”: the reconstruction of an historic and highly symbolic monumental building.⁴ Berlin castle supporters sought simultaneously to reinsert a portion of Berlin’s regal past into the city’s historic center, while reprogramming the building’s interior to provide a future-oriented symbol of both learning and culture, of reunification and reconciliation.

4 For an outstanding assessment of the multiple meanings of the Frauenkirche and its status as church, memorial ruin, and reconstructed urban symbol, see Christiane Hertel, “Beyond In/Authenticity: Dresden’s Frauenkirche,” in *Architourism: Authentic, Escapist, Exotic, Spectacular*, ed. Joan Ockman and Salomon Frausto (Munich, 2005), 40-49.

One can hardly imagine a more appropriate spokesman for decisions taken in Germany to rebuild the Berlin castle than the German-born former US secretary of state. Yet Kissinger’s words bear closer examination as they valorize an official history that has



Figure 1. Heinz Graffunder Architectural Collective, Palace of the Republic, East Berlin, as photographed shortly after completion in 1977. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Palast_der_Republik_DDR_1977.jpg

by no means gone uncontested. The construction of this official history is bound up with the reconstruction of the Berlin castle and the historic buildings surrounding it; even now, the planning and construction process in central Berlin is still smoothing over controversial issues of heritage and historical meaning that have dogged the process of reunification and the treatment of former East Germany. As history is indeed written by the “winners,” West German

authorities have taken it to be self-evident that the East German state was illegitimate, a view that has predominated in the process of dealing with its institutions and its built environment.

Occupying the oldest portion of the Berlin castle site from 1976 until 1990 was, of course, the GDR's Palace of the Republic (Palast der Republik) (Fig. 1), widely acknowledged as one of the most significant buildings in the entire GDR. The Berlin authorities shuttered the GDR palace in 1990 and, following years of protest, discussion, and debate, completed a politically charged demolition of the building between 2006 and 2009 through a gradual, highly publicized process

it dubbed "dismantling" (Rückbau). Early in the dismantling process, during the spring and summer of 2007, the government placed banners at different points on the construction fence around the demolition site. Intended to steer the public reception of the decision to dismantle the GDR palace and re-erect the Berlin castle, one banner



proclaimed the palace demolition "A Democratic Decision" (Eine Demokratische Entscheidung) (see Fig. 2), while another, featuring a shadowy image of the GDR palace, read "A Project of Prestige—East Germany Asserts Its Legitimacy" (Das Prestigeprojekt—Die DDR macht Staat).⁵ As part of the larger universe of "Germans' things," or objects of material culture that in this case were government-issued, glossy color vinyl productions of text and images, the banners reflected official positions being communicated to the public and visiting tourists. Yet these publicly displayed texts themselves became templates for protest and reinterpretation during the season in which they were on display. One graffiti artist altered the first banner by adding a question mark (clearly visible in Fig. 2) to cast doubt on its statement, while beside it (the small scribbles to the right) graffiti listed, in English, the

Figure 2. Banner on construction fence surrounding the Palace of the Republic "dismantling" site. Photo by John Maciuka, July 2007.

⁵ Author's onsite photos, July 3, 2007.

damning assessments of “Western Revisionism,” “Den[ial] of History,” and “Propaganda of a Repeating Waste.”⁶

If the official state point of view now reflects the efforts of the leading private, non-profit group, Wilhelm von Boddien’s “Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V.,” to reconstruct the Berlin castle, then graffiti writers’ responses reflect objections of the type common among former GDR residents and East Berliners—a significant percentage of whom live near the castle site and continue to cast the largest number of votes for a minority successor communist party, the PDS. Those who accept Kissinger’s language at face value are, in the eyes of those sympathetic to the half century of the GDR’s existence, completely obliterating key monuments and moments of GDR history, along with the history of acrimonious post-Cold War debates over GDR palace preservation and castle reconstruction. Where the post-reunification government ruled the GDR palace an object of the “socialist dictatorship” (SED-Diktatur) and deemed it unworthy of landmark status and consequent legal protections, former GDR citizen-supporters saw its demolition as the denial of a way of life they experienced for more than four decades.

Viewed from the perspective of “things,” and in this case of course “Germans’ Things,” the material culture associated with controversies over Berlin castle reconstruction/GDR palace destruction speaks volumes. Indeed, it does so whether one chooses to examine objects on a small scale—historic porcelain displays of the Berlin castle, or government banners with accompanying graffiti, for example—or on a very large scale—say, decisions over which monumental buildings will be destroyed, and which will be revived or reinserted into the cityscape from scratch. One side’s resources permit the projection of government establishment views in colorful, professionally designed and manufactured vinyl banners; the other side relies on Scripto permanent markers to question or deface the official position. One side publishes lavish full-color brochures, public display boards, and sympathetic history books with top-quality publishers in support of Berlin castle reconstruction; the other side self-publishes or uses small-scale, one-color vanity presses to promote preservation of the GDR palace. In the final days of the GDR palace, concessions to youthful, self-styled avant-garde artists led to a series of impromptu art installations, organized exhibits, and parties that fed a post-unification Berlin “mystique” as a city of exuberance and spontaneity. But by 2006,

⁶ Author’s onsite photo, July 3, 2007, detail.

government demolition equipment had taken sole possession of the palace site for a more purposeful display of dismantling and permanent site redefinition.

On the scale of the city, Berlin castle reconstruction must be understood in the context of the government's orchestration of the hugely expensive, comprehensive re-creation of the entire historic core of "glorious Prussia" circa 1850 in and around the Berlin castle site. Synthesizing public and private funds, the city has removed objects like Josef Kaiser's GDR Foreign Office (completed 1964; demolished 1996) and Heinz Graffunder's Palace of the Republic (1976; 2009). Such large-scale "editing" of the cityscape effectively rewrites history in material form and represents the sort of monumental urbanism that accompanies any kind of momentous regime change and redefinition of national identities.

Much as the government's banners—meaningful things in themselves as designed—project a certain understanding and view of history in the cityscape, decisions concerning architecture in and around the site of the former Berlin castle result in the inscription of a new, post-unification identity in the heart of Berlin. The new construction of "old" monumental buildings is a fundamentally political act that projects a certain vision of identity and legitimacy on the part of those decision-makers who have exercised their will on the charged symbolic soil of Berlin's built environment. As at other contested sites in post-unification Berlin, the site of the Schlossplatz has tended, as Dirk Verheyen has recently written, to "trigger underlying tensions between Osis (usually the local activists) and Wesis (authorities on the city or federal level) that were but a reflection of the broader challenges facing Western and Eastern Germans on a political, intellectual, and psycho-cultural level since 1990."⁷ Numbers and the deployment of resources, however, do not always explain the outcomes of Berlin controversies: Adrian von Buttlar, an art historian at the Berlin Technical University and prominent preservation activist, writes that in the mid-1990s, some 80,000 signatures had been obtained in a petition for the preservation of the GDR palace, at a time when the membership of von Boddien's Association for the Berlin Castle numbered well under 1,000.⁸

As overdetermined by competing historical meanings as any architectural site in Berlin could possibly be, the site of the former castle is, for this very reason, one of the most powerful touchstones

7 Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (New York and Toronto, 2008), 184. Interestingly, this recent study avoids discussion of the Berlin castle and GDR palace controversy in favor of a host of other particular governmental, memorial, and symbolic sites, from the Stasi headquarters to the Berlin Wall.

8 Adrian von Buttlar, "Berlin's Castle versus Palace," *Future Anterior* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 13-30. This article lists the membership in Boddien's organization at 463 in the year 2006, including "a growing number of conservative intellectuals and politicians"; Gerhard Schröder garnered votes by publicly favoring reconstruction and joining the association because, he said, the reconstructed castle would present "a nicer view" (22).

Berliners have for reflecting their complex relationship to both past and present. Setting a course for the site's future form and function has involved the clash of citizens' groups and private initiatives, while local, state, and federal government bodies are all major contributors to the replanning and financing of the castle area. To the extent that East and West Berlin bestrode a kind of political "fault line" dividing Cold War Eastern and Western Europe, it is now quite obviously a focal point for Germans striving to develop a capital city consistent with a post-Cold War vision of a reunited Germany. Appropriately for a site at the historic heart of Berlin, the castle square has been a central battleground for determining not only what the new Berlin and the new Germany will be, but also how Berliners will project this sense of identity in urban and architectural form.

The pace of developments surrounding reconstruction of the castle and many of its neighboring historic structures raises difficult questions about monumental historic buildings as "things," or key symbolic "objects," at the historic center of Berlin. For example, many people (this author included) experienced an initially powerful, negative knee-jerk reaction to the decision to reconstruct buildings like the Berlin castle, Karl Schinkel's building academy, and Johann Memhardt's Army Command Headquarters on Unter den Linden.⁹ Does this negative reaction represent any sort of indictment (real or implied) of the Berlin leadership for selecting to replace GDR buildings with replicas of historic structures that were destroyed decades before? Put another way, does widespread doubt and skepticism at the prospect of reconstructing the Berlin castle imply the belief that Berlin authorities should have chosen to erect a brand new building on this site? Connected to these questions is another uncomfortable question: Can reconstructing a historic building destroyed long ago be regarded as authentic and continuous with the past that inspired its construction, or is it in fact a mere token, talisman, or, worse, an unimaginative production of historic kitsch that forecloses opportunities to erect monuments expressive of the present age and its unique aspirations?

At times during the debates over castle reconstruction in the 1990s, it appeared that perhaps those intellectuals who are more accustomed to debating the finer points of identity politics were simply more at ease with the idea of some sort of "hybrid" building on this site—that is, a building that could, as some architects' drawings projected, incorporate elements of both the former Berlin castle and

⁹ This assertion is not based on any social scientific evidence but rather on the author's own experience and conversations in a totally unscientific, ongoing poll of Berliners and others during periods of residence in Berlin for the years 1995-96, 1998-99, 2001-02, and the summers of 2007 and 2008.

the East German Palace of the Republic. Might such a hybrid architectural work somehow have better expressed a forward-looking spirit on the part of a new, reunited Germany while acknowledging in a more honest and realistic manner the complicated history of the formerly divided city?¹⁰ These questions touch upon issues of authenticity, modernity, and historical memory that have preoccupied scholars of Berlin from fields as diverse as architectural history, literary studies, and cultural studies.¹¹ German studies scholars Godfrey Carr and Georgina Paul summarize these debates well with this observation: “What the debates reveal above all else is the dilemma of attempting to express a unified cultural identity in public buildings which are manifestations of a history of political discontinuity and ideological antagonism.”¹²

Another German studies scholar, Rolf J. Goebel, defines Berlin’s interest in “architectural citations” from its past as separate and distinct from historic building restorations: to him, such architectural citations “reveal a productive tension between past and present, between the metaphysics of authenticity and the media-directed politics of simulation.”¹³ Less clear, however, is what exactly this media-directed politics of simulation is productive of: does it contribute to the production of a more authentic contemporary German identity following the fall of the Berlin Wall? Or, by contrast, does it result in the creation of an architectural spectacle that balances the need for public institutions (libraries, museums, etc., which are to be housed in the Humboldt Forum) with the seemingly global desire of cities to produce sites for mass tourism in their historic city centers, as has been traced by such architectural historians as Françoise Choay?¹⁴

Locals who support castle reconstruction have long insisted that a hybrid solution of a Berlin castle façade adjoining a portion of the GDR palace is out of the question. Under the leadership of Wilhelm von Boddien, supporters formed the Association for the Berlin Castle in 1993 to lobby for reconstruction of the original royal residence and displayed a model of the castle in a diorama of historic Berlin. They commonly tout the castle as “the most significant baroque building north of the Alps,” and one of its principal architects, Andreas Schlüter, as “the Michelangelo of Northern Europe.”¹⁵ Yet

>> 35-39. For examples of the hybrid building as well as a variety of other projected architectural “solutions” to the question of Schlossplatz construction, see *Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Historische Mitte Berlin-Schlossplatz. Ideen und Entwürfe 1991-2001* (Berlin, 2001).

11 Compare, for example, two nuanced discussions by literary scholars of the broader context of Berlin’s castle reconstruction debates: Rolf J. Goebel, “Berlin’s Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 118, no. 5 (October 2003): 1268-89; and Andreas Huyssen, “After the War: Berlin as Palimpsest,” in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, 2003), 72-84.

12 Godfrey Carr and Georgina Paul, “Unification and Its Aftermath: The Challenge of History,” in *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Rob Burns (Oxford, 1995), 325-48; quotation from 338.

13 Goebel, “Berlin’s Architectural Citations,” 1269.

14 Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O’Connell (Cambridge, 2001), especially Chapter 6, “Historic Heritage and the Contemporary Culture Industry,” 139-63.

15 These and similar characterizations recur in issues of the association’s own newspaper, the *Berliner Extrablatt*, for example, in vol. 46, no. 4 (2007): 19.

10 The Berlin architectural historian Johann Friedrich Geist traces

the evolution of this attitude in “Der Palast aus westlicher Sicht,” in *Zur*

historischen Mitte Berlins: Denkschrift, ed. Michael Kraus et al. (Berlin, 1992), >>

these obvious exaggerations aside, we should make no mistake: the Berlin castle, locally if selectively celebrated, is a virtual unknown in the global canon of architectural history—as compared to, say, the Louvre or Versailles in Paris, or Buckingham Palace or St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Yet the story of how the canvas façade project of 1993 generated early momentum for Wilhelm von Boddien’s nonprofit association has become quite well known, and is publicized in numerous historical and journalistic publications. Also well known is the gradual accumulation of city and state support over the past decade for this private group’s initiative for castle reconstruction. The private initiative of Wilhelm von Boddien and his supporters, in effect, carried the ball on behalf of castle reconstruction during the 1990s; government authorities at that time appear to have wrestled with questions of how to tear down the GDR palace without incurring too much organized political opposition or poor publicity.

The physical treatment and fate of the Palace of the Republic during the 1990s seems to support this. While the city wrapped such monuments as the Brandenburg Gate or the Berlin City Hall behind protective canvas-covered scaffolding to complete renovations, the Palace of the Republic was left exposed to the elements for years while the building was gutted in an asbestos removal process conducted on the cheap. Architectural historian Johann Friedrich Geist of West Berlin lambasts the government’s widely accepted claim that asbestos contamination required the Palace of the Republic’s destruction: the International Congress Center in West Berlin, similarly plagued by asbestos contamination as a result of broadly similar construction techniques used in the 1970s, was never torn down; its asbestos abatement program, unlike that of the GDR palace, simply found a ready budget appropriation.¹⁶

Similarly, when I first met Justinian Jampol, director of the Wende Museum of East German Culture in Los Angeles, I told him of my theory that Berlin authorities may have let the GDR palace rot under repeated seasonal cycles of sun, snow, and rain intentionally to advertise for the building’s own destruction. I had, in fact, taken to referring to this phenomenon at the GDR palace as “historic preservation in reverse.” Jampol offered an interesting anecdotal reply. He recalled his conversations with Berlin asbestos abatement contractors who competed in the mid-1990s to win the contract for

16 Johann Friedrich Geist, “Der Palast der Republik aus westlicher Sicht,” in *Kampf um den Palast*, ed. Rudolf Ellereit and Horst Wellner (Berlin, 1996), 34-36. This article appears to be an updated version of Geist’s similarly titled essay in note 10.

asbestos removal at the palace. After several rounds of bidding and repeated government requests to contractors to further reduce their estimates, a government official finally admitted to the contractors, “Don’t worry if these low cost estimates mean that you aren’t able to do the most thorough job possible. The Palace of the Republic is not meant to survive in the long run anyway.” Although unscientific, this story clearly represents a reversal of the cause and effect events that have become the official and popular history of why the GDR palace was dismantled: the asbestos is given as the reason the palace could not survive when it appears, in fact, to have served as a pretext for the building’s demolition.

After nearly a dozen years of campaigning by von Boddien in favor of the castle, and the neglect and partial destruction of the GDR palace during the same period, the government stepped up its resolve. It followed the conclusions of a specially appointed commission in 2002 that recommended destruction of the GDR palace and reconstruction of the castle. This report fueled a vote on July 4, 2002, in the Reichstag, that prevailed by 380 to 133, to dismantle the Palace of the Republic, a process that would take place with much fanfare and environmentally correct propaganda from the period beginning in June 2006 and ending in February 2009.¹⁷ What we now have on this site, from an architectural historical perspective, is a rather unique situation: an historical royal palace structure, largely shunned by the rulers who built it in favor of their palace retreats in Potsdam, which nevertheless occupied a site of overwhelming historical, geographical, symbolic, and urbanistic significance. The symbolic reoccupation of the GDR palace site and the former Marx Engels Platz site with the ideologically “right” kind of architecture is every bit as important as the West’s perceived elimination of GDR structures, which, like the Palace of the Republic, were in use for less than two decades. These could therefore be regarded as temporary, illegitimate defacements by the communist bloc of a historic Berlin in need of restoration.

Central to the planning and reconstruction of the castle site has been the fact that, while the union of East and West Germany in 1991 is touted as “reunification,” it was, of course, the capitulation of East Germany to West Germany, with the subsequent absorption of the East German territory, economy, and society into a completely West German democratic capitalist system. The West’s system, having been “the enemy” to the East German state for some four decades

17 Beitrag zur Schloss-Debatte im Deutschen Bundestag: Auszug aus dem Plenarprotokoll 14/248 (4 Juli 2002), Stenographischer Bericht, 248. Sitzung, online at http://www.antje-vollmer.de/cms/default/dok/4/4417.beitrag_zur_schlossdebatte_im_deutschen_bundestag/html.

of the Cold War, was now, for better or worse, the new master of East Germans' fate. Why is this important? Because this political dynamic underlying the otherwise reassuring and peaceable term "reunification" has also determined the course of decisions taken in the parliament, or Reichstag, and elsewhere, concerning planning, demolition, and reconstruction at the castle square. Virtually from the end of the Cold War, a tension has existed between what is discussed as being possible for the site of the former castle, on the one hand, and what is actually done to determine the final fate of GDR buildings and, ultimately, to prompt the reconstruction of the main façades of the historic Berlin castle itself, on the other.

Witness the ambitions displayed by West German government departments in moving from Bonn to Berlin: a kind of agency land grab ensued as, for example, the Foreign Office showed great interest in constructing its new headquarters on the site of the former Berlin castle. As Michael Wise argues in his book, *Capital Dilemma*, the Foreign Office nearly succeeded. It certainly did succeed when it came to setting the wheels in motion for the destruction of the old East German Foreign Office building, a long, obtrusive "bar"-shaped structure that framed the western edge of the Marx Engels Platz from Unter den Linden down to Werderstrasse, along the western side of the Spree River Canal. Compared to the furor generated by discussions over whether to destroy Heinz Graffunder's Palace of the Republic, which ran parallel to the Foreign Office on the opposite side of the Marx Engels Platz, there was relative calm in the public sphere when, in the fall of 1995, demolition equipment tore through the repetitive vertical windows and aluminum panels of the Josef Kaiser Architectural Collective's 1966 GDR Foreign Office building.¹⁸

Appeals from four points of view have primarily driven the dynamics behind the decision to reconstruct the Berlin castle: the historical, geographical, symbolic, and urbanistic significance of the castle. Specifically, proponents of castle reconstruction have gained maximum momentum by pointing to the simple fact that it is Frederick I's elevation to Elector status in the fifteenth century Holy Roman Empire, and the Hohenzollern family's subsequent move to this relatively small town on the Spree River from Bavaria, that gave rise to the castle and the rapid growth of the town in the centuries that followed. The sound bite used most frequently in the post-Cold War castle reconstruction debates has been, "The castle was not in Berlin—the castle WAS Berlin" ("Das Schloss lag nicht in Berlin—Berlin

18 Michael Z. Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy* (New York, 1998), 49-50; 113-16.

WAR das Schloss”). Coined in 1992 by the Berlin historian Wolf Jobst Siedler, this phrase has become something of a slogan for pro-reconstruction forces. By invoking the castle as the beating historical heart of the city almost from its inception, the claims of would-be reconstructionists sidestep debates over aesthetic merit and the questionable authenticity of a twenty-first century façade in the baroque style. They appeal instead simply to the awesome significance of the site and the role that the building and its occupants played in the evolution of the city over 500 years. The fourteen-year



period during which the offending Palace of the Republic served as a showcase for the “Socialist Party Dictatorship”—the Federal Republic’s still current term for the East German state responsible for blowing up the castle ruins in 1950—is judged to represent insufficient cause for the preservation of a socialist “palace” over a reconstructed “Berlin palace.”

This argument feeds into several others. Geographical and historical essentialism justify the reconstruction of a replica. This replica is then taken, paradoxically, as an authentic expression of Berlin’s history and a sense of loyalty on the part of leading constituencies to institutions like the monarchy that helped shape Berlin, Prussia, and Germany over centuries. Simultaneously, castle reconstruction is

Figure 3. Aerial view of the dismantling of the Palace of the Republic, July 2008, with views, shown clockwise beginning at far left, of the Marstall building (façade only), the Ministry of State building, the new Foreign Office building, the partially reconstructed Bauakademie, the Werder Church, the reconstructed Schinkel Plaza, and, on the far right, the reconstructed Kommandatur/Bertelsmann Foundation building on Unter den Linden. Photo by John Maciuika.

seen as necessary for reaffirming the key role the building played in the urban development of the city district around it. And, to be sure, much of the urban fabric surrounding the castle was laid out in response to the castle and its domineering presence—Schinkel’s grand façade for the Old Museum (Altes Museum) is a well-documented, archetypal example of such a response, as are the Prussian Armory and the Marstall building. This fact strengthens justifications for reconstructing the castle “as it was,” even if only for the urban scenography of the historic façades.

The destruction of the GDR Foreign Office exposed the site of Memhardt’s Army Headquarters on Unter den Linden, which was reconstructed to house the Bertelsmann Foundation in 2005. Foreign Office demolition also laid bare the site of the former Building Academy and the Schinkelplatz, whose postwar ruins were cleared in 1961. Both are now undergoing reconstruction with support from corporations like Daimler-Benz and a separate nonprofit organization, the Association for the Support of the Building Academy (Fig 3).¹⁹ Finally, removal of the last of the Palace of the Republic in February 2009 has opened the way for the scheduled reconstruction of the castle façades in anticipation of the new “Humboldt Forum.” Construction is slated to last from 2010 through 2014 to the designs of the Italian architect Franco Stella, winner of a 2008 competition for the three façades, although exact design details for the building interiors have yet to be worked out.²⁰

The reconstructed castle façades of the new Humboldt Forum will, in any event, house educational, cultural, and scientific facilities. These include a “Museum of Non-European Art” comprising the ethnographic collections that had been displaced in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem; a “Museum of Sciences” from the Leibniz Society and the Academy of Sciences; and a “Library of Arts and Sciences” made up of selected holdings from the city and state libraries. Finally, there is to be something called the “Cultural Events Agora.” This will be centered around a reconstructed and covered version of the “Schlüterhof,” the largest of the castle’s courtyards.

The estimated total cost of the project is €480 million, although a September 2008 issue of the *Berliner Morgenpost* reported that the government now estimates a cost ceiling of €510 million. The federal government has pledged to provide €386 million of this, and German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrueck has approved the first €105

19 See Förderverein-Bauakademie, *Mythos Bauakademie—Bauakademie Journal* (Berlin, 2007), journal/large format color brochure.

20 “Zurück in die Geschichte,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 64, No. 278 (2008): 1; Jens Bisky, “Triumph des Rasters: Der italienische Architekt Franco Stella hat den Wettbewerb für das Berliner Humboldt-Forum gewonnen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 64, No. 278 (2008): 15.

million in expenditures. A projected €80 million in private funds—€15 million of which Wilhelm von Boddien’s castle association has gathered so far—is to match this sum. The City of Berlin has committed a further €32 million, marking a serious commitment of public and private funds.²¹ For its part, Boddien’s association has decorated its public information offices at Berlin Hausvogteiplatz in part as a showroom on a 1:1 scale, with plaster replicas of ornamental portions of the Berlin castle, complete with prices at which a donation can link any donor’s name in perpetuity with the building element in question. As of July 2007, for example, a complete window unit with ornamental sills and decorative balustrades based on the designs of Andreas Schlüter exhibited in plaster listed donation prices between €48,250 and €76,400, depending on the architectural detail and the story of the building.²²

To understand the decisions behind castle reconstruction requires us to understand that there may be elements of revenge as well as repression, which I mean in the sense of eliminating key elements of GDR history in the form of the architecture that stood on this site. This may be combined with a desire to resurrect historical buildings created at a time when Berlin, and Germany as a whole, had not yet plunged into the catastrophic experience of two world wars, followed, obviously, by two opposed Cold War regimes. By approximately 2015, if all goes as planned, a rebuilt royal castle surrounded by a reconstructed ensemble of mostly nineteenth-century buildings will comprise the heart of a new, tourist-dominated quarter. The historic heart of the city will be composed of structures that evoke Berlin as the capital of a state that unified Germany in 1871 rather than a socialist state and Eastern Bloc Soviet colony, or, before that, a command post for the military campaigns and worst genocidal horrors perpetrated during the Second World War.

The participation of American politicians and philanthropists in funding the reconstruction of the Berlin castle points to another feature of the entire castle debate: its link with larger geopolitical realities that shaped the city after the end of the Second World War. American conservative politicians’ support for castle reconstruction is entirely consistent with those quarters in American politics that most favored aggressive responses by Western occupation forces to real and perceived threats from the East bloc, beginning with the Berlin airlift and extending through opposition to the Berlin Wall and right up to the events that precipitated the end of the Cold War. To that extent,

21 *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 10, 2007, as cited in Stephen Naumann, *Solving the Stadtschloss Dilemma: What an Old Façade Will Say about New Berlin* (Saarbrücken, 2007), 45. It should be noted that these figures are subject to adjustment based on prevailing economic and political conditions.

22 Author’s site visit and photos, July 3, 2007. Further examples in *Berliner Extrablatt* 46, no. 4 (2007): 18: individual balustrade elements at €850 apiece, a metope for portal II at €8,160, a “colossal column capital” for €159,900, etc.

American support for a project predicated on the removal of the GDR Palace of the Republic and its replacement by the Berlin castle and Humboldt Forum represent in part a further “nail in the coffin” of an East bloc power, at the same time reconstructing an element of German and Prussian heritage of value to the West German government forces that Americans had supported since the late 1940s.

Whereas the American Friends of Dresden would support reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche and, later, reconstruction of the Berlin castle, other Americans sensitive to the GDR history being expunged stepped in to salvage and preserve what they could. As a result, some East German material artifacts managed to survive the general post-reunification fever, in which so many such objects were discarded or destroyed, ending up in American collections like the Wende Museum and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. These two institutions hold some of the finest examples of architectural plans, models, and actual flatware and stationery from the Palace of the Republic that might not have survived had they remained in Germany. Such artifacts have recently been lent back to German and European institutions for exhibitions seeking to represent Cold War material culture and the historical realities of that time.²³

As plans to reconstruct the Berlin castle proceed at a pace dictated by fluctuating political and economic realities, visitors to Berlin will encounter both a modern cityscape and a historical fabric reconstructed atop the “edited” urban core—a core dominated until the first decade of the twenty-first century by a GDR ensemble. If, as pro-castle forces in the parliament and elsewhere have repeated, modernism has been the architectural language of choice at Potsdamer Platz, the Sony Center, the Jewish Museum, the Reichstag Dome, and the Holocaust Memorial, then perhaps the historic heart of Berlin is one location that has been granted a special pass to re-erect historical architecture as part homage, part heritage, and, to be sure, part victory monument.²⁴

John V. Maciuika is an associate professor of art and architectural history at the City University of New York, Baruch College, and the CUNY Graduate Center Ph.D. program in art history. His research on modern architecture and design focuses on the politics of cultural identity in different national settings, particularly Germany, Austria, and the Baltic states. He is the author of *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890-1920* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), and is currently at work on a volume of essays entitled *Global Forces, Local Modernities: Modern Architecture in Cultural Context*.

23 An example of this phenomenon is *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, an exhibition organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum from September 25, 2008-January 11, 2009. See the exhibition catalog: David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (London, 2008), as well as Jana Scholze's contribution in this volume.

24 An exhibition at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, organized by the Munich Technical University Architecture Museum and on view from July through October 2010, thematized the politics and meanings of historical reconstruction in an immense global survey of more than 150 projects. The Berlin castle reconstruction was omitted from the exhibition, possibly because of the highly politicized nature of the project, but it is discussed in the exhibition catalog: Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Geschichte der Rekonstruktion-Konstruktion der Geschichte* (Munich, 2010), especially 16-17.

