

History and Memory in Material Culture

The *Dokumentationszentrum
Alltagskultur der DDR*



After the Wall: Reconstructing and Representing the GDR.

Workshop II: Evoking the GDR Alltag

Bangor, July 7, 2009

Andreas Ludwig:

History and Memory in Material Culture:

The Documentation Centre of Everyday Culture in GDR,
Eisenhüttentadt

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1. The Role of „Alltag“ in Public Debate



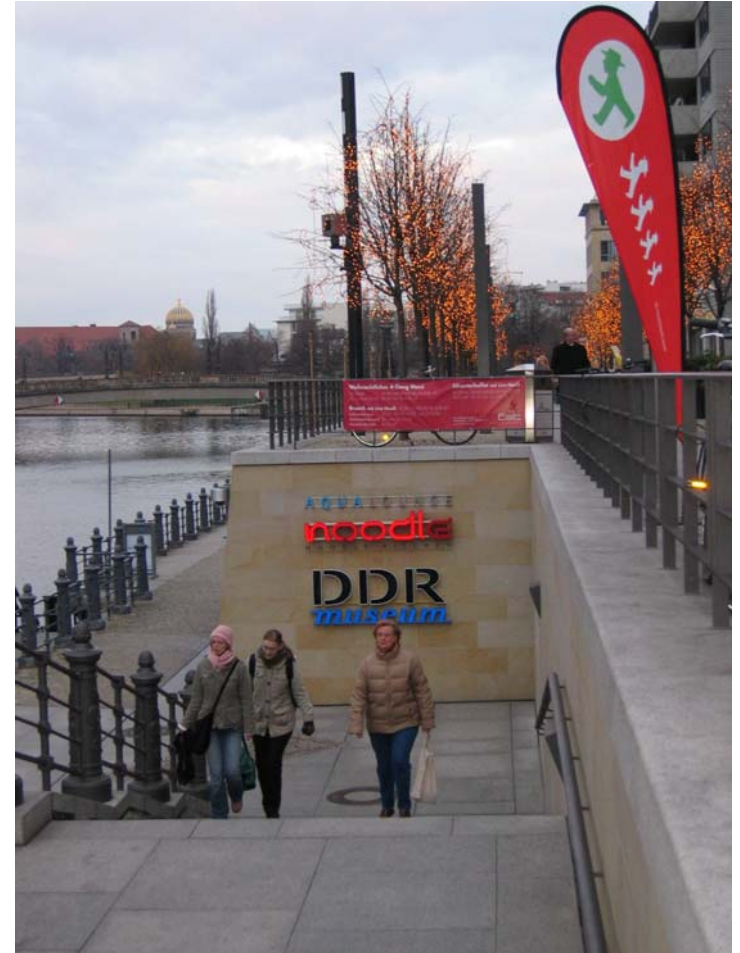
Development of Representations

- GDR history has been presented in memorials rather than museums
- The Sabrow-Commission proposed a concept of „Gesellschaftsgeschichte“
- The current „Gedenkstättenkonzeption“ integrates „Alltag“ into the official concept of „DDR-Aufarbeitung“

Development of Representations

- Exhibitions in museums and memorials show different „histories“ of the GDR:
- Cold War (Checkpoint Charlie Museum)
- Everyday (nostalgic collector's museums)
- Everyday (reconstruction/ethnographic)
- Opposition and Repression
- „Short intro to“-attempts

„Split memory“ in exhibitions



Split memory in exhibitions



Zeitgeschichtliches Forum
Leipzig

The museum presents the
official narrative of
repression and opposition
in the GDR



Haus der Geschichte,
Wittenberg

Representation of living
contexts inspired by
traditional „house
museums“

Split memory in exhibitions



(N)Ostalgie Museum in
Brandenburg/Havel
Example of „collector
museums“



Split memory in exhibitions



Checkpoint Charlie
Museum, Berlin

The exhibition combines the history of the Berlin wall with a general emphasis on civil rights



