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**REMEMBERING EAST GERMAN CHILDHOOD IN
POST-*WENDE* LIFE NARRATIVES**

by

JULIANA MAMOU

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MAJOR: MODERN LANGUAGES
(German Studies)

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Advisor

Date

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2013

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Chapter One: Introduction

In November of 2002, Norbert Kron reported in *Der Tagesspiegel* an increase in life narratives that focus on personal memories of childhood and adolescence spent in the GDR and during the *Wende* period. Moreover, he argued that a new sub-genre in life narratives was emerging and references, among others, Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* and Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders*. This thematic sub-genre comprises the memory stories of authors of the last East German generation, born in the early to mid 1970s, who explore how they became who they are. In other words, they seek to understand how their disparate East German childhood and post-unification young adulthood informed their identities. Kron argues that literary critics had already attempted to capture this new literary trend by employing such labels as *Generation Trabant* or *Generation '89* in analogy to their West German cohort known by Florian Illies' *Generation Golf*. Yet, while sharing not only demographic characteristics but also biographical experience—as conveyed in their narratives—some of these authors, Jochen Schmidt for instance, reject the notion that they could be categorized under a common denominator. These rejections are surprising and puzzling to Kron, who thus calls them a “ein verblüffendes Phänomen” (“a bewildering phenomenon”) (*Der Tagesspiegel* November 17, 2002) because they contradict his understanding of the concept of generation and the fact that he subsumes these authors repeatedly as belonging to the same cohort for which he adopts Hensel's title *Zonenkinder* (children from the Eastern German zone).

Kron's reaction to the adverse reactions of newer authors indicates that his understanding of a generational cohort corresponds to that of literary scholars such as Jörg Magenau, Katrin Völkner, Aleida Assmann, and Wolfgang Emmerich as well as historians Hans-Hermann Hertle and Stefan Wolle who expanded Karl Mannheim's classic discussion "The Problem of Generations" (1923). They argue that the concept of generation describes a cohort approximately of the same age who shared core socialization experiences and hence have similar values, and as such constitutes a "community of shared experience" (Magenau & Völkner 102). Hertle and Wolle write that the term generation cannot be verified empirically and constitutes as broadly defined concept. Nonetheless, they emphasize that the multiplicity of diverse experiences has a common denominator (Hertle & Wolle 101).

Similarly, Aleida Assmann argues that shared forms of awareness and experience form the basis of a generation and that it is particularly in retrospect that the memories generate an intra-generational bond and inter-generational differentiation as the experiences become apparent as distinct from the subsequent generational cohort (Assmann, "Generationsidentitäten" 21). In retrospect, we have gained some distance from the experience, which enables us to see the bigger picture and to contextualize the event in a life story that makes its distinctive aspects more apparent (Assmann, 2006 21). Thus, retrospectively, individuals can look beyond the idiosyncrasies of their own experiences and come to understand much of it as generation-specific. They come to realize the similarity between intra-generational memories compared to inter-generational ones. In other words, Assmann argues that this realization gives rise to the notion of one's partaking in a generational cohort that defines themselves based on

what differentiates them from others and what they have in common with each other because of when and where they were born and raised (22).

The generational cohort that is at the center of my discussion is very much aware of the differences between their own and both previous GDR generations, which are comprised of East Germans born in the 1920s through 1940s and those born between 1940 and 1970. All three GDR generations have been identified by historians: the oldest age cohort of GDR citizens that, according to Hertle and Wolle, can be considered a generation consists of those people who experienced the end of World War II as young adults. It marked the end of old beliefs and values with the capitulation of the Third Reich and a new start in building a better Germany. However, this generation also expressed continuity in their at least latent longing for “einer Instanz, die niemals irrt” (“an authority that never errs”) (Hertle and Wolle 101) that many of them would ascribe to the SED, East Germany’s leading party. They would continue their strong ideological beliefs despite such shattering events as the revelations about Stalin’s crimes, the 1953 uprising in the GDR and the final sealing off of East Germany from the West with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

The second generational cohort, Hertle and Wolle identify, shared the short-lived outrage against the Soviet intervention during the Prague Spring in 1968. In order to prevent open protest and reinforce this generation’s ideological convictions, the GDR government allowed “ein bisschen linke Abweichung” (“minor left-wing deviance”) and “revolutionäre Ungeduld” (“revolutionary impatience”) (193) and encouraged open protests against such international attacks on socialist ideals as the Vietnam War, the arrest of Angela Davis, or the Chilean putsch. The deep disappointment after the

expatriation of Wolf Biermann was the final event they shared. If they had not been actively involved in the protest against it and thus did not have to suffer the dire consequences of political protest in a dictatorship, the members of this generation largely reacted with silent adjustment, cynicism, by withdrawing from political engagement into their professional careers or their private. Their disillusionment with the GRD leadership contributed to what Hertle and Wolle describe as a “seltsam erstickendes Lebensgefühl” (“oddly stifling atmosphere of life”) (196) that dominated the 1970s and 1980s. Many members of this generation, however, nostalgically held on to remnants of their socialist ideals. In an attempt to make good for failing to institute them successfully in the GDR, especially after the Prague Spring and the expulsion of Biermann, this generation was, at the forefront of the assemblies and demonstrations calling for a democratization of so-called real-existing Socialism in the late 1980s. The events that eventually led to the collapse of the GDR were thus not a student revolution but by and large initiated and executed by this generation who at the time were in their 30s and 40s.

The third and last GDR generation, which is the focus of this dissertation, is composed of those East Germans born in the 1970s. Hertle and Wolle describe them as the disillusioned generation, weary of their parents’ and grandparents’ ideals and ideological convictions that they mostly ridiculed and pitied since the GDR had lost its intimidating appearance to them. Many of them, however, also felt very comfortable with their lives and, unable to see an alternative to the Socialist utopia embraced by their parents and least in harsh socio-economic reality of capitalism. As a consequence, they became largely indifferent to East Germany’s master narratives. As they did not

experience the ups and downs of disillusion and hope that the previous two generations shared, the third generation largely expressed an ideological and political apathy and withdrew into their personal lives of friends and family thus creating an atmosphere that Hertle and Wolle describe as a “bedrückende Windstille im geistigen Leben” (“oppressively calm atmosphere in intellectual life”) (384). Given this generation’s lack of idealism, Hertle and Wolle argue that German reunification constituted a “Abschied ohne Aufbruch (“an ending without a new beginning”) (384) because they lacked the enthusiasm for the socio-political potential of democratizing East Germany that the *Wende* signified to their parent’s generation. What all three generations shared, however, was the experience that life as they knew it came to an end as their lives were totally and radically changed.

Yet, despite their disillusionment with East German real-existing socialism and lack of political idealism during the *Wende*, it is the autobiographical accounts of the third generation’s childhood and adolescence in the GDR that constitutes an essential contribution of East German authors to post-*Wende* literature. Preeminent East German writers like Stefan Heym and Erich Loest, who represent the first generation, as well as second-generation authors like Christa Wolf, Monika Maron, and Christoph Hein continue to publish after the *Wende*. However, they write predominantly in fiction rather than autobiographical texts, their narratives focus to a lesser extent on the last East German years and the difficulty of adjusting in unified Germany, and most of all they are much less widely read than the memoirs of the new generation of authors whose literary careers only began after unification. The often surprisingly nostalgic memories narrated by members of this final generation, to which I also belong myself, signify not only their

introspection into their own and other East Germans' struggle to fully accept reunited Germany as their home but also their willingness to move beyond established East-West dichotomies towards integration. They write from the vantage point of "the Other", the *Ossi*, and, simultaneously, against this negative image of East Germans whose nostalgia—according to West German prejudice—preoccupies them and prevents them from moving on and seizing the opportunities offered to them.

The memoirs of Jana Simon and Jana Hensel, Claudia Rusch and Robert Ide, which were published in the first decade of the new millennium, depict the experiences of these writers who not only constitute a generational cohort but also spent their childhood and youth in a comparatively small and homogeneous geo-political space and thus their experiences have been taken as paradigmatic and representative for their generation. They experienced the complete collapse of the state and the disappearance of the country they had lived in with all its institutions and the establishment of a radically different society in their formative years, which significantly changed their daily lives. And while they did not subscribe to socialist ideology to the extent that their parents and grandparent did, the majority nevertheless believed that East Germany was morally and ethically superior to West Germany because unlike the latter it had been established as an antithesis to the Third Reich and antifascist discourse was a core pillar of GDR ideology. Moreover, even the last generation had internalized the belief that with its lack of exploitation, social justice based on similar incomes and thus the elimination of the class system, affordable healthcare, free education, and most importantly employment for all socialism was ethically superior to the capitalism of the West even if its consumer goods rather paled in comparison. In addition to its loss and

the resulting disorientation after the *Wende*, it is the political and ideological framework of their childhood—which they mostly acquired as part of their socialization in state educational institutions whose function was to generate loyal East German citizens—constitute core unifying factors and common themes for this generation.

