DISPLAYING THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC:

NEW EXHIBITIONS IN THE BERLIN MUSEUM LANDSCAPE

By
Jennifer Salemann

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Constantin Iordachi
Second Reader: Professor Carsten Wilke

Budapest, Hungary
2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores competing memory discourses of life in East Germany as represented in recent additions to Berlin's museum landscape. The thesis employs a comparative methodological approach to three case studies: the privately operated DDR Museum; the state-sponsored Museum in der Kulturbrauerei; and the joint private-state administered Stasi Museum. The circumstances surrounding each exhibition's creation, revision or expansion attest to the prominent role of the German federal government in shaping GDR commemoration through truth commissions and historical foundations alongside the influence of non-state actors.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how each museum's particular historiographical and curatorial strategies contribute to competing representations of life in East Germany created for a broad public audience. I ask the following questions of each exhibition. 1) Whose history is told? 2) How is this history told? 3) For what purpose is this history told? My primary sources include the published promotional and catalog materials, narrative explanatory texts, documentary evidence, and various media of each exhibition, as well as interviews conducted with museum staff.

The findings of this thesis demonstrate that historical consensus appears to be forming in the museum community regarding what GDR historical content must receive attention within their exhibitions—namely an integrated approach that acknowledges both everyday life history and the history of the SED dictatorship. However, the landscape remains diverse with respect to curatorial strategy and the affective posture encouraged for visitors. An analysis of the discourses represented in the unique communicative space of these museum environments not only makes a contribution to the study of the historicization of East Germany in particular, but also reflects upon the shifting form and content of contemporary history museum practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Constantin Iordachi, my second reader, Professor Carsten Wilke, and the CEU History Department for their steadfast encouragement and eager willingness to guide me through this scholarly endeavor. I would also like to thank my family and friends for supporting me throughout this deeply challenging and rewarding experience.

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Introduction

"The question is not only what is remembered by whom but also how and why it is remembered"

Silke Arnold-de Simine[1]

Twenty-five years after its disappearance from the political map of Europe, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) now has a firm presence in the exhibitions of Germany's contemporary history museums. The evolution of GDR museums in Germany after 1989/90 has been heavily influenced by the federal government of united Germany in the form of multiple truth commissions, a federal Memorial Concept, and the creation of a number of political education and historical foundations charged with preserving the memory and legacy of the East German SED regime.[2] Parallel to the establishment of numerous state-supported memorials and museums, individuals and citizens' groups in the private sphere developed their own exhibitions, thus diversifying the commemorative landscape. Visitors to Berlin now have over a dozen museum sites to choose from to learn about facets of life in the GDR, and these sites emphasize different memories of the GDR ranging the full spectrum from the traumatic to the nostalgic.

To illustrate and investigate this spectrum of GDR memory, this thesis compares three GDR museums of diverse sponsorship located in Berlin. The co-state/citizens' group administered Stasi Museum (opened 1990, most recent renovation 2015), the privately run DDR Museum (opened 2006, renovated 2010), and the state-sponsored

[1] Silke Arnold-de Simine, ed. *Memory Traces: 1989 and the Question of German Cultural Identity*. Cultural History and Literary Imagination Vol. 5 (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005), 11.

[2] SED stands for *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutchlands* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Created in 1946 through a merger between the Social Democrat and Communist parties of the Soviet Occupation Zone, the SED was the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic until 1990. See Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2014: The Divided Nation*, 4th ed. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 120.

Museum in der Kulturbrauerei (opened 2013) provide a wide sampling of historiographical and curatorial approaches to educating the public about the legacy of the GDR.[3] As this thesis will show, with so many museums already present in the commemorative landscape of Berlin, it is worthwhile to consider what forces are behind the creation of further or expanded exhibitions. This thesis argues that due to state efforts to guide commemoration of the GDR, museum curators of the newest exhibitions reflect signs of convergence in that they simultaneously integrate repressive and everyday life aspects of East Germany into their exhibitions. However, this convergence is not a sign of total consensus, as the sponsors behind these museums have divergent museological strategies and institutional missions—i.e. a different "how and why" as Arnold-de Simine put it—for their particular representation of the GDR.

Literature Review

The interdisciplinary literature on GDR museums in English is a small but growing corpus including contributions from scholars active in a range of fields including social and political history, cultural history, urban studies and museum studies. Dirk Verheyen provides a thorough survey of Berlin's memorials and museums ranging from the *Haus am Checkpoint Charlie* [House at Checkpoint Charlie] museum established in 1962 up through exhibits established in the early 2000s.[4] He charts the histories of museums set up by the Great Powers both before and after 1989/90, the establishment of the Stasi Museum and the Hohenschönhausen Memorial (the main Stasi prison in Berlin), as well as memorials and museums related to the Berlin Wall. His text takes an exhaustive look at the institutional histories of these memorials and museums and provides an

[3] *Museum in der Kulturbrauerei* translates to Museum in the Culture Brewery. *Stasi* is the German acronym for *Staatssicherheit*, the East German State Security (secret police) apparatus. The acronym *MfS* for Minsterium *für Staatssicherheit* [Ministry of State Security] is also widely used.

[4] Dirk Verheyen *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2008).

introduction to the variety of state and civic actors involved, giving special emphasis to the sponsoring role of the German federal government. Verheyen evaluates the GDR primarily as a totalitarian dictatorship or *Unrechtsstaat* [State without the rule of law] as that was the dominant memory narrative present in the Berlin museum landscape at the time of his research.

By the mid-1990s, however, the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* [nostalgia for the East][5] manifested itself in Germany's popular culture and museum landscape. Among its many manifestations, *Ostalgie* represented by the resurgent market for formerly discarded East German consumer product brands found a complimentary expression in the museum sphere with the establishment of everyday life museums displaying these consumer products-turned-cultural artifacts. Writing since the mid-1990s, cultural historian Silke Arnold-de Simine has extensively researched the two main everyday life museums in Germany, the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* [Documentation Center for Everyday Culture of the GDR] in the eastern town of Eisenhüttenstadt opened in 1993, and the DDR Museum in Berlin opened in 2006. She contextualizes the conflicting memory discourses of the GDR as shaped by the notions of *Unrechtsstaat* and *Ostalgie* as the primary debate in GDR commemoration.[6]

Finally, Irmgard Zündorf, a fellow of the Contemporary History Forum in Potsdam, recently presented a monograph on museums of Communism in Germany that weaves together the impact of German legislation on exhibitions of divided Germany in state and private venues and argues that the most recent museums present not only the memory of East Germany as a dictatorship, but also East Germany as a place where

[5] This phenomenon will be explored in more detail in Chapter 1.

[6] Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), "'The Spirit of an Epoch is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books, but Also in Pots and Frying Pans': GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life" in Nick Hodgin, Caroline Pearce (eds.) *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989 (*New York: Camden House, 2011), 95-11. See also Footnote 1.

people led "normal" everyday lives. Zündorf helpfully traces how both state and private exhibitions have changed between 2007-2013 to present this multiplicity of memories and the ways GDR remembrance remains a contested field.[7] While other essay compilations cover a broader range of cultural and political dynamics of GDR commemoration, the above sources are the main titles focused specifically on GDR commemoration in the form of museums.[8]

Contribution to Scholarship

As of yet, there is not any critical scholarship on the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei exhibition, or on the recently renovated Stasi Museum exhibit. While research has been done on the DDR Museum, interviews conducted for this thesis contribute new information regarding plans for its further expansion. This thesis aims to further scholarship on GDR museums by critically analyzing the new and renewed exhibitions by means of a comparative methodological approach. The goal of this comparison is to articulate how and why GDR museums now represent multiple memory discourses within their exhibitions.

To accomplish this goal, in Chapter 1, I first explore theoretical concerns regarding the unique and shifting role of the museum in contemporary society as well as a few salient topics in memory studies applicable to the GDR case. The changes in museum form and content parallel the rise of memory studies and everyday life history within academia. With respect to GDR-specific memory discourses, the spectrum of GDR

[7] Irmgard Zündorf "The Display of Communism in German Museums" (paper presentation, EUNAMUS Workshop on Representing Recent History: Museums of Communism in post-1989 Eastern Europe, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, May 13-14, 2011).

[8] See Nick Hodgin and Caroline Pearce, eds. *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, (New York: Camden House, 2011). See also David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, eds. *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

memory spanning from that of *Unrechtsstaat* to *Ostalgie* grew out of particular socio-political transformations of the post-*Wende* years after 1989/90. Understanding contemporary representations of East Germany then has as much to do with Germany's post-division history as it does with the forty years of GDR history around which these museums revolve. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I provide historical context for the unique case of East German memory debates and the role of the federal government in shaping the official version of GDR commemoration. This chapter also introduces readers to Berlin's GDR museum landscape as it has evolved over the last decades. Finally, in Chapter 3, I present my findings from the three chosen museums by weaving together observations regarding their historiographical, curatorial and pedagogical approaches to educating the public about the history of the German Democratic Republic.

While the DDR Museum, Museum in der Kulturbrauerei and Stasi Museum each emphasize different aspects of life in the GDR for divergent purposes, they all to a lesser or greater extent deal with the relationship between state-structures and citizen's daily lives. As a privately sponsored museum, the DDR Museum prioritizes the consumer culture and positive features of life in East Germany both out of a historiographical conviction that such memory is valid, but also because such an approach to East German history is attractive to tourists. The Museum in der Kulturbrauerei and the Stasi Museum, as politically state and civic sponsored exhibitions, prioritize the repressive structures of the SED out of a conviction to instill democratic civic values in their visitors by showing the ways that East German's daily lives were both supported and violated by the SED dictatorship. In this respect, they all contribute to the federal mandate to provide a "more balanced landscape of memory"[9] that achieves a degree of convergence while still preserving diversity.

[9] Arnold de-Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 161.

Chapter 1: Memory Discourses and New Museum Practice

Introduction

As unique environments for the dissemination of knowledge about the past, history museums have changed significantly over the last thirty years in their form and content. One of the influences on changes in museum design has been the shift in academia to memory studies and its attendant focus on affective relationships to the past. Another influence has been the rise of everyday life history within historical scholarship. I have grouped memory studies and the appeal of everyday life history into the subheading of memory discourses in this chapter. These parallel phenomena—new museum practices and memory discourses—manifest themselves in particularly dynamic ways in the GDR commemorative landscape. There is a tension between memory discourses that tend either towards interpreting the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* [state without the rule of law] or on the other end of the spectrum, a nostalgic discourse that prioritizes the moments of happiness that could be experienced under socialism, known in the German context as *Ostalgie*. A third discourse appears to be emerging that tries to find a balance between the two extremes. This chapter argues that museums of the GDR related to its repressive features tend towards employing more conservative display tactics focused on analytical and cerebral interaction with the exhibits. Meanwhile, museums focused on everyday life in the GDR tend to employ haptic and kinesthetic display techniques to create a sensual experience for their visitors. Thus, the spectrum of curatorial styles parallels the spectrum of memory discourses that range from traumatic to positive and even nostalgic evaluations of life in the GDR.

1.1 Memory in the Museum

Before delving into the new practices and discourses of GDR memory, it is important to discuss what is meant by the term "memory" with respect to the specific setting of the museum. As an interdisciplinary field, memory studies draws on contributions ranging from the behavioral sciences as well as sociologists and historians. As a starting point, historian Arnold-de Simine puts forth a helpful definition: "Memory is used to describe a way of relating to the past that is autobiographical, personal, emotional, sensory, based on lived experience (one's own or that of others) and requiring empathy and identification."[10] Here, we see the focus on the personal or individual as a key component of memory, yet how does memory work within a group context?

For social scientists, the scholarship of Maurice Halbwachs in the interwar period was rediscovered in the 1980s and has provoked renewed debate on how groups find common identification through narratives of a shared past.[11] Cultural theorist Aleida Assmann puts forth the following articulation of collective memory:

> We must not forget that human beings do not only life in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first person plural. They are part of different groups whose "We" they adopt together with the respective "social frames" which imply an implicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, narratives and memories…Each We is constructed through specific discourses that mark certain boundary lines and define respective principles of inclusion and exclusion. To acknowledge the concept of "collective memory," then, is to acknowledge the concept of some "collective identity."[12]

[10] Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 16. Another way of defining memory is to do so spatially. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire*—sites of memory—is helpful for understanding the significance of memorials and museums located on the physical grounds where significant events occurred such as the Stasi Museum. However the other museums under review here only function in this way as symbolic sites of memory due to their location in the formerly divided Berlin landscape. The DDR Museum and Museum in der Kulturbrauerei were opened in repurposed spaces chosen for economic and practical reasons and not primarily due to their capacity to evoke GDR memories due to their geographic locale. See Pierre Nora "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), 7-24.

