Whither *Alltag*?: How the Wende Museum Revises East German History (and why it matters)*

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This paper argues for the significance of the Alltagsgeschichte (everyday history) as both a source of information about the past and as a site of resistance against a master narrative that has excluded East Germans from self-determination. More than just a question of East German culture, I will illustrate that this challenge to history threatens West and united German self-identifications, which maintain the East as subordinate. I will focus my analysis on the Wende Museum, a private non-profit archive and museum of Cold War culture located in Culver City, California. Considering the significance that location has had on the narrating of the East German past, I seek to demonstrate how as neither mileux de mémoire (environment of memory) nor lieux de mémoire (site of memory), the Wende Museum avoids the prospect of representing the past in a unifying "authentic" East German narrative. Facing the future for and through the past, the Wende Museum represents a Cold War tabula rasa with space for infinite pasts.

1. Introduction

In order to imitate the visual reality of East Germany, director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck filtered *The Lives of Others*' (2006) color to a dull hum ("The Lives of Others – Sound, Set and Colour"). Even today, a visit to Berlin's Alexanderplatz evinces the socialist country's yen for concrete. Such images confirm the East Germany in mind, which is to say, the anticipated subject, but inadequately represent its lived experience. Certainly, the image of East Germany as an austere and foreboding space gives a portion of its public face. Nevertheless, after seeing *The Lives of Others*, an East German remarked: "Everything that was portrayed in the film happened. But it didn't happen LIKE THAT. 1000 details were off" (Boyer, "From Algos to Autonomos" 24). This reaction is typical and represents the challenge current scholars of East Germany face. East German history has largely been written from the perspective of the state via Stasi and other government documents (Kelly and Wlordarski 10). What remains off or skewed by the record are the less dramatic experiences of the everyday (*Alltag*). This paper argues for the significance of the *Alltag* as both a source of information about the past and as a site of resistance against a master narrative that has excluded East Germans from self-determination. More than just a question of *East* German culture, I will illustrate that this challenge to history threatens West and united German self-identifications, which maintain the East as subordinate. I will focus my analysis on the Wende Museum, a private non-profit archive and museum of Cold War culture located in Culver City, California. Considering the significance that location has had on the narrating of the East

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German past and employing the theoretic of Pierre Nora, I seek to demonstrate how as neither *mileux de mémoire* (environment of memory) nor *lieux de mémoire* (site of memory), the Wende Museum avoids the prospect of representing the past in a unifying "authentic" East German narrative. Facing the future for and through the past, the Wende Museum represents a Cold War *tabula rasa* with space for infinite pasts.

