

Chapter 5

Consuming Communism

Material Cultures of Nostalgia in Former East Germany

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Ostalgie is perhaps the most high profile case regarding the phenomena of sympathetic sentiments for the vanished socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe. Many years after the film *Good Bye Lenin* made *Ostalgie* – the German neologism for nostalgia for the former socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), also known as East Germany – into a household word, the phenomenon has not faded but rather become a stable part of the tourist and commercial landscape. Today, Berlin’s tourist office promotes the GDR Museum, where ‘the kitchen still has the cooking smells of way back when’, and the Trabi Safari where you can drive the cult cars from old days. The old East German street-crossing signals known as *Ampelmännchen* are not only the rare GDR vestige adopted in the West, but are a growing international brand with a chain of shops from Berlin to Tokyo, where the Japanese website presents them as the ‘symbol of traffic safety, German unification, and resurrection’ and sells their image on everything from lamps to noodles (Ampelmann-Japan 2013). ‘Eastern product’ shops like Ostpaket do a respectable business in the mid six figures, plying over seven hundred items from mundane household goods to novelties such as the Young Pioneers condom with the original Pioneer motto: ‘Be prepared – always prepared!’ Tourists can stay in Berlin’s GDR-themed hotel ‘Ostel’ and take in the hit East–West love story musical *Beyond the Horizon*,

while more determined visitors can celebrate the GDR's anniversaries in rural Tutow's DDR Museum with dancing and Soljanka soup served in genuine Mitropa bowls.

In the early years after unification the appearance of nostalgic themes struck critics as misguided or naive in the wake of the failed dictatorship. The few initial stores that sold 'Eastern' products, such as Intershop 2000, became the focus of media curiosity and occasional scorn for trivializing the GDR dictatorship. Ironic appropriations, such as nostalgia parties, seemed acceptable as long as they mocked the failed regime, yet any serious expression of longing for the GDR was commonly derided as delusory and ungrateful. The term *Ostalgie* itself carries connotations of a stereotypically narrow-minded Western view of former Easterners. While colloquially used, it is seldom preferred by those in what we can call the nostalgia industry. For example, the proprietor of a successful Eastern products store 'flew into a rage' at a journalist's mention of the word, countering that 'when someone in the West uses Nivea cream one doesn't call him *Westalgic*' (Trappe 2012). An annoyed contributor to a recent online forum about Eastern products complained how '*Ostalgie* is a Wessi [i.e., Western] concept for defaming people whose right to their home [*Heimat*] is resented for arrogant, ignorant, bigoted, consumption-addled, socially insensitive and politically charged reasons' (Viktor 2010). Yet whether it is called *Ostalgie* or not, commodified material manifestations of the GDR era – what we can call nostalgia objects – are currently part and parcel of the German cultural and memory landscape.

This chapter contributes to the investigation of *Ostalgie*, with specific focus on the material dimension of nostalgia.¹ While nostalgia is thought of primarily as a form of longing for something no longer attainable – a longing for a style of longing, as I explored in an earlier article (Bach 2002) – it is made manifest primarily through material objects that are, in one form or another, obtainable. Objects and images, as Dominik Bartmanski (2011: 9) writes, 'need to be approached as constitutive, not epiphenomenal of nostalgia'. I argue here that what we call nostalgia is a collective phenomenon that emerges *through* the effects of commodification, which transforms everyday objects into nostalgia objects and thus makes them capable of transmitting cultural knowledge. Commodification marks representative items from a past era, usually from everyday life, as valuable (both literally and figuratively). This allows them to remain in or re-enter circulation and, most importantly, pushes objects into the domain of what Michel de Certeau (1984) calls secondary production, where consumers 'produce' new symbolic meanings that were not originally intended. In their new guises, the symbols, slogans and styles of the old regime are dislodged and

recombined in ways that make them effectively contemporary. In this way nostalgia objects are kept alive and gradually turned into a 'normal' part of the landscape.

