

“KEPT THINGS”: HETEROTOPIC PROVOCATIONS IN THE MUSEAL REPRESENTATION OF EAST GERMAN EVERYDAY LIFE

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This article undertakes a reciprocally informed analysis of Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition *Aufgehobene Dinge: Ein Frauenleben in Ost-Berlin (Kept Things: A Woman’s Life in East Berlin)*, on display in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany, from March 28, 2010, until May 5, 2011. The exhibition emerges as site and practice that questions fundamentally how other contemporary museums represent East German everyday life. At the same time, *Kept Things* renders visible the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge. The foundation for this article consists in an interrogation of the concept of heterotopia that emphasizes its methodological possibilities and capacity to reveal knowledge. The application of dimensions of heterotopia explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts shape the exhibition’s meaning while simultaneously gesturing towards the possibility of more nuanced representations of the East German past than circulate currently.

Keywords: Heterotopia; East Germany; Everyday Life; Postsocialism; Museums; Michel Foucault; Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR; DOK; Material Culture; History; Representation

[H]eterotopias make legible the ground on which knowledge is built by complicating that ground.

—Robert Topinka “Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces”

Between March 28, 2010, and May 5, 2011, the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR (Documentation Centre for the Culture of East German Everyday Life, or DOK) in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany, presented the temporary exhibition *Aufge-*

hobene Dinge: Ein Frauenleben in Ost-Berlin (*Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*). It had a brief, more condensed second showing from June 10, 2011, until October 2, 2011, at the Heimatmuseum Falkensee. This historical exhibition put on display the meticulously and arguably obsessively collected and documented personal belongings of Ilse Polzin, or Frau P., whose household effects her family donated to the DOK after her death in 2004. None of these objects, the majority of which fit into the three categories of writing utensils, women's accessories, and home decorations, had notable artistic, monetary, or even exemplary value. Most of the items had never been used, likely in part because Frau P. owned far too many of them. The show exhibited artifacts such as shoes, hats, and pens in glass cabinets, while shopping bags and purses were suspended from ceilings. It also displayed how Frau P. stored these things tightly cramped in boxes and suitcases on shelves in her bachelor apartment.

Detailed and explicit interpretive frameworks that typically link the material content of historical exhibitions to larger events and processes were absent from the show. More specifically, curators did not situate the shoes, hats, and pens within a social, cultural, economic, or political context. At the same time, Frau P. herself, despite having kept a detailed inventory of her belongings, provided no clues as to what these items meant to her. This lack of information about specific and broader significance, in addition to the unexceptional character of the artifacts, suggests an unimaginative curatorial project that has little relevance for understanding East Germany's past and its contemporary representation. However, this article explicates how spatial, temporal, and political contexts take the place of clearly stated exhibition themes and instructive didactic panels. Meaning further emerges as *Kept Things* is placed into relationship with other exhibitions and more broadly circulating discourses. Extending this argument, I suggest that the DOK's approach to presenting Frau P.'s belongings questions fundamentally how other contemporary museums represent East German everyday life and at the same time renders visible how museums function, thereby unsettling their enterprise.

Museums predominantly approach ordinary life in East Germany from two distinct and conflicting perspectives (Winkler forthcoming). One focuses on how the elements of dictatorship shaped all aspects of quotidian life, dividing citizens into perpetrators, victims, and consenters. This interpretive mode reflects and reinforces broader dominant discourses on East Germany as they operate in today's united Germany, which legitimate the contemporary order. The other, which marginal and amateur practices define, brackets political structure by foregrounding quotidian and domestic life, implicitly suggesting that East Germans negotiated the socialist system rather than simply being controlled by it. This type of museum is frequently labeled *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia of the East, both in its pejorative and more playful and reflective sense (Winkler 2011). *Kept Things* fits into neither museum category: it does not cast its subject, Frau P., as an actor in a political system, nor does it represent routinized and negotiated everyday life. Moreover, the temporary exhibition's perspective differs from the principal strategy that both museum types deploy. Instead of approaching its subject from a macroscopic, societal level, one

that implies collective experience and correspondingly displays the abstracted average, the show shares the material traces of a single woman's life that does not fit the imaginary norm.

However, while *Kept Things* considers everyday life in East Germany differently than comparable museums and thereby complicates them, it enacts mainstream museal practices. This article applies Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia¹ and its six principles to address the tensions and provocations that this coming together of the unconventional and the expected elicits. Foucault theorizes heterotopias as discourses or spaces that mirror other elements in culture and in relationship with them appear different in that they enact, contest, and reverse taken-for-granted order. In doing so, they facilitate the emergence of subversive ideas about society. Here, these ideas guide an exploration into how *Kept Things* unsettles dominant notions about life in East Germany and, by extension, the mechanisms by which museums construct knowledge.

HETEROTOPIA: A METHODOLOGY

In his first deliberation on heterotopias, Foucault considers discourse that reveals the limits of language, for they "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks [and] contest the very possibility of grammar at its source." As phenomena that interrupt nomenclatures, heterotopias are also "disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names" (Foucault [1966] 1994:xiv). In the subsequent two considerations of the concept ([1967] 1986b, 2004), Foucault articulates heterotopia as social space rather than as discourse. Heterotopias, although embedded firmly within society, emerge as "different" or "other" spaces that mirror those around them, while simultaneously challenging or contesting established order as they relationally disrupt time and space.

As spatial phenomena, heterotopias have actual presence, unlike utopias, which are "emplacements having no real place." Foucault describes these existing utopias sweepingly:

There are ... probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places "heterotopias." (Foucault [1967] 1998:178)

¹ Foucault discusses heterotopia on three occasions in three different media: in the preface to the monograph *The Order of Things* first published as *Les Mots et les Choses* in 1966, in a 12-minute radio address on utopia and literature broadcast the same year (Foucault 2004), and in a 1967 lecture to a group of architects in Paris entitled "Des Espaces Autres" (1984), translated as both "Of Other Spaces" ([1967] 1986a, [1967] 1986b, [1967] 2008) and "Different Spaces" ([1967] 1998).