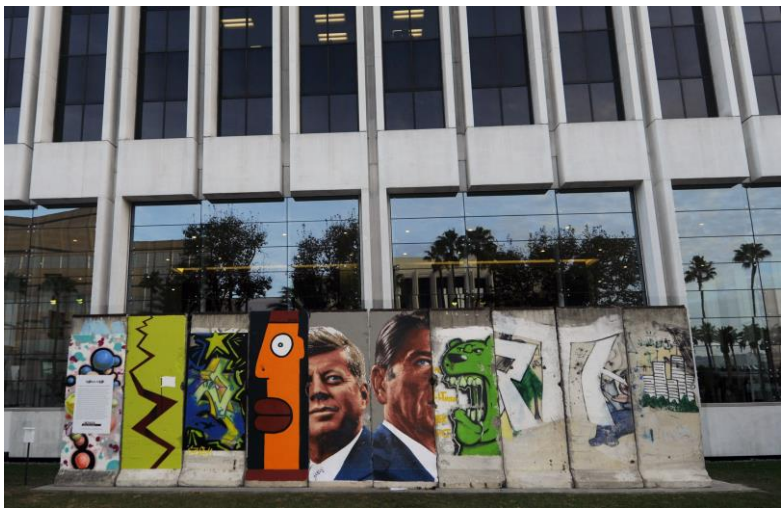
2. The Stakes

Formally established in 2002, the Wende Museum has a collection of over 100,000 artifacts. Its East German collection, which accounts for nearly 75% of holdings, is the largest of its kind outside of Germany (Biehl). The Wende Museum preserves East German culture in material memory and actively resists the tendency in German—not to mention American[1]—Cold War museums and histories to interpret East German reality through a purely political lens. Historians of East Germany have consistently resisted this alternative perspective. Rainer Eckert, director of the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum* (ZGF, Contemporary History Museum) in Leipzig, does not "understand the point of what [the Wende Museum] is doing", maintaining that "almost everything is already documented in Germany...I don't really see what this could add to the debate. In many ways, the GDR is better documented than any other period in German history" (cited in Biehl). However, Wende Museum director and founder Justinian Jampol argues that "if the items in [this] collection were deemed of historical or aesthetic value, they would be housed in the appropriate institutions, and the museum would not exist" (Jampol 258). His perspective resounds both in the museum collections and their origins. East Germans have recognized the significance of the Wende Museum project since its inception, evident in highly personal donations to the collection. There is, in general, no place for these objects of culture to go. These donations confirm the opinion of scholars of East German *Alltag* and memory who maintain that the country has been historicized without reference to the average person's experience, skewing these historicizations with 1000 fraught details. Anthropologist Daphne Berdahl, for example, has criticized the ZGF for its emphasis on repression and resistance, which ignores the apolitical reality of the *Alltag* (Berdahl, "Re-Presenting the Socialist Modern" 350). Because it is the only federally organized and funded GDR museum in Germany, the ZGF's polices and practices represent the significant national barriers that prevent a more nuanced understanding of Germany's Cold War past (352). Moreover, Eckert's claim that the GDR has already been sufficiently documented underscores the necessity of projects like the Wende Museum, which move beyond the state-created documents to which Eckert refers. In any case, to write a history from these documents is in itself a dubious goal. Cultural historians Katherine Pence and Paul Betts allow that although the state used "tools of the modern bureaucracy and police apparatus...[to monitor] the East German population and [log] records of their participation and

[1] For more on the subject of ambiguous Cold War museification in the USA, see Wiener, Jon. *How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. Print.

protests in vast archives" prolifically and without precedence, these official "histories of the GDR have not done much to produce reconciliation and narrative consensus" (Pence and Betts 3). Vera Wollenberger, whose husband informed on her to the Stasi for over a decade, offers an even more vitriolic assessment: "If a future generation of impartial researchers were to reconstruct the face of [East German] society using these [Stasi] files, they would produce only a grotesque grimace, bearing no resemblance to a human countenance" (cited in McLellan 19). Clearly, relying solely on state documents narrates an incomplete and skewed past. Importantly, the Wende Museum's collections of *Alltag* objects and documents converse with its holdings of political artifacts to the effect of adding unanticipated detail to familiar histories. This dialogue works to "capture the lived experience beneath the ideological battles and geopolitical struggles of the Cold War" (Wende Museum, "About Us") and aids the understanding of how people experienced "real existing socialism" beyond the party line.

3. The Museum itself



[Figure 1]
Installation view, Original Berlin Wall Segments at 5900 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. Photo Credit: Marie Astrid González, The Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War.

Tucked away in an office park, the museum's location belies its unusual contents. Though most of its collection remains in the archive vault, museum staff organize on-site exhibitions and also lend objects to local and international institutions. [Figure 1] The Wende Museum's largest project thus far commemorated the twenty-year anniversary of the fall of the wall in 2009 (Wende Museum, "The Wall Project"). Immensely ambitious and interdisciplinary in its audience and temporal reach, "The Wall Project" included a temporary road block on Wilshire Boulevard and the installation of ten original wall segments across from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The Wende Museum commissioned four artists to paint five of these segments for permanent display, including Thierry Noir––one of the first graffiti artists to paint the Berlin Wall in 1984—and L.A. muralist, Kent Twitchell. This

ambitious and dynamic public sculpture remains installed on Wilshire Boulevard, an ambiguous monument that refers to both Germany's walled in past and contemporary parallels, not least of which the US-Mexico border some 150 miles away. "The Wall Project" deliberately coincided with the opening of the LACMA's new location on Wilshire, a concurrence that epitomizes the Wende Museum's goal to engage a wider public in its inquiry. Indeed, this project continues the work of the East Side Gallery—a 1.3km stretch of Berlin Wall painted by 105 artists (including Thierry Noir) in 1990 as a monument to unification. Given the recent removal of portions of the wall to make room for luxury housing along Berlin's Spree River ("Developer Resumes Removal"), the significance of the LA installations has grown increasingly complex and increasingly important. As the Berlin Wall's original sites continue to be erased, preservation efforts abroad will continue to raise questions as to the significance of these spaces in a post-Cold War Germany.