I am not arguing that commodification is somehow a good in itself, or making a statement about the relative value of cultural knowledge transmitted through nostalgia objects. Rather, the examples in this essay explore the relation between nostalgia and materiality. Understanding this relation might help explain why *Ostalgie* did not wane with the coming of the first post-unification generation, but rather became seemingly entrenched. Beyond the example of Germany, it might also help explain how nostalgia functions as a form of cultural transmission. Further, as the above comments critical of the term *Ostalgie* indicate, I also hope to convey some of the quandaries that accompany the widespread use of the term to refer to the phenomenon of nostalgia for socialism. There is a constant slippage in the discourse between *Ostalgie* as a descriptive, derogatory, or defiant term, depending on who is speaking and under what circumstances. In the first part of this essay, I examine a form of redemptive discourse, in which collectors salvage objects of discarded everyday life and give them new values as they find their way into private museums. The second part follows former GDR era products that are sold today, often with cult status, showing how what began as a defiant reappropriation of symbolic value became part of an established market for regional products. The conclusion suggests why *Ostalgie* has become an accepted but not acceptable part of contemporary German culture.

Collecting Communism

In the immediate years after unification, all across the former GDR citizens purged their products, appliances, clothes, cars and documents. This massive cleansing was the corollary to a collective effervescence of consumption that had accompanied the currency union between West and East Germany in February 1990, when Eastern stores switched their inventories to Western products literally overnight. For months shelves were stocked and restocked at breakneck speed in response to the massive pent-up consumer desire endemic to socialist economies of scarcity. As a consequence, fully functional everyday GDR objects instantly became culturally obsolete and wended their way into the bins or attic. In that first unification year residents of the GDR territory produced 1.2 tons of rubbish per capita, three times that of the West (Ahbe 2000). Anything Eastern seemed suddenly inferior. Items that once occupied high status in the East were suddenly next to worthless.

As a joke went at the time, a man stops at a garage on the highway and asks the mechanic for two windshield wipers for his (East German) Trabant car. The mechanic replies: 'That's a fair trade'.

As the material life of a dead nation state disappeared into dumps, attics and storage spaces, a motley crew of mostly middle-aged males, gripped by anxiety at the suddenness of change, began to collect remnants of everyday life from rubbish heaps, flea markets, abandoned buildings, friends and neighbours. This often took the form of a consciously desperate attempt to grasp the past as it slipped away before their eyes. Stretching out his arms with clenched fists, one collector illustrated to me how, during the unification year, he would collect bags and bags of DDR 'stuff' from the streets and shops on his way to and from his night shift at a light bulb factory, fretful because he 'knew it would soon disappear'. Collectors combed flea markets, stores, rubbish bins, buildings and industrial sites for packages of dry goods, Communist Party-related paraphernalia, certificates, postcards, bottles of soda, appliances, cups and saucers, furniture, record albums and instruction manuals, doing the hard work to wrench the everyday out of the fringes.

The first phase of the afterlife of GDR objects of everyday life is inseparable from this collector culture. The inveterate collector, Jürgen Hartwig, was a former East German locksmith who found his calling during an epiphany over Christmas 1989 when he realized the past – his past – which had been preserved behind the Wall, was on the verge of disappearing, and he must begin to collect it. Hartwig was living in West Berlin at the time, having been forcibly expelled after serving two years in a GDR jail for trying to leave the country illegally. Suddenly, preserving for posterity the country that ejected him became a major motive. He co-founded and continues to serve as the president of the Association for the Documentation of GDR Everyday Culture, which has run a swap meet every month at the formerly prominent GDR Café Sybille for over twenty years. Similar acts of collecting gave the everyday objects a combination of two values that began to transform trash items to nostalgia objects.

The first value that accrued to the object through collecting was survival. With the 'death' of the GDR came a widespread sense of people becoming strangers in their own land or permanently estranged from a past that defined their identity (as with Hartwig 1994). One form of the work of mourning is to survive what amounts to a form of living death through the act of collection (Baudrillard 2005 [1968]). The collectors engage in salvage as a way of ordering time and space, of reorganizing the suddenly drastically disorganized present. One collector explained the heady rush of salvage as an irresistible impulse 'to hoard and to hoard, because time is running

out . . . I want above all to brutally collect and unsystematically hoard everything' (Faktor 1999). In a context where many Eastern Germans felt that, 'There was no time to say goodbye' (the title of a 1995 collector's exhibit), objects become, as Baudrillard (2005: 104) wrote, 'the thing with which we construct our own mourning' and thus symbolically transcend death.