„DDR-Museum“, Berlin

General information displayed in 15 topics with a focus on „Alltag“

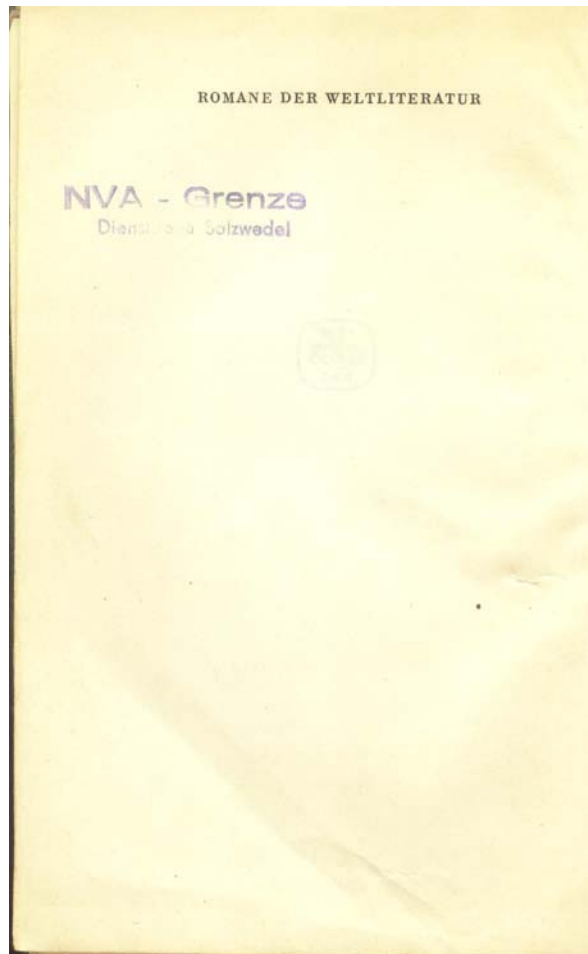
2. Collecting „Alltag“



- The collections of the „Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR“ hold 150,000 objects
- They consist mainly of private donations
- 100 interviews about experiences with material culture objects are documented
- The collections represent a broad range of objects connected with everyday life
- The donations are given in the context of an individual biography
- Their presentation follows biographical as well as theme-oriented principles
- Some of these topics may be the following