[Figure 2]
Csorvássy István, *Lenin Statue*, after 1950, Romania, carved wood,
40 cm x 14.5 cm x 32 cm, 2010.900.218.
Photo Credit: Marie Astrid González, The Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War.

On site, the museum programs dozens of events every year, including exhibitions, film screenings, and panels. The Wende Museum has quite little space to display its artifacts publicly. In Fall 2012, the museum announced plans to move to a much larger space in a few years—a move that reveals not only the museum's desire to expand and adapt, but also the growing public interest in alternative Cold War histories. Until then, in addition to its galleries, the museum invites visitors to tour its vault (to which I will return shortly). Among its curated spaces, the first floor gallery features "Facing the Wall," a semi-permanent exhibition of divergent ephemera from the Berlin Wall. The exhibition includes personal testimony and collections from a Stasi officer who helped draw the original borderlines in 1961, a border patrol officer, graffiti artist Noir, and an original "wallpecker"—the name assigned to the thousands of people who turned hand-rent chips of the wall into lucrative souvenirs. This

admixture of card-carrying party members and wall dissidents typifies the Wende Museum's desire to place contrasting—even contradictory—perspectives in dialogue. [Figure 2] Steeping visitors in official visual culture, the museum's upstairs entry gallery displays a selection of commemorative plates from the Eastern Bloc, and a rotating selection of *Auftragskunst* (state-contracted art) and sculpture. A smaller adjacent gallery presents new exhibitions regularly, including recent displays of Hungarian textiles and the East Bloc's vibrant jazz scene. In addition to a few offices and a library, a third gallery is currently showing paraphernalia from the Eastern Bloc's sports culture, posters from the USSR, and more paintings and sculpture. [Figure 3] In the corner of the gallery, a slightly larger than life bust of Lenin spray-painted pink and turquoise guards the door to the vault below. The sculpture's unique Warholian whimsy is indebted to an anonymous tagger who spraypainted Lenin during one of the pivotal Leipzig demonstrations in 1989 that precipitated the fall of the Berlin Wall. Because such paints originated in West Germany, this iconoclastic act represents the cross-border exchange in a divided Germany. Struck by the ambiguous cultural and historical significance of the bust, the museum has adopted the vandalized Lenin as its institutional mascot.

[Figure 3]
Vandalized Lenin Bust, 1965/1989, East Germany, plaster, 20 cm x 17 cm x 14.5 cm, 2004.900.052. Photo Credit: Marie Astrid González, The Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War.

From the top of the stairs, the archive's 100,000 objects overflow dozens of cubbies. The archive teems with the past: paintings and flags, magazines and street signs, slides and films, fashion and hobby magazines, family photos and art history slides, office chairs and "garden eggs", busts of Lenin, Marx, Thälmann, and other Communist heroes gaze squarely behind earthquake-proof cording. The archive includes a growing number of artworks. Those of East German origin are primarily examples of *Auftragskunst*, but a small selection of artist books and photography portfolios include works by

Gundula Schulze, Ulrich Wüst, and Helga Paris—a few of the small handful of artists whose GDR-era work has been well-received in unified Germany. The marginalization of East German culture as politically suspect has largely devalued its artists, regardless of political affinity. Until recently, the official art of East Germany has disproportionately represented the country's artistic canon. Despite its relative exposure, *Auftragskunst* has nevertheless also been largely misunderstood, colored by simplistic propagandistic interpretation. Consider for example, Jampol's revised interpretation of Heinz Drache's large-format painting *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau* [The People Say 'Yes' to Peaceful Reconstruction) (1952) (Jampol 259). [Figure 4] By all appearances, the painting exemplifies the hyper-politicized socialist realist aesthetic characteristic of *Auftragskunst* and "Communist" art more generally. Though the painting was indeed state-contracted, it was relegated to a basement shortly after a pivotal construction worker's uprising in East Berlin in 1953. Authorities believed that the painting of workers building the city's grand Stalinallee (today's Karl-Marx-Allee) would have reminded the country's population of the conditions under protest, as well as its aggressive suppression by Soviet troops. This important detail emphasizes a need for subtle interpretation of official artworks from East Germany. Moreover, attention must be paid to both the creation and dissemination of nuanced scholarship. This painting's complex past is generally occluded by its appearance, wherein the familiar aspect registers hasty conclusions that miss actual function. Overlooking official art thus parallels similar foreclosures of other products of non-western culture—a tendency no doubt familiar to those still resisting the narrow and essentialist projections of the "primitive" category.