[11] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[12] Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and the Collective" in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political* Analysis, eds. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 223.

Yet, Jan and Aleida Assmann ultimately find the concept of collective memory vague and have suggested a more nuanced typology of forms of collective memory—namely, communicative, political, and cultural memory. Communicative memory "includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications" whose "most important characteristic is its limited temporal horizon."[13] By this, Assmann is referring to a form of collective memory that exists between people who have lived through an event or experience and are still alive to share their memories with younger generations through conversation or oral history. This type of collective memory emphasizes interpersonal contact, and thus depends upon the living presence of eyewitnesses to history so that such "'experiential memories are embodied and thus they cannot be transferred from one person to another.'"[14] [5]With respect to museums of the GDR opening twenty to twenty-five years after its demise, the reservoir of communicative memory about the GDR is still present, but is ever more dwindling, especially for those who experienced its earliest years.

In contrast, political memory and cultural memory are mediated by some additional element beyond interpersonal communication. Political memory takes the form of "collectively organized acts and public rites of commemoration."[15] The annual celebrations on November 9 and, although less popular, October 3 (the Day of German Unification) are illustrative of the role of political memory in the GDR case. Cultural memory, however, deals with "representations of memory" that "exist in material form [and] they can be archived, 'rediscovered' and reinterpreted."[16] Unlike political memory that is centered on events or rituals, cultural memory is more associated with physical

[13] Aleida Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" *New German Critique, No. 65* Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring-Summer 1995) 127.
[5]Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 22.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

mediated forms of representation such as objects, artifacts, and the materiality of film or visual sources. Using the Assmanns' typology of collective memory forms, I concur with the evaluation of Arnold-de Simine that museums are spaces of cultural memory. In museums, the past is communicated through mediated and constructed forms, be they textual, audio-visual or more traditional objects, all of which require commentary to interpret their significance. With respect to filmic evidence, while it may appear to be communicative, the edited nature of such sources when shown as clips within the museum context prevents a reciprocal relationship between witness and audience. If museums hold events with "survivors" or "witnesses" communicative memory can have a place, but museums tend to be spaces of cultural collective memory.

1.2 Characteristics of Contemporary History Museums and New Museum Practice

Parallel to scholarly reflection on the nature and usefulness of collective memory for the study of history, historians have also begun to pay attention to the shifting form and content of museums in recent decades. The International Council of Museums provides the following definition for a museum:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.[17]

As a form of public archive, museums according to this definition are innately historical. As historian Randolph Starn has pointed out, "Museums and history are close kin, each with proprietary claims on gathering and interpreting materials from the past."[18] What

[17] This definition has been modified over the years of the existence of the Council. The latest definition listed here is from 2007. "Museum Definition." Accessed June 4th, 2015. http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/.
[18] Randolph Starn, "A Historian's Guide to New Museum Studies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol.110, No.1 (February 2005), 68.

distinguishes a history museum from a history book is its capacity to put material objects, audio-visual sources and narrative text in conversation with one another as part of an exhibition. History museums are therefore interdisciplinary sites drawing on strategies from literature, theatre and the visual arts in their representations of historical events and epochs.

Since the nineteenth century heyday of national museum construction, state-sponsored history museums were charged with collecting and preserving the material culture of past societies and using these objects and documents as symbolic referents to disseminate knowledge about that era, culture or nation state. Usually such collections were meant to communicate the prestige and glory of the nation that had the resources to assemble such collections. However, in the aftermath of two world wars and the rise of postcolonial and postmodern critiques of the nationalist master narratives of such museums, contemporary history museums face a dual challenge: 1) to make space for hitherto ignored or rejected voices and events; and 2) to design exhibitions that will hold their visitors' attention.

For the global history museum landscape after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the multiplication of Holocaust museums is perhaps the most visible example of a minority community gaining public recognition through the institution of the museum. Paul Williams convincingly argued that we are now living in an age of "memorial museums" focused on commemorating mass suffering and violence.[19] This is surely the case for many Holocaust museums, where there is not only space dedicated to an educational exhibition, but also memorial spaces for mourning and reflection. These museums advocate a respectful posture from their visitors due to the sobering nature of mass

[19] Paul Williams "Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities" (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

suffering and the attendant moral imperative of "never again" that these museums hope to impress upon their visitors.

However, not all history museums focus on memories of trauma and mass suffering. Parallel to the opening up of Holocaust and genocide studies in the 1980s, a parallel trend in historiography towards creating space for everyday life and micro-history was championed by Alf Lüdtke.[20] Everyday life history gives the "average" person's history significance, as well as giving popular culture a place in academia. In the case of museums of the GDR in Berlin, everyday life museums appeal to segments of the former GDR population who do not remember their experience under communism as one solely or primarily of trauma.

For visitors—local and international—without any experiential knowledge of the GDR, a museum visit can also fulfill a variety of desire spanning education to a stimulating urban tourist stop. The rise of mass forms of entertainment and tourism as well as a preference for tactile experiences has also created new expectations on the part of visitors regarding what they desire out of a museum experience. Museums today are expected to provide a sensory and aesthetic experience alongside imparting knowledge. Articulating the goals of contemporary visitor-friendly museums, cultural historian Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphasizes how they "aspire to the vividness of experience, to immersion in an environment, to an appeal to all the senses, to action and interactivity, to excitement, and beyond that to aliveness."[21] This "aliveliness" is usually achieved through the employment of technology such as multimedia kiosks for filmic evidence. The ability not only to visually engage, but also to touch, smell and handle objects in a museum is another way in which museum visitors have an "embodied"

[20] Alf Lüdke, ed. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Translated by William Templer (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[21] Quoted in Starn, 92.

experience. While such interactive strategies make sense for science museums where material experimentation is part of the scientific process, it is not so clear how such a strategy could improve the dissemination of historical knowledge. However, because everyday life history deals with popular culture and—especially in the post-war era—the rise of consumer culture, the ability to handle things in a museum context is attractive, especially for very young museum visitors accustomed to play as part of their daily routine.

Therefore, on the one hand there are museums dedicated to traumatic historical events calling for sober visitor engagement. On the other hand, material culture everyday life museums with their focus on consumer goods invite a more playful atmosphere for visitor interaction. For museums attempting the challenging historiographical task of presenting multiple or contested perspectives of a historical era, there is the added challenge of deciding how best to display such narratives in the museum setting.

1.3 Competing GDR Memory Discourses

In order to assess the stakes regarding the specific representations of the GDR in Berlin's museums, it is important to know the historiographical debates that have occurred in academic circles. The following section introduces readers to the spectrum of memory discourses ranging from the evaluation of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* to a nostalgic positive view of former East Germany. The tendency to lean towards one end of the spectrum or the other depends upon whether one takes a "top-down" perspective of SED political structures or a "bottom-up" approach from the everyday life experiences of East Germans. This section articulates the challenge faced by historians in finding a nuanced, multi-perspectival discourse of contradiction that acknowledges both ends of the memory spectrum as well as the new trends in museum practice discussed previously.

1.3.1 Memory Discourse of *Unrechtsstaat*

In the immediate post-unification years, there was a revival of totalitarianism theory among historians seeking to find ways to characterize the nature of the SED regime. Advocates of a totalitarian interpretation of the SED emphasized its oppressive police state and border regime features, thereby delegitimizing the political ideology of communism.[22] Historian Konrad Jarausch further explains the political reasoning behind adherents of totalitarian evaluations of the GDR:

> Contrasting the SED regime to the free elections of the Federal Republic, they stress its fundamental lack of democratic legitimacy and argue that it could control its population only through the building of the Wall and the construction of a large-scale secret police apparatus, the Stasi. This stark interpretation takes communist propaganda claims largely at face value, and considers East German society thoroughly politicized, organized by subsidiaries of the ruling party as to leave no space for a normal life.

Curators at the Berlin Wall Memorial, the Hohenschönhausen Prison and the Stasi Museum are heavily influenced by this memory discourse in their efforts to educate the public about the undemocratic nature of the GDR. The preservation of this memory discourse is written into mission of the German federal foundation tasked with the public reappraisal of the GDR, which includes "[furthering] the anti-totalitarian consensus within our society as well as to strengthen democracy and German unity."[23] Understandably, the *Unrechtsstaat* discourse is characteristic of Western anti-communists and Eastern dissidents persecuted by the SED regime.

[22] See Peter Grieder, "In Defense of Totalitarianism Theory as a Tool of Historical Scholarship." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, (2007) 8: 3-4, 564-589.
[23] *Bundesstiftung* statement quoted in Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 161. The *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* is a state-mandated foundation for the reappraisal of the GDR and is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

Due to the political goals of these museums to inculcate democratic values, the display style at the Stasi Museum for instance depends on visitors' willingness to engage in large amounts of reading for knowledge acquisition. While the museum incorporates objects into its exhibition, they are illustrative rather than interactive, and as the research chapter will show, textual documents comprise a large percentage of the "objects" on display. The Stasi Museum thus utilizes a conventional museum display strategy in order to encourage a sober posture for visitors encountering the physical and psychological repression of the Stasi apparatus.

1.3.2 Memory Discourse of *Ostalgie*

Moving to the other extreme of the spectrum is the memory discourse of *Ostalgie*. A term meaning "nostalgia for the East,"[24] *Ostalgie* itself is a debated concept.[25] At its worst, *Ostalgie* can have a negative connotation as a non-critical, apolitical form of collective memory of life in the GDR. Arnold-de Simine's general description of nostalgia applies to the East German case:

> In the twentieth century, nostalgia has certainly acquired a pejorative connotation and is often used dismissively: it is predominantly seen as a means of either ideological indoctrination or escapism or both, a distortion that allows people to shirk harsh realities or simply difficult social issues as well as to ignore past crimes and injustices in favor of dreaming themselves into a rose-tinted yet black-and-white past without guilt.[26]

Academics and politicians who interpret the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* tend to equate *Ostalgie* with a trivialization of the East German past that predominantly rehabilitates German consumer culture for commercial gain.[27] Arnold-de Simine criticizes such an

[24] *Ost* is the German word for "East."
[25] For further theoretical literature on nostalgia, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) and Dominik Bartmanski, "Successful icons of failed time: Rethinking post-communist nostalgia" *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 54, no. 3 (September 2011), p. 213-231.
[26] Arnold-de Simine *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 54.
[27] Daphne Berdahl, "(N)ostalgie for the present: Memory, longing and East German things, *Ethnos, 64:2*, 103.

approach in GDR museums because, in her view, it "ignores that the personal is always political."[28] Ethnologist Daphne Berdahl also acknowledges the dangers of a nostalgic view of the GDR, "Indeed, one of the principle criticisms of *Ostalgie* is that it provides a means of eliding questions of complicity, responsibility, and accountability in relation to a burdened GDR past."[29] However, Berdahl also provides an interpretation of *Ostalgie* at its best as a form of counter-memory.

In her research of nostalgic practices in east German towns in the mid-1990s—which included observation of groups playing GDR trivia games and a survey of advertising strategies for recuperated GDR-era products—Berdahl came to see *Ostalgie* as a legitimate response to the challenging transformations and identity struggles of the post-*Wende* years for former East Germans. *Ostalgie* is not "mere nostalgia" according to Berdahl, rather it is "an attempt to recuperate, validate and anchor a collective memory of a shared past."[30] Berdahl astutely points out that for many East Germans, the socialist ideological emphasis on production and communal activities sponsored by factories meant that East Germans had perhaps a stronger sense of personal identification with the products of their labor than did their Western counterparts. This contributed to an intensification of the sense of personal loss at the disappearance of these products and the socialist working environment in the post-*Wende* years:

> [D]evaluations of East German things have taken place in the context of a more general and often systematic devaluation of the GDR past since German re-unification. Such practices have included the selling of East German factories to western companies, occasionally for next to nothing; the discrediting of the GDR educational system, particularly the *Abwicklung* (restructuring) of the universities, the renaming of schools, streets, and other public buildings; the toppling of socialist memorials and monuments; the trial of Berlin border guards that for many eastern Germans represented a sort of victors' justice; debates over what to do with and about East Germany's *Stasi* (state security police) heritage that often compared the

[28] Arnold-de Simine, *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989,* 100.
[29] Berdahl, 205.
[30] Berdahl, 203.