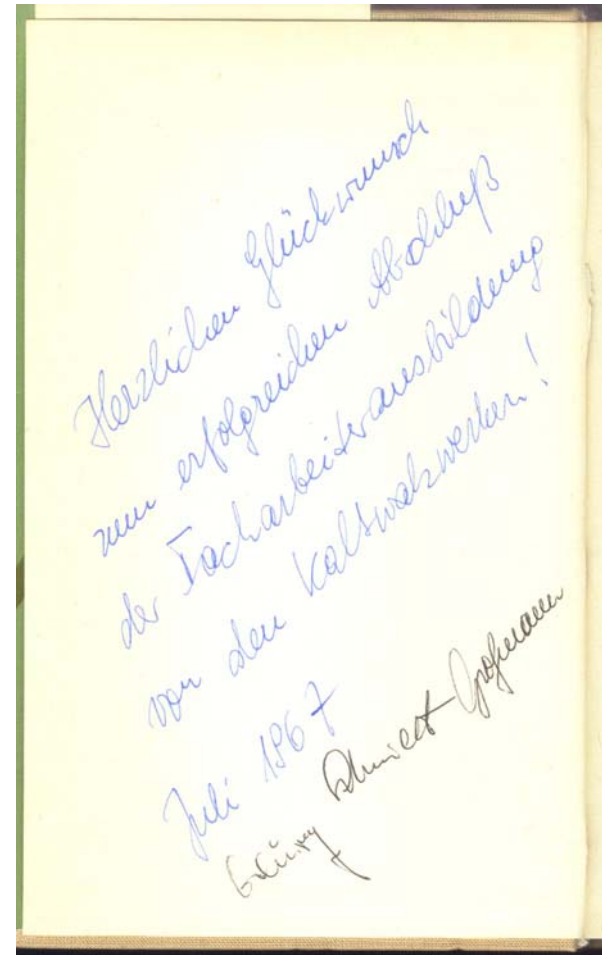
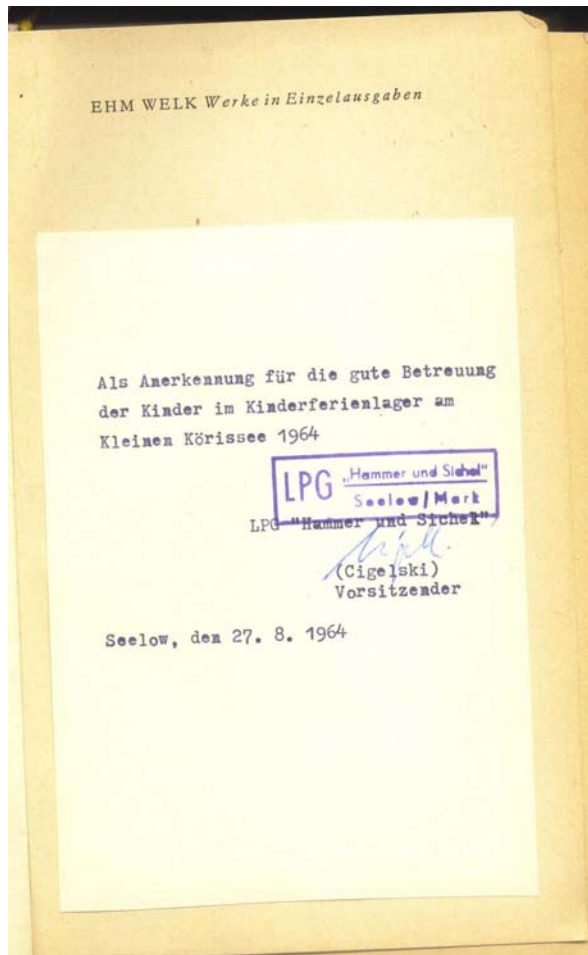
Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

1. book donations



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

1. book donations



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

2. design objects



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

2. design objects



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

3. „Alltag“ objects



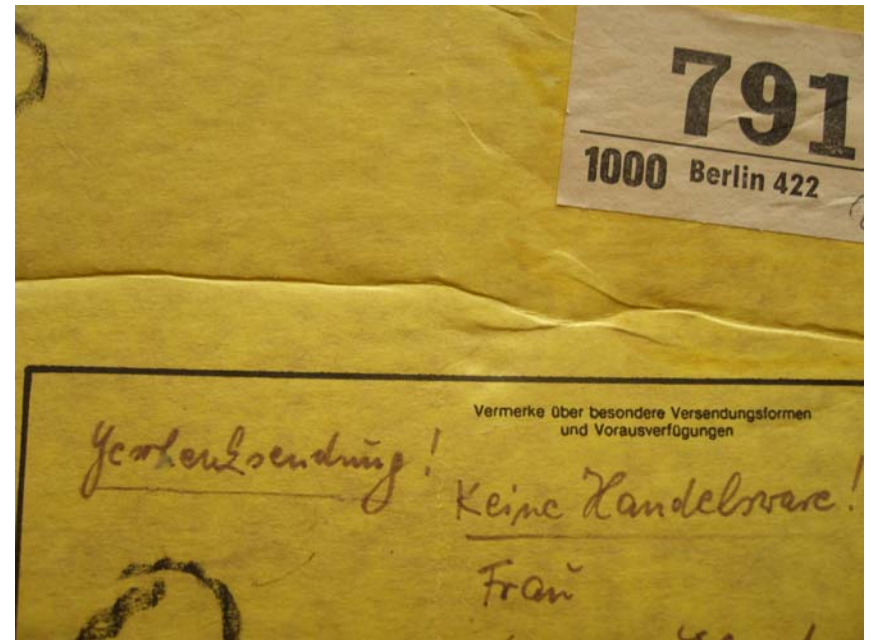
Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