Beyond the value of personal and cultural survival, once the objects began to be the focus of collections they acquired intersubjective worth – the value of recognition of another's desire for your object. Collectors began to understand how their own past could literally fetch a price, and learned to play their own sense of self-worth in the dance around monetary value. The monetary value of GDR items remains unspectacular compared with antiques from earlier periods, with the priciest objects falling into conventional categories such as coins, currency and stamps. Yet the very notion that one's material past can fetch a price began to change self perception, allowing for knowingly ironic reversals and new-found fluency with commodity culture. For example, an East Berliner recalled how, shortly after unification, he saw a Westerner buying badges at a flea market and realized with a sudden flash of insight that his own old school badges and medals, buried in boxes somewhere to which he had never given a second thought, might fetch hard cash. More or less on a whim he invited the Westerner to his home to show him his badges (Krawczyk 1996). When the Westerner asked, 'How much for everything?', the response was a mixture of melodrama, irony and business acumen:

I stood up, breathed deeply, sat down, and whispered: 'That is my past, how can you convert it into money?'

'How much?'

'You tell me.'

'Hundred.'

I laid a cloth over the objects. The effect was stunning. As soon as he couldn't see what he desired, he increased his offer by two and half times. I said: 'I won't let it go for under three hundred'. Fast as a pickpocket he drew three bills from his pocket, and covetously withdrew the cover from his freshly acquired possession.

The point, of course, is not that some GDR everyday items can, as with the badges, fetch some small cash, but that desire by others produces an enhanced sense of the worth of one's own past, and that the clever deployment of this sense can lead to playing with role reversals and notions of value. This suggests a process of self-inscription in objects, similar to what David Parkin (1999) observes among persons whose sense of social self is disrupted by displacement. Yet unlike Parkin's examples, where self-inscription

happens in ‘non-commodity, gift-like’ objects such as mementos that refugees carry with them when they flee, in this example the re-articulation of identity happens through commodification. Commodification of one’s own past allows people to access what Parkin, in another context, has called their ‘temporarily encapsulated personhood’, otherwise stored in the objects that survive from one setting to another.

Object Lessons

These early collections formed the impetus for the two trajectories that GDR nostalgia objects have taken since unification: museums of everyday life and the rebranding of products with commercial distribution. Back in 1994 Hartwig fantasized that ‘one day former East Germans will have a similar experience as I have had with things from forty years of GDR history, and a museum that documents history and everyday culture will later awaken a great interest’ (Hartwig 1994: 3). While there is no one such museum (though the GDR Museum in Berlin comes close), nearly twenty years later there are over two dozen private GDR museums of varying size and quality dedicated to socialist everyday objects, and publically funded museums regularly incorporate everyday objects into their exhibits.

With some difficulty at first, collectors began to find permanent homes for exhibiting their collections, and their museums sprouted in basements, garages, homes, barracks and former factories. With no access to public money they usually formed private non-profit organizations, in the German sense of ‘common-use societies’, that allowed them to raise funds through membership fees, contributions and admissions. In addition to their own collections they placed public calls for the donation of artefacts. Among the very first of these museums was the Open Depot, which turned into the Documentation Centre for Everyday Culture of the GDR in Eisenhüttenstadt (independent from Hartwig’s similarly named association), emerging originally from a short-lived collaboration between the less orderly Hartwig and the scholarly West Berlin curator Andreas Ludwig. More typical of the dozens of private museums is the GDR Museum Pirna, where the founder, Conny Kaden, began collecting numismatics in 1993 and realized a few years later that his small (fifty square metres) apartment resembled a museum – ‘everywhere stood radios, toys and medals, the bookcases were piled with GDR books, and on the walls in the corridor and kitchen hung GDR and Pioneer flags and every morning our former politicians smiled down at me’ (Kaden 2012). In 2004 he opened the museum, which today occupies two thousand square metres in a former military barracks.

The museums are a qualified success. Some are haphazard collections in cramped spaces, others are multi-story mainstays of their local tourist economy. Over 120,000 visitors to date have sought out the recreated dentist's office, schoolroom and kitchen in Apolda, and over 50,000 visitors a year trek to the Time Travel (*Zeitreise*) museum in Radebeul near Dresden. The Berlin GDR Museum tops them all with over half a million visitors a year.² All of the museums claim that showing life 'as it really was' is their main task, educating people too young to remember the GDR and providing an identity-affirming experience for the older generation who, judging by conversations and the many entries in guest books – 'the museum awakens memories of our childhood' is a typical example – are generally appreciative of the trip down memory lane.