> GDR to the Third Reich; and to return to the Trabi again, discourses that ridiculed the backwardness of East Germany while ignoring the social and historical contexts that may have produced it.[31]

A sympathetic reading of *Ostalgie* then permits space for both fond and frustrating memories of the GDR shaped by the experiences of East Germans after unification without necessarily condoning the repressive features of the regime. Berdahl goes on:

> *Ostalgie*, in all its various forms, thus does not entail an identification with the former GDR state, but rather an identification with different forms of oppositional solidarity and collective memory. It can evoke feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction, often within the same individuals.[32]

Ostalgie, then, has more do to with how some segments of the East German population deal with the social and economic challenges of transformation from socialism to capitalism after 1989 and the loss of what they viewed as positive features of their former socialist identity and society. The recuperation of GDR consumer products in the 1990s as a way for East Germans to recuperating their lost identity is a precursor to the way GDR consumer goods have become popular in the setting of the museum. The DDR Museum's original exhibition in 2006 focused foremost on displaying GDR consumer culture in a positive atmosphere where guests could experience a reconstructed GDR lifestyle. For some GDR citizens and certainly for unaware foreign tourists, this affirming interpretation of the GDR past provided a pleasant alternative to the repression-focused museums and memorials. Even with the DDR Museum's expansion in 2010 to cover aspects of the SED dictatorship in their exhibition, the curators maintained a highly tactile and playful curatorial style throughout the museum to maintain a "fun" experience for their visitors. Their slogan is "*Geschichte zum Anfassen"* [touchable history]. The DDR Museum's extensive gift shop and adjacent

[31] Berdahl, 196.
[32] Berdahl, 203.

GDR-themed restaurant reiterate an enjoyable consumer-focused edutainment approach to GDR history. This stands in stark contrast to the sober approach of memorials and the Stasi Museum.

1.3.3 Memory Discourse of Contradiction

I propose that a third memory discourse of contradiction has entered the GDR commemorative landscape. Writing in the late 1990s, social historian Konrad Jarausch pointed out that an *Unrechtsstaat* interpretation ignores the everyday life experiences of many East Germans for whom socialist ideals held real appeal. However, an uncritical nostalgic approach would be historically irresponsible given what is known about the SED's repressive features. Jarausch therefore argued for an interpretation of East Germany as a *Fürsorgediktatur* [welfare dictatorship] as a "two-part designation that emphasizes the basic contradiction between care and coercion of the SED System that color seemingly paradoxical memories of former GDR citizens."[33] Welfare dictatorship gives space for acknowledging the attractiveness of "the ideological goals of socialism, and the vision of an egalitarian social reform" while also including "an unambiguous critique of communist repression."[34] While Jarausch is not a museum curator, I argue that the curators of the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei exhibition have appropriated his recommendations to historians:

> It is important to realize that the GDR could simultaneously be an exciting experiment in social engineering to advance human equality, a living hell of unjust persecution and ideological or class opponents, or the latest version of that German staple, the *Obrigkeitsstaat* [authoritarian state] that challenged its citizens to invent creative ways around its arbitrary rules. Instead of emphasizing just one of these qualities, historian would do well, by focusing on the actual East German people, to ponder their interrelationship, their shifting patterns and their precise implications.[35]

[33]Konrad Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 60.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid,. 8.

This discourse of contradiction finds expression in the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei's exhibition, which makes space for voices of affirmation, apathy and dissent. Its curatorial style is a mix of conventional distancing glass vitrines paralleled by imaginative theatrical scenes to evoke a GDR atmosphere. In order to maintain an analytical academic focus within the museum but still reflect new museum practices, tactile engagement is limited to film kiosks and binders with color reproductions of source evidence. The exhibition reflects the influence of creative artistic interior designers who installed enlarged photographic background images juxtaposed with an array of GDR propaganda media. While visitors are reminded not to touch the majority of objects, a visit to the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei is nevertheless incredibly visually stimulating, attesting to its joint cerebral and aesthetic appeal.

Conclusion

This chapter covered a range of theoretical concerns salient to the study of GDR museums. First, different concepts of memory were defined and contextualized for use within the museum sphere. The types of sources used in museums such as objects, texts and recordings comprise a distinct form of collective memory, that of cultural memory. Second, this chapter traced developments in museums display strategies as well as trends in the type of narratives displayed in the museum boom of the last thirty years. With the growth of mass entertainment that engages the senses, museums have sought to incorporate experiential elements into their exhibits to attract visitors. With respect to the subject matter of new history museums, the global trend of memorial museums dedicated to affective remembering and mourning of victims of mass suffering stands in contrast to museums of everyday life that focus on popular culture and consumer goods that are recognizable to wide segments of the population. The chapter showed how the

narrative subject matter of a museum influences the display strategies employed. In the case of the GDR museums included in this thesis, conventional display styles are appropriated in museums dealing with traumatic aspects of life in the GDR, whereas everyday life topics are displayed in a more playful, interactive manner. Museums that attempt to cover contradictory narratives incorporate both conventional and innovative display strategies.

Chapter 2: Historical Context—The Evolution of GDR Commemoration

Introduction

To understand the contemporary Berlin museum landscape and the newest additions to it, a number of historical contextualizations are required. This chapter traces some key frameworks for situating GDR museums in the wider discourse of historical debates in post-unification Germany. These contexts include the unique case of Germany as a divided Cold-War nation, the challenge of addressing both the National Socialist and Communist pasts in a united Germany, and the role of federal legislation in mandating the content of GDR commemoration. This chapter also orients readers to the evolution of the GDR museum landscape from the 1960s to the present.

2.1 The Unique Case of Germany: Divided and United

Among former Soviet bloc states, Germany was unique in its post-WWII experience of national division. No other Central European state had a linguistic and cultural twin directly next door that would be a constant reminder of the opposing ideology—either of Western democratic capitalism or Soviet state socialism. As the two states emerged in 1949 their superpower sponsors had a vested interest in "their" Germany being the more successful economically, thereby legitimizing their political ideology. [36] For forty years these two states developed in constant competition as the poster children of the Cold War, yet German-German relations themselves vacillated between stern opposition and détente, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. After the disintegration of socialist governments across Eastern Europe in 1989, the overwhelming "yes" vote in March 1990 by GDR citizens to unify with the FRG meant

[36] The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany) was founded May 23, 1949. The German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany) was founded October 7, 1949. See Fulbrook, 138-139.

that the East German state and its variety of socialism was henceforth politically and economically delegitimized.[37] This de-legitimization took a number of forms. At the political and institutional level, democratically elected politicians, most of whom had backing by West German parties, replaced the discredited SED officials.[38] Institutions of higher learning underwent thorough faculty vetting, especially within departments of history.[39] With respect to museums, the collection of the SED's Museum of German History in East Berlin was absorbed by the Federal Republic of Germany's German Historical Museum.[40] At a structural level, then, East Germany evaporated.

For the general populace "on the ground," historian Stefan Wolle emphasized the sudden disappearance of GDR consumer products and the introduction of the West German *Deutschmark* on July 1, 1990, as two of the main areas in which East Germans grasped the concrete consequences of unification in their daily lives.[41] The disappearance and replacement of GDR imagery with the forms of the new federal currency and commodities formed a type of cultural de-legitimization that ran parallel to the structural de-legitimization at the government level. This characteristic is important for understanding why GDR material culture would come to play such an important role in later museal representations of the GDR.

[37] Commenting on the economic dimension of the 1989 revolution, Arnold-de Simine astutely argues, "Western politicians were fully aware that the unrest of 1989 had resulted as much if not more due to the dissatisfaction with consumer rights than with human or political rights." *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, 163.

[38] An exhibition at the *Tränenpalast* [Palace of Tears] at the former Friedrichstraße border crossing highlights the story of Hinrich Lehmann-Grube, a West German and one of Hamburg's former council chief executives, who moved to Leipzig in early 1990, took on GDR citizenship, ran for and won the office of mayor in Leipzig, where he served until 1998. *Tränenpalast* exhibit, author visit April 22, 2015.

[39] This process was called *Abwicklung* [to unwind or liquidate]. See Daphne Berdahl, "'(N)ostalgie' for the present: Memory, longing and East German things" *Ethnos*, 64: 2, pp. 196, 208.

[40] Before unification, each museum ran a campaign inviting citizens to bring East German material culture products to the museum to expand its holdings of GDR-specific goods. Zündorf, 8.

[41] Interview with Dr. Stefan Wolle, April 28, 2015. Unemployment as a result of de-industrialization should also be mentioned here as significant after effects of unification for former East Germans. Berdahl, 199.

East Germany, then, was unique as it was the only Cold War state to cease to exist in 1990. The former East German *Bezirke* [zones] were absorbed and retransformed into federal *Länder* [states] of an already existent sovereign nation and underwent institutional restructuring from an external government. The political, economic and cultural de-legitimization of the GDR in the immediate post-*Wende* years would shape the subsequent debates that grew around the commemoration of communism and the GDR in united Germany.

2.2 Germany's "Second Dictatorship"

Another historical dimension influencing GDR commemorative culture in Germany is that of the relationship between commemorations of the nation's National Socialist past and its subsequent Stalinist/SED past. Comparison between the Nazi and SED regimes is both illuminating and problematic. After 1990, advocates of a revitalized totalitarianism theory found it a helpful tool for categorizing both Nazism and Communism under a common rubric of dictatorship.[42] A totalitarian interpretation of the Nazi and SED regimes focuses on their shared dependence on ideology as a mobilizing force as well as their willingness to use violence on their own populations. With respect to categorizing memory communities in society, the totalitarian model also encouraged a division of the populace into perpetrators, collaborators and victims.

However, as Verheyen points out:

> There are some key differences, of course, between the mastering of the East German past and the need to confront the Nazi legacy. The latter concerned all Germans equally, but was carried out separately in the two postwar German states. The former has differential impact and implications for eastern as opposed to western Germans, yet it is being carried out in a

[42] See Clarke and Wölfel, "Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany" in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, eReader 11. See also Peter Grieder, "In Defense of Totalitarianism Theory as a Tool of historical Scholarship." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* vol. 8, 3-4, 563-589 (2007), Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002) 20-25.

> unified Germany more or less dominated by western Germans who are thus easily seen as standing in judgment of their eastern compatriots.[43]

In addition to this Western-dominated evaluation of the East German regime, there is also the challenge of competing victim narratives.

On the one hand, especially when considering the genocidal effects of National Socialism on the European Jewish, Roma, disabled, and homosexual communities it specifically targeted, it can appear disrespectful to put the suffering of Nazism's victims on the same level as individuals who experienced political persecution by the SED regime and the Stasi. On the other hand, the SED border regime claimed 138 lives at the Berlin Wall and for many former East German citizens, they lived in a potentially lethal regime supported by a pervasive secret police agency that was not hesitant to use both physically and psychologically damaging tactics against its own civilian population.[44]

This helps explain why, alongside the need to situate everyday life in the context of dictatorship for GDR history, the federal government also called for "the pre-eminent importance of National Socialism and the Holocaust in national memory."[45] When taking a longer view of 20th century German national history, national commemoration of the GDR not only must reckon with divergent memories of the Communist era, but also be situated in a commemorative culture that is also charged with not forgetting the genocidal legacy of the National Socialist years.

[43] Verheyen, 9.

[44] The 138 number comes from the Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation. See "Biographical Portraits," accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de/en/biographies-468.html. Other government-sponsored research by the Central Information Office for Government Crime gives a total of 248 for German-German border deaths between 1961-1989. See Marcel Fürstenau, "Remembering Inner-German border victims" *Deutsche Welle*, last modified August 12, 2012. http://www.dw.de/remembering-inner-german-border-victims/a-16161679.

[45] Clarke and Wölfel, eReader 9.

2.3 Legislating Commemoration from Above

Within the first few years after unification, the federal government of Germany took an active role in seeking to influence the form and content of GDR commemoration. Over the course of the 1990s, the German *Bundestag* [Parliament] initiated two commissions of inquiry to investigate the historical nature and legacy of the East German dictatorship and how to support and fund political education about the GDR for future generations. In addition, the government also set up a commission to refine a national Memorial Concept to be used by state-funded historical institutions in their representations of the GDR. This subchapter surveys the goals and outcomes of these commissions on the creation of an "official" discourse of East German commemoration.

2.3.1 Germany's Inquiry Commissions and Memorial Concept

The first commission, *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland* (Coming to Terms with the History and Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany) ran from 1992-1994. An expert on the commissions, historian Andrew Beattie stressed the importance of viewing the commissions as part of Germany's version of "post-communist 'transitional justice.'" [46] Due to judicial difficulties in pursuing prosecutions of former SED officials, former dissidents who were unsatisfied with these proceedings debated alternative forms of justice. [47] Proposed by two former East German dissidents, the first parliamentary inquiry had proportional representation from all parties in the Bundestag and a majority of former East Germans among its commissioners.

[46] Andrew H. Beattie "The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990" in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, eReader 25.