This conceptualization identifies heterotopias' double logic, which entails both the socially homogeneous and the breaking from dominant order, a characteristic that renders them *other* in that they "splinter the familiar" (Johnson 2006:85). Put another way, "a heterotopia is a space of difference, a space that is absolutely central to a culture but in which the relations between elements of a culture are suspended, neutralized, or reversed" (Lord 2006:1). Hence, heterotopias' representational practices give rise to the possibility of reflection and the problematization of dominant norms because the simultaneity of opposites contains revelatory power. In Kevin Hetherington's words, "[h]eterotopic places are sites which rupture the order of things through their different mode of ordering to that which surround them" (1997:46). Reflecting on Foucault's description of heterotopias as Sites where we are "drawn outside ourselves" (Foucault [1967] 1998:177), Peter Johnson describes this rupture as a reorientation: "Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the space in which we may feel at home. These emplacements exist out of step and meddle with our sense of interiority" (2006:84). Thus, heterotopias unsettle in their combining of the incongruous in spaces that, although familiar, are made to appear other.

Foucault develops a typology as he defines the six principles of heterotopia, thereby illuminating the phenomenon's specificities. The didactically laid out principles, the recognizable sites that exemplify them, the wide applicability of the notion, as well as the text's brevity, render heterotopia deceptively enticing. Yet attempts to understand the concept deeply while applying it to empirical phenomena also raise significant challenges. For example, Edward Soja, despite working with the term, characterizes Foucault's analysis as "frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent" (1996:162). Benjamin Genocchio's (1995) critique focuses on the definition of heterotopias as "utterly different" (Foucault [1967] 1998:178) as he questions the very possibility of otherness. Connectedly, Genocchio poses a reasonable question: "[W]hat cannot be designated a heterotopia?" (1995:39). Foucault's broad descriptions and wide-ranging examples open the possibility for labeling any site as heterotopia.

Reflecting on critiques and applications of the concept, Johnson concludes that "[h]eterotopia is more about a point of view, or a method of using space as a tool of analysis" (2012:9). Daan Wesselman (2013) and Hilde Heynen (2008) argue similarly for a conceptualization of the notion as a device that *facilitates* scholarly exploration rather than as descriptive term. Following Johnson's, Wesselman's, and Heynen's conclusions, which recognize but find use in the ambiguous and provisional elements of the concept, I apply Foucault's ideas pragmatically as methodological tool that supports the analysis of a specific site and its perplexingly contradictory cultural practices. Below, I undertake an investigation into the *Kept Things* temporary exhibition at the DOK that involves an exploration of how the site reveals structures of knowledge. This task necessitates a focus on how the exhibit is embedded in dominant ways of doing things, organizes knowledge differently than the spaces surrounding it, and how it stands in

relationship with other sites. I begin this process by placing *Kept Things* in time and space.

PLACING KEPT THINGS

The absence of definitive curatorial interpretive statements complicates the task of making sense of *Kept Things*. While visitors' prior knowledge and possible experience of life in East Germany inevitably contribute to their understanding of the exhibition, contextual information, such as the cues the setting provide, gain heightened significance. More specifically, the physical location establishes a historical backdrop that couches the display. Given the specificity of place, the life of Frau P. becomes part of broader sociocultural imaginings about the East German past. Thus, before proceeding with the elements of *Kept Things* in relationship with the principles of heterotypology, I begin by tending to Foucault's presentation of heterotopia as a relational concept by emplacing it.

THE CITY

Concretely, the temporary exhibition as I experienced it was held at the DOK in Eisenhüttenstadt, a model socialist city in eastern Germany, which is located 80 kilometers west of Berlin on the Polish border and was founded under the name of Stalinstadt (Stalin City). The visible structures of this young city framed *Kept Things* most prominently. They stand unambiguously as testament to the ideological and economic aftermath of World War II, including the GDR being cut off from the center of steel production in the Ruhrgebiet, the industrial heartland of Germany located in the West, burdens of reparation payments to the Soviet Union, and the trade embargos issued by Western countries. Ideas for the model socialist city emerged in 1950 to meet the housing needs of workers at the planned EKO ironworks (Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost). The urban center that was built from scratch was the first to embody the sixteen principles for urban development, which the GDR government ratified in 1950. These guidelines include such imperatives as a city having to express structurally and architecturally the political and national consciousness of the people, as well as the necessity of a center that would serve as focal point for political gatherings (Howest 2006:7). In addition to housing workers, Stalinstadt was to signify the GDR's brotherhood with other socialist countries, as the ironworks would produce "peace steel" from Soviet ore and Polish coal (Lötscher, Howest, and Basten 2004). Moreover, these sites of industrial production were to provide a development impulse for the regional economy by creating jobs for the local rural population and for incoming German refugees from Eastern Europe (Lötscher et al. 2004). Housing Complexes I to V, with their nearly 8,000 apartments and civic infrastructure, such as schools, daycare facilities, a hospital, and grocery stores, were largely completed in the 1950s (Howest 2006). To meet rising needs, Housing Complexes V to VII were added between 1970 and 1987, although the industrialized construction techniques and prefabricated components that were used yielded aesthetically, spatially, and qualitatively inferior structures in comparison to the first phase of development (Lötscher et al. 2004:363).

Today, Eisenhüttenstadt is a city in decline; the population has decreased from 50,200 in 1990 to 28,200 in 2011.² Demographic shrinking has occurred in tandem with economic decline. While the ironworks employed 12,000 workers in 1989, in 2004 it had only 3,000 employees (Lötscher et al. 2004:364). In February 2013, the official unemployment rate of the region was 10.2 percent (Groneberg 2013). Given the surplus of housing, dereliction, and poor structural and aesthetic characteristics, apartment buildings in Housing Complex VII have been demolished in recent years. At the same time, however, the regional government has also continued to protect large sections of the city, including industrial structures and Housing Complexes I to III with their civic buildings, such as the former daycare center that houses the DOK. These areas make up the largest urban monument in Germany, which is likely the reason for why it has attracted international attention from such celebrities as the American actor Tom Hanks, who toured the city in December 2011. Much to the delight of residents and politicians of Eisenhüttenstadt, he shared this experience for several minutes on the *David Letterman Show*. The availability of inexpensive or free spaces has also led various artists to launch projects in the city, many of which have been conceptualized as efforts to revitalize the city (Bangel 2012).