Consequently, their memory stories share such similar themes as the disappearance and partial reemergence of GDR products and their function as nostalgic mementos; the loss of friendships and intergenerational relations to parents as well as communal bonds and support systems due to migration of young East Germans to the former West Germany; a widespread sense of disorientation and alienation and the consequent quest for a place in this new society; and overall the question of how to integrate the East German past and the post-unification present and future in one's sense of self. Furthermore, the cross-generational phenomenon of *Ostalgie* appears in all of the memoirs, albeit to varying degrees. Although ahistorical in its exclusion of the oppression that was part of everyday life in the GDR, this nostalgic longing for the East German past of their childhood and youth generated a new sense of community and collective identity as *Ossis* that served to reconstruct the negative other-defined notion that East Germans are inherently inferior and subordinate to their new West German masters. The post-*Wende* memoirs of East German childhoods I will discuss in my dissertation thus constitute a communal counter-memory to the hegemonic West German discourse that denigrated all things East German.

Although Hertle and Wolle argue that each of the three generations shares core aspects of their life experiences which differentiates them from each other and establishes the respective generation, the lives of the individuals within each cohort

naturally also differ in some aspects. In his *Tagesspiegel* article, Kron cites author Jochen Schmidt who stresses these differences over the similarities in experience with regard to the last generation in his rejection of categorizing these post-*Wende* memoirs, including his own, as reflective of a cohesive group identity. He emphasizes that the danger of the notion of cohesive East German group identity—represented as a collective *We*—lies in the fact that it neglects significant differences in experiences and representation in real-existing socialism not least because the supposed homogeneity and lack of individuality in the lives of East Germans constitutes a core aspect of pre- and post-*Wende* hegemonic West German discourse. As such, Schmidt argues for stressing differences over similarities for the same reason that the majority of authors (and readers) of these childhood memoirs seek similarities among their experiences, namely to generate a positively defined counter-identity to West Germans. Schmidt is right to remind us of the differences in and significant diversity of lives lived in the GDR that are indeed also reflected in the memoirs, for instance, while the experiences of *Stasi* surveillance dominated Rusch's life and are thus central to her memoir, they are entirely absent from Hensel's text. Schmidt emphasizes the idiosyncrasies of his own life story and particularly criticizes the use of a narrative *We* in Hensel's *Zonenkinder* as it claims generational representativity of her own distinct experiences. However, when he states, for example, "man hat nicht versucht, wie ein Westdeutscher auszusehen," ("one didn't try to look like a West German") (cited in Kron, *Der Tagesspiegel*, November 17, 2002) to reject Hensel's contrary claim, his own use of the pronoun "man" (one) while less inclusive than "wir" (we) still indicates a claim of typicality of his own experience because otherwise he would have used "ich" (I).

In the following chapters, I will discuss Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* (After the Wall, trans.), Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (My Free German Youth), Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders* (Because We are Different), and Robert Ide's *Geteilte Träume* (Divided Dreams). I will explore how these authors represent their memories of the childhood and adolescence they spent in in the GDR and the young adulthood in unified Germany. A detailed discussion of memory and its relation to self-identity as well as collective trauma and culture shock in Chapter One will serve to outline core theoretical concepts relevant for the discussion. Subsequently, I will discuss the four primary texts with regard to thematic clusters. In Chapter Two, I will explore the notion of nostalgia and specifically analyze the phenomenon of a nostalgic longing for the East German past known as *Ostalgie*. I will relate nostalgia to the sense of loss and the attempt to establish a positive and self-defined identity in counter-narratives to West German hegemony. The chapter concludes with a critique of *Ostalgie* as it effaces the oppressiveness of the dictatorial regime in personal and collective memory. Chapter Three turns to the notion of home and *Heimat* and the sense of loss and longing for it expressed as *Heimweh* as well as the representation of childhood places and their disappearance in the changing cityscapes in the so-called five new provinces. In Chapter Four I discuss the construction of collective identities and specifically of a new and positively defined *Ossi* identity as a counter-identity to the other-defined and thus negative identity ascribed to East Germans in dominant West German discourse. In my analyses of the four primary texts, which I group together in various combinations in each chapter to explore the respective themes by comparison, I seek to explore both

the similarities in these auto/biographical accounts as well as for the idiosyncratic differences in the lives of their authors and their modes of representation.

As literary texts and memory artifacts generally only contain the potential to affect collective memory, which needs to be actualized in the reception process, I will also analyze select reader responses. They indicate that readers relate to the inter-generational silences that Ide explores and to the sense of disorientation and powerlessness that all East Germans shared and Simon considered to be at the core of her friend Felix's tragic life. Some readers even related to the experience of *Stasi* surveillance recounted in Rusch's memoir and many found their current melancholia for the lost past reflected in Hensel's *Zonenkinder*. Realizing that their own experiences are not entirely idiosyncratic generated a sense of themselves as part of a larger community and thus of the extent to which their identity is collective.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework – Trauma, Memory, Identity

The process of remembering and its interaction with self-identity is at the center of my analysis of selected memoirs depicting East German memories of childhood. As this is a highly complex and sensitive process susceptible to outside influences, it is important to briefly outline theories of individual memory and trauma from the perspective of cognitive psychology. These theories are relevant to my project because memory interacts with, alters, and determines an individual's sense of selfhood and identity. Subsequently, I will provide insights into the concepts of collective trauma and culture shock in order to contextualize the individual identity constructions in post-*Wende* Germany and locate them in the complex struggle of East Germans to adjust and adapt to their new cultural environment.

American psychologist Daniel Schacter, who has contributed significantly to the discussions of the meaning of memory, understands memory in general as a complex faculty of the mind that involves various distinct but interconnected processes and systems. Among the different tasks human memory fulfills are the retention of information, skill learning, habit acquisition, object recognition, and the recollection of specific events (Schacter 5). All these tasks sustain people in their everyday life, and, most importantly, create and stabilize the individual's sense of self. Schacter explains that our memories "can be highly elusive in some situations and dead wrong in others" (7). Nonetheless, without our memories we do not have the "foundation for our most strongly held beliefs about ourselves" (Schacter 7). Brain-injury patients, for instance, who experience retrograde amnesia, i.e. who have lost all or most of the memories of their life before the injury occurred, have reported that they had lost their sense of self

(7). They cannot recreate and replay those past experiences that powerfully influenced the development of their identity. In contrast, the non-damaged brain is able to retrieve impressions of past experiences through conscious effort or upon accidentally receiving a cue that triggers the memory. It is this close relationship between memories and the sense of self with which they provide us that is at the center of this dissertation. Hence it is essential to explore the basic principles involved in the cognitive psychology of remembering and the functions of this process in the interactive activities between the individual and his/her social world. Furthermore, it should be discussed how individuals derive personal meaning through remembering, and, as a result of these processes, negotiate their sense of self.

Memories are constructed via an encoding process that can transform into memory what we see, hear, think, or feel. Psychologists have suggested that it is only momentary bits and pieces of events that are represented in memory, which we have to put together like a jigsaw puzzle to reconstruct the past experience – hence the notion of the *constructedness* of memories. These fragments leave their mark on our nervous system as a memory trace, an *engram* “that conserves the effects of the experience across time” (Schacter 40; 55). Memory researchers have established the existence of three major memory systems: semantic memory, which contains conceptual and factual knowledge; procedural memory, which allows us to acquire skills and habits; and episodic memory, which enables us to recall the personal incidents that define our lives.

For the analysis of memoirs, episodic memory is particularly important, as it frames past experiences contextually with regard to time and space and retains a sense of the participation of the rememberer in the event. Even though we believe “that the

memory is more or less a true replica of the original event,” and “that the event is part of [our] own past” (Schacter 17), it is important to acknowledge that recall is always partial and reconstructive.

External circumstances under which the recall takes place, such as the conditions at the time of remembering, will leave their mark on incident as it is recalled. As Maurice Halbwachs wrote in his monumental work *The Collective Memory*, we “renovate and supplement” our remembrances (73). In other words, one’s state of mind at a given moment will determine the way we remember and what we remember, and “the emotions that you attribute to the past may sometimes arise from the way in which you set out to retrieve a memory in the present” (Schacter 22).

With regard to recall, Schacter differentiates between an active and a passive way to retrieve memories, using Marcel Proust’s literary explorations of memory in the fictionalized account of his life in *À la recherche du temps perdu* as illustration. Proust began his quest for memories when he noticed that some recollections simply appeared without his active pursuit of them – they were triggered by “chance encounters with objects that contain the keys to unlocking memories that might otherwise be hidden forever,” as Schacter puts it. These ‘chance encounters’ are things that are mostly outside of the control of the remembering individual, such as smells, or tastes—as the famous *madeleine* incident in Proust’s narrative—or other sensations. Thus, some memories can be ‘unlocked’ involuntarily (Schacter 26-28).