[47] Due to the legal concept of *nulla poena sine lege* [no penalty without a law] many SED and Stasi officials were not criminally charged because their actions were considered legal under GDR law. See Clarke and Wölfel, eReader 6.

The main goals of the commission included a thorough examination of the machinations of the SED regime, the creation of a forum for debate about the legacy of the GDR, and the recommendation of legislation beneficial to individuals victimized by the SED.[48] The commission sought a variety of voices including those of civil-society groups, victims' associations, academics and some lay East German perspectives to substantiate their findings. Beattie concluded that the commission was successful in creating a forum for "an ongoing, broad and systematic debate about the GDR and its meaning in unified Germany."[49]

The second commission entitled *Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit* (Overcoming the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in the Process of German Unity) took place over the course of the next legislative session between 1995-1998. This commission had a public-policy orientation geared towards "finding institutional mechanisms for promoting critical memory work into the future"[50] as well as acknowledging federal responsibility for "preserving the memory of both German dictatorships and their victims."[51] These two significant recommendations have since taken concrete form.

The first recommendation led to the creation in 1998 of a *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for Coming to Terms with the SED Dictatorship) responsible to provide financial and institutional support of "exhibitions, publications, conferences, and awarding doctoral grants for displaying or exploring the communist past." [52] The second recommendation developed into the 1999 *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* (Memorial Concept). In cooperation with state and locally

[48] Beattie, eReader, 25.
[49] Ibid., eReader, 26.
[50] Ibid., eReader, 28.
[51] Zündorf, 3.
[52] Ibid., 3.

funded memorial projects, the Memorial Concept provides specific guidelines and requirements for additional federal funding of these memorials related to both National Socialism and Communism in Germany with the intent of maintaining a "decentralized and plural character of the memorial landscape."[53]

As the aims and outcomes of the parliamentary commissions show, throughout the 1990s, the government of united Germany was an active participant in promoting a GDR memory discourse focused on exposing the dictatorial nature of the SED regime and supporting memorials dedicated to the memory and experiences of its victims. This discourse would expand, however, as other East German memory discourses emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s. The phenomenon of *Ostalgie* explained in Chapter 1 and the shifting interest of academic historians towards everyday life history eventually led to a third government initiated commission.[54]

2.3.2 The Sabrow Commission

Known by the last name of its chairman, the Sabrow Commission was not an initiative of the German parliament, but rather a response to an administrative restructuring of GDR institutions within the federal government. In 2004, the government shifted the bureaucratic oversight of the Federal Commission for the *Stasi* files (BStU) and the *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* from the Minister for the Interior to the newly created Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Christina Weiss.[55] To avert concerns over this administrative restructuring, Weiss called together experts to form a commission to redefine how the state should support and fund GDR-related memorial sites and public political education programs.

[53] Beattie, eReader 28-29.
[54] For essays by a variety of social historians including Sabrow, see Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience*.
[55] Beattie, eReader 29.

It is worth noting that 2004 also saw major social upheaval from former East Germans against the so-called Hartz IV reforms, which included reductions in unemployment benefits.[56] Parallel to these protests, the post-communist PDS party transformed itself into *Die Linke* [The Left] and gained significantly in the elections of the Eastern *Länder*.[57] This resurgence of a social and political left is another factor contributing to the decision of Minister Weiss to organize a further commission.

In contrast to the parliamentary commissions that included politicians, the Sabrow Commission involved no politicians and was made up of primarily historians and independent professionals. As Professor of History at the University of Potsdam and Director of the Potsdam Centre for Contemporary History, chairman Martin Sabrow's own research interests into the everyday life of East Germans greatly shaped the findings of the commission. While criticized for conducting much of its activities behind closed doors, the Sabrow Commission nevertheless identified a gap in the federal government's commemorative discourse—the experiences and memories of a wider range of East Germans themselves.

Sabrow formulated these divergent memory discourses as *Diktaturgedächtnis* [memory of dictatorship], *Arrangementgedächtnis* [memory of arrangement], and *Entwicklungsgedächtnis* [memory of progress].[58] The commission concluded that current state and federal memorials focused primarily on the memory of dictatorship, but that the memory of arrangement was lacking. More specifically, "the history of repression and official power was very well represented, but the Berlin Wall and the history of everyday life barely seemed present."[59] This call for "a more balanced

[56] See Fulbrook, 287.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Zündorf defines "arrangement" as "adapting one's life to make the best of a difficult situation" (see her footnote 6). The "memory of progress" is less present, but it "still believes that the GDR was a legitimate alternative to the capitalist order," 2.
[59] Zündorf 5.

landscape of memory" came with an attendant criticism of the perceived "'trivialization of the GDR' in existing 'uncritical collections of GDR everyday culture.'"[60] As Beattie summarized, "far from perpetuating the ostensible opposition between official or state-mandated and popular memory, this was a conscious attempt to re-connect the two."[61]

Due to its call for a state-sponsored GDR museum of everyday life, the Sabrow Commission's report was criticized by those in leadership of memorials and museums tied to the experiences of victims. For instance, Dr. Hubertus Knabe, director of Berlin's Hohenschönhausen Prison memorial, expressed strong apprehensions about the capacity for a museum of everyday life to adequately communicate the repressive features of life in the GDR. In his words, he considered everyday life representations as promoting an image of the GDR as a "social experiment on a grand scale instead of an inhuman dictatorship."[62] Here, the clash between Sabrow's memory communities of dictatorship and arrangement found expression in the public sphere.

With a change of government in 2005 and the installation of a new Commissioner for Culture and Media—Bernd Neumann—the commission's recommendations were not fully implemented. In 2008, the revised federal memorial concept (*Forschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption*) promoted supporting the creation of museum exhibitions that showed everyday life in addition to "repression and the history of political power."[63] To counteract accusations of a nostalgic representation of the past, the refined memorial concept necessitated that "everyday life always had to be displayed in the context of dictatorship."[64] This most recent re-conception of GDR commemorative culture at the

[60] Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum,* 161.
[61] Beattie, eReader 32.
[62] "[S]ozialpolitisches Großexperiment und nicht als menschenverachtende Diktatur," as quoted and translated by Arnold-de Simine, 161.
[63] Zündorf, 6.
[64] "The following topics were to be elucidated: the 'comprehensive state control' of all people in the GDR, the 'pressure to adapt,' the 'willingness to participate,' and the instruments the SED used to penetrate the society ideologically," Zündorf, 6.

government level is of crucial importance for understanding the memory discourses at work in the museums discussed in the case studies below.

2.4 The Berlin GDR Museum Landscape Pre- and Post-Unification

2.4.1 Museums and Memorials of Repression in Berlin

In order to historically contextualize the exhibitions explored in this thesis, it is necessary to be familiar with the historical trajectory of GDR-related memorials and museums as they entered the Berlin landscape both before and after unification. This trajectory of memorialization started with an emphasis on the repressive features of the SED regime in memorials, and then spread to museums representing opposing memory paradigms spanning from repression to everyday life in its banal and nostalgic elements.

The first museum related to the GDR—the Haus am Checkpoint Charlie—opened in 1962 and served as a documentation center for the building of the Berlin Wall and attempts to escape it. This private exhibition spearheaded by civil rights activist Rainer Hildebrant and his *Arbeitsgruppe 13. August* [Working Group of August 13] moved to its current locale at the former Checkpoint Charlie. It has expanded to cover topics including non-violent resistance in its "From Walesa to Gandhi" exhibition and a global focus on human rights abuses. Entrance fees are expensive in comparison to other GDR museums (6,50€-12,50€).[65] As the oldest GDR-related museum in Berlin, it still attracts a significant number of tourist visitors due to its downtown location. Since Rainer Hildebrandt's death in 2004, his widow Alexandra has initiated expansion projects that have elicited criticism from the city of Berlin due to her tactic of erecting these new projects without prior permission, such as a field of crosses meant to honor those killed

[65] "Opening Times and Tickets," *www.mauermuseum.de*, accessed May 31, 2015. http://www.mauermuseum.de/index.php/en/ opening-times-a-tickets.

at the Wall nearby the Checkpoint Charlie location.[66] As a grassroots and privately funded museum, the Haus am Checkpoint Charlie continues to reinvent itself to remain a significant presence in the museum landscape, especially for international visitors.

In the early 1990s, sites including the Ministry of State Security's Complex at Normannenstraße and the Hohenschönhausen Prison opened to visitors to make public the surveillance and imprisonment tactics of the East German state. The occupation of the Stasi headquarters by the citizen group *ASTAK*[67] in January 1990 led to the first modest exhibition opened to the public in November 1990.[68] *ASTAK* has fought to keep its exhibition independent from government oversight but has had to navigate a relationship with the federal foundation in charge of the administration of the Stasi files. This exhibition would develop into the Stasi Museum, whose most recent renovation will be covered in more detail in Chapter 3.

The Hohenschönhausen Prison officially opened to visitors in 1994 and is a federal memorial site supported by the state.[69] Guests may only tour the prison by participating in a guided tour, and it was originally decided that these tours should be led by former inmates whenever possible. The Stasi operated seventeen such remand prisons, but Hohenschönhausen was reserved for the most high profile of prisoners and has also become the central commemorative and educational site for GDR political persecution.[70] Recently, an exhibition has been added to the grounds of the prison, but as a preserved site of the GDR era, the evocative power of the buildings and prison cells themselves make Hohenschönhausen a *lieu de memoire* in a way that museums cannot compete with.

[66] Verheyen, 240.
[67] ASTAK stands for *Antistalinistische Aktion Berlin-Normannenstraße*, a grassroots citizen's initiative.
[68] Verheyen, 157.
[69] For an exhaustive account, see Verheyen, 163-73.
[70] According to tour guide, author visit April 27, 2015.

The early 1990s also saw the beginning of an outdoor exhibition at the Bernauerstraße Berlin Wall site, but it was not until the 2000s that a permanent memorial was installed. Bernauerstraße is the only place in Berlin where the breadth of the wall fortifications is still visible (the wall involved two barriers with a "no man's land" in between).[71] A memorial wall with pictures of some of the wall's victims as well as large scale photographs on the adjacent apartment buildings and information kiosks along a green space complement a reconciliation chapel built on the grounds of a church destroyed in the 1980s due to its location in the border area. Like the Hohenschönhausen Prison and the Stasi Museum, the Bernauerstraße site is a space where the physical architectural remains of the SED regime are still preserved in a city where many of the SED's other architectural traces have been consciously removed.[72]

One other lesser-known museum established in 1994 is the Marienfelde Refugee Center in former West Berlin.[73] Now part of the Berlin Wall Foundation, the Refugee Center was a critical point of transition for East German refugees in their transition to life in West Germany. Its location farther from the city center makes it lesser known to international tourists, but its presence in the museum landscape is important for acknowledging the process of seeking refuge and the role of West Germany in supporting these exiting East Germans.

2.4.2 National History Museums

Aside from the memorials and museums connected more specifically to the memory of repression and the Wall, the idea of national history museums in divided and

[71] There is another section of the wall still standing at the East Side Gallery to the southeast of the city center. This wall section is an international art installation space whereas the Bernauerstraße functions as an educational memorial site.

[72] For instance, consider the demolition of the GDR parliamentary building, the *Palast der Republik* [Palace of the Republik] between 2006-2009 and the current reconstruction of the former baroque *Stadtschloss* [City Palace] destroyed in World War II in its place.

[73] See the Marienfelde Refugee Center website: http://www.notaufnahmelager-berlin.de/en/index.html.

reunited Germany always involved a latent concern on the part of Germany's global neighbors who feared a resurgence of the extreme nationalism that characterized Germany's National Socialist past. During the Cold War, the East German government established a *Museum für deutsche Geschichte* [Museum of German History] in East Berlin in 1952 that represented German history from a Marxist-Leninist angle. Displaying a propagandist interpretation of East Germany's supposed successes, the museum even opened a new exhibition in 1987 to cover the Honecker years and to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the city of Berlin.[74] Also in 1987, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl called for the establishment of a *Deutsches Historisches Museum* [German History Museum, henceforth DHM] in West Berlin as well as the founding of the *Haus der Geschichte* [House of History, henceforth HdG] in Bonn to educate the public about the history of the Federal Republic of West Germany. [75] The unexpected events of 1989 and the subsequent reunification of Germany significantly altered the trajectory of these institutions, as the DHM acquired the collection of the former East German Museum of German History, and the *Haus der Geschichte* had to consider how to integrate the history of East Germany into its exhibitions.

Until it opened its permanent exhibition covering two thousand years of German history, the DHM held a few temporary exhibitions on the GDR throughout the 1990s on topics including GDR art and propaganda.[76] As a result of the Sabrow commission's

[74] Andreas Ludwig, "Representations of the Everyday and the Making of Memory: GDR History and Museums" in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, eReader 38.