[Figure 4]
Heinz Drache, *Das Volk sagt 'ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau*, 1952, East Germany, oil on canvas, 149cm x 212cm, 2007.059.011.
Courtesy of the Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War.

The Wende Museum invites scholars worldwide and undergraduates from local universities to research its holdings. Jampol envisioned this objective after experiencing difficulty accessing such material for his dissertation: "At first, I was interested in pursuing these materials for my own research,

then providing them to others for interdisciplinary work, and then, eventually, for other purposes. It all started from there" (cited in Heller). In addition to a regular team of interns made up of American students, an international exchange has brought students from Sweden, Holland, and Germany to intern and conduct research. In May 2012, Florentine Schmidtmann, a master's student researching East German material culture at the Freie Univeristät in Berlin, began a nine-month research practicum at the Wende Museum. Her comparative experience between studying East German *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) in country versus at the Wende Museum demonstrates the museum's unique and critical role as source and facilitator of exploratory scholarship. Schmidtmann explains that because this subject remains controversial in Germany—where the Cold War split still manifests itself in palpable national tensions—she is interested in the US-perspective, which does not bear the same historical or cultural burden. She observes that because the archive does not bear a particular German identification, its artifacts approach greater objectivity. In particular, Schmidtmann finds the museum's presentation of *Auftragskunst* as aesthetic or cultural object, rather than political symbol, remarkable.

In Spring 2012, I consulted the museum's collection of amateur photography. I reviewed thousands of photographs, many of which had been donated in beautifully organized scrapbooks. Among my favorites are the personal albums narrating *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (*FDJ*, Free German Youth, the GDR's official youth organization) excursions that illustrate both political lessons and leisure. Most of the photos in the Wende Museum's collection are even less politically loaded: average people on vacation, celebrating birthdays and weddings, etc. I found two albums by Heinrich, an amateur photographer and retiree from Dresden. Interspersed among photos of family and friends, he placed ones of house repairs, "old and new clocks", typewriters, and the curious burial of a broken lamp. Are these images of functional living a reification of GDR consumer rhetoric? Do they demonstrate Heinrich's dissatisfaction with a faulty lamp or a leaky faucet? Are they indications of Heinrich's parallel interest in the DIY? The question of how to look at the photographs *without* anticipating a political message disrupts my ability to draw a conclusion. Some may say that without the oral history that accompanies these photos, I cannot do much more than describe their contents. I do not disagree. Nevertheless, equally quotidian East German artifacts consistently face this kind of political attachment.

[Figure 5]
Authors Unknown, Loose vernacular photographs, ca. 1973, Zittau, East Germany, 2005.056.009. Courtesy of the Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War.

How can I read these photographs without inferring the country's oppressive public politics? Three photographs from 1973 that I found in the collection raise this methodological question quite poignantly. [Figure 5] In two images, a man stares lustily at a magazine ad for an Audi '80. His hair is coifed in an Elvis pompadour and he wears a Western cowboy-style shirt. He sits at a table in a small living room adorned with regional textiles. A third photograph depicts a woman at the same table with the magazine turned to an ad for a Ford Capri '73. Her pose is more candid. Her fingers graze the car, but her gaze looks off camera, perhaps to something on the television across the room. She has a short modern haircut and wears a tight sweater, in keeping with the time. These images raise the issue of East German desire and desire, in general. If I am to believe the narrative of East German history, then I could presume that these young people are lusting after the West. Consumer evidence may support this conclusion: these cars definitely would not have been available in the East. Indeed, the presence of these Western magazines itself offers mysterious insight into the cross-cultural exchanges that penetrated the Iron Curtain. Likewise, I can imagine the very same photographs taken across the border in the capitalist West. Were these photos taken in West Germany in 1973, the desire for fast and flashy cars could be read as symptomatic of Easy Rider youth culture. Does the fact that these photographs were taken in Zittau, East Germany change the desire for a car? Is it fair to politicize the desire because it occurs in East not West Germany? And, perhaps most importantly, what does the instinct to politicize reveal about Western desire to categorize and other the East?