THE MUSEUM



Figure 1. The DOK.³

The more immediate context of the *Kept Things* exhibition was the DOK itself (Figure 1). When the DOK was founded in 1993, only three years after the unification of Germany, it was the first museum dedicated to the material culture and everyday life of East Germany. Today, its collection includes over 170,000 objects and docu-

² CITY POPULATION, Population Statistics for Countries, Administrative Areas, Cities and Agglomerations (http://www.citypopulation.de/php/germany-brandenburg_d.php?cityid=12067120).

³ All photos are by the author.

ments.⁴ The DOK is located in one of the two daycares built in first phase in the construction of Stalinstadt. Developed between 1953 and 1954 in Housing Complex II, it served as a childcare facility until the mid-1990s. Its large size and columned entrance give it a classically institutional appearance, which, combined with the internal structure, provides a fitting frame for the construction of authoritative discourses of the kind museums aim to produce. The central staircase features a large stained-glass window entitled *Aus dem Leben der Kinder* (From the life of the children), a work by Walter Womack, one of the East Germany's most prominent artists, designed in 1954–1955 (Figure 2). The display of children with varying skin colors and types of dress is suggestive of the ideological idealism that characterized the GDR, including international solidarity, worldwide peace, and the great promise of future generations.



Figure 2. Element of *Aus dem Leben der Kinder*, Walter Womack, 1954–1955.

Whereas the main floor holds a reception area, offices, and a library, the floor above it is reserved for temporary and permanent exhibitions, each taking up one of the two wings. In addition to the *40 Years—40 Objects* display, where one object corresponds to each year in the history of the GDR, the permanent exhibition⁵ provided an overview of East German life and society with artifacts relating to policies concerning women and children, the education system, holidaying, youth festivals, shopping, and industrial production. The introductory statements of the didactic panel that introduces the permanent exhibition communicate the overall orientation of the DOK:

⁴ DOK Sammlungskonzept (<http://www.alltagskultur-ddr.de/sammlungen/sammlungskonzept/>).

⁵ A new permanent exhibition constructed with a federal grant of 800,000 euros opened in 2012.

The GDR was a closed society, its end and its beginning precisely staked and guarded over, with a wide, sky-blue horizon behind and above. A country for dreamers and a sad country, an exclusive and poor country, a country of technological and social progress, a country that its people described and thought of as their country, a country that finally rid itself of its own people, a country rife with contradictions that were never carried out, a humanitarian country, that simply disappeared, without a trace, a country that is incomprehensible.⁶

Here, East Germany and its representation emerge as topics that are complex and rife with contradiction, implying that they must be approached with nuance. Moreover, the didactic panel recognizes the existence of repression, the significance of ideals and processes of negotiation, yet at same time acknowledges the impossibility of comprehending and representing the past as it was.

Under the leadership of Andreas Ludwig,⁷ the DOK's director from 1993 to 2012, the DOK sought to accumulate the material witnesses of East Germany from those who used them and deemed them sufficiently important to preserve them. In a conversation with me in June 2010, Ludwig describes his approach to the museum's collection and exhibitions as "history from below."

The collection conception is ... very simple. As opposed to most other museums, we said, please give the museum that which was important in your everyday life in East Germany, that which had significance for you. This means that we now have a collection that reflects the historical consciousness of their own historical existence in the GDR. The idea is to collect the things from below and, because of it, not determine in advance that this is the history of the GDR in ten chapters and now we need material evidence to visualize this history in an exhibition. Rather, we actually built up the collection from the bottom, to have an archive of material culture that has been brought together by the many.⁸

⁶ All translations from the German by the author. "Die DDR war eine geschlossene Gesellschaft, ihr Ende und ihr Anfang genauestens abgesteckt und bewacht, mit einem weiten, himmelblauen Horizont dahinter und darüber. Ein Land für Träumer und ein trauriges Land, ein exklusives und ein armes Land, ein Land technologischen und sozialen Fortschritts, ein Land, von dem seine Menschen sagten und meinten, es sei ihr Land, ein Land, das sich schließlich um seine Menschen brachte, ein Land voller Widersprüche, die nie ausgetragen wurden, ein humanitäres Land, das einfach verschwand, spurlos, ein Land mit sieben Siegeln."

⁷ Andreas Ludwig has been an active member of the Berlin Geschichtswerkstatt (History Workshop), which is part of the broader history workshop movement. This approach focuses on local and everyday life, constructing social history, history from below, or people's history.

⁸ "Das Sammlungskonzept ist ... ganz einfach. Anders als die meisten anderen Museen, haben wir gesagt, bitte geben sie diesem Museum das, was für ihren Alltag in der DDR wichtig gewesen ist, was für sie Bedeutung hat. Das heißt, wir haben jetzt eine Sammlung, die ist Abbild des Geschichtsbewußtseins über die eigene historische Existenz in der DDR. Die Idee ist, die Dinge von unten zu sammeln und deswegen auch nicht von vornherein festzulegen das ist die DDR Geschichte in 10 Kapiteln und jetzt brauchen wir Belegstücke um diese Geschichte zu visualisieren in einer Ausstellung, sondern tatsächlich von unten aufzubauen, ein Archiv der materiellen Kultur was zusammengetragen ist von vielen" (personal communication, June 20, 2010).

For Ludwig, the collection of ordinary artifacts brings with it the possibility of vibrant engagement with the past in the future. This object-centered approach of the DOK is visible most acutely in *Kept Things* where, given the absence of a definitive discursive framework, the exhibition seems to ask the artifacts to speak for themselves. At the same time, the presence of very few interpretive written texts could be understood as corresponding to a broader trend. For example, Beth Lord argues that "[m]any new museum displays are rich in object and light on interpretation: this appears to be based on the dual aims of reducing didactic content and returning power to objects" (2006:355). I would like to suggest that such an approach raises questions about the limits of the power of things, as well as the sources of meaning in contexts where it appears as though things have a voice.