Proust realized that memories stirred up by chance were rather fleeting in quality, lasting for only a short period of time even though their intensity was overwhelming. In order to be more in control when trying to recapture his past—a process he called

mental time travel—Proust made conscious efforts to expose himself to cues and hints that would help him remember. Such active retrieval, for example, includes meeting old friends and acquaintances with whom contact was minimal in the past. In doing so, Proust controlled the kinds of cues that eventually triggered voluntary recollections (Schacter 64).

The extent to which engrams, or memory traces, can be recalled or triggered depends not only on the retrieval cues provided, but also on the strength and complexity of the engram determined by the associations formed during the encoding process. The more connections an individual can establish between the current experience and other similar or contrasting experiences, the better the trace will be retained and the easier it will be to recall it later. If the encoded information was “particularly vivid, or is repeated frequently enough,” it will also be triggered more easily than if weak associations were formed or the information was perceived to be of little meaning at the time of occurrence (Schacter 58). The degree of complexity that an engram exhibits is thus directly proportional to the amount of possible cues that can initiate memory retrieval at a later point in time, or in Schacter’s words:

Elaborative encoding yields higher levels of explicit memory than nonelaborate encoding, probably because a rich and elaborate encoding is accessible to a broad range of retrieval cues, whereas a shallow, more impoverished encoding can be elicited only by a few perfectly matched cues. (63)

This means in turn that forgetting is more likely to occur in the event that a piece of information has not been remembered elaborately enough, for example due to a lack of meaningfulness associated with it by the individual who encountered it. Furthermore, engrams weaken over time if they are not reactivated from time to time—following the

'use-it-or-lose-it' motto—i.e. if too few or no cues are encountered that are associated with the information encoded in the engram close enough to trigger recollection (Schacter 64).

Memories of traumatic experiences tend to be elaborately encoded and therefore remembered particularly well. I will argue in the next section that the political changes during the peaceful revolution and after unification constituted traumatic experiences for the vast majority of East Germans. However, I do not suggest that East Germans were traumatized as individuals, although this certainly was the case for some, but rather that the concept of cultural trauma captures the post-*Wende* experience of East Germans as their country and hence its imagined community disappeared and they underwent a form of culture shock comparable to that of immigrants to a new country.

II.1. Cultural Trauma and Culture Shock

The *Wende* encompasses the political, economic, social, and cultural changes between October 1989 and October 1990 that marked the end of East Germany after four decades and radically impacted the lives and of all East Germans. Among those changes was a new collective memory imposed by West German discourse that cast life in the GDR past solely in negative terms by stressing the oppression inherent to dictatorships. In order to counteract the forgetting of the mundane joys and sorrows of ordinary life in East Germany that the new hegemonic discourse excluded, particularly the third and last generation engaged in constructing a counter-memory via literature, both fiction and non-fiction, film, television and museums. The overall mood among East Germans after unification changed quickly from the initial euphoria to disappointment

and discontent. The following discussion will outline the three major concepts of acculturative stress, culture shock, and cultural trauma in order to clarify this radical change in the zeitgeist and explain the nowadays less publicized, yet, nonetheless continuing presence of a sense of hopelessness and malaise that puzzles West Germans who continue to mistakenly expect both gratitude from the poor cousins in the East and their acceptance of unification as happy ending of German history.

Given the unprecedentedly fast-paced changes and their transformative impact on people's lives, the *Wende* experience has been described as traumatic despite the fact that the vast majority of East Germans did not exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and were neither subjected to nor did they witness violent crimes or natural disasters. Hence, it is not individual but collective or cultural trauma that I will explore here, a term which sociologist Jeffrey Alexander developed by analyzing the aftermath of events such as natural catastrophes or radical historical changes that alter and even threaten the existence of communities. I will expand upon Alexander's theoretical discussion cultural trauma by integrating Kai Erikson and Michael Minkenberg's empirical studies on the effect of natural disasters on communities and the consequences of the clash between East and West German cultures respectively. The discussion will further incorporate Kalvero Oberg's culture shock model and its application by Wolf Wagner to the East German *Wende* experience which he essentially casts as a form of (involuntary) emigration that consequently leads to what John Berry calls acculturative stress.

The Notion of Cultural Trauma

According to Jeffrey Alexander, cultural trauma is “an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions.” It “occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1).

Alexander’s notion of cultural trauma is useful in describing the processes following the German *Wende*: welcomed enthusiastically in its initial phases, German unification and the processes of change resulting from this monumental event in German history have given way to the disillusion and resentment of many East Germans, particularly in the aftermath of the rapid unification of 1990.

The opening of inner-German borders was clearly a response to popular demand, as more and more people sought to emigrate from the GDR at the end of the 1980s. But the economic and social consequences of the concomitant unification challenged East Germans’ understanding of their past and present lives to such an extent that they developed negative feelings and directed them at what seems to be the cause of their frustration—the destruction of their past lives by a unification that was increasingly perceived forced upon them—similar to a form of colonization – by West Germany.

The *Wende* represents the kind of “abrupt and unexpected, and sometimes not even particularly malevolent, experience of social transformation and change” (Alexander 2) to which Alexander attributes the traumatizing power that can contribute

to a sense of collective sharing. He explains that “the circle of the we” expands once members of a collectivity realize that the suffering of others is also their own suffering (1). The German *Wende* can be interpreted as an event of unifying force, as it ended the order of so-called “real-existing socialism” rather abruptly and unexpectedly and redirected all aspects of life for all East Germans suddenly and drastically. It created an ‘imagined community’, which, according to Benedict Anderson, “is imagined because the members ... will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6).

Consequently, the *Wende* and its aftermath have embedded themselves in German consciousness, particularly that of East Germans: the erasure of established structures, institutions, and relationships that had served as points of reference and orientation for the citizens of the (former) GDR left indelible marks. East Germans saw themselves urged to embrace a world view that was strikingly different from what had previously informed their everyday lives and being, whether they were strict believers in or opponents of GDR socialism, or positioned anywhere between those lines. In order to assimilate to the Western order, East Germans had to ignore the values and norms that had governed their lives in the GDR. Thus, their previous lives, including their reference points and the cultural memories that framed those lives, became part of a world that either did not exist any longer in official history or was looked upon as inferior, limited, and lacking.

Although West German policy effaced GDR identity and, in its stead, promoted a new Western identity, East Germans were not ready to let go completely of their past, especially in view of rising numbers of company closures and unemployment which had

not been anticipated. Despite some generational differences in processing post-*Wende* acculturation stress, which the last generational cohort could work through best while the first could do so least, most East Germans still consider this rather than being German their primary identity-marker and do not experience themselves as fully part of the new Germany but rather as a minority. Nevertheless, they continue to negotiate between their old East German selves and the new West German order surrounding them. For instance, Jens Bisky cites a survey from 2003, according to which 73 percent of East Germans felt more connected to East Germany than the new Federal Republic. Furthermore, 65 percent of East Germans agreed with the statement, "Ich möchte weder die DDR wiederhaben, noch fühle ich mich in der BRD schon richtig wohl" ("I would neither like to have the GDR back, or do I really feel comfortable in the FRG yet") (Bisky 114-115). This survey, *Sozialreport 2004*, was conducted by the Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungszentrum Berlin-Brandenburg among 1,360 men and women over 18 years of age, who were living in East Germany at that time. By surveying East Germans annually, the research center explores the social situation and development in the five *Neue Länder* (five "new federal states") (Winkler 2004). In 2008, the *Sozialreport* showed that 52 percent of 2,892 East Germans surveyed still did not identify with unified Germany, and that 52 percent of all respondents feel that they cannot trust federal institutions (Liebscher).

As they exhibited feelings such as a sense of loss, disorientation, insecurity, frustration, and resentment, East Germans were therefore subject to aspects of human suffering which Alexander considers an integral part of cultural trauma (3). Alexander's definition of a community's cultural trauma allows us to conceptualize the struggles with

which many East Germans are still confronted more than two decades after German unification. He writes:

For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises. Events are one thing, representations of these events quite another. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. Collective actors 'decide' to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go. (10)

Alexander developed his theory of cultural trauma by extending Kai Erikson's *Everything in its Path. Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* to radical changes beyond natural disasters that significantly impact communities as well as the notion of community to imagined communities such as the citizens of a country. Erikson analyzes the devastating effects that loss of community relations and reference points had on the members of a community, namely Buffalo Creek, a small but stable mining community in the Appalachian mountain region of West Virginia. The initial reactions of the majority of individuals who saw their community destroyed were shock and numbness followed by a sense of disbelief, loneliness and isolation. In their efforts to re-establish their lives, many felt misplaced and disconnected from the community, powerless, without control, and stripped of their safety net. Erikson points out that these symptoms experienced by people who have suffered an unexpected and overwhelming loss coincide with the classic symptoms of mourning and bereavement: victims of such a cultural trauma mourn the loss of friends and homes, but also the loss of their collective identity, and with it their orientation: they "feel dazed at least in part because they are not sure what to do in the absence of that familiar setting... [They] have lost

their navigational equipment, as it were, both their inner compasses and their outer maps” (Erikson 200).