4. Othering and *Eigensinn*

Cultural historian Oana Godeanu-Kenworthy writes that "following the absorption of East Germany into West Germany, as the GDR past has become a signifier without a signified, the same past

consequently has become open to invention and to remembering according to the compensatory needs of the present" (169). Because the East has not been allowed to speak for itself, its artifacts cannot self-categorize. The micro-histories present in GDR ephemera are either/or'd to become representative of either the specter of East German oppression or East German victimhood. Whereas it is absolutely true that the state oppressed, surveilled, and restricted the freedoms of the East German population to both general and very specific, often tragic ends, analyzing East Germans and their past with the assumption of victimhood has led to a pathological tendency to infantilize this "Other Germany". Such a perspective verifies the West German narrative of German unification as heroic exploit, establishing a clear moral hierarchy with West as hero and East as either rescued or fascist. This binary has led to a passive explanation for the presence of the *Nischengesellschaft* (niche culture), a parallel and networked public that established alternative economies, collectivized to gain access to or protest scarcity, as well as hosted artistic and intellectual events, all as a means to supplement the deficits of the culture provided by the state.[2] Considering how the niche culture influenced or even defiantly forced changes to national character is significant. Josie McLellan's discussion of the role of civil disobedience in establishing legal nudism is, for example, quite telling (McLellan "Naked Republic: Public Nudism"). Similarly, looking at this second sphere through Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Eigensinn* (a sense of one's self interest) highlights the agency citizens enacted as consumers within their private publics (Pence and Betts 5). Because *Eigensinn* has become a tool to understand the individual's *Alltagsgeschichte*, it stands to reason that looking at the *Alltag* ephemera as hosts or sites of *Eigensinn* may be a useful method to visualize and restage everyday experience. In this sense, the photographs I looked at, as well as the objects within, bear double-witness. Perhaps Heinrich's photograph of his broken lamp accompanied an official complaint about a lamp of poor quality.[3] Because such complaints remain in the government record, as do the changes in policy caused by them, including Heinrich's *Alltag* photograph could reasonably contribute to a more dynamic understanding of GDR *Eigensinn* and consumer behavior.

Insofar as East Germany has been historicized into political binaries, the inherent banality of the everydayness of the *Nischengesellschaft* clearly destabilizes this villain/victim master narrative. Moreover, investigating the *Nischengesellschaft* on its own terms reveals an apolitical public. In fact, part of what makes GDR *Alltag* problematic is that citizens neither largely supported nor resisted the totalitarian state (Ten Dyke 153). The majority of the East German population "made do" (153) and

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[2] See for example Gal, Susan and Gail Kligman. *The Politics of Gender After Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.; Verdery, Katherine. "What was Socialism, and Why Did it Fall?" *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Ewing: Princeton University Press, 1996. 19-38. Print.

[3] See for example Judd Stitziel's chapter about how consumer culture became a conduit between government and *Alltag*. "Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining. Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR." *Socialist Modern*. Ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011. 253-286. Print.