Currently, the future existence of the DOK, particularly in its form as site of research and periodic renewal through such mechanisms as temporary exhibitions, hangs in the balance. The city of Eisenhüttenstadt withdrew its funding of the museum in late 2012 and subsequently the Deutsche Kulturrat (The German Council for Culture), a politically independent national umbrella organization for cultural institutions, has included it on their list of facilities that are in danger of closure. The four permanent staff and the director received their termination notices for January 2013 and there are currently no plans for new exhibitions (Rennefanz 2012).

The locating of *Kept Things* has several purposes. First, it provides contextual information for the analysis that follows. Second, the description entails a starting point of the analysis itself, for the meaning of the exhibition relies on elements that lie outside of the bounds of the exhibition walls. Third, the emplacing of the temporary exhibition speaks to a fundamental trait of heterotopias: their character is inextricably defined by where and how they are located, as they always stand in relationship to other emplacements. In the next section of this article, I tend more closely to the individual principles that Foucault lays out in his theorization of heterotopia.

THE PRINCIPLES OF HETEROTOPIA VIS-À-VIS *KEPT THINGS*

HETEROTOPIA AS CHANGING THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

The first principle of heterotopia concerns its existence across time and space. Foucault writes: "there is probably not a single culture in the world that does not establish heterotopias: that is a constant of every human group" ([1967] 1998:179). Although this principle does not directly elucidate my analysis, I mention it here for the purpose of being complete and to provide an overall sense of the typology. Moreover, it is suggestive of the wide applicability of the term and thus its significant potential to illuminate sociocultural phenomena or, conversely, the analytical problem its breadth poses.

The second element of the heterotopology gestures towards meanings of the DOK's temporary exhibition, as well as its relationship to understanding museal processes, such as representations of East Germany at other sites. Foucault posits, "in the course of its history, a society can make a heterotopia that exists and has not

ceased to exist in a very different way" ([1967] 1998:180). Put differently, heterotopias transform over time and societies alter them actively. Foucault constructs a brief genealogy of cemeteries, describing their relocation from the center of cities to their edges at the end of the eighteenth century to illustrate this principle (180–181). The shift correlates with the "individualization of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery," which is reflective of the emergence of "an obsession with death as a 'disease'" (181). In *The Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett similarly, albeit much more extensively, constructs a genealogy of the museum that places the site into the broader context of the "transformation in the arrangement of the cultural field over the course of the nineteenth century." He sets apart museums, along with international exhibitions and modern fairs, as institutions that are "involved in the practice of 'showing and telling': that is, of exhibiting artifacts and/or persons in a manner calculated to embody and communicate specific cultural meanings and values" (Bennett 1995:6). These institutions regulate visitors unobtrusively and self-replicatingly. Bennett also traces the museum's beginnings to the curiosity cabinets and amusement parks of the late 1800s, highlighting how the developing museal mode of representation distinguished itself from other cultural expressions.

The *Kept Things* exhibition connects visitors to this origin of museums in private collecting, preserving, interpreting, and displaying. Specifically, the products that Frau P. accumulated and their placement into the museum gesture towards this movement from collecting and presenting cultural artifacts in the private sphere to a public, museal setting. At the same time, the ordinary and therefore familiar character of the objects raises the possibility for the visitors' contemplation of their self-musealization, which may consist of their keeping and arranging souvenirs and other mementoes on shelves and desks or their fashioning of photo albums and scrapbooks. From this perspective, the *Kept Things* exhibition holds the capacity to raise historical consciousness, particularly as it pertains to how museums came to be, which illuminates how they function today. Simultaneously, it offers visitors insight into how the material and image-based documenting of their own life connects to the work that museums do.

RE-PLACING

The third principle of heterotopia emphasizes places, their combined representation or re-emplacement in other places, and the transfiguration that this process brings with it. Here, Foucault characterizes heterotopias as having "the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves" ([1967] 1998:181). Examples that highlight this quality are cinemas and theatres, as well as traditional Persian gardens and the carpets that are based upon them. The DOK temporary exhibition presents an unusual case in this respect. While the full title *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin* lays no direct claims on people, places, and times beyond those relating to Frau P., this representational purpose is nonetheless expected or implied given the museal frame. For example, in a newspaper interview, Ludwig states that the topic of the exhibition is "a typical woman's fate in the

Berlin of the 60s to 80s"⁹ (Schreiber 2010). However, the exhibition itself interrupts this very notion of representativeness, or the standing in for something greater, due to the implausibility that many other women in Berlin in the 1960s–1980s also lived alone and hoarded consumer products with little monetary and seemingly no sentimental value. One possibility for explaining Ludwig's statement is the contradiction with which the exhibition presents him. Perhaps with the exception of culturally deemed important figures, a museum's task arguably is to abstract the past, to overcome the idiosyncrasies of places, people, and times. *Kept Things*, however, concerns itself with the singular and unusual, an idea to which I will return below. This tension between the specific and the generalized exposes how historical narratives, such as those museums construct, exclude marginal people and places. Paradoxically, the stories that exhibitions tell by necessity exclude others, most frequently those not aligned with dominant forces. More specifically, *Kept Things* unsettles the narrative of East Germany as a socialist dictatorship that structured everyday life forcefully and completely as it relies on the categories of perpetrators, victims, consenters, and resisters to describe the relationship between the limited agency of individuals and tremendous power of state-shaped structures. The strength of the exhibition lies not in suggesting that other single women who hoarded consumer products lived in East Germany but rather in subtly proposing that many different types of people made their lives there, whose experience cannot be reduced to broad macrostructural forces. This possibility of the imagined out-of-the-norm, such as the exhibit presents, creates affordances for exploring differences, finding ways of inserting them into mainstream historical consciousness, and thereby complicating the past and with it—the present and future.