[75] An initiative for the establishment of a collection for German history in West Germany was first conceived in 1982, but it was not until February 28, 1990, that the Bundestag of the FRG passed a law for the establishment of an independent foundation for this purpose. "Zweck der Stiftung sei es, „die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland einschließlich der Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik unter Einbeziehung der Vor- und Entstehungsgeschichte darzustellen und Kenntnisse hierüber zu vermitteln." [The purpose of the Foundation is to disseminate knowledge about and display the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, including the history of the German Democratic Republic involving the history of origins] Author's translation. "Geschichte und Organisation" *Haus der Geschichte Bundesrepublik Deutschlands*. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.hdg.de/stiftung/geschichte-und-organisation/.

[76] For a detailed account, see Zündorf, 8-12, and Ludwig, eReader 43.

recommendations explained earlier, the DHM did hold a temporary exhibition on everyday life in the GDR in 2007. The current permanent exhibition divides the histories of East and West Germany narratively and spatially and stresses the political developments and the role of the Soviet Union and Western Allies for each respective state. As the main history museum for the reunited German nation, the DHM focuses predominantly on political history and its chronological scope necessitates only limited coverage of the post-war period. As Zündorf aptly points out, there is minimal attention given to cultural memory and, "what is missing are questions and interpretations" of East Germany history on its own terms.[77]

While not located in Berlin, the *Haus der Geschichte* opened two museums that require mentioning. The House of History museum in Bonn opened in 1994 with a primarily political overview of the two post-war German states with West Germany playing the role of the successful Germany in comparison to an economically struggling and politically repressive East Germany. Significantly reworked in 2011, the exhibition now "tries to give a view of GDR society from the inside."[78] The other museum in need of mention is the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig* [Contemporary History Forum in Leipzig], which opened its doors in 1999 with a focus on political repression, opposition and resistance in East Germany as well as aspects of the Peaceful Revolution.[79] As part of the federal government's commemorative program, these museums—one located in the former West, the other the former East—provide the populace with the official narrative of divided Germany.

[77] Zündorf, 11.
[78] Zündorf, 15.
[79] Ibid., 14.

2.4.3 Everyday Life Museums

While not located in Berlin, the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* [Documentation Center for Everyday Culture in the DDR, henceforth DOK] in Eisenhüttenstadt requires mentioning because it was the first museum dedicated to GDR cultural history. Located in a former socialist era crèche in a city designed to represent an ideal socialist urban landscape, the DOK is an objects-based collection where the curators asked contributors to tell stories about the objects and how they represented aspects of life in the GDR. The museum underwent a renovation in 2012 and approaches GDR history both chronologically and thematically.[80] Back in Berlin, the opening of the privately owned DDR Museum in 2006 made GDR consumer culture and everyday life available to visitors to the capitol and has been an immensely popular museum. With its focus on East German material culture and its playful pedagogical approach, the museum was initially heavily criticized for trivializing the repressive nature of the East German state. This museum is covered in more depth in Chapter 3.

Parallel to the interest in everyday life, commemoration of the late 1980s and the fall of the Iron Curtain are also finding space in the landscape. Sponsored by the Robert Havemann Society, the Peaceful Revolution Stelae erected in 2009 are located at numerous sites throughout the city.[81] They document the institutions (many of them Protestant churches) and personalities who opposed or resisted the DDR. This highly specific narrative thread of GDR memory is distinct since it represents only the small portion of the East German population who participated in such efforts in the pre-autumn 1989 years. Nevertheless these information stelae are now a permanent feature of the commemorative landscape of Berlin.

[80] See Arnold de-Simine. "'The Spirit of an Epoch is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books, but Also in Pots and Frying Pans': GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life," 101-103.
[81] See "Revolution Stelae in Berlin" *Peaceful Revolution 1989/90*, accessed June 5, 2015. http://revolution89.de/?PID=static,Revolutionsstelen,0100-StelenBerlin,Index_en.

2.4.4 Recent Developments

The last five years has seen further expansion of the GDR museal landscape with exhibitions seeking to integrate divergent memories of the GDR into their exhibitions. In 2010, the DDR Museum doubled its exhibition space to engage the role and structures of the SED dictatorship, which is explored in more detail in the next chapter. In 2011, the *Haus der Geschichte* re-opened the 1960s-era Friedrichstraße border control station known as the *Tränenpalast* [House of Tears] as site-specific exhibition. This exhibition focuses on life with the border—a border that was open to West Germans and a limited number of East Germans, but closed to the majority of Easterners, hence the emotional connotation of the building's name. This exhibition shows how the Wall affected the daily lives of both West and East Germans using Berlin as their transport hub. The exhibition also covers the revolution of 1989/90. In 2013, the *Haus der Geschichte* opened its most recent exhibition, the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei in Berlin as an exhibition focused explicitly on everyday life in the GDR and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Finally, in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the "Peaceful Revolution" of 1989/90 as it is now commonly referred to, memorials and museums continue to renovate and expand their exhibitions. The Bernauerstraße Wall Memorial opened a permanent exhibition in November 2014, and the Stasi Museum reopened in January 2015 with a completely revamped exhibition, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. This survey shows that commemoration of the GDR in Germany and especially in Berlin is extensive, diverse, and still proliferating.

Conclusion

While sharing a communist past with its Eastern European neighbors, the division and unification of Germany makes its relationship to its communist past unique among post-Socialist countries. Commemoration of the GDR also takes place within a wider context that encompasses Germany's National Socialist past. The German government has taken great pains to acknowledge the repressive nature of both dictatorships without minimizing the genocidal legacy of National Socialism. While a cynical view puts these commemorative cultures in competition, a more nuanced approach recognizes the challenge of acknowledging space for diversified GDR commemoration alongside the extensive efforts to adequately address the legacy of National Socialism, all of which occurs in the symbolically loaded terrain of Berlin. The active role of the federal government in promoting debate and supporting efforts at commemoration in the forms of memorials, museums and foundations for political education demonstrates a concern for transparency with German society and an acknowledgement of diverse memory communities. The evolution of the GDR commemorative landscape since the 1960s demonstrates that not only state, but also civic and private actors have a vested interest in representing the GDR to the public. While representations of the GDR as a repressive dictatorship have tended to dominate the landscape, in recent years a shift towards a "normalization" of the GDR as a bearable, if not enjoyable, country to have lived in reflects the plurality of memories within German society with respect to the GDR. The next chapter explores how the most recent additions to the landscape respond to this trend for a plurality of memories in museums.

Chapter 3. New Museum Exhibition Case Studies

Introduction

The following three case studies analyze convergences and divergences of museum discourses present in recent exhibitions focused on the history of the German Democratic Republic. As the previous chapter introduced, the museum landscape of the 1990s and early 2000s reflected a preference for memorials and museums limited to the discourse of repression. By the mid-2000s, federal legislation in Germany required national museums to incorporate into their exhibitions "aspects of everyday life within the context of dictatorship."[82] The joint state-civil rights association operated Stasi Museum, the privately-operated DDR Museum and the state-operated Museum in der Kulturbrauerei provide a diverse set of case studies to explore how the Berlin museum landscape has changed due to this government mandate. A comparison of the form and content of these museums shows a convergence in all three exhibitions towards acknowledgement of both repressive and banal features of life in the GDR. However, they achieve this through divergent curatorial strategies and by encouraging distinct interactive postures on the part of their visitors.

3.1 The Stasi Museum – A Joint Effort at Public Justice

The Stasi Museum is housed in the former Stasi headquarters on Normannenstraße within Berlin's city limits. While not an everyday life museum for the average GDR citizen, the Stasi Museum's new exhibition does address aspects of daily life for those who were recruited to, worked for, and were targeted by the Ministry of State Security and in this sense incorporates federal guidelines for GDR commemoration.

[82] Zündorf, 6.

On January 15, 2015, the Stasi Museum of Berlin re-opened to the public with an entirely revamped exhibition. [83] The first floor exhibition is the creation of the BStU,[84] the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service. This exhibition introduces visitors to the historical context, founding members and ideological principles undergirding the creation and practice of East Germany's Ministry of State Security (henceforth MfS). The second floor containing the former offices of State Security Minister Erich Mielke was left unaltered. The third floor is the product of the ASTAK[85] group, an independently run citizens' organization that grew out of the original citizens' committee of 1989/90 who demanded the opening of the Stasi Headquarters on January 15, 1990.[86] This third level follows the experience of victims of the Stasi regime.

The conventional museum display style with glass vitrines and a numerically ordered room sequence is marked by heavy dependence on the files themselves as objects for display. This requires visitors to be intellectually engaged, sober-minded readers. The first objects on display include a diorama of the extensive building complex that made up the MfS compound on Normannenstraße. Before proceeding upstairs, visitors can glance inside one of the Barkas™ vans used by the Stasi to transport apprehended individuals. Like the Kulturbrauerei exhibit, a traumatic and critical emotionally orientation is evoked.

The joint-created Stasi Museum focuses predominantly on the historical actors in the categories of perpetrators, informers and victims. Since laws passed during the unification make it nearly impossible to prosecute Stasi employees, this museum also

[83] Due to the time constraints of this project, it was not possible to research the form and content of the museum's former exhibitions from 1990 to 2015.
[84] *Bundesbeauftragte für die Stasi-Unterlagen* [Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Files].
[85] *Antistalinstische Aktion Berlin-Normannenstraße.* [Anti-Stalinist Action Berlin Normannenstraße], Verheyen 155.
[86] Verheyen, 156.

serves as a space for enacting justice in the public sphere through documented revelation of the methods and practices of the Ministry of State Security.

3.1.1 The BStU Exhibition

The main hallway of the first floor designed by the BStU begins with a selective timeline from 1945-1990 that places geo-political events of the evolution of the East German state in parallel with Stasi-specific events. The first grouping of displays belongs to the overarching theme of "The Mission" of the Stasi. The first room starts with the question "Stasi Everywhere?" and includes enlarged surveillance photographs taken by Stasi agents. The captions name specific people, identifying them as agents, unofficial collaborators, or those being reported on. There are also photographs of the Stasi agents with their surveillance equipment. Visitors are invited to form their own opinion—in this case considering the extent to which Stasi surveillance permeated society—as well as being introduced to real historical biographies.

In the remaining three rooms of "The Mission" section, significant emphasis is placed on the role of the Soviet Union and its Cheka secret police as inspiration for the creation of a German version in the Ministry of State Security (MfS) in 1950. Commemorative metals and plates serve to illustrate this relationship. This section also gives visitors a short biography of the three Ministers who led the GDR's State Security apparatus, emphasizing their inter-war communist activities, as well as the criminal past of the longest-tenured minister, Erich Mielke.[87]

Unique to the Stasi exhibition is an emphasis on the nature of Stasi language. For instance, in the section on "The 'Enemy'" curators provided the following text:

> Throughout the GDR's existence, members of the SED and MfS spread the basic idea that the GDR was under constant threat from the capitalist and

[87] The ministers of the MfS included Wilhem Zaisser (1950-1953), Ernst Wollweber (1953-1957) and Erich Mielke (1957-1989).

> imperialist "enemy" in the West. They maintained that economic failures in the GDR were "the work of vermin" and Western "sabotage." Critical opinions, unconventional lifestyles and oppositional conduct within the population were regarded as "hostile-negative manifestations" controlled by "Western manipulators." It was the job of the Ministry of State Security to discover who these people were and render them "harmless" so that such acts could be prevented in the future.[88]

This pattern continues through the remainder of the exhibition: MfS Training Panels include phrases such as "the enemy wants to harm and destroy us"[89] and concludes, "Imperialist spies and agents are dangerous, but they always fail due to the vigilance of our workings and those of the MfS."[90] There are also Stasi/SED terms on the walls of the main corridor of this floor, such as *Sozialismusfremd* [Alien to Socialism], *Feindlich-Dekadent* [Hostile-Decadent], and *Andersdenkend* [Thinking Otherwise]. These statements immerse visitors into the linguistic world of the Stasi, acquainting them with the language of the MfS files that form the core of the displayed texts throughout the museum.