participated dispassionately within a corrupt system. In his foundational text on East German *Alltag*, Günther Gaus observes that "niches are not external [to the socialist system], on the contrary they are niches inside GDR socialism…Over the decades more facts, beliefs, and standards of really existing socialism have made themselves at home in private corners that niche dwellers are always themselves aware of" (cited in McLellan 210). That is to say, East Germans both consciously and unconsciously compromised their needs within the state system. Though examples of the hybrid compliant/resistant East German are vast, personal accounts of the *Jugendweihe* (the state-sponsored and all but compulsory rite of passage that inaugurated a young person's first adult commitment to the state) demonstrate the ambivalent, even beneficiary, relationship that citizens had to the status quo. On a visit to a private *Alltag* museum organized by three Dresden students in the early 1990s, anthropologist Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke recorded one student's account of her *Jugendweihe* (145). Sabine completed both her *Jugendweihe* and her church confirmation at the age of 14. Because it included an avowel of atheism, the *Jugendweihe* conflicted with Sabine's Christian faith. Nevertheless, she described this conflict of interest as only superficially distressing. At the time, 95% of East German youth participated in the *Jugendweihe* (153). Had she opted out, Sabine would have marginalized herself and likely not been admitted to university. As for a growing number of teenagers, for Sabine the *Jugendweihe* represented a rote performance for the state. As such, it did not conflict with her Christian identity, which bore much more personal resonance. This example of *Eigensinn* undermines the official statistics, which—without the introduction of personal histories—inaccurately characterize GDR youth as overwhelmingly supportive of the state. Ten Dyke describes Sabine's behavior as characteristic of the East German experience: "As long as an individual "played along" or "participated"...one could achieve those basic things one desired, such as education, while maintaining one's peace and quiet" (155). That most East Germans "played along" reveals that for the average East German, identity was positioned, with public and private personae negotiable. Accepting these negotiations is imperative to understanding the East German experience. Focusing on the state as it saw itself and its people strips the agency that Sabine clearly enacted *within* the system for her personal benefit. To acknowledge this doubling of dissidence and pragmatism undermines the narrative of omnipresent state power that appears in state documents.

5. Memory and The Construction of History

Sabine's choice to include her *Jugendweihe* in her *Alltag* museum demonstrates her interest in presenting her experience in contradiction. This is, no less, a pointed example of how individual memory differs from institutionalized history, a point to which I will return shortly. Sabine's dual identity, as both confirmed atheist citizen and confirmed Christian, illustrates the hybridity of the East German, a hybridity that is not at all unique to this country. Stuart Hall's theorization of post-colonial identity as subordinate may help to develop an understanding of East German identity—both pre- and post-1989––that invites contradiction. Acknowledging that marginalized political subjects may transform themselves in spite of or because of oppression reveals their agency behind seemingly passive cultural

assimilation (224). Moreover, from such attention emerge histories hidden behind the surface of hegemonic culture or projection:

> Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves, within the narratives of the past. (225)

This perspective seeks to de-essentialize culture through its claims that subjectivities are positioned relative to how the past has been narrated and used to explain a particular way of culture. Culture is, thus, an ahistorical product that disobeys progressive logic, but nonetheless becomes the subject or proof of history.

Historian Pierre Nora's distinction between history and memory models the difference between ideological and hybrid interpretations of culture. Nora defines history as narration that pursues stasis and categorization (8). Memory, in contrast, is a "perpetually actual phenomena" that "remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (8). Because history seeks to normalize the past, it claims a universal authority that "belongs to everyone and no one" (8). New memories potentially contradict the unity that history performs. Historical revision, it may be argued, requires concession to infinite perspectives, including the dominant one. Indeed, it would be foolish to entirely disregard hegemonic narratives, which are not necessarily incorrect in their *memories* but in their claim to completeness and authenticity, that is, their claim to "history" or "truth". Engaging new histories with hegemonic ones may expose the false consciousness and political paradigms that veil truth in ideology. Because history manifests itself in material form—i.e. museums, monuments, architecture, as well as more ephemeral forms of culture—revising or updating the past must in turn adapt these institutions, and objects. Nora identifies such spaces as *lieux de mémoire*: locations that organize history so as to create a site of memory (7). He contrasts these with *milieux de mémoire*; whereas the *lieux de mémoire* condense the past and make it resolve in the present, the *milieux de mémoire*—the real sites of memory—are disparate and highly personal, and as such, largely unquantifiable (7). *Lieux de mémoire* mimic the *milieux*—aestheticizing a particular perspective on the past to bind infinite subjects to a unifying narrative (7).