The private museums themselves mostly conform to a general format that places emphasis on experience and interactivity, most pronounced in the Berlin GDR Museum with its motto of 'history to touch'. Nearly all of them place emphasis on quantity, with rooms full of radios, watches, strollers, or over-stocked *Konsum* grocery stores conveying a sense of scale and fullness in distinction to the sense of the GDR as a small state defined by scarcity. In contrast to the image of the GDR as grey, the exhibits are colourful and homey, as with the 1960s diorama in Wittenberg, complete down to the details of a chocolate bar and cookies on the table, a Stempke vacuum cleaner, a homemade antenna for receiving Western TV, and Igitil shades on the lamps illuminating books in the modular shelving units.³

The term *Ostalgie* is generally avoided to describe the museums or used sparingly and with qualifications. Nearly all museums make a point of saying that they do not yearn for the past, they only wish to dignify people's lived experience. 'Dear visitors', asks an open letter at the GDR Museum in Tutow (Görß 2013), 'is it *Ostalgie* to long for the scents of childhood?' This reference to childhood is not random, rather it points to a major trope in the GDR museums, where objects are presented mostly as innocent carriers of personal memory. As Shevchenko and Nadkarni (this volume) note, nostalgia gains its force by depoliticizing memory into something apolitical, non-partisan and seemingly objective and neutral, such as childhood memories. In the complex case of the socialist everyday, everyday life was mercilessly politicized and private life was officially delegitimized and made inherently suspect. For both public and private museums, then, the representation of mundane objects is more treacherous than it might seem at first glance because it invites and confounds attempts at historical objectification.

The private museums' defensive claim that it is *not* nostalgic to objectively show life 'as it really was' can therefore itself be seen itself a political

move to correct a perceived hegemonic Western narrative that devalues East German lives, consigning them to a past where life was either a lie or a crime. Directors of some of the private museums expressed in conversations their contempt for professional exhibits that they saw as a hegemonic, Western, self-serving, state-supported ‘demonization’ of East Germany. The favour is returned by historians and curators, however, who see such museums as trivializing the very lies and crimes that trapped East Germans in a corroded, paranoid netherworld. While the Time Travel (*Zeitreise*) museum in Radebeul (‘*Zeitreise*’ n.d.) declares up front that the museum ‘is not about the usual portrayal of the GDR and its mechanisms of repression’, the historian Martin Sabrow (Sabrow 2009: 13) counters gravely that denying the complicity of everyday life with dictatorial rule ‘would not be the first time in the history of Germany’s grappling with dictatorships that the self-validation of one’s own experience represses a regime’s violence’.

Beyond debates over whether the museums trivialize the past, their relentless and repetitive focus on the world of everyday goods quietly embodies the vexed role of consumption at the heart of the socialist experiment. Consumption functioned as both a core identity of late socialist modernity and the Achilles’ heel of the system.⁴ Today it plays a further ironic role in reifying (literally) the past. This is reinforced by the significant role the gift shop often plays, becoming in some ways an extension of the museum (and often the entrance itself), presenting GDR-era items ranging from replicas of typical colourful rooster-shaped egg cups to novelty items celebrating the fictitious ‘sixtieth anniversary’ of the GDR (which only lived till forty). This abundance and variety of GDR goods on display and for sale provides a further irony: socialism was supposed to overcome the alienation caused in part by the loss of meaning in ‘things’ due to commodity fetishism, but now it is precisely the socialist ‘thing’ that restores meaning as a commodity.

Products of the Past

This brings us to a discussion of the second trajectory emerging from the transformation of everyday items into nostalgia objects. The collectors’ linking of commodities with identity was reinforced in the museums, and also materialized in the steady reappearance of GDR-era brands and associated products, so-called *Ostprodukte* (East products). Tapping into what Hartwig called a ‘reservoir of memories deeply anchored in the consciousness of the ex-GDR citizen about the positive side of the GDR and one’s own lived past’, once unloved GDR items became displaced sites for emotions

(Hartwig 1994: 3). 'I broke into tears of joy, good old Rondo', pronounced a customer upon the reintroduction of a GDR coffee brand in 1997 (Ahbe 2005: 50).