The people of this community had identified with their social arrangements to such an extent that they had become completely and unquestioningly absorbed in it. They could not separate their individual from their collective identities, as they considered the larger collective an extension of themselves. Individuality was much less important to them than communality—“the network of relationships that make up the general human surround of people”—which guided and safeguarded their sense of connectedness with the world (Erikson 191).

The members of such a community generally consider each other as equals in terms of economic, financial and social status – somewhat analogous to the kind of proletarian equality at the center of socialist ideology (even if not the practice). The relationship between the individual and the group is inherently symbiotic: survival is possible only within the group, analogous to cells in an organism that both support and are supported by the whole. Individuals rely on the community for emotional comfort and draw their strength from it (Erikson 192-193). Thus, when this pillar of social life and resources disappears, the energy and stability individual members used to gain from it disappear as well. The community members Erikson observed “[found] that they (were) almost empty of feeling, empty of affection, empty of confidence and assurance; as if individual cells had supplied raw energy to the whole body but did not have the means to convert that energy back into a usable personal form once the body was no longer there to process it” (198).

Within such tight-knit communities, marital relations are often not only a personal matter, but a reflection of the degree of communality among members. While financial and economic factors play an important role in the decision to get married and have children, the existence of a caring and trustworthy community network that provides safety and comfort has an influence on this decision as well. Erikson found that many members of the Buffalo Creek community still experienced difficulties in their marriage for years after the flood, and “a large number of [marriages] ... are breaking up altogether.” Marriage, according to Erikson, is “something of a community affair,” as the immediate surroundings of the couple entering into married life validates, witnesses, and commemorates their marriage. They are thus at the center of gravitational forces exerted by the interpersonal bond between the two people as well as the ‘outer currents,’ the forces exerted by the social surrounding. Erikson finds that when the social surrounding no longer provides the frame and context for marriage, the interpersonal bond will often start to loosen as well (219).

While this may not happen to all marriages that are subjected to significant changes in the composition of their surroundings, a broken or missing social network, compounded by economic uncertainty, as was the case in Buffalo Creek as well as in post-*Wende* East Germany, may also constitute a reason for many unmarried people to decide against marriage and children. In the first five years following German unification, the birth and marriage rates in the so-called five new provinces, as the former GDR tends to be referred to, decreased by about fifty percent – a stark contrast to respective numbers of the same time period in West Germany, where the birth rate remained stable (Adler 37). Marina Adler concludes that, taking the new economic and

social circumstances into consideration, East German women now had to weigh the risks of having children in a social climate that did not guarantee employment and state support for the integration of work and family responsibilities – conditions that were a given for GDR citizens. In order to provide a healthy and emotionally as well as financially stable family life to children, parents would have to rely on their community. But while the kind of communality that Erikson describes as an integral part of the Buffalo Creek inhabitants was common also for many East Germans, whose guaranteed right to work created communities wherein most members would spend their lifetimes, the introduction of a West German-style market economy, with its constantly fluctuating demands and highly mobile labor force, destroyed these communities.

Today, members of the community change frequently, know little of each other, and are more reluctant to approach or help one another, not least because everyone is concerned about his or her private safety and economic situation in the inherently unstable economic order of capitalism. As Erikson explains, “the community, what remains of it, seems to have lost its most significant quality – the power it generated in people to care for one another in times of need, to console one another in times of distress, to protect one another in times of danger” (226-227). The astonishing decrease in birth rates and marriages among East Germans indicates a decrease in communal relations. Jens Bisky writes that it was most clearly the fact that in 1994 the former East Germany had the second lowest birthrate worldwide preceded solely by the Vatican (Bisky 38). This birth strike, as it has been referred to, marked what Bisky termed the phase when a distinct *Ossi* identity began to develop and signifies a complete lack of

faith in the new society. If we extend the notion of community from small-scale Halbwachsian groups like families or Erikson's town of Buffalo Creek to the large-scale imagined community of *Ossis*, the implosion in marriage and birth rates not only and even primarily signifies a distrust in marriage and family as institutions but also and especially in the new state to provide the necessary support.

According to Erikson, the psychologically and even physically debilitating effects of catastrophic events that drastically alter or even destroy communities constitute a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (154). The collectively experienced trauma "works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'" (154). It is nonetheless a form of shock, according to Erikson, for the members of the community to gradually realize that their communal environment "no longer exist[s] as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared" (154). As the communal ties had cultural significance for the members of the community, their loss affects them not only individually but as a group: these ties were integral parts of a culture and society that they could depend on and use as reference points for their lives. The traumatic event deprived them not only of previously guaranteed rights, such as the right to work, but also of their cultural framework and heritage.

Unlike in Erikson's study, this "blow to the basic tissues of social life" was for East Germans of course not due to a natural disaster. Nonetheless, the *Wende* and its economic, social and personal consequences left their mark on people's consciousness

in a similar fashion because it drastically altered the East German imaginary community. Bisky notices that young East Germans comment on Western market economy not as the “Bühne ihres Lebens, sondern ein Naturereignis, dem sie ausgeliefert sind wie einer Flut” (“the platform of their lives but a natural event, of which they have become victims”) (118). He agrees that the event of a natural disaster is not an inappropriate analogy in this case:

Die alten Routinen konnten nicht beibehalten werden, die Mittelpunkte der DDR-Mitmenschlichkeit, Betrieb und Tauschwirtschaft, verschwanden. Erzählt wird davon wie von einer unvorhersehbaren Katastrophe, die hilflose Einzelne ereilte wie ein Tsunami. (139)

The old routines could not be upheld, the central aspects of GDR humanity, companies, and barter economy disappeared. These developments are talked about like accounts of an unforeseeable catastrophe encountered by helpless individuals as if they were victims of a tsunami.

Besides the factors already mentioned, other aspects of cultural life in the GDR were also inevitably changed or lost. The ‘make-do-habits’, for example, established among East Germans due to economic circumstances of the *Mangelwirtschaft*, and the idealized images of the ‘other’ Germans west of the border shaped by decades of little and one-sided contact – all these and more characteristics of GDR life, from the most mundane aspects of everyday life to the abstract, political, economic, and social order, ended almost overnight when West German market economy and political democracy were introduced in East Germany. Some East Germans even literally lost their homes when West German owners came back to re-claim property that they had left decades ago when they decided to live on the other side of the German border.

The sense of disorientation Erikson describes as part of the distress the Buffalo Creek community members faced, not only immediately after the flood but years later,

parallels a widely acknowledged phenomenon among East Germans: they felt disoriented and misplaced, rather like immigrants, even though most remained physically in the same place. Because landscapes and cityscapes, though changed, are generally recognizable, they simultaneously evoke the past and the present while “people continue to feel that they are lost in a ‘strange and different place’” (Erikson 210). The curiosity of this phenomenon, of people feeling like strangers in their own home, lies in the fact that most buildings were restored and renovated and the infrastructure brought up to West German standards. Though many of these changes were ultimately positive, many inhabitants of these areas felt powerless as they had to stand by and watch these changes happen without being able to contribute opinions or ideas. The forces that changed the cityscapes of East Germany in the early 1990s were not the same as those in Buffalo Creek in 1972, but their effects seem surprisingly similar in their disruption of people’s lives by taking away their past and changing their physical and social environment forever.

In his 1993 essay “The Wall after the Wall”, Michael Minkenberg writes about the contradiction between the overwhelming support for German reunification among both East and West Germans and the unrealized expectations and hopes on both sides. He establishes parallels between the challenges facing post-war Germany in the late 1940s and ’50s on the one hand and those confronting East Germany after 1989 on the other, citing similar changes in socio-economic and political structures. Both systems experienced cultural discontinuities that “went hand in hand with political transformation” (Minkenberg 55), and had to re-evaluate and re-learn concepts and dispositions to which they had adhered before.