Foucault's example of the cinema provides the opportunity for further consideration of the transformation that representation and re-placement bring with it. He points out that this type of emplacement "is a very curious rectangular hall at the back of which one sees a three-dimensional space projected onto a two-dimensional screen" (Foucault [1967] 1998:81). Although Foucault does not explicate the implications of this dimensional reduction, *Kept Things* sheds some light on to what he might have in mind. Here, the footprint of Frau P.'s bachelor apartment appears in wide red lines on the exhibition floor to indicate the small size of her home. Visitors are thus asked to wonder about how all of her possessions fit into such a compressed space and imagine how cramped the living conditions must have been. Yet, much information on Frau P.'s home is also lost in this translation of three- to two-dimensional space. For example, the flattening cannot account for the height and depth of rooms and with it the spatial configuration within the apartment, as well as the larger context of an apartment building in which it was housed. Subsequently, the visitor does not see how Frau P. arranged her everyday life within space. Moreover, the objects that were not on display in her home and were therefore invisible, because they were packaged in boxes and suitcases piled on top of each other in shelves, are made visible and expanded through their placement in vitrines and as they are suspended

⁹ "typisches Berliner Frauenschicksal der 60er bis 80er Jahre."

from ceilings (Figure 3). Further separating the original from its museal representation, the spacious exhibition rooms stand in stark contrast to the cramped space in which Frau P. kept her belongings. This transformation of place that *Kept Things* undertakes, involving dimensional reduction, rendering visible, and magnifying, begin to illuminate Foucault's ideas on the role place plays in heterotopias, an argument that the concept of virtuality further underlines.



Figure 3. *Kept Things*, displays.

Frau P. was an actual person who lived in an actual place, surrounded by many consumer products. The DOK, as a museal space, is also an actual place, one whose task it is to summarize, abstract, interpret, and render meaningful the complex. Despite these constitutive real elements, the exhibition operates in the realm of the imaginary. Put differently, as Frau P.'s things are placed into the museum, she is virtualized. The musealization and curatorial processes involved recontextualize, institutionalize, compress, abstract, decontextualize, and cleanse of contradiction the material traces of her life. In the museal setting, the actual Frau Ilse Polzin has to be imagined. Rob Shields's (2003) theorizing of the virtual helps to clarify the relationship between the historical figure Frau Polzin, who lived in an apartment in Berlin-Karlshorst, and the representation of her and her home in the museum. From the perspective of a binary relationship, the virtual juxtaposes the actual, which is "con-

cretely present" (Shields 2003:29). While both the virtual and the actual are real, that is, they exist, the virtual is a "real idealization" (28), or an idealization of the real. Shields points out that all engagements with the past operate in this mode, for "the past never recurs literally, it has a virtual existence as narrative, a memory, an ideation" (40). At the same time, as a virtuality, Frau P. and her home in the *Kept Things* exhibition are "in a dependent relation to the actual" (29). In other words, what the visitor encounters is not made up or conjured. Although profoundly transformed, the display references the actual past predominantly through the use of material objects that are removed from their original, emplaced life as they are re-emplaced and thereby virtualized.

HETEROTOPIA AS HETEROCHRONIA

With the fourth principle, attention shifts from place to time. Foucault writes: "More often than not, heterotopias are connected with temporal discontinuities [*découpages du temps*]" ([1967] 1998:182). Here, heterotopias emerge as heterochronias, for they break with traditional time, cut up time, and reassemble time in ways that do not correspond with experience in everyday life; they unsettle how human beings sense and understand time.

Foucault differentiates between heterotopias that accumulate and abolish time. Libraries and museums appear to collect time and are thus instances of the first variation, for they "constitute a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion" (Foucault [1967] 1998:182). In contrast, festivals and fairs demonstrate the latter category. These emplacements only occupy temporarily the spaces that are reserved for them; ephemerality defines them. Upon initial consideration, a third type of heterochronia, the vacation village, shares characteristics with fairs and festivals, for their visitors remain only for a limited amount of time, during which they suspend the familiar rhythm of life. Yet, Foucault posits that this example also points to the possibility of the simultaneity of accumulating and abolishing time. In vacation villages that strive to provide the experience of primitive life "the whole history of humanity goes back to its source as if in a kind of grand immediate knowledge" (183). The conceptualization of heterotopic emplacements as disrupting the experience of time in everyday life in two opposing ways illuminates significantly how temporality operates in *Kept Things* and other musealizations of East Germany.

Given their overt topic, the historical existence of the GDR delineates the time-frame with which museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany occupy themselves. Even though this period covers only the forty-one years between 1949 and 1990, Foucault's characterization of the museum as an emplacement "in which time never ceases to pile up" reflecting the "desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place" nonetheless applies ([1967] 1998:182). In this instance, the "piling up of time" takes the form of the accumulation of a particular type of material culture. Industrially produced consumer goods are the primary mode of engagement with the past at these sites (see Berdahl 1999, 2005; Betts 2000). The relative absence of monetary value of most of these items, in conjunction with former East

Germans' enthusiasm for donating their belongings,¹⁰ has provided museums dealing with East Germany with collections rich in number of objects. Museum websites indicate that these museums continue to call for the donation of artifacts, even in the face of limited storage and conservation capacities.¹¹

The vastness of the DOK's collection also reflects this object-centered approach to musealizing the East German past. For Ludwig, what is at stake in the accumulation of material culture is the answerability of questions that the future may pose about the past. Having witnessed the rapid removal of East German consumer goods from private homes and public spaces in the early 1990s, he understands the DOK's project to be the preservation of objects for future investigation. For him, the urgency to collect and preserve as much of the physical traces of East Germany as possible is "to have the source material to always think about and debate new topics. But this cannot be done when the sources are not available."¹² In other words, Ludwig's concern is the continued active engagement with the past and the possibility of approaching it from hitherto unconsidered perspectives.

Kept Things takes this focus on material culture to an extreme. It put on display nearly 1,000 items, 20 percent of Frau P.'s effects that are part of the DOK's collection, with little textual guidance on their broader significance. The design of exhibition-related materials further underscores the centrality of objects. For example, dozens of miniature photographic tiles depicting items in the collection on a white background dominate the show's poster and catalogue. In addition to this piling up of time through the accumulation of objects that ostensibly display the material traces of Frau P.'s life, the exhibition pays little attention to the temporal, thereby, using Foucault's term, abolishing time. With the exception of a few instances where original product labels include a date stamp, the artifacts on display lack information on when they were made. As the exhibition catalogue indicates, where many of the objects were manufactured or purchased also remains unknown (Ludwig and Schütze 2011:13). Given the absence of these types of information, the artifacts in the exhibition seem to float in time; merely Frau P.'s biography frames them temporally.