The second BStU exhibition hall entitled "The Perpetrators" explores the educational and hiring protocols of the State Security, as well as the benefits and costs of Stasi employment on one's standard of living. This section also covers the sensitive topic of informers. It is in these rooms that the "everyday life" of the Stasi is articulated mostly in the explanatory texts with limited illustrative objects. The BStU stressed the comparatively low level of education among senior MfS employees and the highly selective recruiting efforts to find candidates who "had an unquestioning positive attitude towards the SED and the Soviet Union."[91] As a reward for their political loyal services, Stasi employees enjoyed higher salaries and preferential housing, as well as

[88] "The 'Enemy'" explanatory text, Room 3, Stasi Museum, author visit April 28, 2015.
[89] Author translation "So will uns der Feind schaden und vernichten," Room 3, Stasi Museum.
[90] Author translation "Imperialistische Spione und Agenten sind gefährlich, aber sie scheitern immer wieder an der Wachsamkeit unsere Wertätigen und des MfS," Room 3, Stasi Museum.
[91] "Unsolicited applications were generally not considered." Room 5, Stasi Museum.

access to recreational, nursery and elderly care facilities unavailable to the wider GDR citizenry. A wall-sized map of East Berlin shows concentrations of the over 18,000 flats administered by the MfS, including the neighborhoods surrounding the MfS Headquarters and the Hohenschönhausen remand prison.

According to BStU curators, "This system of benefits provided the MfS with two advantages: The employees were satisfied and they kept each other in check."[92] To illustrate this, curators include quotations from former MfS staff and their families to show the underlying competition, distrust and pressure felt by Stasi employees. A former First Lieutenant interviewed in 1992 recalled: "Budding friendships were barred from the very beginning as a way to keep employees in line. This was basically akin to distrusting one's own people. There was one department that focused on its own employees." [93] An anonymous daughter of a Stasi officer interviewed in 2012 recollected, "All the Stasi people I knew were alcoholics. There was no other way to cope with the job."[94] While representing only two subjective witnesses, the above comments shows how the BStU integrates eyewitness memories into its exhibition to shape a visitor's emotional evaluation of life as a Stasi employee who—it may be argued—was also a victim of the manipulative managerial tactics of his/her superiors.

In the room dedicated to "Unofficial Staff," one of the more evocative forms of documentation put on display are the handwritten "letters of commitment" signed by people who agreed to work as secret informers. In 1968, they were renamed "unofficial collaborators" (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter,* henceforth *IM*). Here, it is important to again mention the choice of vocabulary. The BStU curators chose to use the title of "Unofficial Staff" for this section of the exhibition, and the term "collaborator" is introduced as a

[92] "The World of the Stasi" explanatory text. Room 5, Stasi Museum.
[93] Quote form Gerd R. "Former Fist Lieutenant of the MfS in Main Department 1, 1992." Room 5, Stasi Museum.
[94] Quote from "Daughter of a Stasi Officer, 2012." Room 5, Stasi Museum.

Stasi created term. This choice of words reflects sensitivity towards how labels pass judgment on the individuals who participated in this type of work for a wide variety of potential reasons:

> Some informers acted out of political conviction or financial interest; others were forced to collaborate by the MfS. There were IMs who voluntarily agreed to work with the MfS, but provided very few reports and others who became passionate about informing. Others refused to collaborate and intentionally breached their agreement to sworn secrecy.[95]

This room contains over a dozen pairings of *IMs* and their agent handlers, including portrait photographs and biographies of the *IM's* contributions as an informant and a short description of the agent's career. Due to German privacy laws, the names of individuals in the letter excerpts displayed as evidence are blacked out. If photographs of *IMs* and their agents are displayed, the names are sometimes changed and occasionally the eyes are blurred out. A guide explained that it depends upon the isolate cases as to whether people are willing to make their identities publicly available.[96] Here, we see how the German laws regarding the handling of the Stasi files that were passed during and after unification in 1990 affect their use within the public sphere.

In the following room, BStU curators briefly introduce the psychological harassment tactics of the Stasi on their "target subjects." Stasi agents were trained to "instill mistrust and mutual suspicion," and "discredit the public reputation" of individuals, especially through the "use of compromising photos." These quotations are written above excerpts from BStU files calling for these types of actions to be carried out in specific cases, often with the involvement of *IMs*. These protocols are covered in more depth in the ASTAK exhibition upstairs.

[95] "The Unofficial Staff," Room 6. Stasi Museum.
[96] Stasi Museum tour guide, interview April 28, 2015.

To end their exhibition, the BStU curators designed a final room that includes cheerful photographs of Erich Mielke at state social functions paired with recordings of his speeches. This contrast between the "daily life" of a Stasi employee seen in the previous rooms and images of Minister Mielke enjoying the privileges of his powerful position serve as a segue for visitors who will proceed to the preserved rooms of the "Mielke Suite" upstairs.

3.1.2 The ASTAK Exhibition

In contrast to the emphasis on perpetrators in the BStU exhibition, the new ASTAK exhibition focuses on the experiences of victims and the dissolution of the Stasi in the 1989/90. Commenting on the new displays, a Stasi Museum tour guide explained further:

> We get more into what actually happened to the people who fell in the hands of the Stasi…it is a whole evolution…what's going to happen to you from your birth, childhood, being watched, being qualified as an enemy of the state, and then there is going to be the beginning of surveillance, how they make up your file, how they…find the reasons to arrest you, and what they are going to do to you once they have done that.[97]

While this tour guide stressed the museum was not a museum of everyday life,[98] I argue that the above statement actual supports an interpretation of the Stasi Museum as putting the everyday life of Stasi "target-subjects" on display. While the Stasi did not pursue everyone, it was proportionally one of the most pervasive secret police organizations on record and therefore did impact the everyday lives of East Germans, some obviously more traumatically than others.

The first room entitled "Educate and Mold" highlights the collective social and political education policies of the SED within the GDR. "As early as nursery school and

[97] Stasi Museum tour guide, interview April 28, 2015.
[98] The guide stressed that "everyday life" emphasizes the positive features of life in East Germany, which the Stasi Museum does not focus on.

kindergarten, games, stories and songs were used to convey socialist ideals."[99] Young Pioneer uniforms and FDJ propaganda posters illustrate the mass organizations dedicated to "developing socialist personalities." A photograph of children in miniature tanks illustrates the militarized context of life in the GDR. Also on display is a teenager's signed *Jugendweihe* [inaugural oath] to commit themselves to socialism and the GDR as they enter adulthood. Photographs and documents again form the core of objects on display.

The next room entitled "Who is who?" juxtaposes large photographs of "subversive" personalities with quotations of SED-ideological descriptions of the "enemy." The following excerpt from a 1981 speech by Mielke posted in this room attests to the way in which the Stasi were obsessed with monitoring perceived threats: "In its constant effort to clarify 'Who is Who,'" said Mielke, "the MfS – with its Checkist forces, means and methods – has to identify people's true political attitudes, their ways of thinking and behaving."[100] The following rooms document these means and methods as they were put into practice.

Commenting further on the exhibition, the Stasi Museum guide quoted earlier emphasized:

> We don't deal with prison conditions or conditions of incarceration. People can go to Hohenschönhausen to see that. It's more the theoretical [sic] side of things but there's quite a lot about…stuff that took place outside of the prisons…like whole methods of decomposition of individuals and opposition groups.[101]

Thus, the remaining rooms in this wing trace the procedural steps Stasi agents would take to open a case, conduct an investigation, and, when deemed necessary, take some form of action against the perceived threatening individual. Objects used for surveillance

[99] "Educate and Mold" Room 9, Stasi Museum.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Stasi Museum tour guide, interview April 28, 2015.

such as telephone wire tapping devices and steam machines for opening mail are juxtaposed with photographs of Stasi agents conducting covert searches of an individual's residence.[102] The ASTAK curators include documentation of the 1983 "data access regulations" which granted MfS employees unhindered access to "personnel and health files, tax assessments, insurance policies and bank statements."[103] Alongside the Stasi files, then, GDR judicial documents such as these form a core part of the ASTAK exhibition.

These rooms also emphasize the dependence of the Stasi on various types of "information providers" and "volunteer assistants" alongside *IMs* and the German People's Police. "Information providers" were often neighbors of suspected individuals who were registered via an index card system introduced in the 1960s. Both the BStU and the ASTAK exhibitions display a selection of these cards and photographs of the numerous cabinets that housed them. The ASTAK exhibition parallels the BStU's focus on Stasi language by alluding to these multiple—and for outsiders, confusing—number of titles for unofficial staff.[104]

In the room "Arrested, Destabilised, Deported" the ASTAK curators show how the Stasi gave priority to psychological harassment, what the museum guide referred to earlier as "decomposition." Parallel to the BStU exhibition, quotations from Stasi documents illustrate these tactics, including the imperative to "exploit and reinforce rivalries," "generate doubts about personal perspectives," and "summon individuals to state offices."[105] The ASTAK curators also put articles of the GDR criminal code on display with a reference to the maximum length of imprisonment in cases of sentencing.

[102] Perhaps contrary to popular belief, such covert searches were rare according to the Stasi Museum.
[103] "The 'Transparent Being'" Room 11, Stasi Museum.
[104] Downstairs, the BStU exhibition includes a more detailed wall of eighteen different MfS unofficial staff titles with attendant explanations of each role's responsibilities.
[105] "The Stasi Takes Action" Third Floor Wing, Stasi Museum.

It is here that the popularly referenced body odor cloth samples in jars have been kept on display.

Moving to the last exhibition hall entitled "The End of the State Security" these rooms document the occupation of Stasi offices throughout East Germany in late 1989/early 1990 and early legislative steps taken to safeguard their preservation and later administration. The partially successful attempt by MfS—renamed AfNS [106] — employees to destroy files in 1989-90 led civil rights activists across East Germany's cities to occupy Stasi district offices. The display includes orders from the AfNS to prioritize particular files to be destroyed first, as well as one of the shredders used to destroy files. [107] In these rooms, recognizable photos used by the press from the occupation of the headquarters are enlarged for visitors. The final display, "Freedom for My File!" explains the parliamentary proceedings in summer 1990 before unification, wherein the West German and GDR parliaments along with civil rights activists negotiated legislation regarding the future administration of the Stasi files. ASTAK concludes its exhibition with praiseworthy descriptions of the "courageous citizens" who protected the files from destruction.

The Stasi Museum is unique in that it has a bilateral institutional framework for its exhibitions. The continued cooperation-cum-distinction between the BStU and ASTAK in the Stasi Museum shows how the latter, as a civil rights' group, is concerned with maintaining its autonomy from BStU control over its interpretation of the relevance of the Stasi for contemporary society. Both the BStU and ASTAK exhibitions are heavily dependent upon the Stasi files as documentary sources and objects for museal display.

[106] On November 17, 1989, the MfS was renamed the Office for National Security (AfNS) and put under new leadership, but as the curators describe, "the old goal remained the same: protecting socialism and fighting its 'enemies.'" From "The MfS Wears a New Mask", Rooms 16-17, Stasi Museum.
[107] Files were continually being destroyed up through the summer of 1990 under the supervision of the AfNS. According to the tour guide, roughly 500 out of 16,000 bags of shredded files have been painstakingly reassembled. Stasi Museum guided tour, April 28, 2015.

However, the German laws regarding the protection of personal data make using such sources a delicate issue. The conventional curatorial style requires a posture of knowledge appropriation through extensive reading on the part of its visitors. While not advertising itself as an everyday life exhibition as extensively as the DDR Museum and Kulturbrauerei, elements of daily life do emerge in the revamped Stasi Museum within the context of making the injustices of the Ministry of State Security's laws and practices publically transparent.

3.2 The DDR Museum – An Entrepreneurial Approach through Playfulness

Built into the side of the embankment of the river Spree across from Berlin's Cathedral, the DDR Museum opened in July 2006 as Berlin's first private museum related to East German history. Easily accessible to pedestrian tourists, it is one of the most visited museums in contemporary Berlin. It is also prime downtown real estate. Currently, the DDR Museum entrance fees range from €3,50-€7, which are not excessive.[108] In an interview with the museum's chief historian Dr. Stefan Wolle, the importance of this location cannot be overstressed: "We are in the middle of it all, and it offers us a great challenge and a great responsibility."[109] As a private corporation, the DDR Museum receives no government subsidies. This serves not only as a justification for charging entrance fees, but also is an institutional advantage for the DDR Museum to remain independent of state dictated conditions. However, as will be shown later, the DDR Museum has not escaped criticism of its representation of life in East Germany.

After purchasing tickets, visitors proceed through a turn-style with a digitized sign encouraging them to "Have Fun!" The exhibition space spans two large rooms covering

[108] Prices as of April 2015, author visit.
[109] Interview with Dr. Stefan Wolle, April 28, 2015.

over thirty thematic areas with short descriptive texts to introduce each theme.[110] The first room—which formed the original exhibition at the museum inaugural opening in 2006—includes cabinets designed to recall socialist era apartment buildings housing various drawers and doors that visitors are encouraged to open to discover objects, documents and diorama.[111] You can watch West German television programming in a typical East German living room, "drive" in a Trabant™ simulator, and listen to excerpts of East German authors' literary works. The section on the particularly East German pastime of *Freikörperkultur* [nudist culture] is revealing in all sense of the word, showing photographs of smiling families sunbathing in the buff. Statistical charts and tables compliment objects and explanatory texts. One cabinet wall features the requisite years of education and salary range for various professions including that of sales assistant, chemist, farmer, bricklayer, miner, and professional engineer.[112] Consumer goods and the material culture of the GDR populate every corner of this colorful and sensory-stimulating museum. Recently dismantled in March 2015 to create more exhibition space, an adjacent café offered typical East German menus. A gift shop with hundreds of postcards, books, and communist themed kitsch available for purchase completes the visit.