Similar to the move of everyday objects from the trash to private museums, commercially available products came to affirm the 'positive side' of lived experience for Eastern Germans against a general atmosphere of inferiority and insecurity. In the 1990s the rap group A.N.T.I. sang 'Eastniggers . . . /are what we all are. / The color of our skin is white / yet in Germany we are the last shit' (in Roth and Rudolf 1997: 119), an extreme version of a sentiment that is still present in the stubborn inequality in income and employment rates between the former West and East. This binary discourse was to a significant extent internalized in the early years, when the same pent-up consumer desire that drove East Germans to toss their material culture into the rubbish bin conversely overvalued Western products as synonymous with the seemingly superior value. In the wake of unification, GDR products conveyed inferiority in both production quality and taste, a sentiment widely shared in the West.

Yet the shame that surrounded GDR products simultaneously served as a form of cultural intimacy in Michael Herzfeld's (1997) sense, where a set of objects define insiderhood through their disapproval by powerful outsiders, in this case West Germans. The products of everyday life that returned to or remained on the market – detergent, pickles, mustard, beer – were intimate also in the literal sense of being ephemeral products that came into close contact with the body. Some people stockpiled goods out of practicality, like the man who recalled hoarding a year's supply of *Spee*-brand detergent when he realized that stores suddenly considered it worthless. But soon a few stores began to hang signs saying 'We sell Eastern products', offering certain popular GDR brands to appeal to consumers exhausted by the task of trying new items and seeking to save money.

In a short time certain brands developed cult status, in part because they were still available, familiar and inexpensive, and in part because of their design, which emphasized the retro directness of socialist era advertising. Admired in the West largely for their novelty value, these brands also provided a way for Easterners to symbolically undermine the West/East binary by refusing supposedly self-evidently superior Western goods. In conversations with friends, in stores and in online forums Eastern Germans began to regard Eastern products as better tasting in part because they were more authentic: some considered them purer in substance (less preservatives) and soul (less marketing gimmicks), even if this was not always the case. 'Good old' East German products became vehicles of unsubtle defiance, for example, Club Cola – 'our Cola' – came with the tag 'belittled by

some, it can't be killed' (*Von einigen belächelt, ist sie doch nicht tot zu kriegen*), or Juwel cigarettes, which addressed its target audience with the slogan: 'I smoke Juwel because I already tested the West. One for us' (*Ich rauche Juwel, weil ich den Westen schon getestet hab'. Eine für uns*). The reference to testing the West alludes not only to the obvious but to a famous slogan for an older Western brand of cigarettes called 'West'. Eastern products became a political strategy for Easterners to resist speechlessness in a discursive field of cultural production dominated by the West.⁵

One of the reasons why so few East German brands survived unification had to do not only with consumers' perceptions of quality (real or imagined), but with the inability of East German firms to compete in the new unified German market. The federal trust agency in charge of privatization liquidated or sold most of the 'people's own' firms that produced East German consumer products, with the result that the best selling major GDR-era brands today are mostly owned by Western companies, even if in some cases they still produce locally. Juwel, for example, is owned by Phillip Morris, while Club Cola is owned by a Hessen-based (West German) beverage company. F6, the Phillip Morris subsidiary that produces Juwel, cheerfully explains how its product 'stands for what's good and trusted from days past and helps with the self-conscious articulation of East German identity' (Lay 1997). However accurate the clever, critical, advertising slogans of Eastern products are in capturing the sentiments of a lost identity, they are also a marketing strategy for capturing market share in the former East.

Today a standard repertoire of GDR-era brands follow specific marketing strategies aimed at regional identities (except for alcohol brands, which are among the few to have nationwide recognition).⁶ In some cases products are redesigned to seem even more local, like mustard from Bautzen, known in the GDR as Bautzener Senf, and rebranded after being purchased by a Bavarian company as 'Bautz'ner Senf' with the apostrophe suggesting a colloquial, folksy image. Following a national trend towards buying local, GDR-era brands successfully give the impression of helping the struggling local economy, which is an oft-cited reason given by consumers for purchasing them.

The sense of regional identity and authenticity of quality and heritage is deepened by a renewed emphasis on the pre-war roots of many 'GDR' products, such as the Spreewald brand pickles made famous by the film *Good Bye Lenin*, which, it turns out, had received a very early product endorsement in the writings of Theodore Fontane at the end of the nineteenth century. Nudossi hazelnut spread was already enjoyed, as one irked Easterner claimed in a 2010 online discussion, in the Weimar Republic.