However, Frau P.'s lifetime as outlined in her biography also presents a disjuncture when placed in relationship with her belongings, one that further exemplifies how *Kept Things* undoes time. At the DOK, visitors are first introduced to Frau P. through a brief outline of her biography in the main foyer, at the bottom of the first-floor stairs. Upon entering the exhibition rooms on the second floor, they are pre-

¹⁰ Possibilities for explaining this propensity to provide donation include removing culturally outmoded objects from homes and elevating ones past through their placing into the museum context.

¹¹ For example, the DDR Museum in Burg is seeking items as diverse as toys, uniforms, monuments, and vehicles (<http://ddr-museum-burg.de/?cat=1>). At a design-focused GDR museum in Schwebnitz, the owner Uwe Jähning is soliciting donations by asking for anything related to the GDR, "egal was es ist" (no matter what it is) (<http://www.ostdeutsches-design.de/spenden/>).

¹² "die Quellengrundlage zu haben immer wieder neu Themen zu überlegen und zu debattieren. Aber wenn man die Quellen nicht hat, kann man das nicht machen" (personal communication, June 10, 2010).

sented with the things she accumulated. Yet a significant disconnect arises in the conceptualization of temporality between time as outlined in the biography and time as expressed in the remainder of the exhibition. Having lived between 1919 and 2004, Frau P. experienced three vastly different political systems. She worked full-time for the Third Reich's social welfare organization, the National Socialist People's Welfare. Until she retired in 1985, she was employed as an administrative assistant in a publicly owned plant in East Germany. When she passed away in 2004, Germany had been unified for 14 years. Despite these dramatic shifts, interpretive panels make no reference to the time before and after her life in East Germany, nor do artifacts discernibly stem from either of these periods. Connectedly, the material traces of Frau P.'s relationship with her sister, who lived in West Berlin and who visited her on occasion, also remains nearly invisible. Thus, while the ostensible premise of the exhibition is the representation of Frau P.'s life through her belongings, the curators edited heavily what is on display. Not only does this approach reduce Frau P. to seemingly random objects, whose meaning remain elusive—it also dehistoricizes her as a person and the objects she once owned. At the same time, this inattention to longer-term historical situatedness parallels the absence of considerations of social, economic, and cultural transformations that the GDR underwent during its existence, further underlining atemporality, which is a curious characteristic of a site that purports to represent the past.

To summarize, museums representing everyday life in East Germany, including the exhibition *Kept Things* at the DOK, accumulate time in the form of objects, a strategy that implies that the past is embodied and can be understood through material presence. Like all museums, these emplacements are culturally assigned the task of preserving the past. As keepers of time, however, they also abolish time through representations that detemporalize and correspondingly dehistoricize their subject matter, a characteristic that is particularly apparent in the *Kept Things* exhibition. This simultaneity of collecting and destroying time reveals the structures of how museums communicate, which the application of heterotopia clarifies and renders acutely apparent.

OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS

Heterotopia's fifth principle demonstrates one of the concept's methodological strengths. Whereas the previous two draw attention to place and time, this element affords a shift to an entirely different register of analysis. The fifth principle provokes thinking on how the delineation of emplacements defines patterns of behavior and with it structures meaning and the emergence of site-specific knowledge. According to Foucault, "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time" ([1967] 1998:183). Moreover, either "[o]ne can enter only with a certain permission and after a certain number of gestures have been performed" or "by the very fact of entering, one is excluded" (183). Foucault provides a wide range of examples to demonstrate that openings and closings define heterotopias. They include barracks, prisons, saunas that purify the body religiously and hygienically, large South American farms that in the past featured rooms

that, although appearing to be part of the home, prevented certain visitors from gaining access to more intimate areas, as well as motel rooms where illicit sexual encounters take place. What unites these seemingly disparate sites is that each is a demarcated place that differentiates itself clearly from other places. This setting apart includes site-specific pre- and proscriptions for the expression of agency within them. In other words, heterotopias enable, facilitate, and make possible some processes and, in turn, shut down, impede, and obstruct others.

Typical museums require visitors, composed of the general public, to enter a building and pay an entrance fee. In completing the former or both, visitors consent to a museal code of conduct, which includes being quiet, taking on a contemplative gaze, and respecting exhibits. In exchange, they are offered access to materially mediated, trustworthy knowledge, which entails a kind of opening. At the same time, walking into the museum implies a deferring to museum experts in that it requires accepting that what is on display holds truth-value and is worth knowing about. Yet these representations can ever only consist of a limited range of instructive narratives, which inevitably narrow and close off possibilities for understanding phenomena differently. Here, the presentation of ideas as factual and authoritative constricts visitors' involvement in meaning-making activities. Another facet of this exclusion is that with few exceptions visitors have no access or even awareness of the much larger collection museums hold, thereby obscuring the subjective curatorial processes that produce the seemingly objective.

Immediately apparent closings in *Kept Things* include a reduction of Frau P.'s complex life to 1,000 consumer products. Moreover, with the exception of entries in an exhibition guestbook, the majority of which points to the memory-invoking capacity of the artifacts, visitors leave no lasting trace of the sense making in which they engaged while visiting the exhibition. At the same time, the very display of objects also entails an opening. Museums have the effect of imbuing things with cultural value. Simply placing an object into the context of the museum elevates its value and renders it representative of something greater than itself. In an effort to transform the seemingly unremarkable objects into markers of cultural significance, *Kept Things* relies extensively on this process, in part by following genre conventions of exhibition design. It presents artifacts predominantly behind glass and thereby signifies the existence of sufficient cultural or monetary value to warrant protection, even though outside of this context the objects, such as notebooks, hats, and scarves, are arguably worthless. As is common in contemporary museums, the accompanying minimalist panels are brief and use black lettering in an easily readable font style and size. Furthermore, the exhibition is housed in clean, airy, and white-walled rooms. This design, in addition to paying an admittance fee and entering a building with institutional architectural character, sets the stage for the public to slip into the visitor role, one that includes approaching museum content as objective representation that has didactic importance.