Museums of East German history—like Leipzig's ZGF—have tended to embrace the condensed *lieux de mémoire* model. Though the museum presents myriad objects and subjects, its interpretations are nevertheless didactic and describe the anticipated subject. Little attention is paid to unofficial culture, or when addressed these groups are defined in relation to oppression rather than as examples of East German cultural expression. I believe that part of the difficulty with the museification of East Germany relates to location. Because this past is for the most part presented in Germany, GDR museums suffer from what I see as Nora's double bind. Given that it is located in Leipzig—an international cultural and political center of East Germany—the ZGF is in fact both *lieux* and *mileux de mémoire*. That is to say,

many of the artifacts and stories on display in the museum bear the affirmative weight of original or authentic location—*milieux de mémoire*'s required element. I reason that location similarly affects German museums that focus on alternative GDR histories. For example, the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (Dok-Zentrum, Documentation Center for the Everyday Culture of the GDR) embraces the local origins of its environs and collection. Indeed, given that the Dok-Zentrum acquired many of its objects from local residents (Ludwig) and that it is located in Eisenhüttenstadt—a surviving example of communist-era urban planning—the museum is understandably unwilling—even unable—to narrate its artifacts through the ZGF-style GDR rhetoric. Political insight or regime critique are not absent here, but are, nevertheless not emphasized to the same degree. Rather, the rhetoric of this museum abides a defense of GDR culture and people's histories. Indeed, in its intentional resistance to the hegemonic GDR master narrative, the Dok-Zentrum self-consciously distinguishes itself from other museums of GDR history (Ludwig). Given that the museum represents both a decidedly ideological project and an original or authentic location, the Dok-Zentrum is also both *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire*. In short, it seems difficult to reconcile either the Dok-Zentrum's or the ZGF's dueling attachments to location and institutional politics.

In contrast, the Wende Museum is neither *lieux* nor *milieux de mémoire*. Distance precludes the possibility of mistaking the museum as an original or authentic location. Its resistance to "scripting conclusions" (Jampol 262) is, however, optional. That is to say, the Wende Museum's choice to offer historical evidence rather than to tell history enables it to become an alternative space *for* rather than *of* history. After Andreas Huyssen, this is, thus, a repository for "present pasts" that is oriented toward a future as yet undecided (21). The Wende Museum's to-be-determined focus is not end obsessed, but rather "non-purposeful" (Groys 10) in the sense that the museum hedges conclusion and, therefore avoids future contradiction. By attending to memory, the Wende Museum liberates us from Nora's caution against history.[4] Indeed, because it does not mediate its visitors' experiences through familiar or familiarizing histories, the museum allows memories and associations to surface freeform and unresolved. This is especially significant for visitors who lived in the GDR and who have few opportunities to engage with this past publicly. Donations from East Germans evince their desire to preserve personal history, while also demonstrating a persistent need for unmitigated culture. A donation to the Wende Museum offers greater assurance that the GDR past will neither end up in the trash or in an overtly politicized *lieux de mémoire*. A particular example comes to mind. [Figure 6] A few years ago, a suitcase filled with books, records, magazines, and political texts arrived from Germany. This donation signifies the refined purpose of reclaiming the GDR past through the *Alltag*. Everyone's

[4] It is important to consider how limited American interest in East Germany may have contributed to the Wende Museum's ability to take a politically and phisophically liberal approach. As the Cold War and East German culture undergo more in-depth scholastic investigation in the US, it will be important to interrogate the objects in the Wende Museum collection in light of the relationship between the GDR and Cold War US.

memories get lost, but in this case, the East German wants to participate in the representation of his/her culture. Such work is achieved in no small part through the presence of objects.

[Figure 6]

Suitcase filled with everyday items, as received by the museum in early 2000s.

Photo Credit: Sara Blaylock, The Wende Museum Collection and Archive of the Cold War.

6. *Ostalgie* and Self-Affirmation through Objects

According to Nora, memory "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (8). That is to say, culture manifests itself in objects, and as such it can be passed through time. Similarly, Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton add that this communication enables tradition, and theorize that these mediated communications between past and present shape collective memory. Objects are role models: "Even purely functional things serve to socialize a person to a certain habit or way of life and are representative signs of that way of life" (21). For example, a house is a traditional type of dwelling whose tradition is relative to its position, not to any universal definition of what a dwelling should be. Thus, by looking at the things that surround a person, one gains insight into not only the individual, but also the collective behavior that shaped that individual's life and worldview, that is, his/her culture. Similarly, individuals manifest their memories in collections of personal objects, or "autotopographies" (González). Art historian and theorist Jennifer A. González explains that through these collections "one forms modes of self-representation...not only to reflect memories and desires but also to protect a threatened identity" (140). Autotopographies—especially of the displaced or marginalized—may be composed of transitional objects, which aid the psychosocial transformations a people must undergo when transplanted from a familiar cultural context (140).