CONCRETE UTOPIA: EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCIALISM IN BERLIN-MARZAHN¹

Eli Rubin

On the morning of April 11, 1977, construction workers from the Brigade Adolf Dombrowski, VEB Tiefbaukombinat Berlin, tore into the grass and brush near the small village of Marzahn, outside the eastern edges of socialist East Berlin.² The construction project begun that morning, Marzahn (Fig.1), was and remains the largest mass housing project in European history. Between 1977 and 1990, the sparsely populated townships of Marzahn, Hohenschönhausen, Biesdorf, Hellersdorf, Kaulsdorf, and Ahrensfeld were transformed from open croplands, meadows, forests, and swamps into a vast semi-urban landscape with hundreds of perfectly symmetrical, monolithic, and almost identical concrete slab buildings known as *Plattenbau*, wide, straight roads, street cars, parks and playgrounds, housing around 400,000 people in 150,000 apartments. Every square centimeter of the area, known as a “new construction settlement” (*Neubausiedlung*), was planned out in advance by the German Architectural Academy (Deutsche Bauakademie, DBA), the main organ of architecture and city planning in East Germany, as well as the city planning office of the Magistrate of Berlin (the municipal government of East Berlin). The Marzahn plan, approved and set in motion by the Politbüro on March 27, 1973, was the central pillar in the SED’s pledge to completely solve the housing shortage in the GDR by 1990 by building at least 250,000 new apartments—itsself a key component of Erich Honecker’s promise to deliver “Real Existing Socialism.”³

But there was a much more profound narrative interwoven with the Marzahn project, a narrative of newness, historical amnesia, radical modernity, and rationalism, a narrative of family lives and generations shattered by war, loss, flight, squalor, and urban destruction, and a narrative of eastward colonization, utopian settlements, and, ultimately, control and power. For those 400,000 people who moved to Marzahn and its surrounding *Neubausiedlungen*, the experience was one of profound change, change bound up very closely in ways seen and unseen with the power of SED state. This change was more than just a new address, or a new view, or new neighbors: it was a total transformation of their material environment. Whether they came from the crumbling *Altbau* buildings of East Berlin districts

1 This article stems from research done in 2007 and 2008 that was supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellowship Program and is related to a book manuscript I am currently working on entitled *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space and Memory in East Germany*.

2 Christa Hübner, Herbert Nicolaus, Manfred Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn. Chronik eines Berliner Bezirkes*. (Berlin, 1998), 17; and Günter Peters, *Hütten, Platten, Wohnquartiere. Berlin-Marzahn: Ein junger Bezirk mit altem Namen* (Berlin, 1998), 110.

3 Hübner, Nicolaus, Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn*, 9.

such as Prenzlauerberg or Friedrichshain, or from small country houses, the move to a *Plattenbau* apartment in Marzahn meant new dimensions of rooms, new materials in the walls and floors

and windows which required new methods of maintenance, repair, cleaning, and decorating, and it meant new ways of getting to work, to school, to recreation. Often, it meant new kinds of schools, new kinds of playgrounds, new kinds of transportation. It meant new kinds of shopping, and new foods. The symmetric, block buildings created new ways of encountering neigh-



Figure 1. Marzahn in 1984. Courtesy of the Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf.

bors and strangers, and meant new sights leaving and coming home from work; they meant new ways of caring for children, and new ways of children's play, and thus, new childhoods. It meant new trees, new grasses, new smells in the air, new sounds, new weather patterns, new kinds of soil.

The transformation was rapid and complete: multiple construction teams, called *Taktstrassen*, working parallel to each other and on three shifts, were able to finish a new *Plattenbau* living block with as many as 120 apartments, or "living units" (*Wohneinheiten*), in 90-120 days.⁴ By 1984, most of it was finished, and additional developments in Hellersdorf, Ahrensfeld, and Hohenschönhausen began, further expanding the scope of the *Neubausiedlung*. Over 650 hectares worth of land was dug up, displacing almost seven million cubic meters of soil to make room for nearly 1300 building foundations. Forty-five combination *Kindergärten/Kinderkrippen* and 51 polytechnical high schools were built, each with a construction time frame of about 150 days. Sixteen shopping centers, fifteen local restaurants and pubs, nine senior homes, five hospitals, eight general service centers (*Dienstleistungsgebäude*), fifty indoor sports arenas (*Turnhallen*),

4 Peters, *Platten, Hütten, Wohnquartiere*, 190-92.

two indoor community swimming pools (with saunas), and nine youth clubs were built in direct coordination with each *Plattenbau*.⁵ The local river, the Wuhle, which cuts a gentle swale between the old villages of Marzahn and Hellersdorf, eventually flowing into the Spree to the south, was redirected to form an artificial lake that was never completed. The lake was to be at the foot of what would become an artificial “mountain,” the “Kienberg,” a 100-meter, 31-hectare round high hill made of seven million m³ of construction debris, torn-down old homes, leftover war rubble, and displaced earth. Together, the Kienberg and the Wuhle were the center of a new and completely artificially landscaped recreation park (*Naherholungsgebiet*), which included a bunny ski hill, an all-weather bobsled run (*Rodelbahn*), boat rental facilities and open spaces for picnicking, hiking, soccer, an open air stage, and more.⁶ Within five years, an entire metropolis in concrete had sprouted out of the nothingness.

Marzahn was only the largest of numerous settlement projects like it throughout the GDR, some of which had already been built by the time ground was broken in Marzahn. Using prefabricated, steel-reinforced concrete slabs to cheaply mass-produce apartments was not unique to the GDR, either. Throughout the Soviet bloc, beginning in the Soviet Union with Khrushchev’s call in 1954 for socialist countries to build “better, cheaper, faster,” massive housing projects of almost identical concrete slab housing sprang up outside cities, such as the Nowa Huta settlement outside Krakow. In Western Europe, too, prefabricated housing projects were built as part of postwar and postcolonial social welfare states and reconstruction programs. From Manchester to Nanterre, from Athens to West Berlin, the ugly concrete blocks began appearing in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, prefabricated, mass-produced housing blocks were invented in the United States, perfected in France, Britain, and Scandinavia, and the design used in Marzahn itself came from a company in Finland. However, concrete *Plattenbau* was used far more in the socialist bloc than in the West; East Germany built 2.1 million *Plattenbau* apartments, comprising 83 percent of all the housing construction in East Germany—as opposed to West Germany, where, despite the much larger population, only 500,000 were built.⁷ East Germany led the socialist bloc—and the entire world, in fact—in the building of mass-produced *Plattenbau* housing. By 1990, more than half of the GDR’s population lived in mass-produced block housing. In some East German cities, the percentage was much higher: 85 percent in Schwedt, 72 percent

5 Ibid.

6 Hübner, Nicolaus, Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn*, 15; Peters, *Platten, Hütten, Wohnquartiere*, 116; also see Bezirksamt Marzahn-Hellersdorf, ed., *Zwischen Barnim und Spree: Das südliche Wuhletal* (Berlin, 2001).

7 Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte. Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR* (Berlin, 2005), 23.

in Frankfurt-Oder, and 65 percent in Rostock. Of the population living in *Plattenbau*, 20 percent lived in 125 different settlements such as Marzahn.⁸

Moreover, the prefabricated concrete housing block carried a far different meaning under socialism than in the West. In the East, they were built for socialism's model citizens—workers, planners, party members, young families with children—and were often considered the most prized housing. The *Plattenbau* of the West, on the other hand, mostly became ghettos for immigrants and low-income residents. But the real difference between Marzahn—and similar new housing developments or new residential areas—and other such building projects in the West was not fundamentally the amount built, nor was it the extent to which the buildings and settlements became ghettoized or remained desirable. In fact, the major point made by many associated with planning or building Marzahn—namely, that it was an example of how well socialism worked and the extent to which socialism could outstrip capitalism in terms of ending the postwar housing shortage—is not really what makes Marzahn so important in the broader scope of history.

What makes Marzahn so important is the extent to which it was a *total* planning project, the creation of an entire metropolis, comprising every conceivable aspect of government, industry, culture, science, technology, etc., that is inevitably involved in the building and maintaining of a modern, postindustrial city. Everything moved—in theory at least—in harmony with a single, all-encompassing master plan. The GDR was not just building places for its citizens to live; it was building an entirely new world—a world completely free of the material traces of the pre-GDR past, projected directly from blueprints and scaled models onto the tabula rasa of the Märkisch Lebensraum. And it was meant not as an upgrade on the world of the past, but as a radically new world with no memory of the past, built entirely on the principle of rational planning, in which nothing would be left to chance and all needs would always be met.

The Aufbau of Berlin-Marzahn

World War II devastated not only Germany's population and economy, but also its urban infrastructure. The combination of Allied bombing of German cities and the close-range, urban combat that characterized the last six months of the war at least partially destroyed almost a quarter of all homes and apartments in Germany.

⁸ Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 23-24.

In Berlin itself, more than half of the living space was ruined, and by the end of the war, there was a shortage of 1.4 million apartments in the SBZ/GDR. Relatively few apartments were built between 1945 and the 1960s in the SBZ/GDR, and those that remained were not renovated. Consequently, a majority of GDR citizens lived in the same squalid, working-class hovels that had defined proletarian life since the beginning of large-scale industrialization in Berlin. A few others lived in old, rural houses that also dated back fifty, a hundred or more years and were in desperate need of renovation. In 1961, for example, the authorities officially condemned 10.3 percent of all apartments as not fit to live in; one-third of all apartments had no running water, and in smaller cities and towns like Neubrandenburg, this proportion reached two-thirds. Only a third of East German apartments had an indoor toilet; only one in forty had central heating.

A more important consideration for the GDR regime than the poor condition of these old dwellings were the links they had to the past and to private property. The state wished to suppress both of these as they did not fit in its vision of a new, modern, socialist utopia: almost exactly two-thirds were built before 1918, and almost 80 percent of apartments and single family homes were privately owned—only 12 percent constituted *Volkseigentum*, or people's (public) property.⁹

After Stalin's death and the workers' uprising in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev's rise to power in the Soviet Union opened the way for a large, loosely associated group of architects, designers, and city planners to implement their philosophy of a rational, ahistorical, and mass-produced city-space, home-space, and material culture. Having either been in the Bauhaus, the International Congress of Modern Architects, the pre-"Aryanized" German Werkbund, or having studied under disciples of these groups, the group included, most importantly, Gerhard Kosel, who replaced the Stalinist Kurt Liebknecht as the head of the DBA. (Liebknecht, along with East German First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, had previously ridiculed modern, mass-produced housing projects in West Berlin such as the Hansaviertel as un-German, cosmopolitan, and American.) Kosel, the "system builder," as Christine Hannemann has called him, had spent almost twenty years experimenting with *Plattenbau* technology in the Soviet Union; indeed, he had helped develop Soviet *Plattenbau* methods.¹⁰ So when Khrushchev called for "cheaper, better,

⁹ Joachim Palutzki, *Architektur in der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), 194. Also see Hannsjörg F. Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert—Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR* (Münster, 2004).

¹⁰ Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 80.

quicker” housing construction, and personally chose *Plattenbau* as the best, most efficient, and feasible method, Kosel was well positioned to begin widely implementing his vision of a *Plattenbau* future in socialist East Germany, including the Marzahn development. He was able to promote a number of his friends and close colleagues, all of whom were experienced in *Plattenbau* construction and the all-encompassing *Neubausiedlungen* Kosel had experimented with in the vast steppes of Russia. These included Heinz Graffunder, the architect responsible for overseeing the Marzahn plan (as well as the architect of the Palace of the Republic and one of the most influential architects of the GDR), Roland Korn, Berlin’s chief architect who created the original Marzahn plan, and Günter Peters, the head of Berlin urban planning.

Even though they oversaw the project, the idea for building a satellite city in the flat, Märkisch countryside was not Peters’s or Korn’s, nor was it conceived of in the GDR, but had long been envisioned by German city planners of different eras. Hitler’s chief architect before becoming the Minister of Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer, had drawn up extensive plans to settle 445,000 people in modern housing projects outside the northeast edge of the city, including Marzahn (which was to be renamed Ostachse, or East Axis, as the easternmost part of Germania).¹¹ Plans for an expansion into Marzahn and Biesdorf to take some of the pressure off the crowded working-class slums had also existed in the Weimar Republic.¹² And these plans, in turn, were based on resettlement plans for the population of Berlin dating back to the turn of the twentieth century.¹³

In fact, the idea of settling people to the east, either as a buffer or as a release valve, or both, had been in the cultural “DNA” of Berlin and Brandenburg for a thousand years if not more. But it had not yet been undertaken for lack of money and political willpower—as well as willing settlers. By 1970, however, the most advanced mass-production system for concrete slabs—the “WBS 70” (*Wohnungsbauserie 1970*)—had been developed, resulting in a more cost-effective system. With the ascension of Honecker (Fig. 2) and “Real Existing Socialism”—including the declaration that the housing problem would be solved by 1990—Peters presented the Marzahn idea to the Berlin Magistrate, the State Planning Commission, and the Politbüro. All of these entities then approved the original plan, which foresaw a settlement of 35,000 people, but was later vastly expanded.

11 Günter Peters, *Historische Stadtplanungen für den Berliner Nordosten* (Berlin, 1997), 24-26.

12 Peters, *Platten, Hütten, Wohnquartiere*, 42-44, mentions a number of such plans, such as that of Stadtbaurat Martin Wagner. Wagner’s “general settlement plan for the capital of the empire” resulted in a “population plan for the municipality of Berlin” calling for the settlement of 115,000 people in Marzahn-Biesdorf. It was published in 1928 by the Office of City Planning.

13 Peters, *Historische Stadtplanung*, 12. Between 1871 and 1908, Berlin’s population rose from 800,000 to 2 million, and as a response to the overcrowding, the Berlin Architektenverein, which had long been working on a plan to build canals out to the northeast, held a competition for the best “basic plan for the development of the greater Berlin area.” First prize was awarded to Hermann Jansen for his plan to extend the infrastructure and workers’ settlements to Marzahn and northwards to Buch.

Nonetheless, before any apartments could go up, a vast infrastructure had to be built, beginning with utilities. Korn and Graffunder's diagrams called for a large underground tunnel of poured concrete in which all utility lines would be laid, including electric, gas, telephone, and water, to connect Marzahn to the infrastructure grid on Berlin's east side. Entry points to the tunnel throughout Marzahn were to enable easy repairs or inspections. When the canal for the tunnel had been dug, it was wide enough for brigades from the VEB Berlin Tiefbau to race Trabant cars through it for fun.



Figure 2. Erich Honecker visits the Marzahn construction site. Courtesy of the Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf.

Another preliminary issue that had to be dealt with was a sewage field (*Rieselfeld*) just north of Marzahn, near Ahrensfeld and the source of the Wuhle. Since the late 1800s, sewage and storm runoff from Berlin's sewers and storm drains had been allowed to simply flood onto the field at the end of a long sewer pipe. The smell, especially in summer, could be awful, it polluted the Wuhle, which also stank of raw sewage, and altered the pH balance of the surrounding ecosystem, making the planting of many of the green spaces, gardens, and trees a major problem. To address this, Korn and Graffunder's plan proposed a sewer treatment facility in nearby Falkenberg, which is still there today.

Finally, the transportation infrastructure also needed to be put into place. The S-bahn had to be extended to Ahrensfeld from Lichtenberg-Ost. Luckily, there was already an abandoned railroad bed from an old Reichsbahn line that had been used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for farmers to send produce into the city markets and for the wealthy to visit their summer cottages in the Märkisch countryside. It could be converted into modern S-bahn tracks and stations fairly easily. In addition, roads had to be built, and tramlines laid as well.¹⁴

¹⁴ Some of this information comes from a series of interviews conducted with Günter Peters in Berlin, March 22, 29, and April 5, 2008.

Moving into the settlement

As soon as the first units at the southernmost tip of the Marzahn settlement known as the “Südspitze” were finished, East Germans could begin moving in—and hordes of people desperate to escape their miserable living conditions lined up to get into Marzahn. Those who worked for a prominent state-owned factory (VEB), especially one working on Marzahn, such as the VEB WBK, the VEB Tiefbau or the VEB Hochbau, could apply for an apartment through their factory’s workers’ housing cooperative (AWG, Arbeiterwohngenossenschaft), which had an allotment for this. Others could apply for a new apartment through the city’s apartment bureau. There was no guarantee that one would end up in Marzahn by applying for it; one might wind up in a different *Altbau* building, or an older *Neubau* apartment somewhere in the old city. Almost always, having a child, being married, and being young were advantageous. Living in an apartment that was considered condemned or had been slated for demolition also helped. Yet it seems from most accounts that the experience of actually getting an apartment in Marzahn was one of frustration, confusion, life-changing decisions made in a split second, and massive change.

For Gabriele Frank, for example, the search for a larger apartment for herself, her husband Stefan, and their two-year-old son Thomas began in 1982 when she discovered she was pregnant with twins—an impending disaster, considering they lived in a tiny, two-room apartment in Lichtenberg with no bathroom. “I’m expecting twins,” Gabriele said to the women in the darkly lit, linoleum-floored room. “What do you expect, everyone to just fall over when you want a bigger apartment? Prove to me first that you are having twins,” replied the woman at the housing office (*Wohnungsbaugesellschaft*).¹⁵ But eventually the twins, Christine and Janine, were born, and a key to a three-room apartment in Marzahn arrived while she was still in the maternity ward, presented by a joyous Stefan who declared: “We did it! A full-comfort apartment in Marzahn! Is this not insane???”¹⁶

Gabriele knew little about Marzahn except for what she had read in the newspapers about some work being done. When she and the twins got out of the hospital, the family “drove and drove. We drove into a gigantic construction site: cranes crowded our way. All around us stood just-begun *Plattenbauten*. For vast stretches

15 Gabriele Frank, “Was heißt Gemini?” in *(Keine) Platten Geschichten*, ed. Katrin Rohnstock (Berlin, 2004), 77-82, 79.

16 *Ibid.*, 80.

there were no paved streets. Mountains of sand towered over us, a gigantic desert of mud, nowhere a tree, or even a plant.” Then finally, after being lost in the badlands of sand hills, mud and cranes, they found a *Plattenbau* that corresponded to their address: Ludwig-Renn-Strasse Entrance 43. “My heart pounded in my throat, my knees shook as we climbed up in the building still smelling of concrete and paint. My husband unlocked the door, opened it and...a giant empire appeared, with enough room for five family members. Central heating, warm water straight out of the wall, and a balcony six meters long! This is what happiness looks like. We fell into each others’ arms euphorically.” Of course, like all the apartments, this one had just been finished days earlier, and was nothing but naked, gray cement, upon which one of the workers had scrawled: “two cases of beer will be just fine! Greetings, Kalle.” “Prost!” Gabriele said out loud.¹⁷

For Jürgen Hinze, too, the idea of Marzahn hung like salvation in his mind since he first heard about the plan in 1975. He, his wife, and two children lived in a building built in 1862 on Zionskirchestrasse which was “almost in ruins; dark and drafty, water ran between the walls, and we shared a bathroom a half-flight of stairs up with the neighbors.”¹⁸ The thought that he and his family could escape the ramshackle *Altbau* in East Berlin to move to a freshly laid Marzahn apartment was liberating for him, as it was for so many others.

Although new, the apartments had an unfinished quality about them for the new arrivals. As a rule, they were completely empty and without wallpaper. In many cases, apartments were open for moving in before the building itself was completed; blocks of floors were opened as they were finished, while construction continued on the floors above. In some cases, the cement walls were barely dry, as was the glue binding the PVC flooring in the kitchen and foyer.¹⁹ Moreover, the new arrivals had very little with which to fill their new space because they were moving to much larger living quarters than they had enjoyed before. More than half of them had come from small, usually one-room *Altbau* apartments in decrepit tenements in the old working-class sections of Berlin and other cities. Most of the new apartments, in contrast, while they ranged from one to five rooms, were typically three or four rooms because the entire project was intended for young families with children.

17 Ibid., 81.

18 Jürgen Hinze, “Das grüne Ungeheuer,” in *(Keine) Platten Geschichten*, ed. Rohnstock, 52-58.

19 This, however, is an old Berlin tradition dating back to the construction of the tenements in the nineteenth century (the same ones that many Marzahnners escaped a century later): people desperate for a place to live and with very little means could move in while the plaster was still wet for a reduced rent.

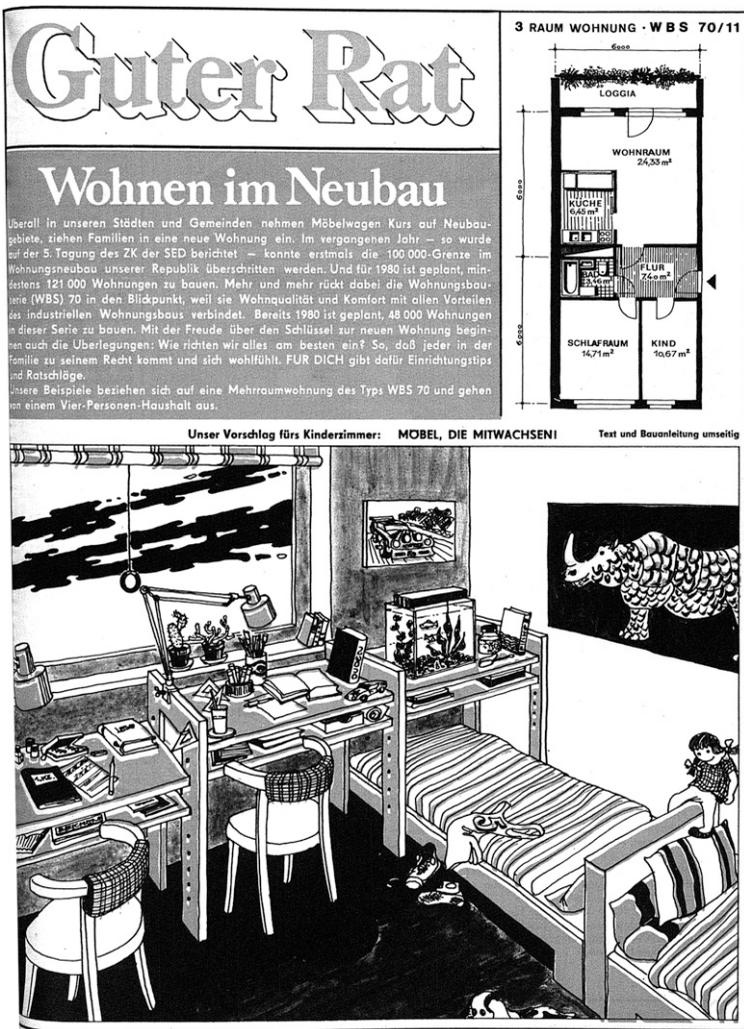


Figure 3. Essay on furnishing a WBS-70 apartment with modern furniture. *Für Dich*, no. 15 (1977): 41.

ture, combining a few different types of shelf units with beds and sofas to provide complete “rooms” for East German consumers. Modern kitchens were also touted as must-have amenities for the new apartments, such as the “Ratioküche”—a rationalized, streamlined built-in kitchen that could be found in most *Plattenbau* apartments. Throughout the new apartments, plastics were central: the Intecta shelf unit was laminated in polyester resin, and the Ratioküche kitchens were coated in “Sprelacart”—a kind of plastic surfacing. Even the floors, made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), were a product of numerous studies by designers and engineers on how to make the modern apartment more efficient and easier to maintain.²⁰

Industrial designers and the technocrats of the planned economy had long been at work designing and mass-producing modern, Bauhaus-influenced amenities, including furniture, kitchens and appliances, and even flooring, for the *Neubauwohnungen*. The *Schrankwand*, a floor-to-ceiling shelf unit designed to hold books, stereos, vases, photos, knick-knacks and other common living room furnishings, became increasingly popular in the GDR and in other socialist countries for precisely this reason. The “Intecta” series, developed by the Hellerau Werkstätte, was the most popular “system” of furni-

20 See Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2008), for more on the relationship between plastics, furniture, and *Plattenwohnungen*.

The young families moving in were primed to purchase these newly developed items through a combination of social and policy influences. Advice magazines such as *Für Dich* ran frequent articles on how to furnish one's new WBS-70 apartment, such as the one pictured in Figure 3. The emphasis on how to furnish the children's rooms is especially significant in this context. Previously, most families with children had had to share one room with them, so the concept of an entirely separate child's room with child's furniture was completely new. Yet families did not have many choices in how to do this: there were only a few furniture stores offering the complete service necessary to furnish a child's room—as well as a kitchen and a living room—all at once, including stores on Alexanderplatz and Karl-Marx-Allee. Moreover, these stores only carried the Intecta or similarly styled furniture sets. Furthermore, most young couples were dependent on *Kinderkredit*, or credit to young families as part of Honecker's "Real Existing Socialism" policy, for such large purchases. This credit could be used to furnish a child's room but only in certain stores—the same stores that plied the modern and synthetic shelf units and kitchens on Alexanderplatz and Karl-Marx-Allee.²¹

Not only were Marzahners moving into a utopia in the process of construction, but they were obliged to take part in its building as well—mostly through communal landscaping campaigns called "Mach Mit!" organized by each building's *Hausgemeinschaft*, or building committee. These campaigns helped to fulfill a motto that resident Torsten Preußing noticed in his building's lobby: "From 'I' to 'We'" (Vom "Ich" zum "Wir"). Preußing, like many residents, got involved in these campaigns within days of moving in when he saw a sign ordering "All men outside with a shovel in hand!" for the arrival of topsoil the next day.²² As he reported, the men did just as the sign commanded, unloading and spreading tons of topsoil over the muddy, sandy, churned-up earth in the front of the building. In the next stage of these campaigns, not only men but women and children, too, got involved, spreading grass seed, and planting seedlings and—most importantly—trees.²³ On nice afternoons when a Mach Mit! activity was taking place, spontaneous grill parties would pop up outside the buildings.²⁴ Almost a fourth of the green space in Marzahn was landscaped like this, with residents, and occasionally soldiers of the East German Nationale Volksarmee (NVA) as well as the Red Army pitching in to do *Subbotnik*, or Saturday volunteer work, as well.²⁵ Annually, prizes called "Golden

21 Some of this information on where furniture came from and how it was financed came from an interview I conducted with Barbara Diehl, April 3, 2008, in Berlin. See below for more information on Diehl's experiences.

22 Torsten Preußing, "Fluchtversuch nach Brandenburg," in *(Keine) Platten Geschichten*, ed. Rohnstock, 17-25, here 17.

23 *Ibid.*, 18.

24 Interview with Leo Märker, March 19, 2008, Berlin.

25 Bärbel Felber, ed., *1979-1999, 20 Jahre Marzahn* (Berlin, 1999), 10.

House Numbers” were awarded to the building committees that best landscaped their green space, with 327 blocks receiving these awards in all.²⁶

Tree planting was important both in a material and metaphorical sense. On the one hand, trees redesigned the landscape according to standards of sanitation and pleasantness, and, on the other, they put down figurative roots in brand new soil that were often both communist and personal. Among Marzahners, the best remembered tree-planting event was on September 22, 1978, when Sigmund Jähn, the first (and only) East German cosmonaut, visited Marzahn with Soviet cosmonaut Valery Bikovsky. Having just returned from a space mission in Soyuz whereupon they received the Order of Karl Marx at the Palace of the Republic from Honecker, the two had come to Marzahn, accompanied by an entourage of SED luminaries, to each plant a maple tree. They ended their visit with a guided tour of one of the freshly completed WBS 70/11 living units, block 60.17.²⁷

The cosmonauts’ visit highlights the pride the state felt in its new housing development, just as the residents were proud of their high-profile guests. Residents renamed the main traffic artery, Leninallee, which the trees had been planted along, “Allee des Kosmonauten” in honor of Jähn and Bykovsky, who were said to have had a special fondness for Marzahn and its residents. The cosmonauts left behind an official SED badge that they had taken with them into outer space, and returned at least one more time in subsequent years to check on their trees as well as to greet the residents of WBS 70/11 unit 60.17. But they were not the only socialist celebrities to visit. In fact, a tour of Marzahn became a common practice for most guests of honor to the capital of the GDR, including heads of state such as Indira Gandhi and, most memorably, Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev.

Growing with Marzahn

For Elisabeth Albrecht, the growth of the trees she helped plant marked the passage of time, and life, in her *Plattenbau* in WG III. She moved there with very little in 1982 as a single mother with her small son—he brought only his plastic dump truck and a few stuffed animals, which he did not have enough room to play with in their previous half-room apartment in old East Berlin, but which he now could roll back and forth, in ecstatic joy, arranging the stuffed

26 Ibid.

27 “Kosmoswimpel Ansporn im Wettbewerb,” *Berlin-Marzahn Aktuell* 2, no. 11, September 28, 1978, 2.

animals and the dump truck in various sequences. The animals and the dump truck came outside with her son on Mach Mit! days to “help” Elisabeth and her new neighbors (and their forty-two kids) plant birches and poplars. Though they had trouble growing these at first because the soil was still polluted from the decades of contamination from the old sewage fields nearby, they managed to earn a “Golden House Number,” painting elaborate murals of fairy tales along the outside walls and inner entranceways. Reflecting on the passage of time, Elisabeth recently said, “Now, twenty-one years later, the poplar I planted below my window has reached my ninth floor window. My son has moved out—a few years ago, in fact, and for many years it was just the two of us. But now, I enjoy my view of the greenery.”²⁸

For some families with children, the move to Marzahn turned out to be a lifesaving break with the past. Barbara Diehl’s childhood in the small village of Magdeborn, outside Leipzig, had been unhappy. In fact, as Barbara herself put it, she “had no childhood.”²⁹ Her family had been shattered by war: she never met her father, who was killed on the Eastern Front, and her mother had taken up with several different men to fill both the emotional and the financial emptiness that her father’s death had caused. None of these relationships ended well. Barbara had to work from a very young age, but it was never enough to heal the wounds of a dysfunctional and loveless home life.