3. „Alltag“ objects



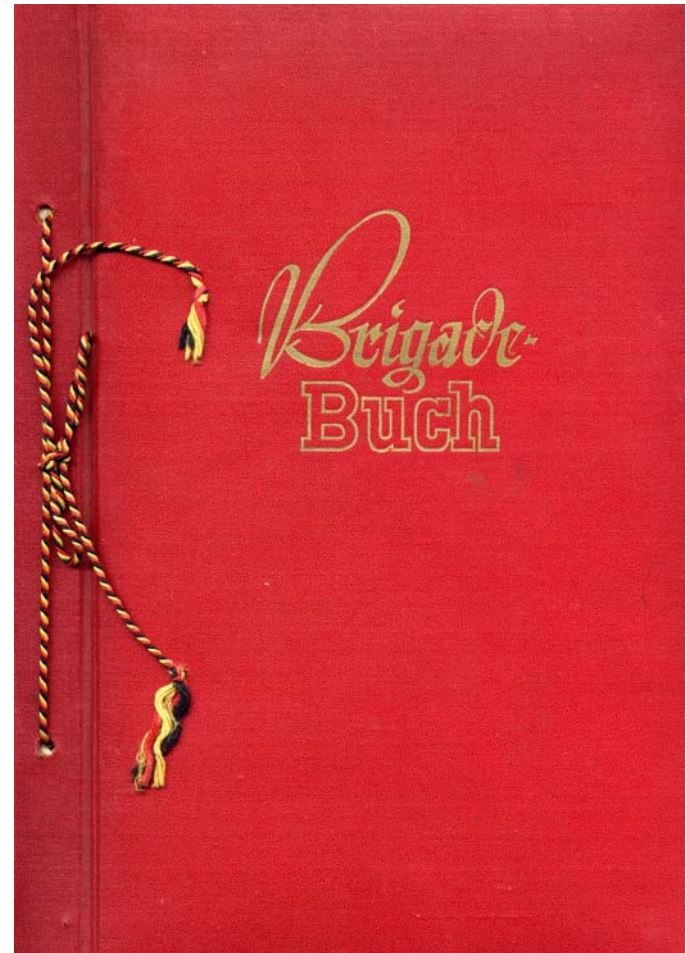
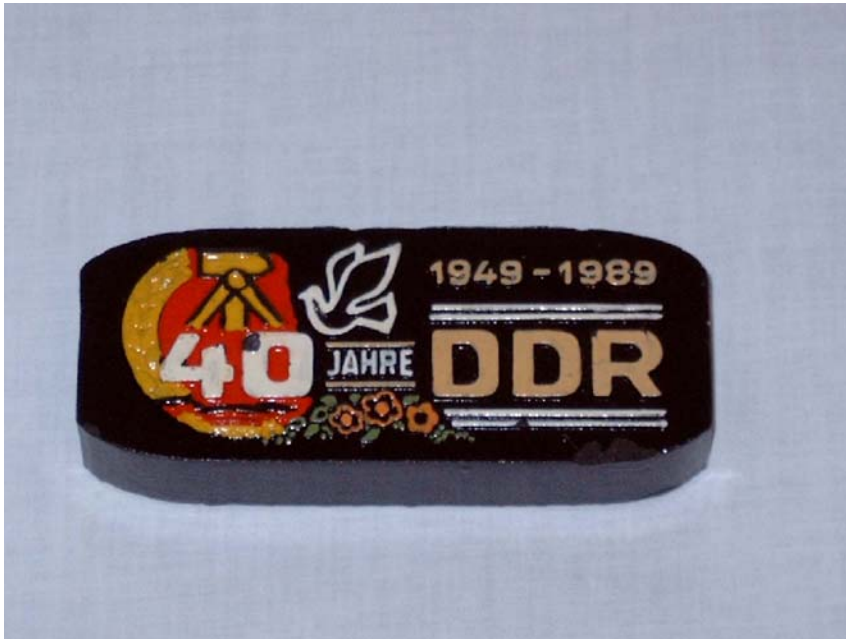
Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

3. „Alltag“ objects



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

4. Politics



Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

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Collections: Representations of the Everyday?