These processes do not unfold smoothly in *Kept Things*, however. Tension arises as the museum attempts to deploy authoritative meaning-making discourses, exposing the simultaneity of heterotopic openings and closings. In fact, Frau P. and her

belongings seem to resist musealization in the sense that their meaning remains ambiguous. The presence of a conflict expresses itself prominently in the following description of *Kept Things* that appears on one exhibition panel.

Initially, the estate of Frau P. leaves one at a loss. The number of objects alone that she accumulated suggests an obsession to own things she desired and to surround herself by them. The things belonged to her and to her home. Are they a representation of "typically feminine" collections? Did Frau P. want to prepare herself for a "bourgeois life," with a large house and a corresponding personal appearance? Did she want to reward herself by purchasing objects of her desire and taking them home? Did she want to surround herself by things that she considered commensurate with her personality? The more possible explanations one considers, the clearer it is that a singular interpretation is impossible. It is this mixture of astonishment and being left at a loss that also characterizes this exhibit. Again and again it poses questions about what the collection means.¹³

The four propositions in this text that also stand as unanswerable questions demonstrate the curators' inability, or at least unwillingness, to provide clarity on what the exhibition actually put on display. Frau P.'s impulse to collect is not the only unknown in *Kept Things*. The significance of the artifacts is difficult to discern, in part because even information on the source of the majority of objects in terms of time and place are absent. In addition, the objects are also strangely detached from the person who gathered them. Judging by their unmarred appearance, Frau P. used few of them. In fact, many of the items on display look like they could just have been picked off the store shelf of a bygone era; in some instances sales tags are still attached to them. Put differently, the things in the exhibition were intended for everyday consumption but did not realize their use value. Moreover, an internal logic that might have held together the types of items Frau P. accumulated is also not apparent. As the exhibition catalogue points out, what *Kept Things* displays "is an accumulation of the gathered, not a collection. It only becomes one in the museum"¹⁴ (Ludwig and Schütze 2011:5). Connectedly, the objects Frau P. collected have no obvious connection to her identity, nor do they seem to be reminders of her own past; they do not appear to be personal treasures. In their study on the kinds of things women keep, Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Silverman describe treasures as items that "build a record of personal development, a history that places them in time and place, and confirms

¹³ "Der Nachlass von Frau P. macht zunächst ratlos. Allein die Zahl der Dinge, die Frau P. angeschafft hat, deutet auf eine Obsession, Dinge ihres Gefallens besitzen und um sich herum versammeln zu wollen. Die Dinge gehörten zu ihr und zu ihrem Haus. Sind sie eine Repräsentation 'typisch weiblicher' Sammlungen? Wollte sich Frau P. auf ein 'bürgerliches Leben' vorbereiten, mit großem Haus und angemessenem persönlichen Auftritt? Wollte sie sich belohnen, indem sie Dinge Ihres Gefallens kaufte und mit nach Hause trug? Wollte sie sich mit Dingen umgeben, die sie als zugehörig zu Ihrer Persönlichkeit empfand? Auf je mehr Erklärungsansätze man stößt, je deutlicher wird, dass eine eindeutige Interpretation nicht möglich sein wird. Es ist diese Mischung aus Erstaunen und Ratlosigkeit, die auch die Ausstellung bestimmt. Es stellt sich immer wieder die Frage nach dem Verstehen dieser Ansammlung."

¹⁴ "ist eine Ansammlung des Aufgehobenen, keine Sammlung. Das wird sie erst im Museum."

their most deeply held values and sources of meaning" (2004:12). Given the absence of indicators that would suggest a close connection between the objects and Frau P.'s identity, the significance that the objects may have held for her beyond their mere accumulation remains elusive.

Despite the ambiguity of meaning and the juxtaposition of heterotopias' openings and closings on the level of the object and the visitor's encounter of it, *Kept Things* provides a different type of opening at a higher level of analysis. The exhibition makes significant contributions to thinking about both the representation of everyday life in East Germany and the work in which museums typically engage. By explicitly posing questions about meaning, *Kept Things* highlights the interpretive work museums undertake. The failure of constructing a clear narrative thus disrupts visitor expectations and in turn undermines the idea that the museum disseminates objective and authoritative knowledge. Moreover, from the perspective of the artifacts as an aggregate, the abundance of consumer products that seem superfluous—in the sense that they are not needed for basic survival—disrupts the globally operating discourse that portrays socialist economies, including that of the GDR, as economies of scarcity. In fact, it suggests the existence of consumer culture not entirely unlike that operating in nonsocialist Western countries.

RELATIONAL SPACES

With the sixth and last principle of his heterotypology, Foucault considers emplacements vis-à-vis other emplacements, stating that heterotopias "have a function in relation to the remaining space." As is the case in several other principles, he identifies two different articulations:

Either the heterotopias have the role of creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space, all real emplacements within which human life is partitioned off, as being even more illusory.... Or, on the contrary, creating a different space, a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged and muddled. (Foucault [1967] 1998:184)

According to Foucault, brothels of the past exemplify the former, while colonies the Jesuits founded in South America are examples of the latter. Although he does not describe how brothels function in relation to the remaining space, the exploration of colonies provides some insight into this dimension of heterotopias. Foucault emphasizes how extensively they structured life for the people who lived within them as "existence was regulated in every particular" (Foucault [1967] 1998:184).