In describing the accompanying exhibition texts he co-authored, Wolle recalled his goal was to keep them "very short, sharply oriented, not objective but rather

[110] According to the 2012 museum guide, these themes include: Politics, Border, Transportation, Youth, Education, Work, Consumption, Products, Food & Drink, Housing, Habitation, Family, Media, Fashion, Culture, Activities, Music, Sport, Holidays, SED, State, Structure of the state, Voting, Bloc Parties, FDGB, Mass organizations, Brother states, NVA, State security, Interrogation, Prison, Ideology, In praise of communism, Church, A new class, Economy, Environment, Healthcare Provision, Opposition, Escape and departure, and The Peaceful Revolution. See Stefan Wolle and Jochen Voit, *GDR –Guide: The Book Accompanying the Permanent Exhibition "A Journey to a Bygone State*" (Berlin: DDR Museum Verlag GmbH, 2012), 6-7.

[111] The original sixteen topics included: border, Berlin, traffic, youth, education, work, consumption, state security, building, living, family, media, fashion, free time, culture, and holidays" as cited in Arnold-de Simine, *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989,* 111.

[112] Wolle and Vogt, *GDR Guide*, 38-40, and author visit to museum, April 28, 2015.

subjective, emotional, and ironic. That was highly criticized, but I cannot write otherwise."[113] Wolle completed his doctoral education at the Academy of Sciences of the GDR with a focus on medieval history. During 1989/90, he was invited to participate in the round-table discussions regarding the dissolution of the State Security Ministry and was thus initiated into politics and contemporary history. After reunification, he was an active speaker at the *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* and has published numerous titles on life in the GDR.[114] As head historian for the DDR Museum, his stylistic preferences significantly shape the narrative representation of East German life on display and open him up to both public praise and criticism. The museum shop includes Dr. Wolle's books for sale and thus provides him with additional publicity. He also conducts interviews regularly and is a highly visible historian/museum administrator.

Wolle articulated the educational goal of his museum as displaying the "difference between democracy and dictatorship from the perspective of everyday life." [115] However, this goal appears influenced by the subsequent criticism the museum received upon its 2006 opening for its alleged *Ostalgie* approach. The original 2006 exhibition room topics show that displaying dictatorship was not a primary goal of the exhibition, but rather was inserted into the exhibition through its 2010 expansion.[116] After entering the new second room through a theatrical "fog screen of the bureaucracy," visitors can make phone calls from the Soviet-style Party-Chairman's desk and peruse displays related to the machinations of the SED Party leadership.[117] Through touch-screens,

[113] Interview with Dr. Stefan Wolle, April 28, 2015.
[114] See Stefan Wolle's trilogy on everyday life in the GDR: *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag GmbH, 1998), *Aufbruch nach Utopia: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1961-1971 (*Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag GmbH, 2011); *Der große Plan: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1949-1961* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag GmbH, 2013).
[115] Interview with Dr. Stefan Wolle, April 28th, 2015.
[116] See footnote 5 and Zündorf, 16.
[117] Wolle and Vogt, *GDR Guide*, 155.

visitors can play a game to learn how "voting" worked in the GDR as well as scroll through an edited copy of the revised GDR constitution of 1974. The impact of the SED radiates out through the semi-circles of displays that cover topics such as the military, the economy, the environment, the suppression of churches and dissident groups, the consumer perks of Party leadership, the border regime and the events of autumn 1989. As a grand finale, visitors exit through a "hole in the Wall."[118]

As of 2010, dictatorship is no doubt on display at the DDR Museum. In the foreword of the museum guide for this revamped exhibition,[119] museum director Robert Rückel retroactively situated the initial opening of the museum in the context of the 2006 Sabrow Commission's recommendations regarding the engagement of GDR history in the public realm:

> The publication in 2006 of the findings of a report to establish a historical commission to 'investigate the SED dictatorship' [[120]] combined with the opening of our museum sparked a nation-wide debate…Those who identified with the Stasi as the sole defining element of life in East Germany argued that the GDR could only be understood from the perspective of its victims. Any other attempt to write the history of East Germany was driven by 'ostalgie,' a yearning to return to the Communist past. […] How can seeking a broader perspective on a state be accused of trivialization? The GDR was clearly a dictatorship, which mean that the state (as with all authoritarian regimes) exerted a greater influence on the lives of its citizens than would a democracy. However, this mere fact does not mean that the inhabitants of a dictatorship do not smile, laugh, play, love and disobey.[121]

Here, the director implied that other Berlin museums such as the Stasi Museum and the Hohenschönhausen Prison are not representative for East Germans who remember their experience of life in the GDR less traumatically. According to Rückel, a singularly oppressive representation of life under the SED dictatorship does not adequately serve the public. "Only through the juxtaposition of the positive (or supposedly positive) and

[118] The exit door is an automated sliding door with a giant decal depicting a section of the former Wall.
[119] This is important to note that this catalog reflects the post-expansion self-understanding of the DDR Museum's vision.
[120] Rückel refers here to the Sabrow Commission findings.
[121] Wolle & Voit, 4.

negative aspects of the Socialist system can we hope to reach an adequate understanding of the German Democratic Republic." [122] Echoing this sentiment, Wolle further explained his approach:

> The GDR was more than an artifice of ideology and power; it involved the lives of millions of people…Life in the GDR could be very happy away from the often distant politics and ideology. […] Nevertheless, living with the conditions of scarcity and the considerable competition for goods was far from ideal. All were forced to develop some response…many retreated into their private worlds, making the holiday home the symbol of life in the GDR. The division between a personal and a public opinion was almost unavoidable, the fear of drawing attention to oneself, or worse, coming into conflict with the Stasi were important parts of everyday life. […] None of this could have been mastered without the considerable resources of humour, optimism and cheerfulness which were to be found under Real Existing Socialism. This explains why so many people are prepared to joke about their lives in the GDR, even if the laughter sometimes gets stuck in their throat.[123]

With this statement, Wolle maintained that an ironic, humorous posture among others is permissible when learning about the GDR. This stands in contrast to other museums that only make space for traumatic or sober memorialization of life in East Germany. From the perspective of the DDR Museum curators, it is therefore acceptable to include playing the role of a Stasi agent listening in to other visitors' conversations as part of the museum experience.

Another significant peculiarity to the DDR Museum is the intentional decision to create generalized profiles of typical East Germans rather than highlighting individual historical biographies. Wolle openly acknowledges his preference for the generalized approach because of the difficulties associated with "finding the right biographies."[124] This issue also came up in the context of the Stasi Museum's discussions of its new exhibition, of which Wolle participated as a member of a consulting committee. Wolle

[122] Ibid., 5.
[123] Ibid., 12-13.
[124] Interview with Dr. Wolle, April 28, 2015.

explained, "They always want facts, not created things."[125] This comparison between the DDR and Stasi museums reveals the divergent historiographical approaches of each institution. Wolle upholds the communicative capacity for "created" generic historical types to introduce visitors to aspects of everyday life in the GDR that are historically representative even if they are not tied to specific historic individuals. In this sense, the DDR Museum displays social history rather than biography, as is the case in the other museums analyzed.

The DDR Museum is a dynamic institution that has undergone significant changes in its now near decade-long history, and further changes are to come. The closure of the restaurant opened up another exhibition space. As of April 2015, a video projection installation of a section of the Berlin wall with interactive spray-paint canisters hanging from the ceiling allows guests to leave their own graphic graffiti tag. Wolle revealed the intended theme of the new section to be the 1980s, and his colleagues are currently in the midst of discussion as to whether the 1990s will also be included.[126] However, with respect to the planned expansion, Wolle is reconsidering the use of generic types versus specific historical biographies to show "exemplary, differentiated variations of how people developed after 1989."[127] Planned for 2017, this expansion will be of great interest to researchers focused on representations of the period of transformation in Germany from the 1980s through the 1990s.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the DDR Museum has a visitor's center and advertises resources including, "expert lectures, workshops, lesson materials, talks from contemporary eyewitnesses, readings, discussions, specialist tours, historical city tours,

[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

and much more."[128] Tour packages range in price from €40-€170 and last between 60-240 minutes.[129] The museum hosts monthly special exhibitions on cultural history topics as well as political themes. Upon exit, visitors are invited to fill out an evaluative questionnaire. Due to its commercial institutional character, the DDR Museum must weigh customer satisfaction into its form and content in order to attract sufficient visitor numbers, and this shapes the way GDR history is packaged to be "fun" at this museum.

The overall framework at the DDR Museum is the attempt at creating a space to enable "total immersion in the history of the GDR."[130] Wolle encapsulated this intention in the catalog:

> One of the most popular SED slogans was their claim to "focus on the person." This was never anything but a hollow phrase, the SED focused on nothing other than retaining power. However, in looking back at the history of the GDR let us take up this slogan. After all, the state was made up of the people living in it.[131]

The DDR Museum, then, is supposed to be about East Germans. However, Arnold-de Simine makes an astute observation that at the DDR Museum, "the focus is not so much on GDR citizens as on the visitors."[132] A quick look at the museum's webpage affirms this, as the advertising photographs depict not images from the GDR past, but images of contemporary visitors "experiencing" the museum.[133]

By visiting the DDR Museum, visitors are encouraged to create their own memories of "what it was like" to live in the GDR, but what they are in fact doing is much more. Visitors are creating their own "second-hand" memories of one type of

[128] "Further educational services" *DDR Museum Website.* Accessed April 19, 2015. http://www.ddr-museum.de/en/service/educational-services/supplementary-services-.html.
[129] "Guided tours" *DDR Museum Website.* Accessed April 19, 2015. http://www.ddr-museum.de/en/service/educational-services/guided-tours.html.
[130] "Life in the GDR—Everyday Life in East Germany" *DDR Museum Website*. Accessed April 18, 2015. http://www.ddr-museum.de/en/exhibition/topics.
[131] Wolle and Voit, 13.
[132] Arnold de-Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum,* 181.
[133] "DDR Museum Homepage." *DDR Museum Website.* Accessed April 20, 2015, http://www.ddr-museum.de/en.

representation of life in the GDR that is heavily influenced by one scholar, embodied through the pedagogical tactic of play, and acquired in the context of a purchased tourist experience.

3.3 The Kulturbrauerei Museum–A State-Sponsored Multi-Perspectival Approach

The Museum in der Kulturbrauerei is the fourth exhibition created by the Bonn-based HdG.[134] As part of the foundation's network of museums, the Kulturbrauerei exhibition is the smallest and only recently opened its doors in fall 2013. The museum is federally subsidized and does not charge an entrance fee. Located in the East Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg, the museum resides in a renovated historic brewery that held underground concerts during the GDR period. The brewery now serves as a cultural and entertainment forum. The HdG acquired this space because it was the storage facility of the GDR's collection of industrial design, which the HdG came into possession of in 2005.[135]

The Kulturbrauerei exhibition is titled *Alltag in der DDR* [Everyday Life in the GDR]. One of the curators explained the goal of the exhibition narrative as offering up answers to the question: "What is everyday life in a communist dictatorship?"[136] As is to be expected, this museum is part of the official network of federal museums charged with fulfilling the numerous commission recommendations for GDR commemoration. For the opening of the museum, the HdG museum magazine included an interview with exhibition director Dr. Jürgen Reiche. In this interview, Dr. Reiche candidly discussed the contradictory idea of *Alltag* [the everyday]:

> The matter is simple: There is no "every day." There are different political, social, societal surrounding conditions, there are old and young, above and

[134] *Haus der Geschichte.* See footnote 73.
[135] Interview with museum staff, April 23, 2015. The collection was administered by the GDR prior to 1990. "Sammlung Industrielle Gestaltung," accessed May 6, 2015. http://www.hdg.de/berlin/sammlung/.
[136] Interview with museum staff, April 23, 2015.