She hated life in Magdeborn, and as soon as she finished secondary education, she went to school in Halle and quickly found work at the Leunawerk chemical factory, where she met her future husband. They married in 1973 and moved to Berlin a year later, where he found work at the State Planning Commission. She then got pregnant with her first son, Dieter, marking a totally new start in her life. But life was hard in Berlin, living with her husband and child in a one-room apartment in the backyard of an *Altbau* apartment in Friedrichshain. It had no bathroom, a tiny 12 m² kitchen, and just a single tap with nothing but freezing cold water. If she wanted to give the little boy a bath, for instance, she had to warm the water in a kettle and then fill a plastic bathtub. Her husband would get up at 4 a.m. to start the radial heater so that it would be warm when they got up a couple of hours later. On top of these inconveniences, Dieter clearly had developmental issues—he was hyperactive and unable to socialize with other children in his preschool. The stress was unbearable—it was “hell” as she described

28 Elisabeth Albrecht, “Balkonblick nach zwanzig Jahren,” in *(Keine) Platten Geschichten*, ed. Rohnstock, 33-40, here 35.

29 Interview with Barbara Diehl, April 3, 2008, Berlin.

it, her life in Friedrichshain deteriorating to the low level she had suffered in Magdeborn.

Finally, when her second son, Stefan, was born in 1980, Barbara was able to secure a new apartment in Marzahn, in a WBS 70/10 building on the Allee der Kosmonauten. Moving to Marzahn did not immediately solve her family's dysfunction, but it did allow the boys to have their own rooms. More importantly, the open green space and the numerous parks spread out below Barbara's balcony meant that the boys could go outside to play and remain in her view. Soon, Dieter found a friend, a girl his age whose family had moved in across the hall, and who, like every other child in Marzahn, was brand new and also very much in need of friends. They played together almost every day after school.³⁰

Although the move to Marzahn was lifesaving for Barbara, one needs to be careful not to overemphasize new Marzahn residents' contentment with their surroundings. For many, the initial euphoria of having a full-comfort apartment for the first time in their lives wore off within a year, and many of the downsides to living in Marzahn became apparent. Most importantly, the spatial design of a *Plattenbau*, as well as the wide open spaces between buildings, made it much harder for residents to form new social networks than it had been in the old neighborhoods like Prenzlauerberg. Inconvenient as the old dwellings were, they fostered relationships and friendships by forcing residents to share toilets and spend time in communal places, as when people ate and showered at the factory. According to the Institute for Marxist-Leninist Sociology study, a plurality (41 percent) of several hundred subjects responded that they were only "somewhat happy" with the social networks they had formed at Marzahn, while almost the exact same number (40 percent) claimed they were either "somewhat" or "extremely unhappy."³¹

Above all, the Berliners, who comprised more than two-thirds of Marzahnners, were dissatisfied.³² Their dissatisfaction stemmed partially from the lack of fun or social things to do in comparison with their old neighborhoods—half of all former Berliners surveyed considered the leisure activities in Marzahn to be almost totally or totally insufficient, whereas only 16 percent of Marzahnners who had come from small towns felt this way.³³ The long commute also spawned dissatisfaction; over 80 percent of Marzahnners commuted for more than 45 minutes, and a third worked in Berlin-Mitte, a central East Berlin district rather far from Marzahn. Many cited this

30 This information is taken from a series of interviews I conducted with Barbara Diehl in Berlin on March 17, April 3, and April 14, 2008.

31 Loni Niederländer, "Forschungsbericht zum 1. Intervall der Untersuchung 'Wohnen 80-Marzahn.' Zur Entwicklung eines Neubaugebietes der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin" (Berlin, 1981), 54.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 52

fact as contributing to their negative assessment of life in Marzahn.³⁴

Plattenbausiedlung and social control

There were obvious political overtones to moving to Marzahn, which were not lost on most of the residents. A large number of the apartments were reserved for members of the government, the NVA, border patrol, Stasi, Volkspolizei (People's Police), and other organs of the state. Many were bureaucrats somewhere in the vast planning bureaucracy of the state, like Barbara's husband, who worked for the State Planning Commission.

People outside the GDR mainstream—for example, those living together without getting married, or those who had been in trouble with the authorities for petty criminal offenses or suspicious political activity—did not stand much of a chance of receiving an apartment in Marzahn, or in any other *Neubaugebiet*. For that matter, neither did those who did not work for a prominent VEB, the state, the SED, or those who were childless or elderly.

And, of course, the Ministry for State Security, or Stasi, kept well informed about every aspect of Marzahn. It possessed every blueprint

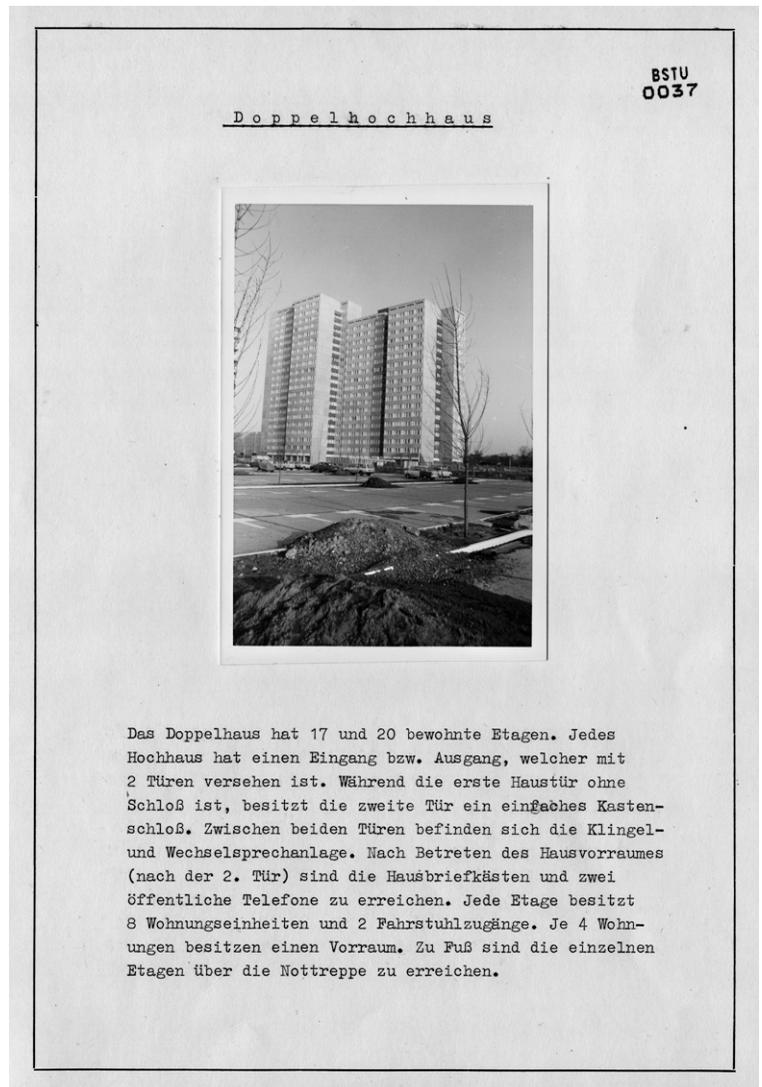


Figure 4. Page from Stasi handbook on how to spy in WBS 70 buildings, especially in Marzahn. Courtesy BStU.

³⁴ Ibid., 55-56.

and knew all about the topography, as well as where every utility tunnel and building exit was.³⁵ There was literally no place to hide in Marzahn—there could be no “underground,” because even the “underground” had just recently been built, and the Stasi knew all the access points to the utility canal. In fact, the Ministry for State Security developed a guidebook for agents following suspects in and out of the new WBS 70 buildings (Fig.4), with helpful hints such as always getting in the elevator with the suspect so as not to lose them, waiting for suspects to press their floor button and then pressing the button of the floor just below, so as not to raise suspicion, and then using the time-lag to run up the extra flight of stairs to catch up with the suspect. The guidebook was replete with blueprints and diagrams showing exactly what angles were needed for surveillance cameras and recorders. Because every WBS 70 building was exactly the same, only one guide was needed for the entire Ministry for State Security and Ministry of the Interior.³⁶ It was intended as a quick reference guide that agents were to keep with them at all times in Marzahn.

35 There are large quantities of blueprints, construction diagrams, technical information about the steel, concrete, topsoil, voltage of electric line, water table, traffic flow, and so on scattered throughout the files of the various departments of the MfS. See, for example, Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS), Hauptabteilung (HA) VIII, 5090, 16-20; BStU MfS BV Berlin, AKG 1019 “Information über Probleme des Standes der Vorbereitung des komplexen Wohnungsbaues im Gebiet Biesdorf/Marzahn,” MfS Verwaltung Groß-Berlin 4.12.74; BStU MfS Sekr des Min, file nr. 1787, pages 0151-0154, and file nr. 2442 Teil 1.

36 BStU MfS HA VIII, 5192, “Dokumentation über den Stadtbezirk Berlin-Marzahn” erarbeitet von den Jugendkollektiven des Referates 4 der Abt. 3, n.d. (early 1980s).

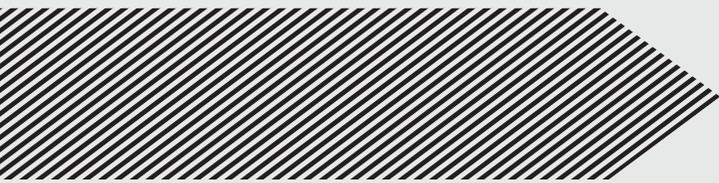
Conclusion

The East German *Plattenbauten* have undergone a remarkable lifecycle. Initially rejected as cosmopolitan and “Western” by communism’s old guard, by the 1960s and 1970s they came to embody the utopian promise of a space-aged communist future. By the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, that promise became a reality for millions of families around the GDR, and the *Plattenbausiedlung*—most prominently typified by Marzahn—came to define everyday life behind the Berlin Wall for approximately half the East German population. When the Wall fell, places like Marzahn stood at a crossroads—they had begun to shape the inner, everyday lives of their residents and, at the same time, it was clear that they were a vision of the future for remaining East Germans not yet living in a *Plattenbau*. Living in Marzahn was both a promise and reality. The East German residential construction program was intended to completely solve the East German housing shortage by 1990, and for the most part it did. Had East Germany weathered the crisis of 1989-90, eventually, the vast majority of East Germans would have lived in a place like Marzahn. For this majority, everyday life would have come to be shaped by the straight lines, the identical patterns, the open, Corbusian green spaces, the effects of holistic and totalizing planning. Most of all, the links to the olden days, and especially to

the tenements and the old prewar neighborhoods (*Kiez*) of Berlin, would have weakened as so little would have remained to remind East Germans of them.

But none of that happened. When the Wall fell, it left Marzahn in a truly wrenching existential bind. During the GDR, Marzahn was an amnesiopolis, a place of the future, designed to erase all links to the past so that a new, self-referential future, based only on itself, could become real. After 1989-90, it became a place with no past, as Westerners quickly recognized. It became a place with only a snuffed out future, thus existing in a strange kind of suspended animation. Those residents who had jostled and waited and worked to get into Marzahn, for whom the GDR's narrative of progress and utopianism was fused with their personal narratives of upward mobility and personal growth, who (in many cases gladly) left their pasts behind, found themselves after 1989-90 stranded in a time eddy. Once the old neighborhoods of East Berlin—Prenzlauerberg, Friedrichshain, Mitte, etc.—were opened up to the mechanisms of a private real estate market and the kinds of investment capital able to renovate old apartments, suddenly having a past was the new future. *Altbau* trumped *Neubau*. And the *Plattenbausiedlung*, originally condemned by the GDR's founders as too dismissive of history and heritage, ultimately came to be judged harshly by Western critics for that very same reason.

Eli Rubin is Associate Professor of History at Western Michigan University. His dissertation, entitled *Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic: Towards an Economic, Consumer, Design and Cultural History* and completed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2004, received the Fritz Stern Dissertation Award from the Friends of the German Historical Institute in 2005 and formed the basis of his first book, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic*, published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2008. From 2007-2009, he held an Alexander von Humboldt Postdoc Fellowship at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam. Currently, he is working on two book projects: one on the history of Marzahn and the other on destruction during and after World War II in Germany.



Cultural Transfers and Everyday Life

“EVEN UNDER SOCIALISM, WE DON’T WANT TO DO WITHOUT LOVE”: EAST GERMAN EROTICA*

Josie McLellan

As the old joke had it, socialism would have worked if it weren’t for cars. Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, it has become almost commonplace to say that consumption is key to understanding the history of East Germany and its eventual downfall.¹ The problem of luxury, as Ina Merkel has shown, was central to debates about consumption under East German socialism.² In comparison to their Eastern neighbors, let alone the Third World, citizens of the German Democratic Republic enjoyed a very high standard of living.³ The basic needs of the population, such as housing, food, and public transport, were heavily subsidized and readily available. Famously, a bread roll cost five pfennigs throughout the life span of the GDR. By providing the necessities of life at affordable prices, the regime hoped to win hearts and minds for socialism. But as memories of postwar shortages faded, full stomachs and low rents quickly came to be taken for granted. Right from the start, comparison with the West was what counted. Spurred by access to Western media, contact with relatives, and, prior to the building of the Berlin Wall, visits to the West, East Germans demanded goods that were not common currency—citrus fruit, TVs, and cars—as well as higher standards for everyday items—tastier sausages, softer toilet paper, clothing of greater quality and style.⁴ And as time went on, the population started to see formerly “luxury” goods such as refrigerators, wash- ing machines, televisions, and cars as necessities.⁵

The flip side of East German pricing policy was that such “luxuries” were sold at extremely high prices. In 1989, a color television cost

1 Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999); Ina Merkel, “Working People and Consumption under Really-Existing Socialism: Perspectives from the German Democratic Republic,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 55 (1999): 92-111; idem,

“Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity Was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture,” and André Steiner, “Dissolution of the ‘Dictatorship over Needs’? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s,” both in *Getting and Spending: European*

and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century, ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt (Cambridge, 1998); Ina Merkel and Felix Mühlberg, eds., *Wunderwirtschaft. DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne, 1996); Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East* >>

>> *Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, “Tulips in December: Space, Time and Consumption Before and After the End of German Socialism,” *German History* 19 (2001): 253-76; David Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003); Paul Betts, “The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000): 731-65.

2 Ina Merkel, “Luxus im Sozialismus. Eine widersinnige Fragestellung?” in *“Luxus und Konsum” – eine historische Annäherung*, ed. Reinhold Reith and Torsten Meyer (Münster, 2003), 221-36.

3 See Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 198.

4 See Felix Mühlberg, “Wenn die Faust auf den Tisch schlägt. Eingaben als Strategie zur Bewältigung der Alltag,” in *Wunderwirtschaft*, ed. Merkel and Mühlberg, 175-84. For a selection of petitions on the subject of material goods, see Ina Merkel, ed., *“Wir sind doch nicht die Mecker- ecke der Nation!” Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin, 2000).

5 Merkel, “Luxus im Sozialismus,” 231, 223.

5297 marks—six months' wages for the average worker.⁶ Elevated prices offered a means of subsidizing the five-pfennig bread roll and other basic goods, as well as a way of gaining access to the millions of marks in savings squirreled away by the population; but they were also a reflection of the regime's priorities. As János Kornai has described state socialist economies: "The leaders of the economy believe they know what is really good for the consumers better than the consumers themselves; they are ready to defend them from their own faulty consumer decisions."⁷ The goods that were cheap and plentiful were those that were considered necessary for work—a roof over one's head, bread, potatoes, margarine, cigarettes, a tram ticket. Certain other goods, such as books, newspapers, and theater tickets, were considered to be culturally or politically worthy of subsidy. But prices remained high for products that were not essential to a worker's existence—butter, coffee, and cars.

The paternalist efforts of the state to encourage consumers to buy useful and functional goods that would make them better workers and socialist citizens did not always find favor with East German shoppers. Long waits for cars, televisions, and telephones added insult to injury.⁸ High prices, combined with scarcity, led to similarly high levels of frustration and grievance, yet the party leadership had little patience for demands for luxury. Schooled in the Stalinist ranks of the Weimar-era communist movement, and with the sacrifices of the Nazi period ever-fresh in their minds, the old communists of the Politburo clearly felt more at home with work and necessity than leisure and luxury. Nevertheless, the question of consumption was not one the regime was able to escape.⁹ The worst crisis of communist rule, the workers' uprising of June 1953, was triggered by a simultaneous hike of work norms and prices and brought the regime to the point of collapse. Eight years later, the Berlin Wall was built as a direct response to the migration of millions of workers to the higher wages and living standards of the West. Ignoring consumers' demands was simply not an option. Concerted efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to make life under communism more attractive included opening specialist shops that sold luxury goods, often imported from the West, at vastly inflated prices. "Exquisit" shops stocked fashionable clothes, and the Delikat chain specialized in luxury foods such as Western coffee and jam. Most contradictory of all were the Intershops, which only accepted Western currency. At first, they were open solely to foreign visitors, but, in the 1970s, they were opened to all East Germans in response to their demand

6 Helmut Weiß, *Verbraucherpreise in der DDR. Wie stabil waren sie?* (Schkeuditz, 1998); Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 159.

7 János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford, 1992), 153.

8 Stefan Pahlke, "Warten auf ein Telefon, mit Permanenz und Penetranz," in *Wunderwirtschaft*, ed. Merkel and Mühlberg, 166.

9 On attempts to build prosperity in the 1950s, see Katherine Pence, "The Myth of a Suspended Present: Prosperity's Painful Shadow in 1950s East Germany," in *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*, ed. Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian (Stanford, 2003), 135-59. On pressure from within the state bureaucracy to increase the supply of consumer goods, see Mark Landsman, "The Consumer Supply Lobby – Did It Exist? State and Consumption in East Germany in the 1950s," *Central European History* 35 (2002): 477-512.

to be allowed to spend hard currency sent to them from the West.¹⁰ The hypocrisy of this was unmistakable: the regime asked its loyal adherents to break off contact with relatives in the West, but rewarded those who did not with access to Nescafé and Nutella.

Like the hard currency gold mine of the Intershops, the production of erotic goods played a role in holding together the East German economy and also provides a telling example of the confused nature of socialist policy towards consumption. Not only did erotica raise difficult questions about the influence of the West and equality of access to consumer goods; it combined them with the equally knotty subject of sex. The production of socialist erotica demonstrates how far the regime was prepared to go to provide its people with the goods they desired.¹¹ While claiming that pornography was anathema to socialism, the authorities permitted the printing of nude photographs both for export and for the domestic market. As we shall see, this gulf between moral rhetoric and economic policy quickly became an open secret.

Following the repressive line taken by the Soviets since the 1930s, early East German policy towards sex and the body was deeply conservative.¹² Abortions were nearly impossible to obtain, prostitution and adultery were frowned upon, the ban on homosexuality was zealously enforced, and attempts were made to ban nudism.¹³ This brand of reproductive heterosexuality was handed down from the highest levels. Walter Ulbricht's Ten Commandments of Socialist Ethics and Morals in 1958 left little doubt as to how citizens should lead their lives. "You should live cleanly and decently and respect your family," thundered commandment number nine.¹⁴ The regime condemned Western pornography and erotica as bourgeois, decadent, and reactionary. During the early Cold War, it portrayed pinups, stripteases, and prostitution as typical of an Americanized, profit-oriented West German sexuality, contrasting them with the healthy sexuality of the East based in marriage and childbearing.¹⁵

10 See Merkel, "Luxus im Sozialismus," 231-35; Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 243-77. On the Intershops, see Jonathan Zatlin, "Consuming Ideology: Socialist Consumption and the Intershops, 1970-1989," in *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR*, ed. Peter

Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde (Essen, 1999), 555-72; Katrin Böske, "Abwesend anwesend. Eine kleine Geschichte des Intershops," in *Wunderwirtschaft*, 214-22.

11 I use the term "erotica" as it encompasses best

the mixture of nude photographs and erotic literature discussed here. Much of this material, particularly the photographs, could be classified as soft pornography.

12 On the repressive turn in Soviet sexual policy, >>

>> see Daniel Healy, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (Chicago, 2001); Janet Evans, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defense of Mother and Child'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981): 757-75.

13 Jennifer Evans, "Reconstruction Sites: Sexuality, Citizenship and the Limits of National Belonging in Divided Berlin, 1944-1958" (PhD diss., SUNY Binghamton, 2001); idem, "The Moral State: Men, Mining and Masculinity in the Early GDR," *German History* 23 (2005): 355-70; Uta Falck, *VEB Bordell. Geschichte der Prostitution in der DDR* (Berlin, 1998); Günter Grau, "Return to the Past: The Policy of the SED and the Laws against Homosexuality in Eastern Germany between 1946 and 1968," *Journal of Homosexuality* 37 (1999): 1-21; Josie McLellan, "State Socialist Bodies: East German Nudism from Ban to Boom," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (2007): 48-79.

14 *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des V. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands. 10. bis 16. Juli 1958 in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1959), 159. All translations from German are the author's own.

15 *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 13/1952, 38.

The capitalist exploitation of vulnerable women fit neatly into a Cold War narrative of capitalist brutality and socialist humanity. An article published in 1952 claimed that nude photographs were used by American magazines to distract the population from the horrors of the Korean War.¹⁶ This was “the Strength through Joy tradition in American portions,” concluded the author, underlining not only East Germany’s moral superiority to its Cold War rival, but its antifascist credentials, too. The Western sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s—which West German media appraised East Germans of quite well—posed a new challenge to East German propagandists. Their solution was to describe developments in the West as a “sex wave” (sometimes “sex flood” or even “sex hurricane”), which commodified sex and nudity in order to sell magazines, newspapers, films, and books. “Flooded” with sexual stimuli, the capitalist consumer became a “slave to his urges,” they argued. The results: “moral sellout, brutality, loss of control, and deformed emotions.”¹⁷ Such moral panic could be mobilized against dissenting voices within socialism, too. At the infamous Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee in 1965, delegates attacked novelists and filmmakers for their “sex propaganda,” “disgusting bed scenes,” “pornography,” as well as the influence of “American amorality and decadence.”¹⁸ As Erich Honecker famously proclaimed from the podium: “Our GDR is a clean state. Here there are immovable ethical and moral standards for decency and morality.”¹⁹

For all its public moralizing, however, the regime consistently used publications with sexual content as part of its strategy to win popular acceptance. Despite their criticisms of West German and American sexualities, the East German authorities had long been aware of the seductive power of sex. Advertisements featuring semi-clad women appeared as early as 1952 and were to remain a constant feature of East German life.²⁰ But the first specifically erotic consumer good appeared on the market in the wake of the workers’ uprising of June 1953. Incensed by a 10 percent increase in work norms, which, combined with price hikes, amounted to a total wage cut of 33 percent, workers in Berlin had taken to the streets. The protests soon spread through most of the country, and by the afternoon of June 17, 400,000 people had become involved.²¹ Forced

16 *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 2/1952, 7. For a much later example, see *Das Magazin* 11/1975, inside back cover.

17 A. Jaritz, “Die ‘Sex-Welle’ oder Ausverkauf der Moral,” *humanitas* 19 (1970): 6. See also Walter Hollitscher, *Der überanstrengte Sexus. Die sogenannte sexuelle Emanzipation im heutigen Kapitalismus* (Berlin, 1975), 16.

18 Günther Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin, 2000), 241, 22, 245, 242. It should be noted that the filmmakers and writers who were the target of such virulent criticism were first and foremost political, not sexual, rebels. “Pornography” was a useful smear, but the Eleventh Plenum was directed primarily against political criticism and artistic autonomy. The SED’s quarrel with the films banned at the Plenum was not their occasional nude scenes—which were rarely sexual—but their unsparing view of life in East Germany.

19 Erich Honecker, “Bericht des Politbüros an die 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED, 15.-18.12.1965,” in *Kahlschlag*, ed. Agde, 241.

20 See, for example, the advertisement for Mildana soap in *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 12/1952, 6, in which the model’s nipple is clearly visible.

21 Gareth Pritchard, “Workers and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany in the summer of 1953,” in

The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht

1945-71, ed. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester, 2002), 112.

to go into hiding, the SED leadership was only able to put down the uprising with the help of Soviet tanks. It was clear that a rapid improvement in living conditions was necessary.²² Reminded that austerity and ideology alone were not enough, the Central Committee increased the money supply and authorized the production of more consumer goods, including a new entertainment monthly called, simply, *Das Magazin* [The Magazine].²³

Das Magazin contained little overt news or politics: its specialties were erotic short stories, racy articles about marriage and infidelity, and irreverent opinion polls with titles like “When is a Flirt More than a Flirt?”²⁴ Most shockingly of all, its editors were authorized to publish a nude photograph in every issue—among the only such pictures available in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵ But despite its unusual content, *Das Magazin* was far from peripheral or marginalized in the East German publishing landscape. Its initial print run of 150,000 copies was highly significant in the context of paper shortages. Nor were its staff in any sense personae non gratae: for example, Hilde Eisler, editor from 1956 to 1979, had been a major figure in communist émigré circles during the Nazi period and was married to the head of East German radio.

Although it was cheap and mass-produced, *Das Magazin* quickly became a collector’s item. In April 1954, just four months after its launch, its publisher wrote to the Ministry of Culture requesting that the circulation be doubled to 300,000 copies. The magazine had sold out in Berlin within 24 hours, and in the Zeiss works in Jena, a key center of socialist production, there were only 50 copies among 18,000 workers.²⁶ By painting a picture of disgruntled customers and dissatisfied workers, the publisher hoped to persuade the ministry’s planners to release more paper—a scarce and jealously guarded commodity in the socialist state. There was, after all, little point in launching a popular magazine if difficulties acquiring it were going to increase consumer frustration. Nevertheless, circulation was increased only grudgingly and incrementally. As early as 1956, the publisher reported that *Das Magazin* was available only “under the counter” in many places.²⁷ By 1965, circulation had reached 425,000, reaching its high point of 565,000 in 1981.²⁸

22 On 1953 as a turning point for East German consumer culture, see Katherine Pence, “‘You as a Woman Will Understand’: Consumption,

Gender and the Relationship between State and Citizenry in the GDR’s Crisis of 17 June 1953,” *German History* 19 (2001): 218–52.

23 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (henceforth SAPMO BArch), DY 30/J IV 2/3A /382. >>

>>The Wende Museum has a complete run of the magazine in its holdings.

24 *Das Magazin* 2/1961, 23.

25 There is no space here for a full account of *Das Magazin*. See the memoirs of its former editor Manfred Gebhardt, *Die Nackte unterm Ladentisch. Das Magazin in der DDR* (Berlin, 2002); Evamarie Badstübner, “‘Zeig’, wie das Leben lacht und liebt...’ Die Unterhaltungszeitschrift *Das Magazin* und ihre Leser zwischen 1954 und 1970,” in *Befremdlich anders. Leben in der DDR*, ed. Evamarie Badstübner (Berlin, 2000), 432–70; idem, “Auf 80 Seiten um die Welt. *Das Magazin* zwischen 1954 und 1970,” in *Zwischen ‘Mosaik’ und ‘Einheit’. Zeitschriften in der DDR*, ed. Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis (Berlin, 1999), 189–201; Martina Freyer, “The Indecent Legend of the Prudish East: *Das Magazin* as Source for Cultural and Historical Research” (master’s thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002). My thanks to David Crowley for alerting me to the existence of this thesis and for kindly sending me a copy.

26 Bundesarchiv (henceforth BArch) DC9/9028. Verlagsleitung (Letsch), Verlag Das Neue Berlin, an Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, Abt. Planung und Plankontrolle, 12.4.1954.

27 BArch DC9/9028. Verlagsleiter Das Neue Berlin (Müller) an Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, 2.7.56.

28 BArch DC9/9028.

What was so appealing about this publication, and how was it able to inspire a level of devotion in its readers that the editors of *New Germany*, the party press organ, must have envied? Despite its low cover price, there was something undeniably luxurious about *Das Magazin*. Few of its articles referred directly to the building of socialism, nor was it oppressively ideological. The monthly nude sent readers an erotic signal, suggesting that socialist bodies could be used for pleasure as well as work. At a time when the sinewy frame of activist Adolf Hennecke was near ubiquitous, softly rounded female curves basking in the warmth of the sun were sumptuous indeed.²⁹ For readers whose freedom of movement was profoundly limited, *Das Magazin's* features on foreign travel and lifestyles were an exotic glimpse of the unattainable,³⁰ as one fan described it, “a glass of champagne at the end of a working week.”³¹

Das Magazin's popularity can also be attributed to the fact that it reflected how the majority of people chose to spend their leisure time—not working extra shifts or attending party meetings but spending time with the family, reading, cooking, traveling, talking about relationships, and dressing up. Even its cookery column was called “Love, Fantasy and the Art of Cooking” and featured recipes for dishes as adventurous as “Lord Byron Rice” (key ingredients: rice, white wine, sugar, cream, and tinned pineapple). The magazine’s distinctive cover art exemplified this mixture of the exotic, erotic, and the everyday. The prolific graphic artist Werner Klemke produced 423 cover illustrations between 1954 and 1991.³² His trademarks were a black tomcat, which appeared on every cover, and an irreverent, mischievous attitude towards sex and relationships. As early as June 1960, the magazine’s cover featured a pretty blonde witch flying through the night sky clad only in fishnet stockings and red high heels.³³ In March 1968, a male insomniac counted Rubenesque women instead of sheep.³⁴ Klemke’s covers often featured blissful couples, whose happiness was clearly based on a strong physical bond.³⁵ He could be extraordinarily suggestive—the Christmas issue of 1973 featured a kissing couple, naked but for a gold star tied over the man’s genitals and a mask tied over the woman’s, giving the impression of an artificial penis and pubic hair.³⁶ Clearly pleased with this motif, Klemke followed it in February 1974 with a cover in which a man, confronted with a naked woman, appears to wear a large pink dildo on his nose.³⁷ Only Klemke’s humor and charm saved such covers from overt smuttiness or official censure.