West Germany, however, was in the advantageous position of being able to proceed at its own pace and to anchor its newly established norms and values within the political framework of the democratic regime of the Bonn Republic after the end of the Second World War and to direct frustrations about the price of transformation toward the Allies. Thus, a political orientation was provided that clearly situated West German identity, which did not encounter serious critique or challenge during the *Wende*. On the contrary, West German identity as constructed on its TV programs which were widely available and consumed in the GDR and tied it to tantalizing Western consumer goods, had long been the ideal for East Germans despite the fact that GDR ideology cast capitalist wealth and consumerism as a constant threat to world peace and the existence of the GDR. However, after the *Wende* and thus the end of the Cold War, the official goal of fighting Western ideology disappeared along with the sense of moral superiority and the belief to be living in the better of the two Germanys despite its inferior consumer products, which many even among the disillusioned third generation shared. While many if not most East Germans had wanted to reform their country and state, the new realities after a unification hastened for macro-economic reasons made East Germans feel disoriented and alienated. The rapid process of unification and its character—often described as *Anschluss*, colonization, or corporate takeover—did not offer the kind of positive reinforcement that could have supported a positive post-*Wende* East German identity. The realities after unification made it impossible for a collective identity to develop that combined democracy with the peaceful revolution in which East Germans had fought for and won it and within which they could take pride for

introducing reform and revolution and ending the dictatorship without West German help (Minkenberg 64).

Minkenberg's thesis that the *Wende* was both a unique historical event while at the same time bearing resemblance to the cultural and political changes in post-war West Germany reinforces the notion of the *Wende* as collective trauma. It supports a view of German unification as an accumulation of disappointments and resentments stemming from imprudently entering a new terrain with high expectations and insecurities.

However, the applicability of clinical trauma terminology remains dubious in this case because the end of the GDR politics of the time was not a shocking experience, and it was a collective rather than individual experience. The opening of the Wall may have seemed surprising to most people, yet, an important fact to consider is that it was the outcome of popular demands to reduce travel restrictions and reform the "real-existing socialism" into a socialist democracy. Hence, the end of the Berlin Wall per se was not an event of shocking proportions, and East Germans, therefore, did not suffer individual traumas as defined by the American Psychiatric Association in its fourth edition of the *Diagnosics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2000). The following years of the *Wende* also were not a sudden, unexpected process that changed people's lives suddenly, but it was a gradual process of change. Even though this process is retrospectively considered to have happened at a rather hurried pace, it did not have the sudden impact nor did it involve experiences of extreme physical violence as is paradigmatic for individual trauma such as rape, assault, or war combat. It can further be argued that former GDR citizens experienced the overall socio-

economic and political changes in East Germany collectively, even though the extent to which they were personally affected varied. The resulting crisis of East German individuals affected their collective identity because East Germans as a group lost the existential basis, the socio-economic and cultural markers that localized and stabilized their group affiliation. Thus, while the *Wende* did not individually traumatize East Germans at large, given the devastating effect it had on both East Germany as a large-scale imaginary community as well as on the small Halbwachsian communities of family and neighborhood, Alexander's notion of collective or cultural trauma provides an apt theoretical framework for conceptualizing the individual and collective effects of the *Wende* on East Germans.

The Culture-Shock Model

The identity changes of East Germans can be explored through anthropologist Kalvero Oberg's classic notion of culture shock, which he coined in the 1950s and which has since been referred to as a foundational principle in studies of acculturation. According to Oberg, culture shock is typically experienced by immigrants upon contact with a new host culture. It provides an additional framework to illuminate the transformations and effects of the *Wende* because German unification has often metaphorically been described as both a form of West German colonization and pseudo-migration of East Germans – if not into a new physical space but into a new social, political, and economic order.

Due to the *Wende* experience, a central part of East Germans' personal identification as individuals and as a group, namely as citizens of the GDR, was

destroyed. They were confronted with the task of assimilating to a new culture. As such, they needed to reconstruct their identities similar to emigrants who face the end of their association with their original cultural heritage, voluntarily or by force, in order to adapt to the circumstances of a new socio-cultural environment. East Germans experienced the destruction of their identity as GDR citizens—exemplified by the disappearance of the familiar infrastructure of everyday life including products and stores, institutions, and communal ties—only to find themselves categorized pejoratively as *Ossis*.

Oberg found that “culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of interaction” (177). When individuals enter a new cultural environment they face a situation in which the signs and cues of the culture they acquired growing up change in meaning or are completely removed. In such a situation, people may feel frustrated and anxious at the loss of the familiar gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms that “are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness” (177).

Since Oberg, the notion of culture shock has been used synonymously with terms such as culture fatigue, language shock, role shock, or pervasive ambiguity. They all describe the experience of culture shock similarly, as basically constituting a stress reaction “where salient psychological and physical rewards are generally uncertain and hence difficult to control or predict” (Furnham 49). In other words, individuals experience symptoms of ‘acculturative stress’ as a normal reaction in the process of adapting to a new environment. These individuals have no prior experience in this environment, thus

lacking “points of reference, social norms and rules to guide their actions and understand others’ behavior,” and therefore perceive it as unpredictable and unstable (49).

Through fieldwork in Alaska, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Surinam, where Oberg investigated and observed human behavior, he found that culture shock does not describe a sudden impact that overcomes the individual in his or her new surrounding, but rather a process that consists of a discursive interaction between old and new components of cultural life, as well as the individual’s personal motivational attitude in coping with the discrepancies s/he perceives. He attributed the symptoms of culture shock to four phases: the honeymoon stage, phase of rejection, development of humor as a way of opening communication between self and host culture, and, finally, complete adjustment or acceptance of the new environment. Wolf Wagner expanded on Oberg’s research and developed a five-phase acculturation model: during the honeymoon or euphoric phase individuals are fascinated by the new culture, behave politely towards members of the host culture, and enjoy their stay, which is up to this point too short to gain a deep insight into this culture. As they are taking the role of observers in this initial phase, they do not yet question aspects of their own cultural background. The second stage is characterized by a sense of alienation and growing hostility towards the host culture and its people. It is initiated as the immigrant encounters the first difficulties in everyday activities, such as bureaucracy, shopping, and transportation. Cultural differences, such as manners and language complicate the situation by making the easiest task seem insurmountable. The individual is perplexed that s/he does not function as easily in the new environment as s/he did at home. At this

point the migrants still find cause for these difficulties with themselves, as Wagner explains (W. Wagner, 1996, 19). In the progression of events, however,—and this Wagner’s expansion of the Oberg model—they start blaming the people that are foreigners to them and start idealizing their home culture in which they did not experience such cultural friction. Out of these sentiments grows the nostalgic attitude marking the third phase of culture shock when conflicts escalate and immigrants idealize their home culture in defense. Acculturation reaches the fourth phase when the immigrants’ confidence increases as the new culture is increasingly mastered. Humor often proves a significant resource as the emigrant becomes an immigrant and starts to accept the peculiarities of the new country as “just another way of living” and begins to view conflicts as arising from misunderstandings based on socio-cultural differences. In the final phase, the fifth one in Wagner’s U-curve, the acculturated individuals have not only achieved an understanding of cultural differentiations but also acquired a sense of appreciation for them (Oberg 178-179; W. Wagner, 1996, 19).

The general and schematic character of both Wolf Wagner’s extension and Oberg’s original model necessitate further exploration into the specific details of each phase as well as of the transition periods between phases with regard to the individual as well as collective views of the self and the other. John W. Berry is among a number of theorists who are trying to fill these conceptual gaps by illuminating the behavioral adaptations individuals are required to make as they move between cultures in this process of acculturation. He points out that Oberg’s and Wagner’s notion of culture shock conceptualizes immigration as a one-sided process wherein the immigrant adapted to the host culture. However, “(w)hen groups of individuals having different

cultures come into continuous first-hand contact,” he writes, the “original culture patterns of either or both groups” change (Berry 232).

Berry focuses less on the causes that generate such intercultural exchange than on the variety of outcomes provoked by intercultural contact, such as changes in population levels, cultural diversification, attitudinal reactions, policy development, and a possible need for organized training to improve intercultural relations in the long run by modifying existing institutions (237). Demographic and attitudinal characteristics of both the dominant and the acculturating group—such as the purpose, goals, and duration of the interaction as well as the relative population size, and the adaptability of established policies and cultural qualities—affect the quality and quantity of the exchange. These factors influence whether the exchanges will result, politically, in the loss of independence and authority; economically, in the distribution of wealth and the power structure among socio-economic groups; demographically, in differences of relative population size and dispersion in urban and rural areas; and, culturally, in the adoption of new languages, religions, modes of dress, schooling, transportation, housing, forms of social organization, or social relations (239).