> below, poor and rich—also in "real existing Socialism"—victims, perpetrators, convinced Party members, women and men who were followers of the Opposition. They all lived and experienced "the everyday" very differently.[137]

This statement shows the reflexive stance and historical sensibility of the curatorial team at the Kulturbrauerei and demonstrates their intent to display the multiplicity of perspectives possible among former GDR citizens. The exhibition is built around four themes: SED Rule, The Rhythm of the Collective, Consumerism and Shortage, and Withdrawal and Departure.[138] What ties all four themes together is this concept of contradiction between the promises made by the political elite and the realities experienced by East Germans. These themes are interwoven with one another, so that different exhibition components can speak to multiple themes simultaneously.

The Kulturbrauerei exhibition, however, is not shy to clearly condemn the SED dictatorship. The first exhibit for visitors is a short film montage highlighting a chronology of repression between 1945-1989. Footage from the crushed June 1953 worker's uprising, a clip of Walter Ulbricht[139] claiming "no one has the intention of building a wall" in 1961, and select excerpts of protesting crowds in 1989—overlaid with an imposing background soundtrack—emotionally orients visitors into a critical posture that the SED was first and foremost a repressive regime. Significantly, additional footage of the first free elections in the GDR in March 1990 and images of the celebrations of reunification serve to remind visitors of the political rights of West Germany that now apply to former East Germans. In a museum sponsored by the federal German government, such a political orientation is to be expected.

[137] Zander, Ulrike. "Alltag ist universell und individuell zugleich: Interview mit Ausstellungsdirektor Jürgen Reiche." *Museumsmagazin*, April 2013, 14.
[138] "SED-Herrschaft, Im Takt des Kollektivs, Konsum und Mangel, Rückzug und Aufbruch." Author translation. "Alltag in der DDR: Neues Museum in der Kulturbrauerei" Ibid., 9.
[139] Walter Ulbricht was General Secretary of the SED Central Committee from 1950-1971.

A distinctive feature of the Kulturbrauerei exhibition is the space given to displaying the combined visual and slogan propaganda of the SED. The main wall of the ground floor includes twenty-four political propaganda posters from the late 1940s to 1980s. Above these looms the SED slogan, "To learn from the Soviet Union is to learn victory."[140] The remaining rooms include more of these slogans in large print above the entrances. Visitors are therefore invited to ponder the "lofty" image of Socialism created by the Soviet Union and the SED that stands in contradiction to the "reality on the ground" they will encounter in the main exhibition hall upstairs.

On the upper level, visitors are free to choose which way to proceed through the two remaining exhibition halls.[141] The hall to the left focuses on "The Rhythm of the Collective" specifying the ways in which the SED's collectivist economic and social policies affected the work and leisure of GDR citizens. The role of VEBs[142]—state-owned enterprises—takes center stage, as visitors learn how workers at these factories were organized into competitive brigades. In terms of working conditions, the explanatory texts emphasize how workers had to deal with insufficient material and faulty machinery, which "often render[ed] workers inactive against their will."[143] However, VEBs also provided child care, administered company holiday resorts, organized sporting clubs, and offered cultural activities. The Kulturbrauerei excels at highlighting the tension between the legitimate enjoyment of these forms of "group solidarity" experienced by some members, and the ways in which other GDR citizens felt "constrained and controlled" by the all-pervasive presence of the SED state.[144] To

[140] "Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen." Author translation.
[141] A museum staff member suggested that the normal way would be to proceed first into the hall that exhibits "The Rhythm of the Collective," but the museum itself does not prescribe a route. This may change with the pending introduction of an audio guide.
[142] VEB is the German abbreviation for *Volkseigene Betriebe*.
[143] "Work According to Plan" explanatory plaque, Museum in der Kulturbrauerei.
[144] Ibid.

illustrate this, a reproduced "Brigade book" shows how collective members were required to document their own socialist activities and discussions, often done so in a positive light. And yet, "people deviating politically from the official line are reprimanded in this book by some Brigades…criticism is often hidden between the lines."[145] The only type of hands-on component of the museum are reproduced source evidence such as the Brigade book and other primary sources such as letters as well as legal documents located in binders throughout the exhibition. These binders reflect the desire of the curatorial team to give visitors the chance to interpret primary sources for themselves, rather than relying solely on the secondary commentary of the curatorial staff.

As the exhibition visit continues, visitors encounter youth culture, military service, and the rise of dissident movements and the repercussions for those who enthusiastically adhered, passively conformed, or actively rebelled. Here, ancillary organs of the SED such as the Free German Youth and the National People's Army are juxtaposed in tension with institutions such as the Protestant Church and various grassroots peace and environmental protest movements that emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Visitors learn that the image of peace promoted by the official propaganda fails to hide the latent and erupting conflicts within GDR society. The important role of the Stasi is acknowledged, but it occupies a rather modest presence in the overall exhibition. The remainder of the exhibition focuses on such topics as housing, fashion, and the challenges associated with accessing limited consumer goods.

From a curatorial standpoint, the Kulturbrauerei exhibition concentrates on "personal stories with personal objects."[146] This approach is rooted in a curatorial

[145] "Work journals" explanatory label, Museum in der Kulturbrauerei.
[146] Interview with museum staff, April 23, 2015.

paradigm that values the presentation of objects that are symbolic of factual biographies and documents based on the lives of real individuals, not composite or "generalized types" as is the strategy of the DDR Museum. For example, visitors can read school children's essays from 1976, written on the topic "What has changed for us at home since the Eighth Party Congress?" Behind these essays stands a Trabant™ with a trademark East German tent set up on its roof. The students' shared desire to travel is juxtaposed with the reality of the means and types of travel permitted to them, and the far wall shows an image of Lake Balaton and a map with statistics of where East Germans travelled in Eastern Europe.

Visitors to the Kulturbrauerei will find quite a few of the same illustrative objects as those used at the DDR Museum. A plethora of GDR consumer goods, typical furniture and fashion pieces, as well as East German print culture permeate the relatively small 600 sq. meter exhibition space. Both museums take a thematic approach to their exhibits and employ the concept of *Inszenierung* [staging] to immerse visitors in a "typical" or "representative" GDR space. A few examples of such scenes in the Kulturbrauerei include a German *Kneipe* [pub], a Bohemian/dissident living room, a grocery store with meager supplies and a *Datscha* [vacation cabin].

The Kulturbrauerei exhibit may not be as kinesthetically interactive as the DDR Museum—other than the binders and film kiosks, most objects are kept behind glass vitrines—but it displays an extensive range of original object-artifacts. Visitors can look at factory machinery and a wall of signs from various *VEBs*. The bike used by dissidents Manfred Butzmann and Ursula Wolf to which they welded a cross in protest against state political oppression is also on display.

What makes the Kulturbrauerei most distinct from the other museums discussed is the prominent role given to film media. There are numerous kiosks with thirty-eight

different film excerpts from the 1970s-80s including propaganda pieces, documentaries and news reports.[147] Totaling up to three hours, these on average one to three minute film clips serve as oral history sources and give visitors access to East German voices discussing their own experiences, as well as West German and international interpretations of life beyond the Wall.

In terms of political education, the HdG produced small interactive guidebooks for young German-speaking visitors. The booklet includes questions to prompt reflection on what it would be like to live in a society where, for example, one's clothing could be interpreted as a political statement by the regime, or how ideological education overlapped with traditional school subject matter.[148] As a state funded institution, the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei has the advantage of subsidized funding, however it also has its own political bias as an extension of the German government in public space. Through its pedagogical resources, the Kulturbrauerei exhibition therefore promotes the importance of citizen rights and government accountability as the most important political lessons to be learned from an encounter with the history of everyday life in the GDR.

At the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei, it is not the privileged perspective of one historian that is put on display, but rather the team effort of an already established historical foundation mandated by the federal government of Germany. This is not to say that a collaborative approach necessarily produces a more "accurate" historical representation of the GDR. However, I argue that the Museum in der Kulturbrauerei is a successful implantation of the commission's goal for "a more balanced landscape of memory" because it acknowledges contradictory perspectives attached to historical

[147] Ibid.
[148] "Wie war das…in der DDR?" Visitor Booklet. Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2014.

biographies and diverse media sources while simultaneously engaging visitors' aesthetic imagination through the curatorial strategy of *Inszenierung.*

Case Studies Conclusion

The case studies above reveal both convergence and diversity among museum discourses of the GDR. Aware of each other's presence, each institution's original design (and subsequent expansion or revamping) attempts to maintain a way of looking at the GDR that is distinct while simultaneously responding to governmental pressures to cover both the repressive and banal features of life in East Germany. While the DDR Museum and Kulturbrauerei exhibition converge in their curatorial strategy of material culture-dependent *Inszenierung*, the Stasi Museum diverges as a document and text-centered exhibition. The Stasi Museum and the Kulturbrauerei exhibition converge to promote the power of biographies and original sources tied to identifiable former GDR citizens to bring visitors into a personal encounter with perspectives from the past. The DDR Museum diverges on this count in its use of generic types that is nevertheless based upon the credible reputation of an established historian. Visitors to the DDR Museum are encouraged to assume a primary posture of kinesthetic play, Stasi Museum visitors are expected to analytically look and read, and Kulturbrauerei are encouraged to do both. This comparison shows that history in the public sphere of museums comes in a myriad of forms in the Berlin museum landscape, each carrying its own aesthetic and analytic potentialities and pitfalls. The influence of government commissions has influenced the coverage of everyday life themes alongside themes of repression, resulting in new exhibitions that attempt to cover both, as Zündorf phrased it, "within the context of dictatorship." In this respect, historical consensus appears to be forming in the museum community regarding what GDR historical content must receive attention within their

exhibitions, meanwhile the symbolic forms employed to communicate about life in the GDR continues to be re-imagined.

Conclusion

"The question is not only what is remembered by whom
but also how and why it is remembered"

Silke Arnold-de Simine[149]

I include the quote by Silke Arnold-de Simine both in the Introduction and Conclusion to remind my readers of the goals of this thesis. Taking the institution of history museums of the GDR as my subject area, I have sought to answer the following three questions throughout my research: 1) whose history is told? 2) How is this history told? And 3) for what purpose is this history told? Throughout the three chapters, I have sought to reflect on how the unique space of the museum with its texts, objects and sensory stimuli can simultaneously communicate information and evoke feelings about life in the German Democratic Republic.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the competing memory discourses of the GDR past, be it a view of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat,* an apolitical *Ostalgie* perspective, or a view of contradiction that includes elements of both extremes. This chapter also introduced the variety of display strategies that museums of the GDR employ to communicate their memory discourse. Conventional display styles, with their glass vitrines and reliance on textual commentary, help create an atmosphere of sober intellectual concentration appropriate for museums communicating a critical interpretation of life in the GDR. For museums that have a more positive interpretation of life in the GDR, display styles that encourage tactile interaction contribute to a playful atmosphere where learning about the past is an enjoyable tourist experience. Museums that display contradictory discourses attempt to employ both playful and serious display strategies.

[149] Arnold-de Simine, *Memory Traces*, 11.

In Chapter 2, I explored the reasons why the German federal government has been so active in guiding commemoration of the GDR, and why private sponsors have felt the need to offer an alternative vision of life in the GDR. While governmental efforts at remembering revolve around the desire to instill democratic values and make the injustices of the SED regime transparent to future generations, private museums reflect the desire to find positive or redeemable aspects of the GDR so as not to completely delegitimize the socialist society that lasted for forty years in the form of the East German polity. In comparison to other former communist societies, the German landscape of GDR memory is remarkably diverse and while debates regarding the most appropriate way to commemorate the GDR have been strong, the mere fact that such active debate exists reflects the democratic nature of this landscape.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I synthesized the topics of the previous chapters in my research findings from the three museum case studies. While there appears to be convergence on what *ought* to be remembered—features of everyday life integrated into the wider structure of dictatorship—there is still divergence as to how and why the legacy of the GDR is important. As contemporary museums occupy a public space that serves political agendas, educational purposes as well as requires significant economic resources, the motives for representing the GDR are multiple and mixed. State-subsidized museums can focus on their mandated task of political education with less concern for maintaining economic viability, whereas private institutions must find ways to attract visitors and stay afloat financially as one of many Berlin tourist attractions. Differing display strategies promote different emotional postures in visitors who are either looking for a sober engagement with the traumatic aspects of the GDR or more light-hearted images of life in an attempted socialist utopia.

The challenge for historians and museums curators alike is to navigate the multiple memories of the GDR in their respective fields. As the historiography of the GDR demonstrates, initial critical interpretations of the SED regime as a failed an illegitimate state have been nuanced by the contributions of social and cultural historians looking at the ways in which East Germans identified positively with aspects of their former socialist society. After twenty-five years, the most recent additions to the Berlin museum landscape appear to have converged in their capacity to find ways of acknowledging—even integrating—these diverse and contradictory perspectives of the history and legacy of the German Democratic Republic.

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