29 The figurehead of the East German Stakhanovite movement, Hennecke rose to fame by overfulfilling the norm by 387 percent.

30 See Badstübner, “Auf 80 Seiten um die Welt,” 199.

31 *Das Magazin*, 2/1962, 3.

32 *Das Magazin*, 3/2004, 85.

33 *Das Magazin*, 6/1960. See <http://www.dasmagazin.de/1960/titelbilder.htmls/#>. All covers can be viewed by searching the Heftarchiv at *Das Magazin's* web site and selecting the appropriate year.

34 *Das Magazin*, 3/1968.

35 E.g., *Das Magazin*, 11/1975, which showed a newlywed couple approach their wedding bed, on which the figure of a prone woman was outlined in flowers.

36 *Das Magazin*, 12/1973.

37 *Das Magazin*, 2/1974.

The openness and irreverence about relationships present on *Das Magazin*'s covers was in evidence in its features, too. East German mating habits were put under the microscope in a 1959 survey on flirting and seduction techniques, with respondents recommending the tried and tested formula of wining, dining, and flattery.³⁸ One outraged reader objected to these rather unsubtle suggestions. "What were you thinking of when you devoted three-and-a-half pages to the primitive, kitschy opinions of these self-satisfied amateur Casanovas?" he fumed.³⁹ Other readers leapt to the publication's defense: One man insisted, "Even under socialism, we don't want to do without love," a phrase that could have been coined to describe *Das Magazin*'s philosophy.⁴⁰

The cultural authorities appear to have agreed. *Das Magazin*, along with most other East German magazines and newspapers, was not officially censored before publication. While all books were vetted by the Ministry of Culture before publication, magazines were submitted to the press department of the SED's Central Committee only after they were printed. If the department's officials were really displeased by what they read, they could recall and pulp the entire edition. This drastic measure was never taken in the case of *Das Magazin*, although the editor was called to the press department for a dressing-down on a number of occasions.⁴¹ On the whole, though, *Das Magazin* was spared the difficulties faced by other publications, such as the satirical *Eulenspiegel*.⁴² This, of course, did not mean that censorship did not take place.⁴³ Authors and editors had a strong sense of what could and could not be said in the socialist public sphere and self-censored accordingly. If a contributor's "inner scissors" did not trim sufficiently, a more cautious member of the editorial staff was sure to step in. This "censorship without censors" was perhaps even more effective than direct party censorship would have been.⁴⁴ The lack of a safety net before publication, and the dire consequences if a publication had to be pulped, meant that editors tended to err on the side of caution. *Das Magazin*, for example, did not engage with politics in anything but the gentlest manner. Its articles on sex and relationships were certainly risqué by East German standards, but they did nothing to challenge the state's emphasis on heterosexual monogamy. Articles that did mention adultery, or extramarital pregnancy, were usually morally disapproving, or emphasized the unhappy consequences of such actions. For all its irreverence, *Das Magazin* published little that contradicted Ulbricht's exhortation to live cleanly and decently.

38 *Das Magazin*, 7/1959, 28-30.

39 *Das Magazin*, 9/1959, 3.

40 *Das Magazin*, 11/1959, 4.

41 Gebhardt, *Die Nackte unterm Ladentisch*, 120-25.

42 Sylvia Klötzer, "Über den Umgang mit heißen Eissen. *Eulenspiegel*(eien)," in *Zwischen 'Mosaik' und 'Einheit'*, ed. Barck et al., 105-15.

43 On censorship in East Germany, see esp. Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer: Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeiten in der DDR* (Cologne, 1998).

44 Gunter Holzweissig, *Zensur ohne Zensur: Die SED-Informationsdiktatur* (Bonn, 1997).

The nude photographs, too, chimed surprisingly well with the regime's emphasis on "clean," reproductive, heterosexual sexuality.⁴⁵



Figure 1. Nude on a beach, *Das Magazin*, June 1968, 64. Photographer unknown. This photograph has been cropped but gives an indication of the East German style.

The typical East German nude was female, young, slim and physically unblemished, lightly tanned, wore little make-up or jewelry, and was photographed out of doors. (See Figure 1 for an example of the genre.) In marked contrast to Western "pinups," body hair was not a taboo, with armpit and pubic hair often on display.⁴⁶ It was generally agreed that it was best to photograph these "natural" models outdoors, preferably "playing sport and happy games."⁴⁷ That way, there were plausible grounds for their nudity, and the viewer would admire the beauty of the human body rather than use the photographs for sexual stimulation. Contexts that might imply sexual activity—the bedroom, group nudes—were to be avoided at all costs.⁴⁸ The attempt to make the nude body stand for health and strength rather than sexuality had, of course, important precedents in Nazi art and photography. And there can be no doubt that the "naturalness" of East German nudes, particularly the vis-

ibility of body hair, owed something to the conventions of Weimar nude photography, too.⁴⁹

In any case, *Das Magazin's* monopoly on nude photographs did not last for long. By the mid-1960s, such images began to appear in other mainstream publications, including photographic, health, trade union, and youth magazines. As they became more commonplace, nudes also became more overtly sexual. Whereas early nudes tended to be prized for their natural, outdoorsy qualities, those published in the 1970s and 1980s were posed in altogether more come-hither attitudes, looked directly into the camera lens,

45 Evans, "The Moral State," 355–56.

46 American magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* only began to depict pubic hair in the early 1970s.

47 Gerhard Vetter, "Zum Thema Aktfotografie," *Fotografie* 6/1954, 165.

48 The idea that outdoor nudes were morally less worrying was nothing new. As Alison Smith shows in her work on the Victorian nude, pastoral settings were often a way of dissociat-

ing nudity from the questionable activities of the "demimonde" and transcending the "urban sexualised body." Alison Smith, "The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain: 'The English

Nude,'" in *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, ed. Alison Smith (London, 2001), 11–22, 14.

49 See, for example, Gerhard Riebicke, *Photographien* (Berlin, 2000).

and wore heavier make-up.⁵⁰ These developments were closely linked to the evolution of Western nude photography. East German photographers, publishers, and consumers did not inhabit a closed visual world: after all, the regular publication of nudes had been a direct response to developments in the West. Before 1961, the open border allowed East Germans to sample the racier side of capitalism. And even after the Berlin Wall was built, East Germans experienced West German erotic consumer culture via TV, radio, and smuggled books and magazines. For all their protestations about Western pornography, the East German media, too, looked over the border for inspiration. The editorial staff of *Das Magazin* had a subscription to *Playboy* so that they could keep up with Western trends.⁵¹

The “Westernization” of the nude was accompanied by a new openness about the commercial value of erotica. From the 1950s onward, state-owned publishing houses produced pinups and glossy books of nude photographs for the lucrative overseas market.⁵² By 1980, this was enough of an open secret for Inge von Wangenheim to publish a novel about it. *The Derailment* took as its starting point the moment when a train came off the tracks in a small Thuringian village. Its cargo, books of erotic photographs, printed in the GDR but destined for the Swedish export market, quickly disappears—with hilarious results. Supposedly based on a real incident, the novel spoofed the hypocrisy of the party and the old-fashioned morality of country folk in equal measure and was a huge success with East German readers.⁵³ Rather like Werner Klemke, Wangenheim was able, with her humor and lightness of touch, to address a potentially delicate topic to a mass audience.

Perhaps one of the reasons the book was passed by the censors was that in reality, East Germans no longer had to wait for a train to go off the tracks—erotic consumer goods had begun to find their way onto the domestic market, too. Books such as Klaus Fischer’s *Nude Photography* offered lavishly produced glossy nude photographs under the guise of an advice manual for amateur photographers.⁵⁴ By 1989, 27 out of 237 photographic posters on sale were of nudes.⁵⁵ The East German film industry, better known in the West for its hard-hitting social criticism, had a lucrative sideline in erotic slides for the home entertainment market. East German television got in on the act, too, with *Night Time Erotica*, soft pornography for the late night viewer.⁵⁶ Even striptease, which had until then been emblematic of the exploitation and gender inequality of the West, began to become an acceptable form of entertainment at factory

50 On the commercialization of nudes, see also Ina Merkel, “Die Nackten und die Roten. Zum Verhältnis von Nacktheit und Öffentlichkeit in der DDR,” *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 18 (1995): 80-108.

51 Brigitte Sellin, the photo editor of *Das Magazin*, interviewed in Uta Kolano, *Nackter Osten* (Frankfurt/Oder, 1995), 37.

52 On the production of pinups in the 1950s, see BArch DR 1/7794, Jüttner an Volkskammer, 21.3.58; BArch DR1/822, Deutscher Buchexport an VVV Leipzig 13.4.55. For an early example of a book produced solely for export, see *Internationale Aktfotografie* (Leipzig, 1966).

53 Inge von Wangenheim, *Die Entgleisung* (Halle, 1980). It had already gone through seven editions by 1985.

54 Klaus Fischer, *Aktfotografie* (Leipzig, 1987).

55 “Das Fotoposter im Programm des Staatlichen Kunsthandels,” *Fotografie* 6/1989, 2.

56 Torsten Wahl, “Zärtliche Zofen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 7, 2003, 16.

work outings in the mid-1980s;⁵⁷ the celebrations for the 750th anniversary of Berlin in 1987 were marked by the presence of topless “mermaids” (Fig. 2).⁵⁸

The population was equally aware that erotica was a commodity. A lively unofficial trade in professional and amateur photos ran parallel

to the regime’s activities, with books changing hands at hugely inflated prices.⁵⁹ Amateur nude photography was encouraged by the regime as a legitimate socialist leisure activity, and the results ranged from snapshots from the nudist beach to sexually provocative poses clearly imitating Western pornography.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that it was forbidden to bring or send pornography into the country, East Germans and their West German relatives went to great lengths to smuggle *Playboy* and

other erotic goods across the border.⁶¹ By the time the Wall came down, 30 percent of the population admitted to having been shown illegally smuggled West German pornography at their place of work alone.⁶² Erotica was not only popular for leisure but also a means of gaining access to scarce services such as car repair and plumbing.⁶³

As well as for pacifying socialist consumers, erotica was used to persuade them to part with their savings. In 1980, the Kiepenheuer publishing house proposed the introduction of a new series, the Erotic Library. This was part of a mini-boom in erotic publishing, centered around classics like the *Kama Sutra* and Casanova’s memoirs. Like the goods in the Exquisit and Delikat shops, erotica was in such short supply that publishers could set prices high and still



Figure 2. Participant in the parade of ships to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the founding of Berlin, July 25, 1987. Landesarchiv Berlin, 289463. Photographer: Günter Schneider. This image has been cropped.

57 Günter Rössler, interviewed in *Nackter Osten*, 57-58.

58 Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1987-0704-042; Landesbildstelle Berlin, 289455, 289463, C14373, 289480, 289437. For more on this, see McLellan, “State Socialist Bodies.”

59 Klaus Honnef, “Als die Bilderwelten zusammenstürzten,” in *Die nackte Republik. Aktfotografien von Amateuren aus 40 Jahren Alltag im Osten* (Berlin, 1993), no pagination.

60 See Josie McLellan, “Visual Dangers and Delights: Nude Photography in East Germany,” *Past and Present* 205, no. 1 (2009): 143-74. For a collection of amateur photographs, see *Die nackte Republik*.

61 See, for example, Christian Härtel and Petra Kabus, eds., *Das Westpaket. Geschenk-sendung, keine Handelsware* (Berlin, 2000).

62 Werner Habermehl and Kurt Starke, *Sexualität in*

der DDR (n.p., 1990), no pagination.

63 Günter Rössler, interviewed in Kolano, *Nackter Osten*, 52; Backmann, “Als die Bilderwelten zusammenstürzten,” n.p.

expect an edition to sell out within weeks. The Erotic Library took the concept of erotica as a luxury good to new extremes. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classics such as *The Adventures of Fanny Hill* were to be published in tiny volumes, opulently bound, and aimed at bibliophiles. The motivation for this was more economic than cultural; in fact, the idea had come from the printing works rather than the publisher's editorial staff.⁶⁴ The head of the publishing house also admitted that the possibilities of the lucrative export market (and the resulting hard currency) had proved influential in the decision to produce the series.⁶⁵ Crucially, though, these publications would also be available to East German consumers. The Ministry of Culture and the Central Committee quickly acquiesced, and the series went into production.⁶⁶ Not only did the high prices of these books (around 95 marks) promise a hefty profit for the publishing house; they were also designed to keep their controversial content away from the general reader. Thus, it was possible to publish much more explicit material than in a mass-market paperback.

But despite the sound financial arguments for the series, it still had to be justified in cultural terms, both to maintain Kiepenheuer's image as a serious literary publisher and to satisfy the demands of the East German censorship system. Publishers' usual tactic was to stress a manuscript's historical, literary, and cultural value, and to refute any suggestion that a book might be published for its erotic content alone. Nerciat's *The Devil in the Flesh*, a romp through the bedchambers of the *ancien régime*, was praised for its critique of pre-revolutionary society. This book, its publisher was at pains to point out, "should not be seen as the facile sexual fantasies of an aging man," but rather as a valuable eyewitness account of life at the court of Louis XV.⁶⁷ Chorier's *The Dialogues of Aloisia Sigea*, a tale of sixteenth-century Italian courtesans, chastity belts, and male prostitutes, had no such political value. The reader's report admitted that it "verged on the pornographic," and that it would be disingenuous to attribute anti-clerical intent to the sex scenes between priests and noble ladies. What did justify publication, however, was Chorier's rich and subtle use of language.⁶⁸

Yet even publishers themselves were not always convinced by such justifications. Roland Links, the head of Kiepenheuer, admitted in a letter to the Ministry of Culture in 1988 that members of his editorial staff had expressed serious reservations about the series, doubts that he himself shared. He could not honestly say that any

64 BAArch DR1/3704a, 480.

65 BAArch DR1/3884a, 457.

66 BAArch DR1/3884a, 453-56.

67 BAArch DR1/3885a, 460.

68 BAArch DR1/3884a, 459, 460.

of the books in the series were “great literature,” and he conceded that he had “not yet found an oracle” that would tell him “exactly where the boundary between literature and pornography” lay. Links balked at the suggestion that *Josefine Mutzenbacher*, the next book in the series, should be printed in an edition of 15,000, and felt that it was unwise to include it in the Erotic Library at all.⁶⁹ Subtitled “The Life Story of a Viennese Whore,” *Josefine Mutzenbacher* was unusually explicit. Its anonymous author, the publishers surmised, must have aimed to include every variant of sexual activity. However, they concluded queasily, even then there was “a limit to the number of human orifices, as well as the combinations of the sexes.”⁷⁰ Links suggested a much smaller edition of 5,000 and a retail price of 160 marks to restrict potential purchasers.⁷¹ By the time the publisher officially sought permission to print, the price had been set at 200 marks, almost one-third of the average monthly white-collar wage.⁷²

Links’s agonizing about *Josefine Mutzenbacher* neatly illustrates the economic pressures within the state socialist economy in the 1980s. It also demonstrates how keenly publishers like Links felt the gap between official rhetoric and economic necessity. However much they attempted to claim that they were producing a specifically socialist erotica—literary and aimed at the connoisseur—there was no getting around the fact that their motivation was primarily financial. Pricing potential purchasers out of the market was unusually elitist: East Germany prided itself on its reputation as a “land of reading” (*Leseland*), where literature was available to all. But even heavily subsidized publishing houses were expected to run one or two profitable sidelines. Links himself admitted that Kiepenheuer’s erotic ventures had been “an excellent breadwinner.”⁷³ Nevertheless, the profit motive would not have justified mass editions of pornography. State-owned enterprises were more dependent on the approval of their superior organizations—“the charity of the bureaucracy”—than the market.⁷⁴ *Josefine Mutzenbacher*, as Links recognized, bordered on the unacceptably explicit. The only possible way to justify the work was to package it as a luxury good, stress its literary credentials, and keep circulation low. Setting the price high was supposed to limit its potential audience to bibliophiles and collectors. At the same time, the luxurious nature of the good, and the fact that such publications were in short supply, meant that a market was guaranteed, whatever the price. In fact, the extent to which such pricing policies put the Erotic Library out of the

69 BArch DR1/3704a, 480-81.

70 BArch DR1/3704a, 475.

71 BArch DR1/3704a, 480-81.

72 BArch DR1/3704a, 374. In 1988, the average monthly net wage of a worker was 899 marks, and that of a white-collar worker without a degree 688 marks. Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 159.

73 BArch DR1/3704a, 480.

74 Kornai, *The Socialist System*, 265.

ordinary citizen's reach is questionable. Due to the lack of desirable consumer goods and the low prices for everyday items, most East Germans saved considerable amounts of money. The small number published was likely to have proved a greater obstacle.

What, then, was luxurious about erotica? In economic terms, it was certainly expensive. In the case of the Erotic Library, the consumer bore the cost, but other products, notably *Das Magazin*, were heavily subsidized. Like all other newspapers and magazines, it was classified as a staple of socialist cultural production, which should be made available to the workers at an affordable price, and its cover price of one mark was never raised. This strategy proved counterproductive, however, as the extra cost for each copy made it difficult for the regime to justify broader circulation, with the result that consumer demand far outstripped supply. *Das Magazin* was continually oversubscribed, celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 1974 under the tongue-in-cheek motto: "In Short Supply for Twenty Years" [*Zwanzig Jahre Mangelware*].⁷⁵ Readers complained that the only way to get a subscription was to inherit one—or marry a postal worker.⁷⁶

Aesthetically, erotica had an air of luxury. Both *Das Magazin* and the Erotic Library enjoyed distinctive and unusual looks: *Das Magazin* boasted colorful covers, dreamily photographed nudes, and "handwritten" headlines, and the Erotic Library sported a diminutive size, gilt-embossed titles, and fancy endpapers. While the Erotic Library was deliberately targeted at bibliophiles, *Das Magazin* proved surprisingly collectible, too. Treasured copies were passed from hand to hand and eventually bound into volumes for future reference. Readers reported using the covers to wallpaper their homes,⁷⁷ and one man wrote, "I collect the nudes; my wife collects the recipes."⁷⁸ They experienced both Klemke's cover art for *Das Magazin* and nude photographs as a welcome relief from the dominant trends of socialist visual culture and the ever-present leitmotifs of school, factory, and collective farm.

Ideologically, erotica never really shook off its associations with the West, as *The Derailment* mischievously demonstrated. More than that, it made no reference to the world of work, politics, sport, or education. The lack of adornment, jewelry, or elaborate hairstyles (stressed by photographers and photographic manuals as crucial to the success of a nude photo) meant that nudes in *Das Magazin* appeared classless, a world away from the everyday politics of East German life. Most unusually for an East German cultural product, erotica

⁷⁵ *Das Magazin*, 1/1974, 4.

⁷⁶ *Das Magazin* web site, "Leserpost zum Jubiläum," March 2004; <http://www.dasmagazin.de/content/forum/lesermeinungen.php>.

⁷⁷ *Das Magazin*, 7/1962, 2.

⁷⁸ *Das Magazin*, 5/1961, 2.

did not make ideological demands on readers or viewers, allowing them a rare opportunity to throw off the political yoke. This space for personal fantasy and escapism may have formed part of its appeal. Unlike the pinups in conventional men's magazines, the nudes in *Das Magazin* and elsewhere were aimed at a mixed mainstream audience, and there is evidence to suggest that readers of both sexes enjoyed looking at the monthly nude.⁷⁹ The outdoor setting created an implicit narrative based on good weather, leisure, and heterosexual sensuality. The idealized girl next door could act as an object of fantasy for both men and women. For the male viewer, the nude was a potential partner—young, and a little bashful. But the female observer could also see herself as the alluring object of desire.⁸⁰

Sexually, erotica made the altogether luxurious assumption that the primary purpose of sex was pleasure, not reproduction. It is interesting that the predominant theme of East German erotica was of surrender rather than domination. Even male sexual surrender was repeatedly thematized on the cover of *Das Magazin*: on the July 1972 issue, a tiny frogman sits in the palm of a monumental, topless blonde, imploring her to kiss him.⁸¹ Later that year, a cover showed a man slumped in bed, clearly sexually spent, as his statuesque partner jubilantly claims victory.⁸² However, although it was possible for Klemke to draw male sexual subordination, it was represented rarely if at all in photography. To the intense frustration of *Das Magazin's* female readership, male nudes were in short supply. The inclusion of a black male nude in the June 1954 edition raised hopes, yet the next male nude did not appear until February 1975, despite dogged lobbying on the letters page.⁸³ Even then, readers reacted with a mix of delight and disappointment as the model's hand coyly concealed his groin. Seven readers spoke for many more when they versified on the letters page:

Dear Magazin,
 Showing a man
 Without his full span
 Is really rather unfair
 If you expect the masses to stare,
 We seven Saxons hope and pray:
 Next time take the hand away!⁸⁴

But even such heartfelt appeals fell on deaf ears. The male nude remained a rarity, even as the female nude, propelled by the consumerism

79 See, for example, the letter from an "avid reader" (*eifrige Leserin*) from Berlin, complaining that the nude photograph in the previous issue did not show enough of the model's figure. *Das Magazin*, 11/1968, 3.

80 On female identification with nude photographs, see Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London, 1985), 41.

81 *Das Magazin*, 7/1972. See <http://www.dasmagazin.de/1972/titelbilder.html/#>.

82 *Das Magazin*, 11/1972. See the same link as note 81.

83 *Das Magazin*, 2/1975, 20.

84 *Das Magazin*, 4/1975, 3. "Liebes Magazin, zeigst du den Mann/Nicht mit allem Drum und Dran,/kannst Du ihn auch weglassen,/so interessiert er nicht die Massen!/Wir sieben Sachsen hoffen froh und munter:/Im nächsten Heft ist die Hand herunter!"

and increasing prosperity of the mid- to late-1960s, spread beyond the niche of *Das Magazin* to other publications. Photographers and publishers clearly felt the male nude was inappropriate and unnecessary. The female subjects of nude photography were unmistakably passive objects of sexual fantasy. Male nudes rarely existed because they were difficult to fit into the photographic conventions of the nude: passive, sexualized, in thrall to the camera and the spectator. What was possible on Klemke's covers was not possible in the more literal world of the photograph.

For all the regime's rhetoric about gender equality, this world of leisure and pleasure, so self-evidently secondary to the realities of work and politics, was inhabited only by women. One only has to mentally substitute a male for a female model to realize how unthinkable it would have been to portray men in this context. Here the naked body was female, beautiful, heterosexual, and apparently apolitical. With their conservative gender politics, denial of class divisions, and unspoiled rural settings, mainstream nudes were curiously divorced from both the reality and the rhetoric of East German public life. So while these photographs may have been utopian, they were not progressive. It is difficult to agree with Dagmar Herzog that

these photographs were remarkably tame compared with representations in the West and generally lacked the lascivious look and the nonaverage bombshell bodies so prevalent in Western pornography. Meanwhile the heterosexual male anxieties that both funded and were fostered by the pornography typically available in the West were not provoked in the same way in the East.⁸⁵

The presence of body hair and the natural settings should not lead one to assume that these were gender neutral or positive images of women. If anything, East German erotica was fundamentally conservative, a reaction against a society in which women made up an unprecedented percentage of the workforce and had a high degree of economic freedom.

Ultimately, the place of luxury goods in a socialist society was ambiguous: were they a necessary evil to keep the population happy, or a means of raising revenue, or could they contribute to the building of socialism? Thus, erotica fulfilled a number of often contradictory functions: as a crowd-pleasing strategy in heavily subsidized publications

⁸⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005), 205.

like *Das Magazin*, as a source of hard currency on the export market, as a profitable sideline for publishers, and as a means of projecting a pleasurable, even luxurious, image of life under socialism. But as in other areas of consumption, it was unclear whether East German producers were supposed to emulate the West or to provide an alternative.

Thinking about sex was equally muddled. Attitudes towards sexuality became increasingly laissez-faire in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁶

In part, this was an attempt to project an image of East Germany as a modern progressive state and to differentiate it positively from its more prosperous Western neighbor. But while openness about sexuality came to be seen as an integral part of a young, healthy socialist society, it was still overwhelmingly conceived of in terms of heterosexual reproduction. Sex manuals and sex surveys focused on penetrative sex within a monogamous relationship. Attitudes towards homosexuality ranged from grudging tolerance at best to Stasi surveillance at worst. But sex, despite its worthy associations with family, health, and happiness, also became increasingly commodified along Western lines as the regime struggled to keep the population happy. The mixed messages about sex and gender inherent in East German erotica raised uncomfortable questions about the true values of socialist society. Publishers, photographers, and journalists clearly felt a need to compete with the West, but both economic limitations and ideological scruples made it impossible for them to achieve either the production values or the variety of Western erotica and pornography.

After the collapse of communism, the fate of these two publications diverged. As the books of the Erotic Library had, unsurprisingly, done little to shore up the ailing socialist economy or to assuage the grievances of the population, they quickly lost their market. Now they are only available through specialist dealers and Internet auctions, where they are sought for their rarity value rather than their erotic charge. *Das Magazin*, on the other hand, was one of relatively few East German cultural products to survive the transition to capitalism. After German reunification, it experienced a short-lived and unhappy eroticization at the hands of a West German publishing house. Circulation plummeted, but a swift return to its tried and tested mixture of features, short stories, surveys, and the obligatory nude has resulted in a loyal, mostly Eastern, readership.⁸⁷

Das Magazin showed that it was possible to promote the values of the regime and win a devoted readership. Luxury did not have to be

86 Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, ch. 5.

87 A partial explanation for *Das Magazin*'s continued popularity is nostalgia for the vanished sexual culture of East Germany, particularly its ease with nudity. See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 216-19, and McLellan, "State Socialist Bodies."

expensive, and it did not have to imitate the West. In fact, readers experienced *Das Magazin* as luxurious because it promoted the idea that socialist leisure time could be pleasurable and sensual, too. The success of *Das Magazin*'s publishing formula under capitalism demonstrated a potential which the East German regime, in its haste to emulate the West, had consistently failed to grasp: that of a genuine alternative to Western patterns of consumption. It was not the scarcity of material goods that sealed the fate of the East German regime but its failure to provide a unique style of living.

* This article is reprinted with the publisher's permission from David Crowley and Susan Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010). My research was generously funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the British Academy Small Grants Fund, and the University of Bristol Research Fund.

Josie McLellan is Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Bristol. Her book, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in September 2011.

BOOM BOXES AND BACKWARD CAPS: HIP-HOP CULTURE IN THE GDR

Leonard Schmeding

Like many Western youth and pop cultures before, hip-hop¹ found the loopholes in the Iron Curtain and, starting in 1983, also spread throughout the German Democratic Republic. When West German radio stations like the Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), the Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR2), and the Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR2) played rap music in their charts, East German youngsters tuned in and were turned on by the sounds they could hear. Similarly, breakdance performances of the *Rock Steady Crew* and the *New York City Breakers* on West German TV shows hosted by Thomas Gottschalk and Hans-Joachim Fuchsberger helped many later b-boys pick up their first moves. They enthusiastically took part in the cultural transfer of rap, b-boying, DJing, and graffiti into the GDR, creating their own world of hip-hop east of the Iron Curtain. When Harry Belafonte's movie *Beat Street* (1983) premiered in the GDR on June 14, 1985, only a year after its release in France, Great Britain, and West Germany, the hip-hop scene there really started to flourish.