The ways in which the acculturating culture relates to the dominant culture will determine which of the following classifications will apply to the newly established ‘mixed’ culture: the ‘melting pot’ model, the ‘pressure cooker’ model, the ‘separation alternative,’ or the ‘integration’ model. The ‘melting pot’ model designates the phenomena in which the acculturating group and its individuals will freely choose to discontinue and abandon their former collective identity and, seeking frequent interaction with members of the dominant culture, fully embrace the host culture. In the

'pressure cooker' model members of the acculturating group are forced by the dominant group to give up their former cultural identity in order to be able to function within the dominant culture. If the interaction between dominating and acculturating groups is characterized by an insistence on the part of the latter to maintain their original culture and to avoid interaction with the former, they enact what Berry terms a 'separation alternative'. And, lastly, if the acculturating group is forced to retain its original identity and not granted access to interaction with members of the dominating culture group, the host culture engages in cultural 'segregation.' Furthermore, groups can express varying degrees of interest in acculturation, ranging from assimilation, where the need to maintain the original culture is perceived as little or none; to uneven acculturation, where the acculturating group seeks interaction and identification in different domains of behavior and social life, but never in all of them at the same time; to marginalization, which is the case when there is little interest in maintaining the original culture but also little interest in adopting customs of the new culture. In this final case, the result is typically a peripheral positioning of the individuals on the margin of two cultures, being accepted and supported by neither one (Berry 244-245). The ideal model of interaction between the dominant and acculturating groups is that of integration, in which case people of both groups express an interest in maintaining their original culture while at the same time interacting daily with the other culture, so that a certain degree of cultural integrity is upheld while individuals also aspire to become integral parts of the newly established larger social network (245). However, even if an integrated culture is eventually established, the process of acculturation largely tends to be subject to phases of social disintegration and personal crises primarily among the acculturating

group. This occurs when the old and familiar social order and cultural norms disappear, causing individuals to feel lost in the transition, hostile towards the new environment, uncertain of their own futures, and confused about their personal identities. These phenomena, caused by what Berry defines as 'acculturative stress,' are experienced by individual group members at different levels, depending on a variety of psychological and social factors, such as personal mental health and stability, and the stability of the social network (246). The stress level individuals experience as they transition from one cultural environment to another depends, furthermore, on the disparities perceived between the mode of acculturation they aspire toward and the one they are offered by the dominating culture, i.e. integration, separation, or marginalization. The acculturative influences of the dominant society present another challenge to members of the acculturating group, in particular because the provision of networks that support people who are entering the acculturating experience, along with the degree of tolerance offered by members of the dominant society towards newcomers, greatly determines the success of acculturation.

The socio-economic status change that confronts the acculturating individuals upon entering the new cultural environment is a further indicator of acculturative stress. The loss of status comparative to the one obtained in the home culture as well as the perceived chances of improving one's status play an important role in establishing a view of the dominating culture that is either more or less encouraging. Both the availability of one's own original group as a means of support and the extent to which the newly arriving cultural group is viewed as acceptable in terms of established

parameters, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and others, by the dominating society, constitute further factors determining the degree of acculturative stress (Berry 250).

Culture-shock researchers have compiled lists of psychological and behavioral symptoms commonly manifested by individuals displaying culture shock. In their most extreme forms, they involve an almost obsessive concern with cleanliness and orderliness, concerns over drinking water, foods, and bedding, and psychosomatic complaints. Those suffering culture shock may further express fear of physical contact and hence isolate themselves; they may show excessive levels of anxiety that affect normal behaviors, fits of anger over minor frustrations, and excessive fear of being robbed, cheated, or injured (Oberg 178; Furnham 48). Most common are less severe symptoms, including lack of self-confidence, distrust of others, loss of inventiveness and spontaneity, the desire for dependence on acculturated in-group members, a strong nostalgic longing to be back home in the familiar environment with familiar foods and people, and aspects that have been studied as parameters of alienation and anomie, such as feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness (Furnham 48-49).

Both Oberg and Furnham explain that a delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country is another sign of culture shock. The language barrier is mostly addressed in the culture-shock literature under the assumption that individuals affected by such a shock had physically relocated from their home culture to the new environment, which is usually a different country with not only a different national culture, but most of the time also a new language. In the case of the East Germans, however, most individuals did not relocate, and even if they did—forced by employment or lack thereof—they could continue to speak their mother tongue but for a few

specifically East German phrases. East Germans, then, rather faced what could be considered a take-over, occupation, or colonization of their home culture by the new West German socio-cultural norms and ideals. East Germans did not have to struggle to learn a new language in the narrow sense, but rather a new semiotic system of signs, symbols, norms, and behaviors. Hence, while a different language may be the first sign of being surrounded by a new set of cultural cues, this important signal was omitted for East Germans, which might explain why they did not recognize initially that they were confronted with the task of learning to function in a new culture – the West German culture that had formed in the forty years of separation and become dominant in the new, unified Germany.

The Wende as Culture Shock and Acculturation Experience

Culture-shock theory serves the understanding of the *Wende* experience of East Germans because, just as emigrants are faced with the challenge of relocating their identities within a new cultural environment, East Germans were forced to assimilate and adapt to a new, 'foreign' West German culture. In other words, East Germans underwent a symbolic emigration from the GDR to a unified Germany that by and large constituted a continuation of West German socio-cultural and politico-economic institutions. This challenge involved the difficult task of establishing a new identity in an environment for which East Germans were unprepared as they lacked the social understanding of its processes and attitudes. This lack of familiarity, which confronts all emigrants, and the lack of common points of reference, made it difficult for East

Germans initially to ascribe meaning to and identify with the new socio-cultural conditions.

Wolf Wagner has described the East German *Wende* experience as that of culture shock. He casts as culture-shock symptoms among East Germans the common claims that everything was better in the GDR, and that the life as they lived it in the GDR is devalued in post-unification culture. East Germans also expressed their discomfort about an overwhelming amount of decisions confronting them on a daily basis, ranging from the simplest, such as which brand of milk to buy, to the most complex, such as which life insurance to choose. The lack of knowledge about the challenges involved in Western lifestyles and how to handle them caused East Germans to feel insecure, disoriented, helpless, and, worst of all, inferior to their West German counterparts. They were not able to fully enjoy the freedom gained after unification because new and different pressures awaited them and had to be met (W. Wagner, 1996, 15-17).

The aspects that define the situation East Germans saw themselves confronted with in the aftermath of German unification make it clear, then, that applying Oberg's culture-shock theory to East Germans during and after unification might lead to fruitful insights, for instance, into their mindset at the time: East Germans faced difficulties adapting to the new West German host culture because those ideas were so dissimilar to the "familiar signs and symbols of interaction" (Oberg 177). Confusion took hold of them about their own roles, about what was expected of them, about their feelings regarding the unification process, and, in addition, feelings of loss and rejection

introduced high levels of stress into their lives in their efforts to cope with the demands of adaptation (W. Wagner, 1996, 13).

The emotional roller coaster East Germans found themselves riding is indicative of Oberg's first culture-shock phase of euphoria. Initially, virtually all Germans embraced and celebrated the *Wende* and even unification – the images of people dancing on the Berlin Wall, of emotional outbursts by friends and strangers greeting each other on both sides of the Wall after passing it freely went around the world and have become symbolic of the events of 1989/90. Yet the second phase of alienation set in immediately after unification, as soon as the new West German culture was imposed on East Germany. Concomitantly, East Germans felt robbed of their identity and past achievements. Thus, 84% of the people in East Germany who were polled in June 1991 already resented being perceived, according to their assessment, as second-class citizens, and only 7% of all people polled in East and West Germany in 1993 considered the unification a success (W. Wagner, 1996, 17).

Berry states that one of the factors of acculturative stress is the perceived acceptance of one's own group in the acculturative setting (250). The largely negative way East Germans were portrayed in the German media in 1989-1990 certainly did not give them the sense of appreciation which they had hoped for in the face of their experiences in a totalitarian regime and the high hopes they had had for their future in a unified Germany. For example, Susan S. Morrison analyzed a variety of political cartoons published in major German newspapers, such as *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, but also American and British news media, such as the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and the *Guardian*. The

common theme of these cartoons was the portrayal of East Germany as an unattractive and de-feminized woman—either due to the apparent use of steroids or the embodiment of communist militarism—who was nevertheless helpless and dependent on political and financial support from West Germany, personified as the strong and handsome man. German unification was depicted as a marriage of unequal partners, for instance when a West German Henry Higgins vowed to make a lady of the rather ugly East German Eliza Doolittle (Morrison 40-43). At a time of extreme political and socio-economic confusion, such ridicule and mockery did not exactly contribute anything positive to the situation East Germans faced as they started to see their cultural competence fade away.

The culture they had grown accustomed to and even accepted with all its faults was invalidated and provided inadequate means of negotiating their lives in the new West German world. Their stellar accomplishment of ending the East German self-declared proletarian dictatorship non-violently found little appreciation in post-1990 German culture. Self-doubts and distrust of others were the result, which added to their difficulties. Wagner speaks of a growing resentment and feelings of inadequacy compared to West Germans who 'know it all' (W. Wagner, 1996, 16-17), most concisely expressed in the notion of the *Besser-Wessi*. Eventually minor irritations evolved into a sense of alienation that soon after unification escalated into accusations made by either side of enforcing stereotypical images and emphasizing differences instead of bringing the two sides closer.