Following unification, East Germans lamented that they had "emigrated without leaving home" (Berdahl, "(N)ostalgie" 202). The East German transitional object may help ease the material and cultural unease caused by unification by marking the new reality with pieces of the old. Nevertheless, *Alltag* ephemera have been disregarded as *ostalgic*, a cultural phenomenon which describes nostalgia for East Germany. Since unification, *Ostalgie* has been especially evident in the market for GDR-era

products, a fetishization popularized and made internationally recognizable by the 2003 film *Goodbye Lenin* (dir. Wolfgang Becker). Some scholars argue that what is today a kitschy commodification of the GDR began as an effort to ease East Germans into a unified state. Daphne Berdahl, for example, argues that this inclusion, rather than assisting cultural transition, focused entirely on adjusting East Germans from communist to capitalist consumers and thus "perpetuated a narrative of 'democratization' and national legitimacy in which access to consumer goods and consumer choice [was] defined as a fundamental right and a democratic expression of individualism" ("Re-Presenting the Socialist Modern" 360-361). In light of the failure to include East German culture outside the gift shop, this argument is especially convincing.

Alternatively, *Ostalgie* may be conceived as a Western invention—an imaginary that has helped to maintain the Cold War master narrative and preserve a fantasy of an Eastern utopian alternative.[5] Dominic Boyer considers *Ostalgie* to be a nostalgic phenomenon with resonance with more West than East German identification. In his view, in order to stabilize the West's post-Nazi identification, East Germans must remain West German's muted Other:

> The very powerful and diverse *Ostalgie* industry in unified Germany reflects the desire of its West German owners and operators to achieve an unburdened future via the repetitive signaling of the past-obsession of East Germans. But this incessant signaling is itself symptomatic of West Germanys' own past-orientation. In the end, the therapy of East/West distinction cannot really resolve or dissolve what Freud might have termed the pathogenic nucleus of the Holocaust in all postwar German memory. Nevertheless such therapy exerts tremendous effects upon the lives and self-knowledge of eastern German citizens. ("Ostalgie" 363)

Boyer's analysis suggests a deeper and more problematic subtext to the controversy over East German memory. This is not "simply" a question of retelling the Cold War. Rather, revising East German history potentially derails the long sought after *Selbstwertgefühl* (self-respect/esteem) of the post-Nazi (West) German. Such a derailment will arguably serve to further the restoration of German-German identification, healing the political divide that severed ties between post-war Germans along ideological lines, lines which reflect and shape popular belief, but which nevertheless muddy with attention paid to everyday realities.

7. Conclusion: Unscripted

In this paper, I have argued for the necessity of the objects of culture through various scholarships, including post-colonial theory, anthropology, memory studies, and museum studies. I join this

[5] See for example Boyer, Berdahl, and Godeanu-Kenworthy cited in this document as well as the "Former West" project: http://www.formerwest.org.

scholarship to that of East German cultural historians as a means of demonstrating how the study of objects elicits far more than a vapid nostalgia. By grounding my analysis in the work of the Wende Museum, I have sought to demonstrate how this institution's location and mission contribute to an expanded study of East Germany. Although I have focused on the Wende Museum's collection as a factual and tangible presence, I also believe that as a steward of culture, the museum has demonstrated great commitment to its public—past, present and future. I am optimistic that as the museum expands in size and public stature, and interest in the Cold War increases, the Wende Museum will remain dedicated to unscripted presentation. Such a vision has thus far liberated these artifacts from their history, telling not one but 100,000 stories with unseen conclusions. The Wende Museum relishes and performs Cold War contradiction. Indeed, given the historical value of Berlin Wall segments, the Wende Museum's choice to install 21st century murals on these monuments represents its commitment to bold, unpredictable appropriations of the past. Perhaps this ambiguity recalls "real existing socialism" best.

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