Various state actors, including state and party representatives, functionaries of the party youth organization, Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth), as well as the police and officers of the GDR Ministry for State Security (MfS, or Stasi), reacted with alarm to this new youth cultural phenomenon and attempted to bring it under their control. They relied on three strategies: First, the police and MfS enforced a ban on any unauthorized public hip-hop performances—b-boying and rapping on the streets, in passages, and in underpasses were strictly prohibited, just as scrawling graffiti was; any youth apprehended in the act would face interrogation at the police station. Second, to draw so-called hip-hop heads away from the street, the cultural bureaucracy resorted to a well-tried system of licensing and rating for hip-hop culture that allowed b-boys, rappers, and DJs (though not graffiti artists) to practice in sponsored training facilities and officially earn money for public performances. Yet although this appeared to be a system to support and encourage the practice of hip-hop, it also aimed to control and curb it. Every artist had to apply to rating and licensing commissions, which disciplined and mainstreamed hip-hop culture

¹ In 1973, African-American and Puerto Rican teenagers from the New York City South Bronx invented new styles of dancing, making music, and painting on walls. Their practices of b-boying (a.k.a. breakdance), spray-painting graffiti, DJing, and MCing (a.k.a. rapping), which came to be known as hip-hop, emerged as youth cultural expressions to function as both pastime activities and powerful voices of protest against racism, oppression, and exploitation. Starting in 1979, with the release of the first rap record called *Rapper's Delight* by the Sugarhill Gang, hip-hop gained more and more presence in the media all over the United States. While this transition from youth culture to popular culture tremendously changed hip-hop, it also set it into motion to spread throughout the world. Thus, only ten years after its birth, one could listen to British artists spinning their records and rapping their rhymes, watch young b-boys dancing in France, and look at walls covered with graffiti in Munich, Hamburg, and Dortmund. For research and accounts regarding the birth of hip-hop, see, e.g., Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH, 1994); David Toop, *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (Boston, 1984); Grandmaster Flash and David Ritz, *The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash: My Life, My Beats* (New York, 2008).

for the socialist cultural landscape by imposing the categories of *Volkskunst* (Folk Art) and *Unterhaltungskunst* (Entertainment) on it. Third, the state attempted to replace the American cultural products needed for performing hip-hop that were entering the GDR despite all border controls with things made in the GDR. For example, the state-owned Amiga record label released the album *Elektrik Boogie* (1985) by composer Arnold Fritzsich in the hope that b-boys and DJs would breakdance and mix with this socialist music. In this way, the functionaries in charge of cultural policies wanted to counteract the American commodities' appeal to East German youth.²

These three strategies designed to bind youth to socialism and control their practice of breakdance, rap, DJing, and graffiti essentially backfired. The hip-hop heads, after tuning in and being turned on by these new forms of cultural expression, dropped out of the state-sanctioned hip-hop scene and continued to develop their own. While they lived within the state they felt was confining them, they broke out of it on an imaginary level every time they rocked their bodies, spun their records, spat their rhymes, and spray-painted walls. In the following, I will illustrate how the performance of GDR hip-hop culture functioned as a form of imaginary and temporary *Republikflucht*, or flight from the GDR. I will focus on the consumption and production of rap music and on hip-hop fashion in the GDR, paying attention not only to the material objects involved in these processes, but also to the economic constraints state socialism imposed on them.

Why things matter

Hip-hop is material culture—now probably more than ever. But even in its beginnings, hip-hop relied on things: spray cans, vinyl records, turntables, shoes, boom boxes, etc. As I will show, hip-hop artists play with many items of material culture, appropriating them for their own purposes and not as the items were originally intended to be used—e.g., using a microphone not to amplify the human voice but to create percussive sounds (known as beatboxing); or playing a vinyl record on two turntables, mixing and cutting back and forth, and scratching the vinyl with the needle to make noisy and zipping sounds.

Materials transport certain ideas. Or, to be more precise, the way people use things creates meaning. In hip-hop, these appropriating practices assign new meanings to existing things. A baseball cap turned backwards may signify its bearer's protest against the fashion industry that prescribes how to wear it; a microphone used

² This introduction provides merely a brief overview of hip-hop history in the GDR. For a more detailed argument, see Leonard Schmieding, "Of Windmills, Headspins, and Powermoves: Hip-hop in the GDR 1983-1990," in *Ambivalent Americanizations. Popular and Consumer Culture in Central and Eastern Europe*, American Studies. A Monograph Series 165, ed. Sebastian M. Herrmann, Katja Kanzler, Anne Koenen, Zoë Kusmierz, and Leonard Schmieding (Heidelberg, 2008), 65-85.

for beatboxing may stand for hip-hop's creativity to be able to make something with almost nothing—a mouth and a microphone connected to a sound system substitutes for a whole (and expensive) drum set; and spray cans may be regarded as the postmodern artist's set of brushes, with walls and trains embodying the new easels.

Over time, things become laden with layers of meaning according to their different uses. These layers of meaning constitute a thing's "aura," as Walter Benjamin puts it, which, when we account for its history, makes it close to us as a tangible object, but also far away from us since it refers to things that happened in its past.³ It is not primarily the present use value of things that is of importance for historical analysis but rather their symbolic value—what they stand for, or, in Krzysztof Pomian's words, the "invisible" they point to.⁴ Apart from the written texts that serve as sources for historians, things form important complementary testimonies about historical actors' practices through the meanings with which they were invested and the specific uses they had.

In the cultural transfers of hip-hop in the GDR, things perceived as "American"—and with them, the ideas and ideals of this African-American expressive culture—found their way into socialism. However, some things that were required to create hip-hop in the US and other Western countries did not make it through the tightly sealed border, the Iron Curtain. Only their images and use values were broadcast, and this transfer of ideas sufficed as an incentive for East German teenagers to start copying, recreating, and appropriating hip-hop with their own means. Given this transcultural context, how should we categorize both the commodities they consumed from the West and the material objects they made themselves in the East? Are they socialist (whatever that means), German, American? Socialist, because they were appropriated under conditions of a socialist state and party set; typically German, because they were transferred in the peculiar dynamics of the German-German relationship during the Cold War; or American, because the objects, ideas, and practices stemmed from across the Atlantic? To what extent are these Germans' things not so German after all, and, conversely, to what extent have American things been made German in this process of cultural transfer?

Boom boxes—Consuming and producing rap music

In order to analyze hip-hop music in East Germany, it is necessary to explain how this music is typically produced and consumed,

³ See Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 13-16.

⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums: Vom Sammeln* (Berlin, 2001), 40-45.

including the technique of sampling and the dynamic this generates for creating a new musical aesthetic. Only against this backdrop can the specific circumstances and ramifications of mixing music as a hip-hop DJ in the GDR become apparent.

In hip-hop culture, sampling is of vital importance. Malte Pelleter and Steffen Lepa suggest three categories for analyzing this mode of producing new songs by taking from old ones. First, they define sampling as a musical tool that DJs use to appropriate and control any kind of sound, which enables them to create new musical works. The turntable, which the first hip-hop DJs utilized as an acoustic editing table, and later the digital sampler, became the instruments for making music. In this creative process, new sound patterns keep repeating as loops, and composing as well as improvising have increasingly become a matter of programming the instrument. Musical production has thus come to be primarily engineered. Together with the widespread availability of technical equipment and sounds, at least in the West, sampling has effected a radical change in the production of music, empowering teenagers and adolescents who cannot afford or do not want an education in music schools to appropriate and recreate their highly heteronomous everyday soundscapes.⁵

Second, since the aesthetics of sampling are based on material culture, the technique always refers to the meanings of the prefabricated pieces of music it utilizes. Hip-hop artists thus allude to contexts and connotations in specific musical genres. With their contribution, they demonstrate their knowledge of and their location in the history of popular culture.⁶ What is more, these intertextual relations emphasize the history of reception of the sampled musical items or “citations.” The different individual meanings of the new piece of music arise in the process of communication between the composer/producer of hip-hop and the listeners. In Russell A. Potter’s words, “Hip-hop *sites* itself as a product of African-American urban cultures at the same time it *cites* the sonic past in order to construct a radical present.”⁷

By playing with past and present, sampling contributes to hip-hop’s communicative memory. The knowledge about the birth of hip-hop in the South Bronx and the pioneering work of DJs like Africa Bambaataa, Kool DJ Herc, and Grandmaster Flash or rappers like MC Melle Mel, b-boys like Crazy Legs, and graffiti artists like Taki 183 functions as a part of the genre’s foundational remembrance.

5 See Malte Pelleter and Steffen Lepa, “‘Sampling’ als kulturelle Praxis des HipHop,” in *HipHop meets Academia. Globale Spuren eines lokalen Kulturphänomens*, ed. Karin Bock, Stefan Meier, and Gunter Süß (Bielefeld, 2007), 203-206.

6 Ibid.

7 Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, 1995), 53 (emphasis original).

The mode of biographical remembrance, i.e., individuals referring to “the early days” and emphasizing how important this period was in their own lives, whether they were producers or fans of hip-hop culture, complements this.⁸ In the dynamics of its global cultural transfers over the last thirty years, hip-hop has been enriched by countless narratives of emulation, appropriation, and recreation in its host countries. With its worldwide spread, it has created a global communicative memory with reference to the founding myth in NYC, its local pendants, and personal stories of coming-of-age through hip-hop.

Third, sampling explicitly underlines the historicity and materiality of a particular musical piece. Hip-hop artists thus undermine the idea of autonomous art. They technically reproduce art in the Benjaminian sense—that is, so that the reproduction is permitted “to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, [thus] reactivat[ing] the object reproduced”;⁹ they deconstruct the artistic aura in its “here and now,” its “authenticity,” and its “historical testimony.” DJs playfully interact with their audience in order to achieve originality, which always oscillates between past and present, and which ideally creates local and/or historical continuities.¹⁰

The unique technique of sampling presented GDR hip-hop DJs with special problems, just as the music had an impact there particular to the situation of the socialist nation. To begin with, they did not know how DJing functioned but only what hip-hop sounded like and that its aesthetics differed radically from the rock and pop music they knew. In order to develop DJing skills, then, they needed someone to show them. The institutions that offered seminars on becoming *Schallplattenunterhalter* (SPUs, vinyl record entertainers) were unsuitable, because they aimed to train good socialist entertainers rather than to keep up with the newest American musical trends. In this situation, *Beat Street* turned out to be the perfect tutor, as the movie depicts several DJs practicing their craft with the turntables, mixers, and tapes. Inspired by this insight into the necessary techniques, aspiring DJs in the East watched the movie repeatedly in order to master them.

Once they knew how to make the music, would-be hip-hop DJs were confronted with a lack of the needed material goods. Mixers, turntables, and especially records were hard to obtain despite the high demand, so live mixing was impossible. Consequently, DJs resorted

8 See Lothar Mikos, “Interpolation and ‘Sampling’: Kulturelles Gedächtnis und Intertextualität im HipHop,” in *HipHop: Globale Kultur—Lokale Praktiken*, ed. Jannis Androutsopoulos (Bielefeld, 2003), 69-71.

9 Benjamin, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>. See also the German original cited in note 3 above, 13.

10 See Lepa & Pelleter, 208-209.

to creative solutions: If they could procure records, they copied them on tape and then used the recordings for their mixes. They also followed the music charts of Western radio programs, eager to record the newest rap release or even funk and soul tunes straight from the radio to use as the raw material for their DJ sessions.¹¹ They also got their music through contacts. For example, the GDR hip-hop artist TJ Big Blaster Electric Boogie from Dresden received a large variety of vinyl recordings from a friend who was a music journalist; officially he was supposed to write reviews of these albums, but unofficially he used them to make music. Thus, he was able to sample from Bootsie Collins, George Clinton, Frank Zappa, Pink Floyd, Just Ice, and Erik B & Rakim. For his parties in the Dresden youth club Scheune (Barn), he put together taped sets of music that he would sometimes even rap to.¹² Another DJ from Dresden, DJ Gambler, mixed his songs with a stereo Tesla tape recorder and a mono cassette recorder, recording the different tracks back-and-forth until he was satisfied with the result.¹³ Everywhere in the GDR, DJs, rappers, and b-boys played tapes on their boom boxes, exchanging their newest acquisitions when they gathered for dancing and rapping. Most of these boom boxes were made in the GDR (e.g., the skr 700), but some were imported from the West (e.g., the Sharp GF-777).

If, as noted above, the turntable serves as a time machine in hip-hop music, then GDR DJs also played with time, which likewise meant playing with history. However, this was a subversive act in the eyes of the communist party that controlled the country, the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei, SED). As the SED needed to have history at its command to legitimize its power, no one outside the party was to possess, direct, or define it. The party enacted all public discourse about the past, superimposing narratives like the antifascist founding myth of socialist Germany on individual memories and the traditions of families, milieus, and other social groups. By the 1980s, the prescribed historical narrative, which was intended to include most of the population and convince them of socialism's superiority, had been transformed into a farce that left large groups feeling ignored and no longer able to identify with it. As a result, the SED kept losing its legitimacy.¹⁴ GDR teenagers' identification with the history of hip-hop, which also helped to remove them from the official cultural memory, seems to be symptomatic of the SED's deterioration of power.

Sampling also helped hip-hop audiences transcend space, and thus, temporarily escape the confines of the GDR: By mixing and

11 Starting in January 1988, the East German youth radio station DT 64 broadcast the black music program "Vibrationen" hosted by Lutz Schramm, who played American rap productions and thus sanctioned the recording of rap music from the radio.

12 Interview with TJ Big Blaster Electric Boogie, February 29, 2008.

13 Interview with DJ Gambler, April 5, 2008.

14 See Martin Sabrow, "Einleitung. Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktriningesellschaft," in *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs: Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 2000), 17-18.

sampling the records and radio songs they received from the West, DJs and their audiences created moments of leaving the GDR for the US. They tuned in to the world of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Run DMC, and Public Enemy, feeling more “at home” with American hip-hop than in the FDJ youth clubs where hip-hop parties usually took place. As the declining SED ultimately lost its power and the GDR was reunified with the West, hip-hop heads’ warping through time and space turned out not to have been so short-lived after all.

In addition, sampling undermined GDR policies of socialist cultural production, which specified the percentage of songs that so-called record entertainers or SPUs were allowed to play from outside the GDR. With the sampling technique of a hip-hop DJ, who plays his turntables and tape recorders like an instrument, such quotas were impossible to regulate. In other words, the SPU was an entertainer and the hip-hop DJ a musician. The authorities could no more tell these DJs what to sample than they could tell a pianist which keys to press, a guitarist which strings to pick, or a trumpeter which valves to open. Young hip-hop DJs were thus able to sample prefabricated music from the United States. Ironically, the officially registered, licensed, and rated DJs among them performed as artists in the “Folklore/Folk Art” category, garnering respect for their contribution to the socialist cultural landscape.

Beat Street

Beat Street boosted the evolution and spread of hip-hop culture in the GDR not only by amplifying teenage interest and involvement in breakdancing, DJing, rapping, and graffiti, but also by depicting “America” in a way the cultural authorities found acceptable. In this respect, the film served as a point of reference for official appropriations of hip-hop culture. *Beat Street* made it onto the GDR screens, as the following analysis will show, because of the meanings officials assigned to it and the way they connected hip-hop discourse to official socialist discourse on black culture. However, teenage hip-hop heads did not interpret the film as the officials had intended.

The Ministry of Culture’s head office for film approved *Beat Street* for public screening on March 14, 1985.¹⁵ As *Body Rock* and *Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo* were also considered but only *Beat Street* received approval,¹⁶ it must have had a special appeal to the functionaries

15 Ministerrat der DDR, MfK, HV-Film, Abt. Filmzulassung, “Protokoll 27/85,” March 14, 1985, 1, BArch, DR-IZ, 5689.

16 See Ministerium für Kultur, Hauptverwaltung Film, Abteilung Filmzulassung, “Zulassung ausländischer Spielfilme 1. Halbjahr 1985,” July 10, 1985, 3, BArch, DR 1, 4717.

who selected it. Regardless of their reasons—whether they hoped to influence the way teenagers practiced hip-hop in the GDR or they sensed that *Beat Street* could draw an audience large enough to make a profit—these functionaries acted swiftly to approve it. Not only did they seize the very first opportunity to watch the movie—a delegation traveled to West Berlin to attend its West German premiere on July 27, 1984—but they also approved it in a mere eleven months, a very short period compared to the approval process for other Hollywood productions and even other socialist ones.¹⁷

Their interpretation of *Beat Street* explained why this American movie should be screened in the GDR. Siegrid Geerds of the Progress film distribution company that handled the approval process stressed the aspects of community, of living in the ghetto, and the role hip-hop plays for the protagonists in coping with their everyday lives in summarizing the film. This emphasis, which naturally resulted from a particular interpretation of the movie, paved the way for a favorable review. The company recommended the film be approved for its social criticism, its staging of music and dance, and its attractiveness to a young audience:

The film impressively shows where the roots of this new wave called “hip-hop”—of breakdance, graffiti paintings, and rap music—are to be found. The film achieves its authentic character especially through its many original locations, which put on display the forbidding and disintegrating street blocks where the black populations live, and by casting the main characters with youngsters who live in this milieu, who really do breakdance in the subway, on the streets, etc. Music and dance connect and determine the plot of the film, they are not presented as mere show, because as in the movie, they are in the center of the youngsters’ lives. The boys are usually out of work after leaving school, so that dance, music, and painting help them to pass the time.¹⁸

Geerds furthermore tied *Beat Street*’s achievements to its producer Harry Belafonte, whom she lauded for his involvement in the peace movement and black emancipation. She regarded Belafonte as a warranty that the movie constituted “not only an effectively staged musical, but also an unmasking narrative about the life of youngsters in the black ghetto of New York.”¹⁹ Years later, she recounted

17 Ministerrat der DDR, MfK, HV-Film, Abt. Filmzulassung, “Vorläufiges Protokoll 238/84,” August 15, 1984, BAArch, DR-IZ, 5689b.

18 Ministerrat der DDR, MfK, HV-Film, Abt. Filmzulassung, “Protokoll 27/85,” 3.

19 *Ibid.*, 3.

that “with its story and way of depicting it, [*Beat Street*] matched well with the image we wanted to convey of America.”²⁰ The cultural authorities’ interpretive goal, then, the way they wanted youth in the GDR to watch and understand the film, was geared towards raising consciousness for America as a bad place because of its capitalist exploitation, which created ghettos and discriminated against African Americans.

A brief glance at the way GDR teenagers perceived *Beat Street* already reveals the wide gap between their youth-cultural understanding of the film as expressed in their appropriations of hip-hop as represented in the movie and the official goal. For them, *Beat Street* performed authentic hip-hop culture. For one thing, it enabled them to meet real hip-hop stars, their role models, albeit on screen: Kool DJ Herc, DJ Jazzy Jeff, Afrika Bambaataa, the New York City Breakers, and the Rock Steady Crew. For another, they were able to identify with the everyday teenagers in the movie and observe them “doing their thing” in hip-hop: Kenny the DJ and MC, Lee the b-boy, and Ramon the graffiti-artist. What GDR youth had previously pieced together on the basis of media snippets from the West, they could now view “live,” in color, and basically anytime they wanted for only fifty East German Pfennig. *Beat Street* appealed to them because of its style rather than any political message in its story. Or, as the b-boys themselves recalled about their viewing experience: “What these teenagers had in the Bronx and did with it was a lot more stylish, worlds cooler than anything we *Osthäckchen* had.”²¹

In their self-fashioning, GDR b-boys, rappers, MCs, and graffiti artists emulated *Beat Street* in far more ways than just their clothing styles. They also performed their visions of New York in their graffiti and the additional accessories of hip-hop attire in the movie, like boom boxes and briefcases. Posing in front of run-down houses in central Dessau, for instance, they invoked “a whiff of New York,” meaning a ghetto in the Bronx (Fig. 1). Equating the Bronx with inner cities in the GDR, though, challenged the sanctioned marketing of socialist cities, which held them up as paragons of modern housing for everyone and relied on spreading immaculate images of progressive urban socialist achievements.

Beat Street embodied a projection screen for both groups of actors involved in hip-hop: the practicing youth and the controlling representatives of state and party. For those in the hip-hop scene, the movie boasted a repertoire of styles, techniques, and messages

20 Bonus Material, in Nico Raschick, *Here We Come*, DVD, Dokumentarfilm (Alive-Vertrieb und Marketing/DVD, 2007), Heading “Beat Street,” 20:45-21:00.

21 Bonus Material, in *ibid.*, Heading “Beat Street,” 05:48-06:14. “Osthäckchen” is a self-denigrating term for people from the East; here, the b-boy uses it ironically.

that made sense in their lives east of the Iron Curtain. The b-boys and graffiti artists took hip-hop to the streets, eagerly learned the moves, beats, rhymes, and graffiti, and generally made sure they

had a good time. By living *Beat Street*, they located themselves in the Bronx, albeit only in their imagination. For the authorities, however, these appropriations generated uncertainty since they were ambivalent: On the one hand, they regarded “doing” hip-hop as an act of international solidarity with the oppressed black



Figure 1. “A whiff of New York.” Photo: Archiv Nico Raschick/*Here We Come*.

population in the US, whom civil rights activist Belafonte portrayed in the movie. On the other hand, partying on the streets, sporting brand names, and writing graffiti on the walls belonged to forms of adolescent behavior they despised and found unacceptable.

“It’s spray-time now”—A graffiti incident in Rostock

In April 1987, an unofficial informant told his officer at the State Security office in Rostock about graffiti on the wall of a school gym. He relayed that a former classmate, Jörg Pribbenow, and his breakdance crew had spray-painted “It’s spray-time now” (in English) and had taken photographs of their graffiti, which had been painted over the next day. A study group at the informant’s school, the seven-member crew called the “Crazy street-breaker[s]” (also in English) had previously taken part in spray-painting other graffiti including the English words “Tako,” “Show,” and “Crazy.” While this information in itself did not seem to bother the MfS, the added revelation that one member had boasted of spraying the slogan “Russians out of Afghanistan” on the same spot aroused suspicion and triggered a secret police operation to observe Pribbenow. The report continued:

Whether the two slogans had been created at the same time the source could not determine. The youth continued

that “the Stasi” had visited him at home because of this slogan. Very confidently, he said: “They can’t prove anything.”²²

The file documenting this operation provides useful insight into how the Stasi in Rostock dealt with hip-hop culture, and especially with graffiti. I argue that the secret police overzealously focused on finding evidence for matching their criteria of “politically negative,” leading them to look for the obvious rather than the implied. In this context, the operation reveals the State Security’s paranoia and the suspicions it entertained towards the cultural practice of hip-hop. Instead of coming closer to finding out how hip-hop functioned as a youth culture, that is, outside the grip of mass organizations, the agency solely concerned itself with assessing the extent to which hip-hoppers inside the regime expressed acceptable socialist morals and values. From this limited policing perspective, the MfS failed to detect any real life relevance in hip-hop graffiti and therefore presented it as non-political. The incident involved two graffiti: two “daubs” consisting of “slogans,” in police language, one of which was clearly politically charged, with the Soviet-Afghan war raging at the time. Thus, it is not clear whether MfS officials aimed to prosecute graffiti artists in general or whether they were only interested in pursuing perpetrators of threats against state authority or defamations of the Soviet Union. In other words, did the Stasi, at least in Rostock, consider hip-hop-graffiti “politically-negative,” the phrase they applied to people and practices that they went after?

In the beginning, the two Stasi captains responsible for the operation²³ treated the incident as a whole and did not distinguish between the two graffiti. They categorized them as “agitation against the state” and “public vilification of the state order,” following §106 and §220 of the GDR penal code, using this to propose monitoring the whole breakdance crew, and specifically Jörg Pribenow, its founder and leader. Based on background information they gathered from existing sources, they deemed him harmless: As someone interested in politics, he had been an “agitator in his class” (i.e., he was entrusted by his teachers with organizing and overseeing political activities for his class) and a “member of the FDJ group administration,” which was why they could not see any “negative moral conduct.”²⁴ His seeming impeccability notwithstanding, the two captains devised a tight-knit plan of investigative operations.

22 MfS, BVfS Rostock KD Hafen, “OPK ‘Spray,’” April 9, 1987, 8, BStU, BVfS Rostock, AOPK 3256/87, Band I, BStU. Translation mine.

23 They worked in the harbor office of the MfS-Rostock. As the file of the unofficial agent “Rainer Müller” shows, this office kept a particularly close eye on sailors as it expected them to attempt to flee the GDR. See MfS, BVfS Rostock KD Hafen, “GMS ‘Rainer Müller,’” January 9, 1986, 41-87, BStU.

24 KD Hafen, “OPK ‘Spray,’” 5.

The “operative plan” was geared towards substantiating the suspicion following the penal code and consisted of three parts: using unofficial informants, checking official sources and networks, and applying standard procedures of secret police reconnaissance. The first measure, titled “offensive assignment of unofficial forces,” called for espionage by two unofficial informants, “Rainer Müller” and “Herbert Kleinfeld.” Müller, roughly the same age as Pribbenow, was to reinforce his contact with him by arranging to have the breakdance crew officially paint two more graffiti in Rostock youth clubs and by attending (break)dance events; he was also to find out where and when the crew practiced. Primarily, though, the MfS officials wanted him to search for evidence such as spray cans, paint, and brushes. Kleinfeld, a close relative of Pribbenow’s belonging to his parents’ generation, was to investigate Pribbenow’s social network to identify the breakdancer who spray-painted the graffiti with the “politically negative” content. Kleinfeld was also to perform a secret search of his room to gather evidence. While finding and securing evidence belonged to the more traditional operations, Rainer Müller’s strategy was new: It was specifically designed to embed youth cultural practices in officially sanctioned activities, e.g., spray-painting graffiti in youth clubs, and thus winning the trust of Pribbenow’s breakdance crew (as well as controlling what they actually painted).²⁵ The second and third parts were to be carried out by MfS officials and involved intercepting Pribbenow’s mail, wiretapping his phone, and collecting data from the police networks in Rostock, including the municipal criminal investigation department of the People’s Police and the higher-ranking regional office of the MfS.²⁶ Accessing these additional resources, then, meant that the MfS had to coordinate several sections in different levels of the chain of command with the People’s Police.

Neither the unofficial informants nor the official operations yielded any evidence the MfS could use to proceed with the case. The only new information was provided by the regional MfS bureau concerned with youth culture (section XX), which added that Rainer Müller was wrong about the place of the graffiti: “It is not the gymnasium at the *Alte-Warnemünder-Chaussee* but the complex of stores and public houses at the *Kusnezow-Ring* in Rostock-Schmarl.”²⁷ Since interrogating the alleged sprayer named JV had not clarified the case, the two MfS captains of the harbor section responsible for the investigation chose to have an “operative conversation” with Pribbenow in the hope that he, as the head of the breakdance crew, could best aid them.

25 See *ibid.*, 11-12.

26 See *ibid.*, 12-13.

27 *Ibid.*, 51.

The “operative conversation” turned out to be an eight-hour interrogation of Pribbenow.²⁸ The two MfS officials pursued three goals: First, they wanted to find out whether or not JV had spray-painted the “politically negative” slogan. Second, they intended to infer from the outcome whether b-boys in general, at least in Rostock, were involved in spray-painting these slogans. Third, in case the b-boys and especially Pribbenow turned out to be harmless, they aimed to recruit him as an unofficial informant for “the operative control of breakdance groups and their members in Rostock.”²⁹ They based their approach on their previously formulated hypothesis that either JV was alone guilty of “public vilification of the state order” (note that the “agitation against the state” charge had been dropped), or in collaboration with other b-boys, or that he just wanted attention and therefore used his knowledge of the locations of such “politically negative” graffiti to falsely imply that he had been the perpetrator.³⁰

Pribbenow confirmed that he and his breakdance crew “Crazy Seven” (as they were called then) had spray-painted “It’s spray-time now” in October 1986, and that JV had been involved in that, but he denied any knowledge of the “Russians out of Afghanistan” graffiti. In the eyes of the MfS officials, the b-boys of “Crazy Seven” did not spray-paint any “politically negative” slogans, nor did they have any “negative-decadent” attitudes. Hence, the interrogators concluded that JV “had used knowledge gained from interrogations by MfS officials to make his claims about daubs in Rostock.”³¹ In other words, one MfS investigation about graffiti in Rostock had led to another one, which allowed the captains of the MfS harbor bureau to conclude that the first had triggered the second without any new “public vilification of the state order” or “agitation against the state” actually taking place.

This outcome means that the MfS, by its very own paranoid and overzealous activities, created more work for itself. More importantly, however, it shows that the MfS in Rostock did not perceive hip-hop graffiti as anything to condemn. It neither regarded “It’s spray-time now” nor the previous graffiti “Tako,” “Show,” and “Crazy,” which officials found out about in the investigation, as dangerous. Nevertheless, they maintained their distrust and expressed their wish to have breakdancing and graffiti controlled in the future. They scheduled more meetings with Pribbenow in order to recruit him as an unofficial informant for this purpose. As the file does not

28 See *ibid.*, 56.

29 *Ibid.*, 53. With this intent, the MfS especially focused on monitoring the individuals working in the “State Combine Maritime Traffic and Port Management” (VE Kombinat Seeverkehr und Hafenwirtschaft) in Rostock, who were widely suspected of attempting to flee the GDR.

30 See *ibid.*, 52.

31 *Ibid.*, 57.

include any further information on this, however, it seems safe to assume that the two captains did not follow through with this plan. In closing the “Spray” case on December 17, 1987, they probably also abandoned the idea of recruiting Pribbenow.³²

While the Stasi tactics in this investigation were typical in many ways, they also conveyed a lack of organization and interconnect- edness between the agencies responsible for controlling hip-hop. It was common to ask teenagers as youth culture insiders to spy on their peers. These unofficial agents were indispensable not so much for their inside knowledge, monitoring, and controlling of their friends and acquaintances but as decoders of the information they conveyed. They interpreted signification processes of youth culture that the Stasi could not understand, embodying the Stasi’s only direct way to bridge the generational gap between officials and those they spied upon. However, there were a number of other indirect published sources of information on youth cultures, including the magazine *Melodie & Rhythmus*, the supplement *Informationen* to the journal *Unterhaltungskunst*, and the FDJ magazine *Junges Leben*, all of which the Rostock MfS surprisingly did not bother to consult. Even more astonishingly, it neglected to contact the FDJ, the Stadtkulturkabinett (municipal bureau for culture), or the Bezirkskommission für Unterhaltungskunst (regional commis- sion for entertainment culture), any and all of which would have had useful information on Jörg Pribbenow and “Crazy Seven.”³³ Most unusual, however, seems to be the regional bureau’s failure to connect with other regional bureaus of the MfS, such as the municipal bureau in Riesa. In November 1984, this bureau had already sought guidance from the regional bureau in Dresden concerning breakdancing on the streets, but it did not receive any at the time.³⁴ Since bureaus did not communicate their experiences in dealing with hip-hop culture with one another, the MfS had to rely excessively on its unofficial informants.