The downward path of Oberg's (and Wagner's) culture shock and acculturation model, cast as a U-curve, also includes idealizations of one's own culture as a reaction

to its rejection by the host culture. The notion of *Ostalgie* describes this phenomenon of longing for an idealized past, embodied in GDR paraphernalia and products that re-emerged in grocery shelves and special 'GDR stores.' According to Barbara Gallatin Anderson, this phenomenon serves as an attempt to regain self-validation by withdrawing into the familiar realm in which one feels in control of things: "Just as the new culture reaches out and involves us, like it or not, so the old reaches out but with a clinging hand. It helps assure not only our adaptation to the new culture but the continuity of the old. It does this by shaping a protective secondary system of cultural identification that cushions us psychically through the more threatening phases of culture shock" (Gallatin Anderson 1124f).

As part of a culture shock process, nostalgia serves as a means of creating group cohesion and empowerment among individuals cast as lesser and alien in the host culture. Thus East Germans as a group "dredged up when needed the bulwark of old songs, familiar people, safe places" (Gallatin Anderson 1124) for support in times that seemed to promise nothing but uncertainty. These characteristics of the third phase of the culture shock and acculturation process will be the point of departure for exploring connections between identity and memory in the following two chapters.

II. 2. Collective Memory as Identity Construction

The transformation of collective East German identity constitutes a threat to the imagined community – as conceptualized by way of Jeffrey Alexander's notion of cultural trauma and the concepts of culture shock and acculturation by Oberg and Berry. The reason for this perceived threat is that the factors affecting the overall collective

also impact the individual's sense of self as a group member. The role of individual and collective memory in the complex processes of identity construction is the focus of this chapter, which I will begin by reviewing insights from memory and identity research in order to outline the theoretical foundations of my assumptions.

Individual and Collective Memory

I will analyze memoirs of East German childhood in chapters two through four as paradigmatic for the *Wende*-experience of East Germans of this generation. They can be described as located at the intersection between individual and collective memory because individual memory functions within the social environment as it is acquired and employed through social interaction. Maurice Halbwachs' insights into this particular characteristic of memory, i.e. its interaction between the individual and collective, have been particularly influential in the field. He hypothesized that most recollections occur through direct and indirect interpersonal contact through which the 'social framework' for individual memory is established (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 38). Within this framework, our remembrances are connected to those of other people in the same group. They may not exhibit the same details, but a similar background shared by the memory group suffices to allow every individual to follow each other's way of thinking, due to similarities in their past experiences that were meaningful enough to be remembered by them (54).

One of the memory scholars who appreciates and incorporates Halbwachs' explorations is James Wertsch. By outlining the different uses of the term *collective memory* since Halbwachs, he establishes the categories of strong versus distributed

versions of collective memory. He describes the former as based on the assumption that “some sort of collective mind or consciousness ... above and beyond the minds of the individuals in a collective” exists (Wertsch 21), which basically equates collective processes of remembering with those of the individual. Halbwachs’ theory is an example of this approach. Whether or not to draw parallels between individual and collective memory is, however, highly debatable. Furthermore, the strong version of collective memory also stipulates that members of the same group share the same memories of events. The high degree of homogeneity, or collective like-mindedness, implied in this theory is extremely rare, if it exists at all. Therefore Wertsch suggests that a particular variation of collective memory as distinguished in the category of distributed versions of collective memory may be more applicable to the act of remembering taking place within groups.

Wertsch defines distributed memory as a pattern or framework that characterizes the memory of a group as constituted of partially overlapping memories of individual group members (23). A precondition for the successful creation of such a framework of complementary memories that is acceptable to all group participants requires, however, intense interpersonal contact between the members of a group. The more members of this community interact with each other, the more their knowledge will overlap and be mostly similar to that of other members, since in closely knit communities individuals frequently share their memories with each other, in the course of which they—largely inadvertently—adjust and complement them on a regular basis. However, in large-scale, post-industrial societies, such direct social contact is reduced to a minimum (23-24).

Jan Assmann explains that the conversational exchange of memories in everyday personal interaction is only one aspect that contributes to the formation of collective memory and, like Wertsch, argues that in what Benedict Anderson terms large-scale imagined communities, such as nation states, it plays only a subordinate role. Assmann introduced the core distinction of collective memory as communicative and cultural memory, with communicative memory referring to the creation of a shared group memory among small-scale groups, such as families. These are memories that are dispersed via everyday communication, which makes them subject to “a high degree of non-specialization, ... thematic instability, and disorganization” (J. Assmann 126). Cultural memory, on the other hand, signifies the creation of a shared discourse with regard to the groups’ past, embodied in and disseminated through cultural artifacts in the imagined communities of post-industrialized societies, whose millions of group members cannot interact immediately. As they are removed from the everyday, they become ‘islands of time’: “These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (129).

As individuals play an active role in the formation of collective memory, it is relevant to differentiate between the notions of individual memory and collective memory, as Aleida Assmann (2000) has done. In summarizing the similarities and differences between individual and collective memory she points out that individual memory is always subjective and idiosyncratic and therefore cannot be exchanged or transferred. Nonetheless, it does not exist in isolation but is connected to a network of

other individuals' memories, not least via the semiotic systems employed to communicate memories.

The process of mutual exchange and communication of memories, central to both Jan Assmann's concept of communicative memory and Wertsch's notion of distributed memory, not only adds a sense of coherence and believability to one's personal remembrances, it also enhances the feeling of belonging that is established through the act of sharing. On their own, individual memories are only fragments, incoherent, limited, and shapeless images. Only when communicated and, thus, narrated do they acquire form and structure.

Assmann agrees with Daniel Schacter (and Marcel Proust) that individual memories are fleeting and unstable by nature. They change over time as the life circumstances of the remembering person takes different directions, so that memories can also fade away slowly or be lost completely due to their reduced relevance to the individual (A. Assmann, "Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis" 21). Counteracting these qualities, the overlap in individuals' memories of shared events enhances and strengthens memory stories, since individual minds encode different aspects of the same event to a different degree and thus, when recalled and communicated, contribute to the recollection of more aspects of the event than one single mind can successfully retrieve.

Like (her husband) Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann distinguishes such individual and small-group memories created via direct and immediate social interaction and the cultural memory of imagined communities. The latter do not involve individuals on a very personal and intimate level but address group history on a general level, although

they may have personal meaning for individuals as well. They usually serve a 'higher purpose,' which is to provide the ideological legitimization of a particular national, ethnic, or religious group or cause. Assmann stipulates that this kind of cultural memory can exist only if and because institutions, such as a nation, state, church or company create it. Cultural artifacts, such as texts, pictures, rituals, places, or monuments, which embody and disseminate cultural memory, function to symbolize a common identity, a (his)story of belonging (A. Assmann, "Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis" 22). Their function as memory artifacts will be examined in the next chapter.

The elements that comprise communicative and cultural memories undergo a highly selective process to decide whether or not they represent the memorable moments of the respective group history and consciousness adequately and can therefore be included as representative of the group. Hence the collective memory of both small and large-scale groups does not possess the idiosyncratic quality that is characteristic of individual memory. It is also not fragmentary, like individual memory, but consists of coherent, if at times contradictory, narratives, such as well-structured myths or legends. As such, collective memory represents a more resistant entity that fulfills the purpose of stabilizing and generalizing remembrances objectified in the different kinds of symbolic systems mentioned earlier. The coherence and stability that characterize cultural memory distinguish it further from individual memory because, unlike the latter, which is embedded in a framework of other individual memories, cultural memory tends to be self-enclosed (A. Assmann, "Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis" 22).

Despite these apparent differences between individual and collective memory, they are interconnected: individual memories play an important role in the composition of the small group's communicative memory. Moreover, they benefit from group interaction since the social context in which the fragmentary components of individual memories are placed makes them appear less isolated and creates the opportunity to form more complex associations during the recall and renewed encoding processes generated in everyday interaction. The exchange of individual memory stories also enables the creation of the communicative memory framework, which is comprised of the critical mass of elements contained in the shared individual stories.

Horst-Alfred Heinrich explores the relation of both individuals and small groups in the construction of the imagined community's cultural memory. He advocates analyzing the different perceptions that individuals and small-scale groups have about the meaning of particular aspects of the imagined community's past. In order for a person to consider an event meaningful, Heinrich states, s/he has to be able to relate to it. A past event is meaningful for an individual if a close relation between the individual's personal frame of reference and the frame of the event can be established. The event's frame of reference is comprised of temporal, spatial and personal characteristics previously determined by the social group, of which the individual considers him or herself a part (Heinrich 26). In other words, only if we are able to locate analogous experiences in our own life can we anchor past events that we did not experience within the context of our mental framework and hence ascribe meaning to them.

Halbwachs discusses this issue in a similar way in *The Collective Memory* as he addresses the question how we can "grasp the historical reality underlying [an] image"

(58). He suggests that only by moving outside of our idiosyncratic perception of an event, and by placing ourselves within the viewpoint of a group can we attach meaning to an event (58). Heinrich thus confirms Halbwachs' thesis of individual memory as a social phenomenon, but adds the idea that "memories of the individual nonetheless remain separate from those of the group" (Heinrich 26).