Under the heading *Do Western Germans Have No Sense of Quality?* he asserted that, in comparison to Nudossi, the better-known brand Nutella is a ‘cheap sugar paste’, and implicitly compares it with Goethe and Schiller, who also ‘spent much of their time in “East Germany”’ (Ruediger 2010).

If certain Eastern products such as Radeberger beer or Rotkäppchen (Little Red Riding Hood) sparkling wine have found their way into the standard supermarket repertoire, the largest concentration of Eastern products is to be found in the specialty stores. The largest of these, such as Ostpaket and Ostprodukte Versand, have substantial physical stores and a robust online presence.⁷ Similar to the private museums, which they resemble in many ways, the specialty stores disavow *Ostalgie*, claiming simply to give the people what they want and keeping alive ‘affectionate memories of how’, as the store Ostprodukte-Versand puts it, ‘alongside the Wall, there was much loveliness [*so viel Schönes*] in our own country’ (Ostprodukte-Versand 2013). Similar to the museums, they see themselves as providing a vital social function of transmitting history to the next generation. Accordingly, their websites contain history sections with photos, guides to GDR currency or official abbreviations, and lyrics to the GDR national anthem, in addition to trivia contests, editorials and links to GDR-themed sites. Ostpaket (the store whose proprietor flew into a rage at the mention of the word *Ostalgie*), has created its own mini museum called ‘East Times’ (*Ostzeit*) that seeks ‘to keep alive memories of forty years of living and working in the GDR’ (Ostpaket 2013). To this end, the store asks to borrow objects from former GDR citizens for its exhibit, preferably accompanied by stories such as ‘on my turntable is the record by the band AMIGA, like it had when I got my first kiss!’

Ostpaket, whose logo is a Trabant against a silhouetted map of the GDR accompanied by the motto ‘good things from the East!’ plays in its name (literally ‘East Package’) on an inversion of the well-known phenomenon of West Packages sent to the GDR from West Germany during the Cold War. Similar to other stores it offers several ironic varieties of ‘East Packages’. As a profit-making business engaged in an earnest historical mission, Ostpaket and other similar stores seek distinction through their use of irony. Similarly to the private museums, who often use an ironic background soundtrack of songs like *The Party is Always Right*, the self-conscious irony that pervades the Eastern products industry serves to dislodge the slogans, symbols and styles of the regime and make them usable as contemporary persiflage.

In one of dozens of possible examples, the company Ostprodukte Versand offers a ‘Hero of Labour’ set, of six ‘Hero of Labour’ products, including shower gel, bottle opener and a certificate that adapts socialist

language, for example: ‘The superhuman and exemplary tasks rendered by the bearer of this honorary title are worthy of emulation and continuous improvement. To learn from the hero is to learn victory’. This last sentence echoes the famous GDR slogan ‘To learn from the Soviet Union means to learn victory’. In the early years of unification such irony functioned to strip official symbols of once feared power (cf. Shevchenko and Nadkarni, this volume). More than twenty-five years later the effect is to ‘retrofit’ the symbols, to use Serguei Oushakine’s term, to ‘offer a recognizable outline without suggesting an obvious ideological strategy of its interpretation’ (2007: 456). As a result, the symbols are redeployable in new contexts and for new generations.

Conclusion

In Schevchenko and Nadkarni’s excellent treatment of nostalgia in post-socialist Hungary and Russia (this volume), they locate its power within the ability of politicians to generate political capital out of nostalgic content. In the German case, the *Ostalgie* phenomenon has been decidedly less directly connected to the machinations of party politics. What the above examples suggest is how nostalgia functions to create a popular-cultural form of knowledge transmission. In this essay I am not concerned with the substance of the knowledge (e.g., whether the representations are historically accurate), but in understanding how everyday objects become nostalgia objects through acquiring new forms of value. In the process of acquiring value and re-entering circulation, consumers appropriate the symbolic capital of the objects in new ways. The case of socialist-era symbols is particularly rich when it comes to semiotic re-appropriations, not least because, as Vladislav Todorov (1995) writes, the socialist deficit of goods was accompanied by the overproduction of symbolic meaning, offering a potentially large domain for creating new double meanings, ‘retrofitting’ and other forms of secondary production in the post-socialist era.