The MfS, however, did not succeed in recruiting hip-hop heads as unofficial informants.³⁵ The MfS officials in Rostock, therefore, had to rely on the interrogation with Pribbenow to progress in the case. As they had not read publications on breakdancing, rap, and graffiti, they had to make sense of Pribbenow’s statements without any further context. Maybe that is why they explained graffiti as the “installation of fantasy pictures on public space such as walls of houses, subway trains, etc. with spray-paint.”³⁶ Since fantasy, in

32 See *ibid.*, 57-63. According to Jörg Pribbenow, the MfS never started the recruiting process, and he never worked as an unofficial informant for it.

33 Jörg Pribbenow gave me access to his private collection, which holds extensive material bearing witness to his correspondence with all of the above organizations (and more). Also, I researched several files about “Crazy Seven” in the city archive in Rostock—the Archiv der Hanse- stadt Rostock—in its holdings 2.1.1, 2.1.14, and 2.1.15, which all testify to his communication with the mass organizations.

34 See Oberst Tzschentschler, “Information über Break- Dance im Kreis Riesa,” January 4, 1985, BStU, MfS, BV Dres- den, KD Riesa, 13039-2, Blatt 490.

35 I draw this conclusion from my archival research in the BStU. For a failed recruitment effort, see my case study on TJ Big Blaster Electric Boogie in Dresden, 1989: Schmieding, “Of Windmills, Headspins, and Powermoves: Hiphop in the GDR 1983-1990,” 65-85.

36 KD Hafen, “OPK ‘Spray,’” 62.

their eyes, did not refer to real life in the GDR, they judged it to be politically harmless, if not even a political. But the graffiti shown in Figure 2—in a photograph taken by the young artists—is, in my reading, more than just fantasy.

The photo shows three members of Crazy Seven in front of their graffiti. It belongs to a series of pictures, which were all taken immediately after the graffiti was created, and in which the b-boys/artists strike various hip-hop poses. Merely taking



the photographs is part of a hip-hop practice to affirm artistic presence: Regardless of whether the graffiti on the wall—as an ephemeral work of art—would be witnessed by an audience, the photo testified to Crazy Seven’s iconographic inscription into public space.

Figure 2. “It’s spray-time now.” Photograph courtesy of Jörg Pribbenow.

The graffiti reads “Spray Time” (rather than “It’s spray-time now,” as the MfS described it) in two shades of red, with the word “crazy” painted underneath it in green and both phrases outlined in black.³⁷ On the right side, the boys painted “rap” in a three-dimensional style. There are two so-called characters in the picture—a spray can and a person, both in green, black, and white. While the spray can emits “Spray Time” in a cloud of aerosol, the person thinks “crazy” in a cartoon-like thought balloon. The graffiti not only features common hip-hop motifs—the spray can, “rap”—thus taking part in a transatlantic imaginary world of hip-hop culture; it also comments on itself with its spatial organization of styles, colors, and characters. In reacting to “Spray Time” (emblazoned twice as large as the little thought balloon) with “crazy,” the artists formulated a frequent verdict of graffiti. At the same time, though, the word refers to the name of the group, ironically deconstructing the comment and pointing to the artistic creators. Crazy Seven thus played with graffiti and its notions in public space—a game that only worked because graffiti is rooted in society and not in fantasy.

37 “Spray time” was painted in bubble-style, i.e., with round and soft lines, whereas “crazy” can be categorized as a block-buster style, with linear and hard lines. See http://www.graffitiverein.de/Forschung/FS_Forschung.html.

The MfS's misinterpretation of the graffiti, to be sure, was rooted in the fact that the officers never saw the graffiti or photographs of it. This explains not only their incorrect rendering of the slogan "spray time" as "It's spray-time now," but also their ignorance of the different styles and characters typical of hip-hop graffiti. While I still do not know what the "Russians out of Afghanistan" graffiti looked like, I feel it is safe to assume that it was not hip-hop graffiti, but merely a monochrome slogan written on the wall. With its easily perceptible political message, this scribble posed a clear state threat to the MfS. "Spray time," in contrast, although it depicted the very act of spray-painting, turned out to be undecipherable to the organization and was therefore dismissed as mere fantasy. In hip-hop culture, then, it seems that teenagers could communicate subtle political messages in playful, encrypted content—a practice also to be found in hip-hop self-fashioning.

Backward caps—Hip-hop self-fashioning GDR style

People consume fashion to create identity, express themselves, and put their bodies on display. Young people are particularly prone to use fashion signifiers in striving for difference, otherness, and authenticity. They freely recombine these signifiers according to their personal tastes and desires to create new meanings with and for the clothes they wear. In this respect, the adolescent consumption of fashion opposes any kind of uniformity, whether it takes the form of politically motivated dress codes or arises from a lack of supply.³⁸ Mass-produced fashion challenges teenagers' efforts to fashion themselves because it is paradoxically based on the principle of uniformity. When ready-to-wear clothing arrived in the eighteenth century, following directly on the manufacture of military uniforms, uniformity came to be built automatically into every serially produced—and thus generally affordable—garment. Teenagers therefore strive to achieve a balance in their self-fashioning: On the one hand, they struggle to individualize their fashion, and, on the other, they seek to secure their peer group's respect by making only minor modifications. Ironically, their outfits often resemble uniforms after all.³⁹

Pop cultural stars, in general, and the way they dress, in specific, serve as role models for adolescents, who emulate these styles to gain acceptance in their peer group. Instead of designer clothing at exorbitant prices, teenagers utilize so-called samples (cheap fakes of expensive designs), which the fashion industry readily supplies,

38 See Heike Jenß, "Original-Kopie. Selbstmodellierung in Serienkleidung," in *Coolhunters. Jugendkulturen zwischen Medien und Markt*, ed. Klaus Neumann-Braun and Birgit Richard (Frankfurt, 2005), 21-34, 21.

39 *Ibid.*, 22-26.

to copy their favorite celebrity's outward appearance. They also make use of retro productions, which simulate the vintage garments of past fashion periods. The historical fashion iconography they thus access, and which they have never experienced in the original, is new and alien to them. By familiarizing themselves with these visual fashion codes, they learn to deconstruct them and tease their parents' generation with their provocative potential.⁴⁰ Both these methods of individualizing fashion could be found in modified form among East German teenagers.



Figure 3. "Sporting Fashion" warm-up suit, manufactured by the VEB Textilwerke 'Clara Zetkin' Burgstadt, 1984. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011.

Hip-hop fashion in the GDR differed in its consumption and, more importantly, in its production from that of the West. On the one hand, ideological limitations determined its conditions: Although the SED did not explicitly dictate any dress codes, one clearly could not run around sporting Western brands without fear of consequences. In schools, workplaces, and mass organizations like the FDJ, fashion consumption was controlled and, if necessary, penalized. However, youths could sometimes get away with wearing a Puma t-shirt, a Mickey Mouse sweater, or Levi's jeans because enforcement of the unwritten code was often lax. On the other hand, the GDR economy



Figure 4. "Boogie Wave." Photo: Archiv Nico Raschick/Here We Come.

40 Ibid., 26-29.

could not meet hip-hoppers demand for items they required for their self-fashioning as b-boys, rappers, DJs, and graffiti artists. While

capitalist fashion production already had built-in uniformity, the available variety of garments for recombining, altering, and individualizing under socialism was even smaller, presenting a particular challenge to these teenagers. Some had contacts to the West who helped them to acquire the fashion commodities they desired, but those who did not turned to producing their clothing themselves.



Figure 5. "Best Puma."
Photo: Archiv Nico Raschick/*Here We Come*.

Take, for example, the Berlin b-boy crew Boogie Wave (Fig. 4). Most dancers' attire had to fulfill several purposes: "Well, the gear had to be comfortable, flexible, and suitable for b-boying. Most of all, though, it had to look cool," they recalled. It had to be uniform enough to identify them as a crew, but individual enough to mark them as special among the other b-boys. Disappointed by the limited supply of such attire in the GDR—"There was not much, when you looked for sports gear, only a few elastic track suits, that was it"—they resorted to sewing their clothing themselves.⁴¹ B-boy Tom Nixx, who was completing an apprenticeship to become a tailor at the time, designed their b-boy outfits, usually making one uniform out of the raw material of two regular track suits. A suit like the one shown in Figure 3 could thus have served as the material basis for making Boogie Wave's fashionable appearance in the hip-hop scene.

In their peer group and as individuals, GDR hip-hop heads utilized visual codes for constructing and displaying their identity and belonging. As with the music, they modeled themselves on *Beat Street*: as Puma had supplied the fashion for the movie in a product-placement effort, it was Puma that they wanted to wear. And so they did—adding the Puma logo onto their shirts and pants by painting (with a toothbrush)⁴² and airbrushing (with a hair-spraying device),⁴³ or ironing on Puma patches bought in Hungary or Czechoslovakia (see Fig. 5).

In addition to Puma and other brands like Nike and adidas, Dresden graffiti artist Simo explains, "the hoodie, baseball cap, and

41 Bonus Material, in Raschick, *Here We Come*, Heading "Klamotten Selbermachen."

42 Interview with DJ Opossum, November 15, 2005.

43 Interview with Jörg Pribbenow, October 24, 2008.

leather sneakers were the three most important things” in hip-hop fashion.⁴⁴ Various pictures illustrate how widespread these “DIY” clothing aesthetics had become. Emulating *Beat Street* also involved showing off self-made outfits “ghetto-style,” i.e., in the ruins of houses, which created an atmosphere with a “whiff of New York.”⁴⁵ This practice, together with the backpiece graffiti on the hoodies and jackets (see Fig. 6), which often pictured the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, or other NYC landmarks, suggests that the identity and sense of belonging these young hip-hopers expressed was located in their vision of America.

They equated the Bronx with the GDR—a confining ghetto that they could only escape through hip-hop culture.⁴⁶ Like consuming and producing hip-hop music, then, hip-hop self-fashioning (also with graffiti-clothes) functioned as a means of breaking out of the GDR on an imaginary level.

Conclusion

The things young hip-hop heads in the GDR produced and consumed in their practices of rapping, DJing, b-boying, and graffiti bear witness to their creativity and desire to build their own environment. All three—graffiti, music, and fashion—served as vehicles for overcoming the confining GDR on an imaginary level. The meanings they assigned to the objects they designed and used testify that they lived, despite all material and ideological constraints, in their vision of America.

Furthermore, the things they used defy categorization as distinctly socialist, German, or American. As they transcended national



Figure 6. “Back to the Bronx.” Photo: Archiv Nico Raschick/*Here We Come*.

44 See Bonus Material, in Raschick, *Here We Come*, Heading “Klamotten Selbermachen.”

45 See private collection Beatschmidt.

46 Interview with DJ Opossum, November 15, 2005.

borders and even managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain, they can only be analyzed in a transnational framework. The culture of hip-hop, which feeds on material culture and plays with images, soundscapes, and words, set these things in motion when it left the Bronx and became globally known. Puma t-shirts, adidas sneakers, vinyl records, boom boxes and backward caps— all these commodities and fashion items became cultural mobilizers as they traveled around the world. With the ideas, ideals, and ideologies people attributed to them, they allowed for highly ambivalent resonances, including condemning capitalism, provoking socialist authorities, expressing international solidarity, or celebrating a good party and having a good time.

Without these things and the stories they attest to, the transnational cultural history of the Cold War era would be missing an integral repository. After all, this era saw the rise of postindustrial societies East and West of the Iron Curtain, and with that the rise of modern consumer cultures, either capitalist or socialist. As a cultural historian of the everyday, I include these commodities in my research. I am thankful to museums, and especially to the museums and professional collectors who also preserve the pieces from the margins. They allow me to give voice to their experiences—to let the deaccessioned speak.

Leonard Schmieding recently finished a dissertation on hip-hop culture in the GDR. He has also worked on various projects devoted to putting East Germany on display in exhibitions and museums.

SHIFTING NARRATIVES OF THINGS: THE EAST/WEST GERMAN GARDEN EGG CHAIR

Jana Scholze

Today, more than twenty years since German reunification—and even longer since the fall of the Berlin Wall—Germans in both the eastern and western parts of Germany still struggle to come to terms with the history of the Cold War and the country's former, divided state. As people who spent the greater part of their lives in either East or West Germany rapidly pass away, age, or displace memories of this era with events of the intervening period, historians have the urgent task of supporting this endeavor: they must collect eyewitness testimony and preserve the material culture of these former nations and times—and especially of the former GDR—along with written documentation and other types of historical evidence, before it slips away.

In this project of capturing the past, museums and their curators play an important part. They not only work to preserve historical evidence, but they also convey specific interpretations of certain aspects of history, usually to a broader public, thus forming a central component in public debates about that history. To be sure, museums deal with a wide range of types of historical evidence, but they are perhaps the most significant sites for the preservation of material culture. Whereas eyewitness testimony is subject to the changing condition of personal memory, material objects appear to be rather solid and immutable windows onto the past. Yet, in order to view that past through them, curators must follow the trails that objects leave behind—in the case of furniture, for example, via documentation of the design process, production specifications, and contexts of use and display; but also via personal memories, such as reports by or interviews with designers, production managers, and owners of the piece. Interviews, in particular, are naturally as subject to problems of memory as eyewitness testimony. Nonetheless, the objects as such remain unchanged, presenting a cultural palimpsest of the attitudes toward and uses of the objects. The rather complex trails objects leave can not only uncover detailed accounts of the history of the object but can help us to better understand the social, cultural, economic, and political context of their time.

This historical tracing is precisely what I did with one particular object—the East/West German Garden Egg Chair—which I helped to accession in my curatorial work at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for the exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*. Touted by the lead curators, Jane Pavitt and David Crowley, as “the first exhibition to explore international developments in modern art, design, architecture and film in the context of the Cold War,”¹ the project brought together over three hundred items presenting art and design from the immediate postwar period through the space race and the youthful rebellions in Paris and Prague in 1968. One significant theme—and the one that the Garden Egg Chair was a part of—was the application of Cold War technologies in architecture and design to create visions of the future, inspired by the space race, that captured the sense of ideological rivalry between East and West.

I was born in the German Democratic Republic, studied in Leipzig and Berlin, and also worked for various German collections before taking up my current position at the Victoria and Albert Museum, working specifically on German design history. This background, combined with the experience of working on this groundbreaking exhibition—and the task of accessioning the Garden Egg Chair, in particular—gave me insight into the unique problems that curators “collecting the GDR” face, and how these problems differ inside and outside of Germany. Moreover, the exhibition highlighted how important material objects are in piecing together history. As the specific story of the Garden Egg Chair will show, objects help us to uncover new, quality information that provides for more nuanced and integrated historical narratives and helps people—and in this case, especially Germans—understand the past.

Shifting narratives of history

One reason Germans in particular find it so difficult to come to terms with the Cold War past is that, for a long time, only conflicting and fairly simplistic master narratives of the period existed. Citizens raised in the GDR were presented with a historical master narrative authorized by the ruling Socialist Unity Party, or SED. Embodied by the Old Communists who had led an antifascist struggle under Hitler, the “official memory” of the GDR, which the SED encouraged Old Communists to write in their memoirs, was intended to legitimize the regime.² At the same time, critical alternative and unofficial voices—primarily oral rather than written—contested this master

1 See the exhibition description on the Victoria and Albert Museum web site: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/microsites/cold-war-modern/>.

2 See Catherine Epstein, “The Production of ‘Official Memory’ in East Germany: Old Communists and the Dilemmas of Memoir-Writing,” *Central European History* 32, no. 2 (1999): 181-201, 181.

narrative in the East. After reunification, a crucial question that both Germans and international historians have had to address, then, is which versions of history to accept and convey. Is there any truth to the master narrative, and what details of the “official memory” should not be dismissed? Are the unofficial voices trustworthy? To what extent? Of course, the answers to these questions are rather complex and can often only be found for particular cases.

In the West, on the other hand, the master narrative revolved—and to a great extent still does—around the superiority of the Western way of doing things and the corruption and bankruptcy of the communist system. In the long process of reunification, East Germans, especially, often assumed that Western historians would be more trustworthy and impartial in their judgments of East German history because of their “proper” education. Others, however, doubted whether Western scholars would be able to interpret the East German past precisely because they lacked direct experience of it.

These conflicting narratives and the mutual distrust of East and West have made telling the history of the GDR within Germany, as well as the collection and integration of East German material culture, a particularly daunting task. Not surprisingly, a great many historians and curators within Germany shied away from dealing with the GDR. A lot of East German curators, in particular, feared the necessity of changing the interpretations of their collections as it required them to be actively engaged in the writing of history, with all the uncertainties that entails. Their anxiety also pertained to collecting material from their immediate surroundings; many of them preferred to concentrate on objects that had not been available to them before the opening of the Iron Curtain. West German curators, on the other hand, held off from collecting Eastern material for lack of knowledge. In retrospect, it seems that a period of slow rapprochement was necessary for Germans in the eastern and western parts of the reunified country to develop insight, trust, and respect for one another so that an exchange of knowledge and an honest accounting of the history of both sides could be presented among historians, in history books, and in museum collections. Indeed, it seems that this situation is, at last, beginning to change, as both museums and academic organizations begin to address issues of East and West Germany from a more comprehensive, inclusive perspective. One example of such a perspective with regard to design history is the new annual conference of the Gesellschaft



Figure 1. Garden Egg Chair, designed by Peter Ghyzcy, 1968, manufactured by VEB Synthesewerk-Schwarzheide, East Germany, 1971. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011. The chair is white with a bright blue cushion.

für deutsche Designgeschichte. The first annual conference (after the inaugural one the year before) held in the spring of 2009 in Hanover under the heading “Deutsche Dinge. Design im doppelten Deutschland von 1949 bis 1989”³ did not focus on the place of design within each political system but rather introduced the design history of the two countries in parallel. With East/West comparison of approaches, designs, and products central to all discussions, participants came to see that, at least concerning design, the two Germanys had more commonalities than differences, which emanated from shared traditions and cross-border connections between designers. To be sure, there were politically driven attempts to foster opposite approaches to design that manifested themselves in differing iconographies with certain stylistic indicators. Yet these seemed to peter out early on, and primarily impacted design in the foundation years of both German

countries, after which the two design histories followed largely parallel courses.

Such a shift in perspective has been a long time in coming, however, and in the twenty years prior to this development, the “mental blocks” to dealing with and collecting GDR material culture in Germany left their mark. One consequence of the practical and ideological hurdles to “collecting the GDR” in Germany was that it has made the subject more attractive for non-German collectors. A small number of museums outside the country took up the task, integrating East German and East European material into their collections. The Wende Museum in Los Angeles is one of these.⁴ However *The Cold War Modern* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, though not specifically dedicated to the history of the GDR, represents another such international effort, as it looked at Eastern European design, including that of East Germany, alongside Western design history.

What Justinian Jampol, the founder of the Wende Museum, as well as the curators of the Victoria and Albert exhibition and numerous German museum curators who have collected GDR material culture, despite their initial hesitation, understand is the urgency of the

3 For a conference report, see <http://www.gfdg.org/archiv/tagungen/tagung2009/bericht>.

4 See Justinian Jampol's contribution in this same volume on the advantages that this museum's site in Los Angeles brings to the issue of interpreting GDR history, 123.

situation. The end of the GDR and the Eastern Bloc, as such, presents a unique and special circumstance with the concomitant duty to collect as much of this disappearing material culture as possible before it is gone. By the mid-1990s, people were renovating their homes and offices in the former East at an unprecedented pace, with massive amounts of GDR material culture winding up in the trash heap. But these international and daring German curators have followed the advice that Günter Höhne, the last editor of the East German design magazine *form und zweck* and the self-proclaimed “ehrenamtlicher Erbpfleger” (honorary keeper of the heritage) of East German design, gave me in an interview: “solange weggeschmissen wird, aufheben...”⁵ Only if we save these objects will we be able to trace their stories, using them to probe and question the master narratives.

A cultural palimpsest: The East/West German Garden Egg Chair

The particular story of my accessioning the Garden Egg Chair (Fig . 2) for the Victoria and Albert Museum and the *Cold War Modern* exhibition, in particular, is fascinating on three levels. First of all, it illustrates some of the fundamental issues that curators “collecting the GDR” have to deal with. Second, the different stories—the oral histories of the chair’s designer, the general director of the production company, and the production manager—enable the chair to act as a cultural palimpsest wherein we can see the changing perspectives on the chair over time and across East and West. Third, as the historical evidence surrounding the chair will show us, it discloses hitherto unseen interrelationships between East and West Germany in production and manufacturing. Looking at one object in this way helps to underscore not only the shifting nature of historical narratives discussed above, but also the importance of preserving GDR material culture for its historical value.

Pictured below is the very Garden Egg Chair that the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired for the *Cold War Modern* exhibition. Designed by Peter Ghyczy in 1967/68, it is a bright, plastic-lacquered, low-slung chair made of polyurethane. Its UFO (or literally egg-shaped) form, portability, and suitability for informal lounging make it very characteristic of the period, reflecting the progressive, utopian visions prominent in contemporary designs. In recent years, the Garden Egg Chair has become a collector’s item that

5 “As long as things are being thrown away, keep them.” Günter Höhne, phone interview by Jana Scholze, December 9, 2010.

can frequently be found at antique sales and auctions. This new popularity even prompted Ghyczy to put a revised version into production.

Yet these new versions and the sheer numbers of Garden Egg Chairs available point to the first fundamental issue curators have to address when they seek to obtain an object for a collection: authenticity. How do we know that a particular object is an original or early example (which museums generally prefer) rather than a later imitation? As knock-off reproductions of the chair have been found as far afield as China, Thailand, and South America, what information can we use to verify its genuineness? In essence, one has to rely on whatever information is available and also seek out information in an act of piecing things together through archival materials and oral history, using consistency of information and discernment to evaluate the reliability of the information thus gathered. In this particular case, as there was not a lot of information about the Garden Egg Chair available, I looked where the chairs originated.



Figure 2. Tangerine and yellow version of the Garden Egg Chair from the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Cold War Modern* exhibition.

The first contact was the designer Peter Ghyczy himself. Surprisingly, given the chair's popularity, hardly any scholar had contacted or spoken to him about it before.⁶ Ghyczy was a Hungarian émigré to West Germany who, after studying architecture, became the chief designer at the polyurethane factory Elastogran GmbH in Lemförde, West Germany, where he was responsible for developing a design department for polyurethane products. Contacting him proved to be beneficial: He was, foremost, able to point us to an early example of the chair with an interesting provenance. The daughter of Gottfried Reuter, who owned Elastogran GmbH, possessed the particular chair we selected, having used it by a swimming pool. Moreover, Ghyczy provided us with a lot of pertinent information that prompted further searching, ultimately leading us to uncover new trails to follow. The Garden Egg Chair was one of his very first designs, which he had developed to inspire clients and stimulate ideas as the material, polyurethane, was new and its possible applications were seemingly limitless. He also told us that the Lemförde factory

⁶ I conducted this interview together with Jane Pavitt.

only produced a couple of prototypes of the chair in testing the new material. The lacquering process required substantial manual labor, making mass production too expensive for West Germany.⁷ According to Ghyczy, the company then transferred mass production to East Germany because “production was much cheaper there.” This comment prompted us to continue our research as this form of outsourcing did not officially exist between the two German countries. Ghyczy himself knew very little about the East German history of the chair. He had never been in touch with the East German production company, VEB Synthesewerk-Schwarzheide, nor had the company contacted him despite changing the design for its own production needs. In addition, Ghyczy never sold the rights for his design, nor was he ever paid any royalties from East Germany, and he only had a vague idea of how many chairs were ever produced.

Although our particular chair turned out to be a prototype from the Lemförde factory, we did not immediately know this but had to dig deeper, following the trail to East Germany. From the start, one of the motivations for the research was the confusing provenance of Garden Egg Chairs as some were marked as being manufactured in Lemförde (former West Germany), whereas others were marked as being made in Schwarzheide (former East Germany). When we first examined the new acquisition, we found a label indicating a quality inspection that read “In Ordnung, Abt. Qk, 9. Juni 1971.”⁸ At first, we assumed that this confirmation of quality referred to East German rather than West German production, but this assumption proved to be incorrect. This points to a second, basic issue curators have to deal with: discovering information about an item’s provenance and collating as many details about it, including who produced and used it and in what circumstances. An appointment at the archive of the former East German company led to an interview with the former general director of the VEB Synthesewerk-Schwarzheide, Dr. Hans-Joachim Jeschke.⁹ Together with documents in the company archive, Jeschke revealed the exact dates of production, which began later in East Germany than this label indicated. Accordingly, the chair was one of the few prototypes made in Lemförde, and the label marked the end of a certain testing process there.

Jeschke’s story about the East German production of the Garden Egg Chair not only enlightened us with regard to our chair’s provenance but also highlighted the depth of interaction between East and West Germany in the process. Jeschke explained that the

7 Peter Ghyczy, interview by Jane Pavitt and Jana Scholze, Swalmen, January 26, 2007.

8 This translates as “OK, Quality Control Section, June 9, 1971.”

9 Hans-Joachim Jeschke, interview by Jana Scholze, Schwarzheide (in the archives of the former VEB Synthesewerk, now owned by BASF), April 11, 2007.

GDR was quite interested in producing polyurethane in the late 1960s but, like other Eastern Bloc countries, lacked expertise in

the field. However, in the short period between the late 1960s and early 1970s, East Germany had begun to exchange expertise and technology with the West, establishing contacts with relevant West German companies. In early 1970, the VEB Synthesewerk bought manufacturing technology from Elastogran, for which it was to manufac-



Figure 3. "Ebba Ghyczy Carlborg," future daughter-in-law of Peter Ghyczy, in the garden of her grandmother's Josef Frank home in the south of Sweden, 1985. Photo by Björn Carlborg, used courtesy of Felix Ghyczy and Ebba Ghyczy.

ture 15,000 pieces of polyurethane furniture as part of the payment, including a substantial number of Garden Egg Chairs. In the autumn of 1973, Elastogran went bankrupt, so production continued solely for the East European market. But since Garden Egg Chairs were expensive both to make and sell, production was halted in 1975 after a total of about 14,000 chairs had been made. Reflecting on the production of the Garden Egg Chair, Jeschke concluded: "This furniture was just a fashion article and as such far too expensive with a sales price of 430 marks, comparable to a general salary...No one in the company knew the designer's name or was specifically interested in the chair."

While this last comment reflects the different, lower status of designers in the Eastern Bloc, where they mostly worked collectively (and anonymously) in bureaucratic design institutes,¹⁰ an interview with the production manager of the VEB Synthesewerk, Günter Dämmig, calls Jeschke's assertion into question.¹¹ Dämmig confirmed that he knew the designer's name, Peter Ghyczy, but had not been allowed any contact. In fact, he would have liked to contact him about production details when the design had to be slightly altered. Not only did Dämmig refute Jeschke's claim of the anonymity of the designer, but his perception of the chair and people's reactions to it was markedly different from Jeschke's. Far from

10 See Jane Pavett and David Crowley, "Introduction," in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, ed. idem (London, 2008), 1-25, 21.

11 Günter Dämmig, interview by Jana Scholze, Bernsdorf, April 8, 2009.

being indifferent to the chair, most VEB workers, Dämmig averred, were proud to be involved in its production because they regarded all production for the West as something special. Moreover, East German consumers, according to Dämmig, happily paid the high price for the chair as they construed getting one with ownership of a Western product. It was not necessarily the price but the limited space of their dwellings that restrained many from buying one, as only people with a house and/or yard had a suitable place for such a chair. What is remarkable is that the prestige conferred on this “Western” item persisted for two years of East German-only production after West German production ceased.

In an interesting side note, despite the differences in perception of the chair that the three interviewees presented, they did have one thing in common: one person dominated all three stories: Gottfried Reuter, a chemist with hundreds of patents to his name and the owner of the Elastogran company in Lemförde. Ghyczy even praised Reuter highly since our interview with him for his “visionary attitude” and the “total creative freedom” he gave Ghyczy and his crew in the design center at Lemförde in the BASF customer magazine *PUR*.¹² From the late 1960s to the 1980s, Reuter’s life appears to have been interwoven with the East in multifarious ways, not the least of which was the sale of parts of his Lemförde plant to the Schwarzheide facility.¹³ He landed in financial difficulties several times and was involved in a variety of scandals, finding a mysterious death in a hotel room in East Berlin in 1986, in the end.