4. Politics



3. Displaying „Alltag Exhibitions in the *Dokumentationszentrum*



- Exhibitions are spatially organised according to their content
- When displayed spatially, history loses its linear narrative and is replaced by clusters in „Gleichzeitigkeit“
- In exhibitions, history is presented in room(s) as spatial surrounding to which the viewers´ attention is drawn

Modes of Presentation in „Tempolinsen und P 2“, 1995



- The exhibition presented different modes of presentation without providing written commentary to allow for visitors' own interpretations
- Top: Works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Luxemburg – who really read them?
- Bottom: reconstruction of an office – what did being exposed to power feel like?

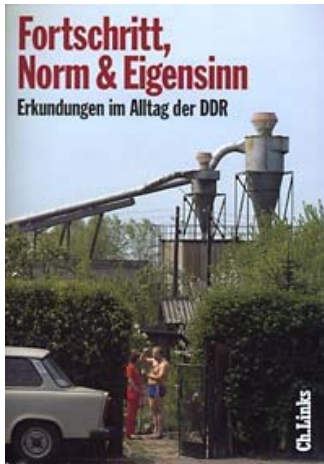
Exhibitions

Modes of Presentation in „Tempolinsen und P 2“, 1995



- New Year greetings of the party leader displayed by the newspaper „Neues Deutschland“ – who believed the repetitive stereotypes?
- Accessories of the official youth organization FDJ, „Jesuslatschen“ and peace-stickers represent different youth cultures – what happened to you if you were young, what did you make happen?

„Fortschritt, Norm & Eigensinn, 1999



- The cover of the exhibition catalogue shows a photograph containing all three elements of the exhibition title
- Bottom: a chronology of everyday objects from 1949 to 1989 combined with references to relevant historic events

Exhibitions

„Fortschritt, Norm & Eigensinn, 1999



- The exhibition presented three concepts as an attempt to outline an everyday interpretation of the GDR
- Top: social politics as a core task in the „real existing socialism“ in GDR
- Bottom: Interconnected views: from social politics to public commendation success in the workplace



Exhibitions

„Keine Konkurrenz in dem Sinne ...“, 2008



- The exhibition aimed to ask whether advertising, although it existed in the GDR, made sense in a plan economy
- Top: household appliances in contrast to their presentation in advertisement
- Bottom: aesthetic appearance of everyday products



„Keine Konkurrenz in dem Sinne ...“, 2008



- Top: different advertisements for the state travel bureau
- Bottom: forms of advertisement, in the background a chronology of magazine ads



Eisenhüttenstadt

City under preservation



- The city as a „lieu de mémoire“ – what influence does it have on the museum’s work? Will a New Town, a model city of the 1950s evoke memory or provoke historical reflection?
- Top: car sticker showing the city’s isolated position at the far eastern edge of Germany
- Bottom: Housing and industry as progress and modernity – the core representations of Eisenhüttenstadt in the GDR

Eisenhüttenstadt

City under Preservation



- Appearance of Eisenhüttenstadt about 1953/4 – neo-classicism is a form of architecture to represent power, normally used for public buildings and here for apartment blocks



Eisenhüttenstadt

City under Preservation



- The New Town was a model city for the future of socialism
- Top: first buildings in „intentional style“ in the city centre, 1959-60
- Bottom: cultural centre (Kulturhaus) in neo-classicist style and modern shops present contrasting notions of a „socialist city“ during the 1950s

Eisenhüttenstadt

City under Preservation



- Apartment blocks of 1953, currently renovated under preservational supervision, today are attractive for cultural tourism
- Can the „everyday“ be represented within an urban setting that was anything but normal for the GDR?

Eisenhüttenstadt

City under Preservation



- Dream of a modern urban setting in arts (Otto Schutzmeister, ca. 1970)
- Clearing of a tower block, 2004, due to the population shrinkage of 40 per cent since 1990

5. What's left



- Top: piece of the Berlin wall, personally broken off private souvenir
- Bottom: display of pieces of the Berlin wall in an museum shop



What's left

- Relics of the GDR in central Berlin, winter 2007