Through commodification and new forms of representational value, *Ostalgie* has become recognized, if grudgingly, as a fixture in the larger landscape of German memory politics. This recognition manifests itself often in strong rejection of the term as at best insufficient, and at worst inimical, for the task of doing justice to the lived experience of the GDR. The younger generation – ostensibly the beneficiaries of the private museums and specialty shops’ educational efforts – seem to agree. An initiative called Third Generation East expresses dissatisfaction with the lack of voices of those who grew up after 1989: ‘We don’t want to choose anymore between the

GDR as an unjust state (*Unrechtsstaat*) and a plaintive *Ostalgie*', writes one member, 'we third generation, of all people, have the responsibility to make our own image of the past' (Staemmler 2011; see also Hacker 2011).

Different actors thus project onto *Ostalgie* and its material forms a different set of meanings, definitions and emotional investments. In this essay, I have focused on everyday objects as they are transformed into symbolic carriers of 'positive' aspects of the former GDR as nostalgia objects. Their widespread presence, whether in the private museums, supermarket shelves, or specialty shops, combined with a robust nostalgia industry in the form of tourist attractions, fixes *Ostalgie* in this objectified form in the German memory landscape. In this sense, we may be able to speak of *Ostalgie* as a social fact. Yet, however socially recognizable *Ostalgie* becomes, it is unlikely to ever to become fully socially acceptable and transcend its negative connotations as trivializing, camp and kitsch. In the German case, where national identity is founded on a 'will to memory' (Eyal 2004), *Ostalgie* functions as an insolent interjection to the 'injunction to remember'. Through its alternately innocent and ironic representations, *Ostalgie* subtly undermines the redemptive quality of collective memory as a national project under the guidance of professional historians and State commissions. As Eyal (2004) has analysed, collective memory in Germany is central to the state and its institutions as a guarantor of identity and a healer of wounds. *Ostalgie* dislodges symbols of this project so that a digitized Lenin can wink at you in the Berlin GDR museum, prodding established identities and scratching at the wounds. Nostalgia allows the symbolic content of collective memory to be re-appropriated by collectors, companies and consumers, rather than the hermeneutic guardians of culture and history. Thus does nostalgia tug at our conscience, even as we enjoy its (guilty) pleasures.

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Notes

1. For existing literature on *Ostalgie* see, inter alia, Berdahl and Bunzl 2010, Boyer 2006, Cooke 2005 and Todorova and Gille 2010. See also Betts 2001, Rethmann 2009.
2. This data comes from the museums' respective websites: for the Berlin GDR Museum see <<http://ddr-museum.de/de/presse/statistiken>>, for Zeitreise see <<http://www.ddr-museum-dresden.de/>>, for Apolda see <<http://www.olle-ddr.de>>.
3. For a fuller discussion of private GDR museums see Bach, forthcoming. See also Scribner 2003. For a discussion of the Open Depot, the forerunner of the Documentation Centre for GDR Everyday Culture in Eisenhüttenstadt, see Kuhn and Ludwig. 1997. See also the catalogue for the Centre's first major exhibit, Ludwig, Stumpfe and Engelhardt 1996, and Berdahl 2010.
4. See, among others, Pence and Betts 2008, Reid and Crowley 2000 and Rubin 2008.
5. See Bach 2002 for these and other examples. On *Test the West's* reception in the East see also Norman 2000.
6. The top Eastern brands, not all distributed in the Western states, include alcoholic beverages (Rottkäppchen Sekt, Nordhäuser Doppelkorn, and Köstritzer, Wernesgrüner, Hasseröder and Radeberger beers), sweets (Halloren Kugel, Grabower Küsschen, Frischli cookies, Komet desserts, Nudossi spread, Schlager chocolates), baked goods (Kathi baking mixes, Burger Knäckebrötchen, Filinchen crackers, Teigwaren Riese), detergents (Spee, Fit), body and bath (Florena cream, Badusan soaps), Bautz'ner Senf, Halberstädter sausages, Vita Cola, Werder Ketchup, coffee (Rondo Coffee, In Nu malt coffee), and of course Spreewald pickles. See Trappe 2012 and Willmroth 2010.
7. The major specialty stores of GDR products in 2013 include Ostpaket, Ossiversand, Ostprodukte-Versand, Ossiladen, Allerlei Ostprodukte, Kaufhalle des Ostens (KdO), Ostprodukte.de, Ostprodukte Verkauf, and Ostshop.com.

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