The different perspectives on the chair that the three foregoing interviews by the chair’s designer, the general director of the production plant, and the production manager offer illuminate yet another problem that curators and historians alike face: the reliability of memory and perception in oral interviews. As we saw, three different people involved with the chair had different perceptions of it when they were interviewed: for Ghyczy, it was a progressive, modern design intended to inspire clients; for Jeschke it was an expensive fashion article he himself would never have bought and cared little for; and for Dämmig, it was, to be sure, a desirable product that he was proud to manufacture because of its Western associations. These differences arise from their different experiences and preferences, making it difficult for us to know which of their assertions are historically accurate. In addition, with more than thirty-five years having elapsed between the design and production of the chair and the interviews, it is possible

12 See “Ingenious: The PU Egg Chair of Peter Ghyczy,” interview with Peter Ghyczy, *PUR*, no. 18 (1/2010): 12-13, here 13, available online at http://www.polyurethanes.basf.de/pu/solutions/en/function/conversions/publish/content/group/News_und_Medien/Kundenmagazine/magazin_1_10_en.pdf. In addition to several colorful pictures of the Garden Egg Chair and the polyurethane design center where Ghyczy developed it, this article mentions the exemplar at the Victoria and Albert Museum to highlight the chair’s historical value (12).

13 See “Abgehört und eingebrochen: Konzerntöchter der BASF setzten auf eine Fachzeitschrift und ein Konkurrenzunternehmen Spitzel an,” *Spiegel*, May 3, 1976, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41252004.html>.

that their perceptions of the chair changed over time. Was it pure pragmatism and sales numbers that made Jeschke indifferent to the possible popularity of the chair in East and West? Did he see value in production for the Western market being motivation for the workers producing the chair? Was Dämmig only proud because of the association with the West or was he simply interested in design, or did his attitude possibly change because of inquiries in the early 1990s?

It is likely that their perceptions have changed because the attitudes of the general public toward the chair certainly shifted over time and from West to East. First of all, when it was initially produced, the chair, though an icon of progressive, utopian design, apparently failed to generate enough response in the West to make production viable, though we do not know exactly why the Western business failed. Was it because the chair was too expensive and mainly regarded as a fashion product? Was it known that the chair was produced in the East? In the East, on the other hand, it was precisely the perception of the chair as a Western product that made it attractive, though it was never commercially successful. Consequently, did production in both countries ultimately falter because of the chair's high price? Over time, too, the desirability of the chair shifted in both East and West. In 1990, when the first West German garden stores opened on eastern territory, East Germans discarded a large number of original Garden Egg Chairs in favor of new and cheaper West German versions. Apparently, the chair they had previously associated with the West was no longer Western enough in light of reunification, having been produced in the East long before that. Yet, just a few years later, Garden Egg Chairs became sought-after collector's items that fetch high prices at auctions and antique shops. Owners in East and West lucky enough to have them guard them carefully and place them in prime locations. It is worth mentioning that it was not nostalgia for the East that motivated this latest transformation in the chair's desirability but its inclusion as a "design icon" in the design history canon. The Eastern context seems to have played no role in this inclusion and, hence, no scholar had undertaken research into it despite the obviously conflicting provenance of the chair.

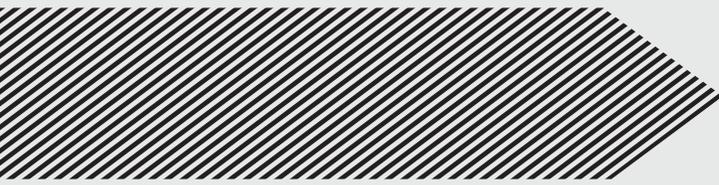
While we cannot necessarily know exactly what drove these shifting perceptions, they serve to highlight the unique interrelationship between East and West that the particular history of the East/

West Garden Egg Chair discloses. Was it an East German object, or a West German one? Or a German object at all? Designed in West Germany but by an émigré from the Eastern Bloc, the provenance does not absolutely determine this for us. Nor do the production or perception of the item. As we saw, prototypes were manufactured in West Germany, but it was mass-produced in East Germany, where East Germans desired it as a status symbol of Western consumption, even though production extended two years longer for the East German and not the West German market. And it is now a collector's item because it finally became what it aspired to become at its outset: a design icon of its time. The chair's history provides a tangible marker of East/West economic exchanges and a rare instance of outsourcing manufacturing from capitalist West Germany to the socialist East. Although this sort of outsourcing did not "officially" exist, the example of the Garden Egg Chair shows us that the "official" history, a product of the simplistic master narratives on either side, is not the only history and needs to be called into question.

In conclusion, the East/West German Garden Egg Chair can teach us a lot, underscoring the value of preserving material culture for deepening our understanding of history. The history of the object itself—the intricate entanglement of West and East German design, production, as well as perceptions of its provenance—exemplifies the complexity of fact that often hides behind the simple master narratives that interfere with people's ability to come to terms with historical changes. The process of accessioning the chair for the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design, 1945-1970* illustrates the issues of authenticity, provenance, and reliability of witness testimony that curators, like historians, struggle with in the face of a general lack of information. But the information we managed to gather, as well—the paper trails but especially the memories prompted by the presence of the chair itself—further highlights the ways that material culture can enrich historical understanding, particularly in acting as cultural palimpsests that can reveal a whole array of perceptions and interactions over the history of their production and use. Consequently, exhibitions like the one this chair was a part of, as well as museums devoted to East German history and culture, play an invaluable role in advancing historical knowledge by preserving and presenting material culture. It is to be hoped, especially, that exhibitions and museums like that of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the

Wende Museum in Los Angeles, by stepping outside the conflict zone of inter-German struggles to make sense of Germany's divided past, will help German curators of GDR material culture find fruitful and healing ways to interpret and present this history.

Jana Scholze is Curator of Modern Furniture and Product Design at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where she has worked on two major exhibitions, including *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (2008). Her special interest is in twentieth- and twenty-first-century design and contemporary museum practice, both subjects she has published on, including the book, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004).



The Politics of Memory and Display

DISTURBING THINGS: THE INTERPRETATION OF EAST GERMAN ARTWORK IN REUNIFIED GERMANY

Joel Segal

The Wende Museum in Los Angeles contains a number of medium-sized Lenin busts, which, back in the days of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), typically decorated the desks of party offices of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, SED), one of its many affiliated organizations, or the cupboards of loyal party members. Most of these follow the GDR mold, being mass-produced, plaster-cast, and covered with dark brown paint to resemble bronze, but one of them stands out, having been spray-painted pink and turquoise (Fig. 1). It is believed that the bust got its new flamboyant appearance during one of the demonstrations in Leipzig in October 1989 that helped pave the way for the fall of the Berlin Wall.

What is particularly interesting about the “Pink Lenin,” as it has come to be known, is its reversal of a common and omnipresent symbol. Nothing would have been easier than to destroy the bust in an act of anger and rebellion, yet the “artist” who altered the Lenin bust found a more creative solution in appropriating the symbol and radically redefining its meaning. Many of the protesters in Leipzig did not necessarily wish to overthrow communism and embrace the capitalist free market system; they wanted a radically reformed and democratized socialism “with a human face.” Accordingly, as this bust suggests, they did not need to destroy Lenin but just make him look a little bit more humane and cheerful.

This “fun fact” of the German Velvet Revolution seems to have a broader implication, however, for it shows how material objects can engender in us a deeper understanding of the nuances and ambiguities of history. The “Pink Lenin” does not exactly fit the picture that prevailed in the historical debates in Germany in the



Figure 1. *Vandalized (Pink) Lenin, 1965/1989. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011.*

early 1990s, which focused intently on the repressive character of the SED state, on the one hand, and the anti-communist resistance, on the other. That might even be one of the reasons why this pop art version of Lenin ended up in a Cold War museum in Los Angeles.

As this example shows, material objects, especially “things” with symbolic content like monuments and artworks, can force us to reconsider and complicate our sometimes overly generalized visions of the past in myriad ways. Here I will explore how they do so in the case of East Germany, which is especially promising in this regard as deeply ingrained Cold War positions strongly informed an often one-sided and politicized interpretation of history. I will argue that this interpretation did not sufficiently take into account the developments, ruptures, paradoxes, contingencies, and incongruities of lived history, nor the richness and variety of individual experience and agency. Moreover, I will suggest that “things” can play an important role in helping to define and subsequently diminish the gap between historical narrative and everyday experience. I will conclude with an analysis of the revaluation of street names and public monuments, as well as of the reception of East German artworks after 1989/90 as symbols of a politicized collective memory.

Historical narrative and truthfulness

It is commonplace to observe that history-writing is story-telling: it has a narrative structure, and this historical narrative is not history itself. This is not to say, however, that history-writing is just a form of literature as the two genres have different purposes. Whereas novelists may use historical evidence in creating stories, historians aim to make sense of historical evidence in a narrative structure that is formed by their interpretation of the facts. This structure, in turn, is consciously or unconsciously based on their personal outlook, life experiences, and moral convictions; in other words, they always construct the interpretation of historical facts—the causal nexus of a narrative—in their minds. Unless one believes that one’s interpretation of the past happens to be identical with the fundamental logic of human history itself, it is clear that no single historical narrative can claim to be “true” in any universal, objective sense.

At the same time, there are rigorous standards of quality in historical research—this is where the difference between literature and history becomes apparent. Whereas novelists might write historically valid and original works and historians might produce

studies of great literary skill, novelists will be judged primarily on their literary qualities; historians on their truthfulness regarding the available historical sources. Historians have the moral obligation to do justice to the relevant sources and use them respectfully, trying to reconstruct and understand their original meaning, as far as this is possible.

Looking at historical things in this light makes it clear how, as sources of our interpretation of the past, such things might become problematic or even disturbing. In 1801, the philosopher Hegel had defended his dissertation in which he claimed that our solar system necessarily contains seven planets, so that Herschel's discovery of Uranus in 1781 constituted the final contribution to our understanding of this system. Confronted in his doctoral defense with Giuseppe Piazzi's discovery of the new small planet Ceres (now defined as a dwarf planet, or planetoid) between the orbit of Mars and Jupiter that same year, Hegel allegedly responded, "So much worse for the facts." Apocryphal though this story may be, it well illustrates how facts can be disturbing when they fail to correspond to one's interpretation of reality.

A more complex and nuanced example from history- and art-history-writing shows how such interpretations stamp "history." Authors of historical and art historical reference books are confronted with the dual task of presenting facts and suggesting a coherence among them. Without their narrative structure, reference books would just be encyclopedias. A comparison of various examples immediately reveals that each one tells its own story, developing different criteria for the selection of facts or artworks derived from its overall interpretation. For instance, reference books published roughly between 1950 and 1980 tended to identify world (art) history with Western (art) history and to describe developments in terms of progress: the theory of modernity informed most historical reference books, whereas art historical theories from Gombrich to Greenberg shaped the narrative structure of "progress" in terms of artistic skills and the purity of artistic means. Not so long ago, art historical reference works largely neglected nineteenth-century symbolism and twentieth-century realism or treated them as a hindrance to artistic progress. They left the disturbing facts of life out of the story or portrayed them as obstacles to be overcome.

This example is particularly apt in this context because theories of modernity and artistic progress were instrumental in the construction

of a Western postwar identity during the Cold War. Although both political systems viewed themselves as rightful heirs to the values of the European Enlightenment, the Western theory of modernity maintained that these values could only be realized by means of democracy, a liberal market, and respect for individual freedom. The corresponding art historical perspective associated modern art with Western freedom and individuality as opposed to the propagandistic realism of the Third Reich and the Soviet Bloc.

Several representatives of the art world prominently articulated this perspective. For example, René d'Harnoncourt, vice-president of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, called modern art a "foremost symbol" of democratic society, and museum director Alfred Barr Jr. stated that "the modern artist's nonconformity and love of freedom [could] not be tolerated within a monolithic tyranny," and therefore that modern art was "useless for the dictator's propaganda."¹ In West Germany, Martha Mierendorff and Heinrich Tost argued in the same vein in their *Einführung in die Kunstsoziologie* (Introduction to the Sociology of Art) of 1957 that realist art was always susceptible to ideological abuse, whereas abstract art was free, carried no national symbols, and was not restricted by any borders so that dictatorial regimes always distrusted it.² Although few modern artists before 1945 had actually been staunch supporters of liberal democracy, and a democratic majority of people living in the Western world around 1950 did not care much for modern art, this very association played an important role in reshaping Western artistic identity. By implication, it also shaped our view of communist art as the very denial of the essential character of artistic production. This view strongly influenced the German art debates of the 1990s.

A clash of narratives

The fall of the Berlin Wall has been associated with the phenomenon of "broken" biographies. After 1989, there were paradoxical consequences to East Germans having to assimilate to a system most of them were not directly familiar with. On the one hand, many naturally welcomed the Western standard of welfare and the new political and personal freedoms, but, on the other hand, a great many experienced a feeling of displacement since their understanding of what constituted a meaningful life differed considerably from that of their Western counterparts. Identities in East and West Germany had largely been developed in direct opposition to one another. Not surprisingly, many East Germans readily distanced

1 Harnoncourt as quoted in Jonathan Harris, "Modernism and Culture in the USA, 1930-1960," in *Modernism in Dispute: Art since the Forties*, ed. Jonathan Harris, Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison, and Paul Wood (New Haven, 1993), 57; Alfred Barr, "Is Modern Art Communist?" *New York Times*, December 14, 1952, cited in David Cauter, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003), 549.

2 Quoted in Martin Damus, *Kunst in der BRD, 1945-1990: Funktionen der Kunst in einer demokratisch verfaßten Gesellschaft* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1995), 183-84.

themselves from the strictly bipolar model of Cold War history, while many politicians, intellectuals, and artists in the West fully identified with it, confusing their self-image with reality itself in the tradition of Hegel's apocryphal remark about the solar system. For them, the fall of the Berlin Wall amounted to nothing less than the final victory of the West in the Cold War, along with the end of socialism. American philosopher and political scientist Francis Fukuyama captured this sentiment well with his thesis of "the end of history."³

During the 1990s, two fundamental narratives emerged that each tried to make sense of the history of the GDR and, by implication, of its possible relevance to reunified Germany. The first is an extension of the Cold War theory of totalitarianism, according to which the GDR was an evil system that denied its citizens the basic human rights of individual freedom and well-being, so that the country and its history have to be unequivocally dismissed. To be sure, a lot of scholarly attention has been dedicated to political opposition and dissidents in the GDR, and especially to their role in dismantling the SED regime from the inside during the late 1970s and 1980s.⁴ However, the strong focus on the dichotomy between state and opposition, or socialists and dissenters, which might make sense in an abstract and generalized way, actually complicated the issue of integration and assimilation after 1989/90, since it often proved extremely hard to make a clear distinction in everyday reality. Were East Germans who abhorred the regime but did not participate in any active political opposition, perhaps out of fear of disciplinary action against themselves or their families, to be considered totalitarians or opportunists in need of some form of reeducation? And what about those who participated in the system, or even worked as unofficial members of the state security apparatus (Stasi), but did so—or so they later claimed—to help others retain a private, intellectual sphere or "niche" within a hostile system? If the history of coming to terms with East German biographies, as opposed to the political system itself, has proven anything, it must be, to quote novelist Rose Macaulay, that the powers in human beings of evading influences and escaping obvious references are unlimited.⁵

The second narrative subsequently countered this black-and-white interpretation of GDR history with a hardly less one-sided perspective: the *Ostalgie* view of GDR history. According to this alternative point of view, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a mixed blessing for most East Germans as the East German state was

3 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992). In his book, Fukuyama marks the end of the Cold War, and the corresponding "victory" of liberal democracy, as the endpoint of mankind's social evolution, and consequently, he understands the "end of history" to mean the termination of a continuous battle between political systems and ideologies.

4 E.g., Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *Möglichkeiten und Formen abweichenden und widerständigen Verhaltens und oppositionellen Handelns, die friedliche Revolution im Herbst 1989, die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands und Fortwirken von Strukturen und Mechanismen der Diktatur: Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland,"* Vol. 7, 1 & 2 (Baden Baden, 1995); Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989: Social Movement in a Leninist Regime* (New York, 1995); John C. Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (Minneapolis, 1995); Erhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bonn, 1997); Detlef Pollack and Dieter Rink, eds., *Zwischen Verweigerung und Opposition: Politischer Protest in der DDR 1970-1989* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997); Eberhard Kuhrt, Hannsjörg F. Buck, and Gunter Holzweissig, eds., *Opposition in der DDR von den 70er Jahren bis zum Zusammenbruch der SED-Herrschaft* (Opladen, 1999); Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989* (New York, 2005).

5 Rose Macaulay, *Non-Combatants and Others* (London, 1986 [1916]), 111.

actually superior to the West in terms of full employment, social security, and a widespread sense of solidarity and idealism that were completely lost in the West German world of mass consumption, harsh competition, and social inequality. This view involves a rather undifferentiated reevaluation of East German culture, including some typical consumer products that were taken off the market soon after reunification but were later reintroduced for aesthetic, nostalgic, and political reasons.⁶ Whereas the narrative based in the theory of totalitarianism makes no distinction between the state and its citizens, the *Ostalgie* perspective does so in a radical way, portraying a form of East German well-being that existed in the GDR in spite of the SED and Stasi. By implication, the totalitarian approach to GDR history condemns all East Germans to a broken biography, but the *Ostalgie* approach, for its part, potentially boils down to a shameful denial of the physical and mental hardships that those who suffered from political oppression in the GDR endured.

Debates about the interpretation of the past can provoke discussion about the specific meaning of concepts associated with defining historical moments. The Wende Museum in Los Angeles takes its name from precisely such a contested concept. Egon Krenz used the term “Wende” (turning point) in his acceptance speech as new general secretary of the SED Central Committee on October 18, 1989, indicating that his succession of Erich Honecker marked a GDR move toward more openness, liberalism, and democracy. Although Krenz was echoing the term that *Der Spiegel* had put on its cover two days earlier to describe developments in the GDR, his use of it rendered it controversial as an indicator of the process leading up to the events of November 9. In particular, historians, intellectuals, and politicians who tend toward the totalitarian view of GDR history dismiss the term “Wende” not only because Krenz used it—he being a representative of the GDR who had lost all moral credibility after supporting the Chinese suppression of the Tiananmen student protests in June 1989—but also because they would prefer “downfall” to “turning point”: the former stresses the breakdown of communism and the victory of the West in the Cold War and downplays the historical importance of reform tendencies in Eastern Europe and especially the GDR.

⁶ See Hans-J. Misselwitz, *Nicht länger mit dem Gesicht nach Westen. Das neue Selbstbewußtsein der Ostdeutschen* (Bonn, 1996).

Disturbing things

One-sided perspectives on GDR history have to cope not only with problematic words but also with a lot of “disturbing” things. Different

views of the present can determine interpretations of the past, resulting in problematic things that function as a projection screen of diverging ideologies. Street signs and monuments referring to communist history in the former GDR are a case in point. Since street names and monuments reflect a society's self-image by selecting historical persons and events that deserve collective commemoration, it is not surprising that the German government decided to intervene and change many of them after reunification.

As it was unclear whether the street sign purification campaign should restrict itself to GDR officials and other representatives of Stalinism or be extended to individuals more generally associated with the history of socialism, a number of street names that were ultimately changed were hotly contested.⁷ West German artist Raffael Rheinsberg captured the idea of a broken history associated with street name politics well in his work *Gebrochen Deutsch* (Broken German) of 1993, a modernist rectangle in the Western artistic tradition put together from abandoned East German street signs. His work is “disturbing” in the sense that it points to a collective loss of meaning and reference and somehow symbolizes a new narrative East-West synthesis not based on common ideals and dreams but on mutual irritations and reproaches.



Figure 2. Lenin Monument (1968-69) by Nikolai Tomsky at Leninplatz in Berlin-Friedrichshain, now known as Platz der Vereinten Nationen, demolished in 1991. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lenin-statue-in-Berlin.jpg>.

7 Helga A. Welsh, Andreas Pickel, and Dorothy Rosenberg, “East and West German Identities: United and Divided?” in *After*

Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (Providence, 1997), 130-32; Dirk Verheyen, “What’s in a Name?”

Street Name Politics and Urban Identity in Berlin,” *German Politics and Society* 15, no. 3 (1997): 44-72, here 61-62.

The debate about the rearrangement of the Neue Wache at Unter den Linden in the eastern part of Berlin provides an example of altered monuments. In the GDR, this pavilion designed by the Prussian architect Karl Schinkel functioned as monument to the victims of militarism and fascism. After reunification, it was rearranged as a monument to the victims of war and tyranny, including all those who had succumbed to Nazi terror as well as to the Soviet and GDR regimes, and to the fallen German soldiers of both world wars. Although critics condemned this as an attempt to unburden history by including German soldiers as victims instead of perpetrators,⁸ it is more important in this context that this reconfiguration directly associated the GDR—the state that had always defined itself in terms of antifascism—with Nazi Germany as one of the totalitarian regimes that had to account for German suffering. In so far as it posed difficult questions about the identity of reunified Germany, the Neue Wache became a disturbing thing.

Equally contested was the dismantling of Nikolai Tomsky's large monument of Lenin from 1968-69 at Leninplatz in Berlin-Friedrichshain (Fig. 2), now known as the Platz der Vereinten Nationen (United Nations Square). Although this pompous sculpture seemed to represent everything that was reprehensible about "real socialism," some East Germans in favor of retaining it stressed the difference between Lenin's socialist ideas and their perverted realization in the GDR and Eastern Europe. Moreover, in a non-socialist state, the Lenin sculpture opened new possibilities for coming to terms with the past. In early September 1990, Krzysztof Wodiczko used the monument quite literally as a projection screen, dressing Lenin like a tramp walking a shopping cart with his personal belongings. Despite these arguments and numerous protests, the monument was slated for dismantling by November 1991, and someone posted a sign on the fence surrounding the site that read: "Here the city council of Berlin is unburdening German-German history as part of a campaign against dissenters."⁹ The Lenin monument had become a disturbing object for those in power who wanted to rewrite East German history by cleansing public space of its socialist markers.

As this example amply demonstrates, things can suddenly become "disturbing" due to a change of circumstances. Witness the different meanings attributed to a simple black square in various artworks highlighted by Arthur Danto and Susan Buck-Morss:

8 Christian Meier, "Das Problem eines Berliner Denkmals," *Die Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte* 8 (1997): 733-43.

9 The original reads "Hier entsorgt der Senat von Berlin deutsch-deutsche Geschichte im Rahmen einer Säuberungsaktion gegen Andersdenkende," quoted in Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London, 1997), 79-85.

Alphonse Allais's jokingly entitled *Negroes Fighting in a Cave at Night* of 1879, Kasimir Malevich's famous *Black Square* (1913–15), and Ad Reinhardt's black squares of the 1950s and 1960s. While all of these artworks at first sight look exactly the same, they have completely different meanings on account of the various periods and contexts of their production and reception.¹⁰ In the context of Lenin as "icon," it is interesting to recall the Lenin portrait that the Novi Sad-based Hungarian artist Balint Szombathy carried through the streets of Budapest in his performance *Lenin in Budapest* in 1972 because of the new meaning the artist conveyed by altering the framework. The poster he used was the same as those typically carried during mass rallies and organized festivities. While a socialist artist was, of course, expected to identify with Lenin as the father of East European socialism, in a society where this identification was so completely ritualized and institutionalized, Szombathy's explicit individual confirmation of this devotion had a comical, and therefore slightly subversive, effect.¹¹ This shows how Lenin in his function as socialist icon could be used to mockingly mirror socialist power politics even during the heyday of state socialism in Eastern Europe, turning him into a disturbing symbol.

A clash of art histories

The art debates since the 1990s strongly reflect the clash between Eastern and Western narratives after reunification. Frequently, the artistic tradition of the GDR has been portrayed as a symbol of East German totalitarianism, reducing individual expressions to political ideology. Precisely in the context of such interpretations, East German artworks can assume a "disturbing" quality.

In a much quoted interview with Axel Hecht and Alfred Welti published in June 1990, Georg Baselitz, an artist from East Germany who fled to the West in 1957, stated that there was no such thing as GDR art since all sincere artists had left the socialist state. Those who had remained, he held, were just "arseholes" who had supported a criminal regime and renounced the fundamental qualities of true art—fantasy, love, and creative madness—in the process.¹² With this forceful language, Baselitz confronted the creativity and individualism of the West with the totalitarian smothering of all creative impulses in the Soviet Bloc. Various art critics and journalists echoed this idea in other publications; for example, Hans-Joachim Müller described East German painting generically as "agitprop" in *Die Zeit* in 1994.¹³

10 Arthur Danto, *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World* (New York, 2000), 416–31; Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 89–95.

11 Misko Suvakovic, "Art as a Political Machine: Fragments on the Late Socialist and Postsocialist Art of Mitteleuropa and the Balkans," in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. Ales Erjavec (Berkeley, 2003), 117.

12 Axel Hecht and Alfred Welti, "Ein Meister, der Talent verschmäh't: Interview mit Georg Baselitz von Axel Hecht und Alfred Welti," *Art 6* (1990): 54–72, here 66–70.

13 Hans-Joachim Müller, "Mahnwachen-Schnelldienst," *Die Zeit*, May 20, 1994.

This stance was not confined to West Germans and exiled East Germans. One can find a similar though more subtle and better supported line of thought in the publications of East German art critic, journalist, and exhibition organizer Christoph Tannert. Tannert argued that a considerable number of artists unwittingly supported the system, despite distancing themselves from the narrow principles of socialist realism from the 1970s on, by being artistically active under a morally reprehensible regime. This even held true for unofficial artists, he maintained, because they were not actively involved in the political opposition against the SED leadership. In other words, for Tannert, the burden of artistic participation in a rotten system outweighed any possible critical intentions and individual motivations among the artists.¹⁴

Uwe Lehmann-Brauns, cultural speaker of the CDU in the federal state of Berlin, lent fierce support to opponents of “totalitarian art” on several occasions. When, for instance, the Kunstbeirat des Deutschen Bundestages (Art Council of the German Parliament) chaired by Rita Süßmuth published the list of artists the committee had selected for the artistic decoration of the renovated Reichstag building in 1998, Lehmann-Brauns criticized the inclusion of a single living painter who had made his career in the GDR, Bernhard Heisig, by comparing his artwork to that of the Nazi sculptor Arno Breker. Lehmann-Brauns rebuked the Kunstbeirat, pointing out that reunified Germany was not a continuation of the GDR with new borders, and that it should be self-evident that artists who supported the first or the second German dictatorship could not be represented at the very heart of German parliamentary democracy.¹⁵

The equation of GDR art and National Socialist culture, as expressed by Lehmann-Brauns, found its conceptual climax in the exhibition organized by Achim Preiß in Weimar in 1999, *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* (Rise and Fall of Modernism). In this tripartite exhibition, a collection of early twentieth-century art from Weimar represented the “rise” of modernism in the Schloßmuseum, whereas selections of Nazi and GDR art, separated by one floor, stood for the “fall” in the multi-purpose building at the old National Socialist *Gauforum* (regional district forum) in Weimar. This presentation obviously portrayed Nazi and GDR art as the totalitarian antithesis of the free Western art tradition. The East German exhibition consisted of gray partitions overloaded with some five hundred paintings, as well as a single white wall containing works produced in exile, or “inner

14 Christoph Tannert, “‘Nach realistischer Einschätzung der Lage...’: Absage an Subkultur und Nischenkultur in der DDR,” in *Der Riß im Raum. Positionen der Kunst seit 1945 in Deutschland, Polen, der Slowakei und Tschechien*, ed. Matthias Flügge (Dresden, 1994), 41-48.

15 Paul Kaiser, “Die Grenzen der Verständigung,” in *Enge und Vielfalt. Auftragskunst und Kunstförderung in der DDR*, ed. Paul Kaiser and Karl-Siebert Rehberg (Dresden, 1999), 458.

emigration,” arranged in a more spacious way to suggest a clear distinction between “official” and “unofficial” art in the GDR.

The exhibition concept can be viewed as an echo of the historical approach that focuses exclusively on the distinctions between state and opposition. In the case of art and culture, it leads to rather bizarre results because art and culture never unconditionally and unequivocally reflect political realities, let

alone dogmatic political theories. To present East German—or, for that matter, East European—art and culture exclusively in terms of political totalitarianism is to grossly underestimate the power of individual creativity, even under dictatorial regimes.¹⁶ The simple fact is that it is impossible to summarize forty years of GDR painting under a single heading since the history of East German painting is marked by a number of radical changes, parallel developments, and contingencies.

For instance, it is necessary to qualify the common view that the painters and sculptors of the *Leipziger Schule* (Werner Tübke, Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and others) represented the SED regime as “state artists.” Although this view informed much of the radical critique of the 1990s, it fails to appreciate the complexity of these artists’ careers. To begin with, a number of these artists actually countered the dominant simplistic and dogmatic socialist realism of the 1950s and 1960s with a more complex and individual style and iconography. Originally disciplined by the regime, they only came to be officially recognized after West German art critics (e.g., Eduard Beaucamp) and collectors (e.g., Peter Ludwig) showed interest in these new artistic developments.¹⁷

Moreover, the Leipzig artists paved the way for younger artists to expand the limits of experimentation and explore new artistic horizons, far surpassing their predecessors in the process, despite



Figure 3. Margret Hoppe, *Die verschwundenen Bilder* (*Vanished Images*), 2006: Werner Tübke, *Fünf Kontinente* (*Five Continents*), 1959, Interhotel Astoria, Leipzig. Courtesy of the artist. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011.

16 For an excellent study of Soviet art in terms of political control and individual creativity, see Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven, 1998).