Foucault's general statement emphasizing the relationality of heterotopia, the specification that follows, and his examples do not align well. Thus, for the purpose of my analysis, I focus on the relationship between emplacements and the creation of spaces that are highly organized. For an examination of the historical museum through the lens of heterotopia this interpretation draws attention to how the complex, convoluted, and largely unknowable past is transformed into something representable and understandable. Scholars, such as Elizabeth Ten Dyke (2002), have argued that the founding of museums dedicated to everyday life in East Germany

entailed a response to the disorientation the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's unification brought with them. Here, this type of museum emerges as compensatory in that it represents the past through the object world of East Germany, neatly arranged through such methods as recreated rooms in private homes. These museums put on display not only the mundane but also the typical; they join the material traces of the imaginary average person's past, things that all those who have memory of living in the GDR would recognize. Contrary to the pursuit of the typical, *Kept Things* concerns itself with the singular, abnormal, and exceptional. Far from presenting the ordinary and "normal," the exhibit even suggests the possibility of neurosis. It is explicitly gendered, as it displays the material traces of a particular, arguably odd woman with a unique biography. Yet the DOK's temporary exhibit does not pursue women's history overtly; it does not specifically deal with what it was like to be a woman in East Germany. For example, unlike the exhibition on the East German fashion magazine *Sybille* entitled *Sybille: Modefotographie und Frauenbilder in der DDR (Sybille: Fashion Photography and the Representation of Women in the GDR)* that was on display between May 13, 2010, and August 22, 2010, in Potsdam, *Kept Things* does not raise issues relating to the rights of women and gender equality. However, a farther-reaching definition suggests that the exhibition could be identified as women's history. As Gaby Porter (1990:70) points out,

Women's history has added its own particular concerns to mainstream history, and has shifted emphasis from the objective to the subjective, from the narrative to the first person. It has questioned the generalized boundaries of public and private, respectable and depraved, dependent and independent, which have previously been used to circumscribe and diminish women's role in history, by examining the local and specific characteristics of women's work.

In light of this broad description, *Kept Things* contributes to the museum landscape a representation of East German everyday life that, although enigmatic, demonstrates women's history, one that purposively seeks out the unusual, unknowable, and distinctly singular. The exhibition appears superficially orderly and precise, yet it accentuates profoundly how the focus upon a seemingly historically insignificant woman provides unexpected insights into the past and its representation.

CONCLUSION

This article has undertaken a reciprocally informed analysis of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the temporary exhibition *Kept Things*. Although the principles of heterotypology operate simultaneously, albeit to varying degrees, in isolating each, the concept afforded a concentrated tending to place, time, how places structure agency and knowledge, as well as how emplacements operate in relationship to other emplacements.

To conclude, I return to the full title of the exhibition, *Kept Things: A Woman's Life in East Berlin*. Even after a detailed analysis, it remains striking how little the visitor/researcher comes to know about the woman whose life is purportedly on display. More-

over, the absence of historical contextualization, the failure of addressing change over time, as well as missing linkages between the personal and the sociocultural and political, undermine the DOK's broader project of interpreting everyday life in East Germany. For example, the temporary exhibition sidesteps several relevant topics, such as how Frau P. might have experienced personally the de jure and de facto status of women in the GDR and to what degree living under a socialist regime shaped her life.

Despite these limitations, I have argued that *Kept Things'* central contribution lies in its provocations. The exhibition complicates how museums represent everyday life in the GDR; it creates possibilities for imagining difference in the past and with it in the present and future. The mechanisms that produce this effect include the display of the out-of-the-ordinary rather than the typical from the perspective of the subject, as well as the banal as opposed to the exceptional in terms of materiality. Moreover, the show poses questions in place of providing distanced, professional, and objectifying statements about the past, thereby creating interpretive openings. *Kept Things* presents a single woman's life and her things concretely and abstractly in parallel. On the one hand, the visitor encounters the material traces of an actual person through the consumer products she once owned. On the other hand, the context of the museum abstracts them, asserting that they stand in for something greater than themselves, even if this something else is difficult to discern. Unlike more traditional historical exhibits, *Kept Things* hybridizes the mode of museal historical representation and what could be conceptualized as installation art, displaying artifacts playfully, with attention to aesthetics, and without rigid and definitive textual frameworks. Thus, the exhibition disrupts museum genre conventions, thereby offering the possibility of approaching the musealization of East Germany in ways that complicate rather than replicate convention. From the perspective of a heterotopic framework, *Kept Things* thus articulates a "reservoir of imagination" (Foucault [1967] 1998:185).

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«ВЕЩИ ПРО ЗАПАС»: ГЕТЕРОТОПНЫЕ ПРОВОКАЦИИ В МУЗЕЙНОЙ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ ПОВСЕДНЕВНОЙ ЖИЗНИ И БЫТА ВОСТОЧНОЙ ГЕРМАНИИ

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*В основу настоящей статьи положено исследование, выполненное при щедрой поддержке Университета Альберты. Я благодарна Майклу Гранзоу, Ким Мэйр, Сорайан Мукерджа, Ондин Парк и Елене Сименс за конструктивные замечания в разработке идей, окончательно оформленных в данной публикации. Я хочу выразить благодарность также трем анонимным рецензентам и редакции журнала *Laboratorium* за серьезную работу с текстом моей статьи и полезные советы, существенную помощь в процессе публикации оказала мне шеф-редактор журнала *Laboratorium* Анна Исакова.*

В настоящей статье проведен взаимосвязанный анализ концепции гетеротопии, предложенной Мишелем Фуко, и выставки «Вещи про запас: жизнь женщины в Восточном Берлине», которая проходила в немецком городе Айзенхюттенштадт с 28 марта 2010 года по 5 мая 2011 года. Эта выставка представляет собой площадку и практику, которые принципиально отличаются от методов репрезентации повседневной жизни Восточной Германии в современных музеях. В то же время выставка «Вещи про запас» обнажает механизмы, посредством которых музеи конструируют знания. В основе этого тезиса лежит анализ концепта гетеротопии, который подчеркивает ее методологические и эвристические возможности. Применение различных аспектов гетеротопии в этом конкретном случае проливает свет на то, каким образом пространственные, временные и политические условия формируют значение выставки, а также указывает на возможность более точной репрезентации прошлого Восточной Германии в отличие от той, которая имеет место сегодня.

Ключевые слова: гетеротопия; Восточная Германия; повседневность; постсоциализм; музей; Мишель Фуко; Центр документации культуры повседневности в ГДР (Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR); материальная культура; история; репрезентация