17 Beaucamp, an art critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, even suggested that the *Leipziger Schule* could inspire Western modernist painting, which, in his view, had reached a deadlock. See his collection of essays: Eduard Beaucamp, *Der verstrickte Künstler. Wider die Legende von der unbefleckten Avantgarde* (Cologne, 1998).

the regime's vigorous attempts to counter this development. The fundamental critique of "real socialism" in some of the works of Mattheuer, who would hardly qualify as a "natural" representative of GDR state art, is fairly unmistakable. Likewise, it is unjustified and misleading to dismiss Tübke, Heisig, and others as obedient manufacturers of visual propaganda.¹⁸

I would like to conclude with the suggestion that these one-sided approaches towards GDR art and culture do not meet the criterion of historical truthfulness. Politically or ethically motivated as they may be, they tend to completely overlook the "disturbing" quality of their sources, their capacity to qualify and renounce simplistic interpretations and narratives. Margret Hoppe, in her photo series *Die verschwundenen Bilder* (Vanished Images) of 2006, impressively captures exactly this disturbing quality by documenting the absence of East German paintings and sculptures after their removal from public life in reunified Germany (Fig. 3). The desolate spaces she depicts seem to reflect the real-life consequences of a rigorous process of "coming to terms with the East German past"—in this case with East German artwork. As historians, we should try to understand the complexity and paradoxes of life and culture in a totalitarian state, and in doing so try to remain critical toward our own inevitable biases, realizing that the end of the Cold War not only disturbed "their" historical narrative, but "ours" as well.

18 There are several excellent studies on (certain aspects of) the history of GDR painting. Apart from Kaiser and Rehberg's volume mentioned above (n15), see, e.g., Martin Damus, *Malerei der DDR. Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Realen Sozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1991); Eckhart Gillen, *Das Kunstkombinat DDR. Zäsuren einer gescheiterten Kunstpolitik* (Cologne, 2005); Bernd Lindner, *Verstellter, offener Blick. Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte bildender Kunst im Osten Deutschlands, 1945-1995* (Cologne, 1998); Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, eds., *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* (New York, 2009); Eckhart Gillen, *Feindliche Brüder? Der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Kunst 1945-1990* (Berlin, 2010).

Joos Segal is Assistant Professor of Cultural History at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He has published extensively on German cultural history, art history, and the cultural Cold War and has been a guest professor at UCLA, as well as a guest curator at the Wende Museum on the basis of a Fulbright senior research grant.

"GDR ON THE PACIFIC": (RE)PRESENTING EAST GERMANY IN LOS ANGELES*

Justinian Jampol

In January 2009, Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), with the aid of art historian Eckhart Gillen of the Kunstprojekte-Berlin, launched the exhibition *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*. Building on the success of Barron's earlier German-themed LACMA exhibitions, this was the inaugural event of the brand new, palm-tree-lined Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) building, designed by architect Renzo Piano. Barron and Gillen featured artwork from both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic and placed the images on equal footing, allowing them to share wall space in the same gallery halls. At first glance, an exhibition that compares and contrasts art from the two Germanys might be deemed an unusual choice for the inaugural event in a new \$56-million institution in Los Angeles. Given, however, LACMA's extensive collection of German art and an audience accustomed to being challenged by German art, the Los Angeles public subjected the decision to little scrutiny.¹ Responses in German curatorial circles were markedly different; the exhibition's juxtaposition of East and West German art gave rise to considerable commentary and critique. While the design of the exhibition was a point of interest in the United States, with American journalists expressing surprise that quality art had been produced in the GDR, it became a major story in Germany, where East German art had long been disregarded and denigrated.²

The reception and instrumentalization of twentieth-century German art within Germany has been heavily influenced by contemporary politics, and the collapse of the GDR offered yet another opportunity for a reassessment of its legacy. The debates and arguments over the past—specifically regarding what the GDR *means*—have often coalesced within the realm of culture, including the iconography, art, architecture, and everyday material culture associated with the former East Germany.³ The tone is rarely neutral. Charges of neo-colonialism, for example, were levied against the reunified German government for attempting to replace the East German *Ampelmännchen* (GDR traffic-light figures alternately indicating

1 International interest in the New Leipzig School was fueled by American collectors such as the Rubbell family and critics from the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. See Arthur Lubow, "The New Leipzig School," *New York Times*, January 8, 2006; and Peter Schjeldahl, "Paintings for Now," *New Yorker*, June 4, 2007.

2 Michael Kimmelman, "Art in Two Germanys Often Spoke the Same Tongue," *New York Times*, January 12, 2009.

3 See Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1998); Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, 2008); and Mark Landmann, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

when to walk and wait) with their West German counterparts, which sport a distinctly different and less playful design. Similarly, heated public protests have erupted over the destruction of significant GDR architectural landmarks, most notably the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic). Within the curatorial world, institutions and individuals that deal in or collect East German art objects are often dismissed as being engaged in uncritical nostalgia, or *Ostalgie*.

As keepers and interpreters of culture, museums have emerged as central subjects of these debates, whether passively, through their validation of particular normative perspectives, or actively, as in the case of several museum exhibitions that have subsequently drawn ire and rebuke.⁴ Such issues are by no means confined to public gallery halls; they also determine activities in the private backrooms of curatorial institutions. German museums have become involved in the process of reclassifying large portions of East German art as historical material, prioritizing their historical value while simultaneously denying their status as “art.”⁵ As a result, tens of thousands of paintings have been relocated to warehouses or *Kunstdepots* in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt over the last twenty years.

As these limited examples demonstrate, museums—be they focused on art, culture, or history—impose, reflect, and shape cultural value and are therefore inescapably political entities. In deciding what and how to exhibit, they determine what is worthy of preserving, what is excluded, and what is disregarded as kitsch. Such decisions are influenced by a range of factors that include economic, cultural, and emotional considerations. While problematic negotiations of the past are not limited to Germany, the region perhaps presents a special case.⁶ Victimization and repression are central components of German identity, tropes that have reemerged in recent narratives of the GDR. There has been a spate of memorials built to commemorate victims of communism, for example,⁷ while grant-making organizations have been established to support projects and initiatives examining communist oppression.⁸ This post-*Wende*

4 For a discussion of different approaches, see Jonathan Osmond's account of the 1999 exhibition *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* in Weimar and the 2003 *Kunst in der DDR* exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin: “German Art Collections and Exhibits since 1989,” in *Art Outside the Lines*, ed. Kelly and Wlodarski.

5 For example, the artworks housed in the Palast der Republik, representing some of the most important artists in East Germany, were transferred to the Deutsches Historisches Museum; many of those paintings were on display in the Weimar exhibition. See Barbara Wolbert, “De-arranged Places: East German Art in the Museums of Unified Germany,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 57-64.

6 István Rév in Hungary, for instance, has led the charge to uncover the political motivation behind the creation of the national historical museum in Budapest, which is called the “House of Terror” and conceptually links the Third Reich and communism, supporting the approach and agendas of the conservative factions in Hungary. See István Rév, “The Terror of the House,” in *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, ed. Robin Ostow (Toronto, 2008), 47-89. For a discussion of the debates surrounding the concept of Germany's *Sonderweg*, or special path in history, see Peter Baldwin, *Reworking the Past: Hitler,*

the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate (Boston, 1990).

7 See Thomas Schaarschmidt, “Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur

Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007),” Vortrag Bernauer Strasse, December 17, 2007, p. 3.

8 The brochure of the Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur states that

the organization “aims to testify to the injustice of the SED regime and its victims, to further the anti-totalitarian consensus within our society, as well as to strengthen democracy and German unity.”

process has had consequences for historical material. Artwork supporting the former official party line, including solidarity with the Third World, women in the workplace, and industrial progress, has been destroyed or has simply disappeared. In this context, national history, museums, and material culture occupy particularly sensitive positions in Germany, an observation suggesting that more neutral exhibition sites might play an imperative role in the reconsideration of East German art.

West meets East—Los Angeles

How would cultural institutions present the GDR if such immediate sensitivities were not a factor, if the issue of nostalgia were to evaporate, if the voices of the historical actors and witnesses were to be mitigated or at least contextualized, and if geographic proximity were removed from the equation? The question is currently being raised in Los Angeles, a city that the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht once compared to the sprawling metropolis of hell, a plastic city without any cognition of the past:

... And endless
 Trains of autos,
 Lighter than their own shadows, swifter than
 Foolish thoughts, shimmering vehicles,
 In which
 Rosy people, coming from nowhere,
 Go nowhere.
 And houses, designed for happiness,
 Standing empty,
 Even when inhabited.⁹

The temporal and uprooted nature of life in Los Angeles has often provoked criticisms alluding to its status as a land without a past—a place of absent or “artificial” history. This common perception is only magnified by the myths and glamour of Hollywood and Los Angeles’s notoriety as the global center of mass media. Yet, while many have charged that Los Angeles lacks interest in historical self-reflection, it undoubtedly has a long history of being interested in all things German.

During World War II, Los Angeles became the adopted home of numerous German and Austrian exiles fleeing the Third Reich, earning itself the titles of the “Weimar of the West” and “Weimar

9 Translated by Robert Firmage. This is an excerpt from Brecht’s poem, “Contemplating Hell.” See <http://www.angelfire.com/zine/verse/brechtb.html> for the full English translation. The German original reads: [...] Und endlose Züge von Autos/ Leichter als ihr eigener Schatten, schneller als/ Törichte Gedanken, schimmernde Fahrzeuge,/ in denen,/ Rosige Leute, von nirgendher kommend,/ nirgendher fahren./ Und Häuser, für Glückliche gebaut, daher/ leerstehend/ Auch wenn bewohnt. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 830.

on the Pacific.”¹⁰ Intellectuals and artists including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Franz Werfel, and Lion Feuchtwanger converged on the city and prospered. In this sprawling metropolis, Thomas Mann wrote his masterpiece, *Doktor Faustus*, in which the protagonist Adrian Leverkühn bore an uncanny resemblance to the modernist composer, and fellow Los Angeles exile, Arnold Schoenberg. Others, such as Hanns Eisler and Fritz Lang, contributed significantly to the burgeoning film industry.¹¹ At the close of the war, several of these émigrés, including Brecht, Eisler, and the composer Paul Dessau, returned to take up new positions in the evolving communist society of the Soviet Occupation Zone, and later the GDR. Yet even after the departure of the majority of exiles from Southern California at the conclusion of World War II, their influence continued to pervade Hollywood and the broader Los Angeles cultural scene. To this day, Los Angeles boasts some of the largest collections of German art, archives, and material culture in the world, located primarily in the area’s major institutions: The Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, LACMA’s Rifkind Collection, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the University of Southern California (USC), and the Huntington Library in San Marino. Indeed, a cursory glance at some of the major exhibitions mounted in Los Angeles over the last twenty years demonstrates the region’s interest in German art:

“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany, LACMA, Spring 1991;
Exiled to Paradise: German Intellectuals in Southern California, USC, Spring 1992;
Exiles and Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler, LACMA, Spring 1997;
Driven into Paradise; L.A.’s European Jewish Émigrés, Skirball Center, Spring 2005.

In recent years there has been a marked shift in focus in Los Angeles’s fascination with all things German; a preoccupation with exile culture has yielded to a growing interest in the postwar division of Germany.¹² This shift was embodied in the LACMA exhibition, *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Culture*, which attracted the attention of the global press. Understandably, the exhibition garnered significant attention in Germany. Several reviewers specifically emphasized the neutral space of Los Angeles as a necessary precondition for the re-evaluation of Cold War art. In a provocative article

10 See Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley, 2008).

11 *The Song of Bernadette*, based on Franz Werfel’s novel, took several Academy Awards, though not Best Picture, in 1943. Special thanks to John Ahouse for his helpful comments about the exiles in Los Angeles. John Ahouse, “Enclave in Wartime,” read at a meeting of the Los Angeles Book Collectors on September 24, 2002; subsequently read at the American Center, Moscow, on May 14, 2005.

12 This shift is mirrored in Hollywood, where World War II films such as Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) have dominated the Academy Awards. In the new century, more attention has been paid to the postwar period. Spielberg directed *Munich* about the 1972 Olympics in 2005; *Das Leben der Anderen*, a film about the secret police in East Germany, won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2007, and *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* was nominated for the same award in 2008.

in *Die Zeit*, journalist and art critic Hanno Rauterberg polemically addressed the politicization of East German art in Germany, arguing that the *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition could not have occurred in reunified Germany; it could have only taken shape in a place like Los Angeles:

A groundbreaking exhibition in Los Angeles teaches us to see and evaluate postwar German art in a new way. It buries the old images of the East and West as enemies. In Germany, no art police are on patrol, we briefly need to be reminded. There are also no state examination offices for aesthetics nor museum censors. And yet a peculiar constraint prevails: Iron Curtains traverse the German art landscape, intellectual off-limit zones wherever one looks. For even 20 years after the fall of the Wall, the Cold War has not come to an end, not in the minds of many museum directors. ... But don't celebrate too soon; liberation is approaching! And it is precisely oh-so imperialistic America that wishes to tear the German art world from its resentments. Evidently, California sunshine and a distance of 10,000 kilometers are needed to overcome the old friend-foe manner of thinking.¹³

Like Brecht, Rauterberg remarks on the sun-drenched distances between Germany and California, and yet, unlike Brecht, he argues for the museological benefits of a place where “people come from nowhere and are nowhere bound.”

LACMA's *Art of Two Germanys* curator Stephanie Barron, who has played a leading role in shaping the perspective of German art in Los Angeles, expressed a similar sentiment in a published interview with *Deutsche Welle*:

Coming at this project as someone in the United States, I don't bring the same baggage that I would if I were a curator in Germany—for better or for worse.... I think I wasn't burdened by many of the expectations that [Germans] would have coming to the exhibition.... For many in our audience...they come freshly looking at it as art—not with any preconceptions about East as one thing and West as something else. I find that very liberating and very fresh.¹⁴

13 Hanno Rauterberg, “Kunst in BRD und DDR: Nun kann die Mauer fallen,” *Die Zeit*, January 29, 2009.

14 Kate Bowen, “Top LA Curator Breaks the East-West Divide in German Art,” interview with Stephanie Barron, *Deutsche Welle*, January 30, 2009. See <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,3989952,00.html>.

In this particular case, the characterization of Los Angeles as ahistorical has allowed it to emerge as a neutral negotiator in the highly contentious debate of German history and art.

LACMA's venture was well reviewed, well received, and well attended. To mark the opening of the exhibition, cultural institutions throughout the city offered complementary programming that highlighted the need for a fresh look at East Germany. In anticipation of the exhibition, the Goethe-Institut in Los Angeles held a lecture series about East Germany. In early 2009, the Getty Research Institute hosted a symposium dedicated to exploring art and culture in the GDR while the DEFA Film Library and the Los Angeles-based Wende Museum cosponsored the film series "Wende Flicks," which brought East German filmmakers to Los Angeles to introduce the final films made by the East German film collective. The series, which was presented at a variety of institutions throughout Los Angeles, including UCLA, the Hammer Museum, LACMA, and the Goethe-Institut, broke various institutional attendance records, including overall attendance for a single event at the Goethe-Institut.

Although *Art of Two Germanys* closed on April 19, 2009, events and programs dedicated to East Germany continued at a steady pace. The October 2009 conference upon which this volume is based was one of the most prominent of these. Various GDR-themed forums at the Hammer Museum and Museum of Tolerance followed, culminating in official United States commemorative celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 2009, which Los Angeles, the sister-city of Berlin, hosted.

The Wende Museum: Los Angeles, California

Many of the East German-related events, exhibitions, and projects in Los Angeles involve the Wende Museum, a research institute devoted to archiving and providing access to the material record of Eastern Europe in the Cold War, with a focus on East Germany. Currently, I serve as the director of the museum, which was founded in 2002 and firmly established in 2004, when it moved to a new facility in Culver City. This relocation provided the physical space necessary to warehouse and catalogue the collection of over 60,000 objects and materials. In order to meet the high cataloguing demands, the Wende Museum relies heavily for its development on collaboration with and assistance from the Los Angeles eleemosynary and academic

community. It benefits directly from relationships with public history and museum studies departments, such as those located at the University of California Riverside and USC, and participation in work-study and internship programs administered by UCLA and the Getty Trust. Shelving systems were donated by the Goethe-Institut, while the museum's state-of-the-art film digitization equipment was designed in collaboration with the Academy for Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (to transfer 16mm East German



film to high-definition digital format). In addition to screening DEFA films, the museum has a center for film digitization specializing in East German health, hygiene, and educational films.

Figure 1. Photograph by Marie Astrid Gonzales of the *Collected Fragments* exhibition. Courtesy of the Wende Museum, 2011.

As emphasized in the 2009 exhibition *Collected Fragments—Traces of the GDR* illustrated here (Fig. 1), the Wende Museum's focus is on materials that are not included in other museum collections for practical and political reasons.¹⁵ This includes subjects from the rich field of East German pornography to restaurant menus, collections that are both currently being used by cultural scholars and historians in their research.¹⁶ Other materials have been donated to the museum by former historical participants who believe that their personal collections would be politicized by European institutions. This is especially the case with perpetrators, many of whom worked for the notorious police services such as the Stasi. Recently, John Ahouse, special collections curator at the Wende Museum, has begun cataloguing a collection donated by former East German border guards who never considered contributing their materials to a German institution for fear of political backlash. Similarly, Erich Honecker's confidant Hans Wauer gave the museum Honecker's personal papers from his time in the Moabit prison in the early 1990s; Wauer had threatened to destroy the papers fearing that a European institution would politicize them. Thus, as with the *Art*

15 *Collected Fragments—Traces of the GDR*, exhibition, Wende Museum, co-curated by Justinian Jampol and Joes Segal, December 2009.

16 Josie McLellan (University of Bristol) has worked on erotica in the GDR (see her contribution in this volume), and Paul Freedman (Yale University) is conducting research for a project concerning luxury foods in the GDR.

of *Two Germanys* exhibition, the political and geographic distance of the Wende Museum has benefits, in this case allowing the museum to preserve materials that might otherwise have been destroyed.¹⁷

In many respects, the museum can be regarded as a direct manifestation of the difficulties surrounding the legacy of the GDR since the *Wende*. If the items in its collections were deemed of historical or aesthetic value, they would be housed in appropriate institutions, and the museum would not exist. The collections are, in effect, made up of materials that have been relegated to the dustbin of history, both before and after the *Wende*. Included in the collections are, for example, plush velvet banners from the 1950s with large gaping holes where Stalin's profile was removed in the 1960s. After 1989, as Silke Wagler, head of Kunstfonds Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, has commented, a large part of the art and other cultural materials produced in the GDR was either consigned to *Kunstdepots* or deaccessioned altogether. Works of art ended up in attics, basements, antique shops, flea markets, and small historical auction houses, where East German paintings were sold alongside Nazi paraphernalia and Prussian uniforms. It is these discarded items that form the basis of the Wende Museum's collections. In a post-*Wende* climate, these items are divorced from their original meanings; curators are now faced with the challenge of exploring how such items should be interpreted and of determining what they mean.

Many of these issues of historical relevance and meaning come together in Heinz Drache's 1952 painting *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau* (The People say 'Yes' to Peaceful Building), which was loaned by the Wende Museum to LACMA for inclusion in the *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition (Fig. 2). A commission for the *Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Third German Art Exhibition) in Dresden in 1953, Drache's oil-on-canvas painting depicts workers building the grand East Berlin boulevard of Stalinallee, a popular theme in the political art of the early 1950s. The painting initially won acclaim and received widespread press attention. Its fame was short-lived, however; in the wake of June 17, 1953, Drache's artistic homage to the same "heroic" workers who had initiated the uprising offered an uncomfortable and conflicted message. The painting was consigned to a dark basement in East Berlin for the next four decades where it was joined by other works by Drache in the early 1990s, when paintings

17 Arnold Bartetzky, "Lenins Asyl unter Kaliforniens Himmel," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 11, 2009.

were removed from galleries, offices, exhibitions, and archives of the eastern *Länder* of the newly unified Germany. The Wende Museum acquired several of these paintings in 2007.

Along with the many conceptual and practical benefits resulting from Los Angeles's outsider status come some specific draw-

backs, most of which pertain to the city's disengagement. The United States was a major actor in the drama of the Cold War, and Los Angeles is very much a product of the military-industrial complex that boomed in the postwar era. Weapons factories rose from the semi-arid landscape just as quickly as suburbia began to dominate the geographic and cultural scenery of Southern California. The supposed target of these military weapons was the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites, the latter being viewed simply as hapless victims of the red empire. Such rhetoric enabled Americans to interpret the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the liberation of West-loving Eastern Europeans from the grips of Soviet domination.

But over the last twenty years, as fear of nuclear war and the politics of the Cold War have steadily eroded and been replaced with new fears of terrorism and global economic and environmental decline, audiences to the exhibits have often lost a historical and educational context for the art they are viewing. This absence of political and historical awareness is problematic for curators. While the political component of East German art and material culture should not dominate or dictate interpretation, it played an undeniable role in the realms of production, dissemination, censorship, and reception. In fact, it is the rich and complex mixture of politics, culture, history, and art that makes the products of East Germany particularly dynamic, and, more importantly, renders them useful sources of information about society, artistic expression, and everyday life.



Figure 2. Heinz Drache, *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau, 1952*. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011.

Conclusion

The prioritization of aesthetic quality over cultural or historical significance raises a strong, and perhaps political, point that has important consequences. It allows for East German art to be displayed and appreciated as art rather than as evidence of dictatorship, as is often the case in Germany. The recognition of East German art as art (even when this recognition comes at the expense of political and cultural awareness) provides a rationale for its preservation and exhibition; Western civilization displays art; it does not destroy it. The tendency to evaluate GDR art purely in terms of its merit as historical documentation has led to a practice of non-conservation and a reluctance to spend state resources preserving overwhelming amounts of material. This reluctance has been compounded by the dominance of an interpretive lens of totalitarianism, through which “communist art” is perceived as a monolithic expression of an omnipotent regime. In this context, ten paintings make the same point as a thousand, withering the need to collect and preserve. Here I argue that GDR art deserves to be strategically collected in an ongoing process, involving a long-term and more nuanced approach that both recognizes the plurality of GDR art and promotes a differentiated and evolving understanding of East German artistry. Such a position is not without controversy: in 2005, Dr. Rainer Eckert, director of the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig and a genuine victim of the GDR regime, responded to my arguments with the retort that everything that needed to be collected already had been.¹⁸

18 As Eckert argued, “I can’t really say I understand the point of what [Jampol] is doing Almost everything is already documented in Germany And actually it bothers me that someone in California is making such claims.” Jody K. Biehl, “East Germany Goes Hollywood: A Cold War Museum in Sunny Climes,” *Der Spiegel International*, April 22, 2005.

19 See Martin Sabrow, Rainer Eckert, Monika Flacke, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Freya Klier, Roland Jahn, Tina Krone, Peter Maser, Ulrike Poppe, and Hermann Rudolph, eds., *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Göttingen, 2007).

Those who subscribe to the totalitarian model and assert the immorality of East German art certainly have a trump card in the Stasi. The Stasi, which had real and harmful implications for the well-being of East German citizens, has become synonymous with the repression characteristic of the East German state apparatus and its systematic control over the people, culture, and art. From this perspective, East German material culture and art, like Nazi art, are simply remnants of a terrible regime that museums should resist exhibiting—or even ceremoniously destroy. In this model, such actions serve to avenge the grotesque way in which culture was manipulated during periods of totalitarian rule. Although the validity of the model has come under question in recent years, its moral imperative continues to dominate state policy in Germany. The report of the Sabrow Commission, for example, determined that too great an emphasis was being placed on the Stasi in the exhibitions and collections of state-funded cultural institutions.¹⁹ (Excluded from this were investigations of everyday

life and the varied relationship between culture and politics.) Despite such recommendations, however, the report, which was submitted to the Bundestagsausschuss für Kultur und Medien in 2007, was ultimately altered by the government minister for culture in order to re-emphasize the centrality of the Stasi and draw parallels between the GDR and the Third Reich.²⁰

Because the conflict between East German perpetrators and their victims is absent from the political landscape of Los Angeles, there is not the same pressure to interject the moral messages that would normally predetermine or at least heavily influence German approaches to the art or materials on display. With this moral priority removed, the use of material culture and art can be expanded to offer insight into products, lifestyles, aspirations, and activities that shaped everyday life in the GDR. In other words, materials that would otherwise remain hidden or presented within the context of a strict totalitarian narrative are free to be used as evidence to reach unscripted conclusions. The display of *Auftragskunst*, or officially commissioned art, in Southern California does not spark protests such as those that occurred at the Neue Nationalgalerie in 1994, when curators sought to exhibit paintings of the Leipzig School.²¹ Moreover, exploration of political iconography within the realm of everyday life does not immediately lead to charges of indulging in naïve nostalgia for the former German state. In sum, by allowing the viewer to come into contact with perspectives on the GDR that venture beyond the undeniable brutality of the Stasi, visitors can engage with moral questions in a multifaceted, and ultimately meaningful way.

Los Angeles institutions, including the Wende Museum, cannot resolve the problems of East German history. And yet, they continue to play an important role in the debates surrounding the reception of East German art and culture. As German history has become internationalized, Los Angeles has emerged as an important “alternative voice” in debates about what East Germany *means*. German newspaper articles that address the latest controversy over how the past is represented increasingly include outside perspectives, in particular those from Los Angeles. In this case, Los Angeles is in a unique position. While it remains far away from the frontlines of the historical struggle, it simultaneously belongs to German historiography, both through the early waves of German exiles and the more recent run of contemporary exhibitions, projects, and programs. The juxtaposition of Berlin and Los Angeles and their contrasting approaches to and

20 Schaarschmidt, “Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007),” p. 3.

21 See Joes Segal, “Disturbing Things: The Interpretation of East German Artwork in Re-unified Germany” in this volume.

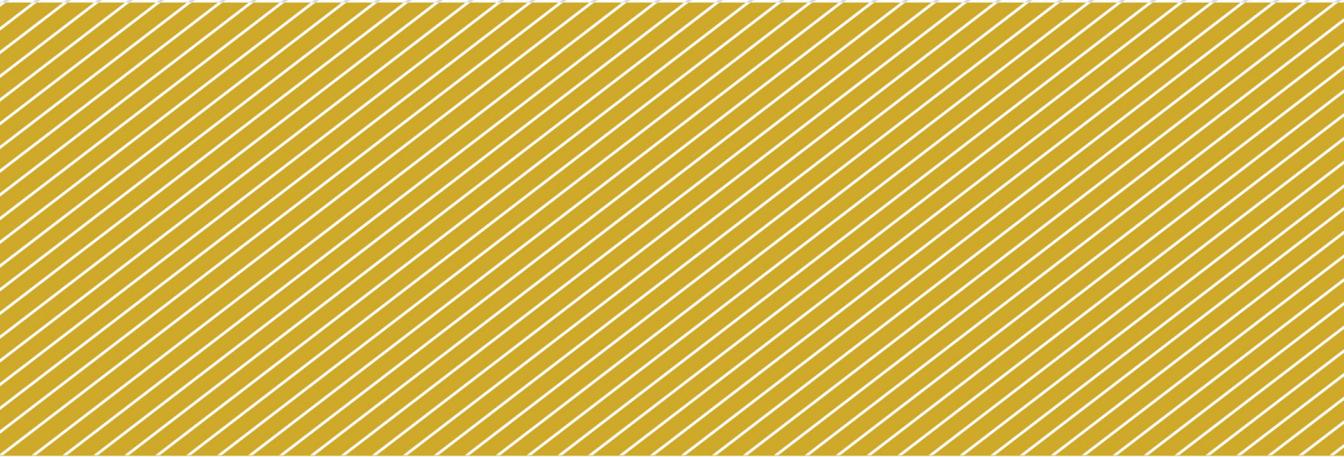
arguments about GDR art helps to define and illuminate the constantly changing contours of the perceptions and legacy of East Germany.

As a final postscript, we may consider the following recent exchange between the two cities. When the repackaged version of LACMA's *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition came to Berlin in October 2009, it was housed in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, which perhaps controls more East German art than any other institution. The shift in where and how the exhibition was presented—notably, in a *history* museum rather than an art gallery and with the East German artworks reprioritized as historical objects—is suggestive of the differing priorities and approaches of the two cities. These differences were the theme of a recent roundtable in Berlin hosted by Peter Tokofsky of the Getty Trust and organized by the Los Angeles-based Zócalo, a forum for civic discourse directed by *Los Angeles Times* journalist Gregory Rodriguez.²² The event, which was entitled “Los Angeles vs. Berlin: How Should New Cities Deal with Their Pasts?,” explored, for the most part, the contrasts between the two cities. Yet a common thread was clear. Despite their differences, Berlin and Los Angeles have contributed significantly, both directly and indirectly, to a transcontinental relationship that dates from World War II, and the two remain influential and often critical observers of one another today. Ultimately, it is a relationship that is both informative and constructive and one that has significant potential for dealing with the complex legacies of the GDR.

* This article is reprinted with the publisher's permission from Elaine Kelly and Amy Wlodarski, eds., *Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

Justinian Jampol is founder and executive director of the Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War. He is a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Oxford University. His doctoral dissertation is entitled “Swords, Doves, and Flags: Appropriation of Political Symbols in the GDR, 1949-1989.”

22 See <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/thepublicsquare/2009/07/last-night-los-angeles-vs-berlin>.



**GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON DC**

1607 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20009 USA

WWW.GHI-DC.ORG
INFO@GHI-DC.ORG