However, while separate from them, individuals' memories should not be considered isolated from collective memory: the latter cannot exist without individually perceived and internalized images of memorable events and moments, which individuals share with others in the course of their everyday communications (J. Assmann 126). Jonathan Crewe clarifies this point further in his explorations of Halbwachs: "His postulate of collective memory made individual memory a function of social memory, not an isolated repository of personal experience – any memories capable of being formed, retained, or articulated by an individual are always a function of socially constituted forms, narratives, and relations" (Crewe 75). According to Crewe, individuals have personal recollections of one and the same event or chain of events, but their memories are nonetheless part of a larger, collective remembrance of these events. While East Germans, for example, remember their childhood idiosyncratically, their individual memories are all part of and constructed in interaction with the larger collective memory of life as a child and adolescent in the former GDR.

Individuals thus contribute to the collective attempts of the groups of which they are members, both small and large-scale, to revitalize the past by producing their versions of it. Astrid Erll adds that there is no hierarchy of collective and individual memory, but rather a process of interaction and exchange between the two. The

individual remembers by taking on the perspective of the group to which s/he belongs or, in Heinrich's words, by relating their personal frame of reference to the external one of group memory. Thus, group memory is actualized in individual memory. Erll explains that collective memory can only be observed and analyzed in externalized and medialized individual acts of remembering (16). Personal stories function as memory artifacts because they are exchanged either in direct oral or written or indirect communication. Their distribution thus supports the construction of a larger collective story. While this story will most likely not contain the intimate details that characterize personal memory stories exhibit, it will nonetheless establish a framework allowing individuals to relate their particular experiences to the group's collective memory.

By focusing on how individuals relate to the past—both their own and that of the group—Heinrich expands upon Halbwachs' ideas of an internal, or autobiographical memory, and an external, or historical memory. The two should, according to Halbwachs, not be viewed as separate entities, but rather as complementary: while internal memory is understood as "something that we know only from within" and external memory as "known only from without," they complement each other because they are part of one and the same consciousness (Halbwachs, *The Collective* 52). In other words, the cultural memory of events in the group's past that most or all members have not personally experienced and thus cannot relate to personally, but which provide the cultural framework for present acts of cultural and individual memory, can become personal, and thereby meaningful, when the remembering individual relates his or her individual memories of personal life events to the cultural memory framework. The rememberer then takes on Heinrich's outer perspective. Halbwachs stipulates that we

inadvertently integrate individual and collective memory as we only remember things vividly that we feel involved in. In other words, “our memory rests not on learned history but on lived history” (*The Collective* 57).

Further contributing to the discussions about individual and collective memory, particularly the cultural memory of large-scale imagined communities, Wulf Kansteiner provides useful insights into the negotiating factors of collective memory, namely intellectual and cultural traditions, memory makers, and memory consumers. Notions of agency, objectification, and consumption of memory have been raised by other researchers, such as Aleida Assmann. She defines memory agency as the institutionalized creation and manipulation of memory by nations, states, religious establishments or companies that initiate the objectification of memory in the form of signs, symbols, texts, images, rituals, places or monuments (A. Assmann, “Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis” 22). Kansteiner locates collective memory within the same constellation of outside factors. Yet he clarifies explicitly that, while it does not have an “organic basis and [does] not exist in any literal sense,” collective memory is also “not simply a metaphorical expression” (Kansteiner, *In Pursuit* 19). It is a “collective phenomenon,” resulting from conscious manipulation and unconscious absorption of memories, and manifesting itself in the actions and statements of individuals, which in imagined communities are embodied in and communicated through cultural artifacts. (12).

To summarize, while they constitute distinct phenomena, individual and collective memories do not exist in isolation from each other. While each constitutes a self-sustaining system, it is also fundamental for the existence of the respective other with

which it is inseparably intertwined. Both individual and collective memories are created in communication – both immediate and mediated – about past events (Kansteiner, *In Pursuit* 19).

Erll aptly defines collective memory as “the reference to past events through interaction, communication, media and institutions within social groups and cultural communities” (15). It is a social framework that anchors individual memory and provides the individual rememberer with a sense of belonging and a place in time. Memory therefore plays a significant role for individuals as well as for groups because it aids in the construction of a self-image, which grounds individual and group identities. Before I explore the complex interactions between memory and identity, I will discuss theories of identity in the following section.

Identity

The concept of identity has been used since the 1940s – it evolved out of explorations devoted to issues described in such terms as ‘essence,’ ‘substance,’ ‘tradition,’ ‘character,’ or ‘people.’ Heidrun Friese explains that the term ‘identity’ is originally derived from the Latin *idem*, which refers to a notion of sameness that is upheld at all times and under all circumstances. It not only implies a sense of continuity, or the desired continuation of one and the same substance, or quality, but also addresses something considered the ‘essence’ of things. The attempt is made to maintain this essence by negotiating possible relations into which entities can enter spontaneously and through which change can interfere with their essence. With regard to human beings, these relations encompass not only contact between one person and

the conditions and people external to him or herself—also called the *other*—but also “relations of the singular human being to him or herself, to their actions, experiences, wishes, dreams and memories, and thus to the various instances of the ‘self,’” which contribute to the notion of self-identity and personal identity (Friese 1).

Peter Wagner supports Friese’s view of identity defined as the continuity of selfhood. Human beings are usually more or less aware of their existence over time and “of a certain coherence of [their] person and memory” (P. Wagner 35). He also points out that people do not seek to construct a coherent sense of self only by differentiation from but also by identification with particular others. This can be attributed to a feeling of belonging as part of their identity that connects them to a larger community of, usually, likeminded people. Wagner writes that self-identity “is usually ‘social’ in the sense that a relation to particular other human beings is seen as giving a significant orientation to one’s own life” (35). A collective identity, then, emerges when “a multiplicity of singular human beings draw a sense of significance for their self-identities from the same collectivity” (37). Viewing ourselves as part of a particular group—whether small-scale groups like families or large-scale imagined communities like nations—is therefore part of the sense of self that we are continuously trying to establish and maintain. And in acknowledging the relevance of our participation in such groups, we contribute in turn to a collective’s sense of selfhood and identity.

As Friese indicates, the desire for the continuation of one’s essence relates directly to one’s interaction, both immediate and via mediated communication, with other people. Her arguments concur with Wagner’s notion that individual identity is interactively related with a social or collective identity, established by a group’s

perception that particular other individuals are similar and hence constitute group members, while the remaining others are dissimilar and hence do not belong to the group. When individuals who are perceived as possessing similar core traits number beyond the small scale of groups like families where members know each other and interact directly, they constitute what scholars call the imagined group. It is an imagined community because we do not have to know each individual personally whom we perceive to be like us with respect to core identity markers (e.g., nationality or religion). Likewise, we do not or need not know personally all who we believe to differ from ourselves in core identity markers to consider them outsiders with respect to our community (Friese 1-2). Hence, identification with one group also implies that individuals, in their roles as members of the group, recognize themselves as different from individuals who do not belong to their group. The idea of ‘othering’ that is inherent in this process serves to set boundaries “between that which is one’s own and that which is of others” (P. Wagner 35).

The elements that constitute what Wagner and Friese call ‘sameness’ create a group culture. We can distinguish different types of groups based on the dominant features of their culture: the imagined group that makes up a nation, for example, is constructed by emphasizing different identity markers than used in both small-scale groups, such as families, and other groups of large-scale imagined communities. The latter groups recognize characteristic aspects as the core of their togetherness that bridge nations, such as ethnicity, gender, or religion. As in the case of individual identity, such group definitions are based on perceived similarities and differences. People partake in group membership—when they do so freely—in order to strengthen their

sense of self with respect to the dominant identity markers of the selected group. On the other hand, association with a particular group may also indicate the need for differentiation, i.e. people want to dissociate themselves from other groups. Regardless of the personal reasons for group membership, the process of establishing one's own identity, individually and collectively, inherently serves as a means of articulation and empowerment. It is for this reason that people who perceive themselves as marginalized or invisible within the dominant socio-cultural or politico-economic hierarchy are likely to subscribe to a certain group consciousness, since as a group member they have a louder voice than on their own (Friese 2).

Shared beliefs, values, behaviors and norms interactively create group culture. Every imagined community, whether religion, nation, ethnicity, gender, or based on other core identity markers, subscribes to a certain set of dominant ideological beliefs. Wolf Wagner explains in his exploration of the culture shock model that, in general, the notion of culture does not only refer to the intellectual and artistic accomplishments of a society, such as its art, philosophy, music, or other forms aimed to educate and enlighten the mind, but also always includes the rules of everyday life—i.e. that which goes without saying—of which participants are largely unaware as they enact them. Regardless of how self-explanatory and common-sensical and thus 'invisible' these behavioral rules may seem, they nonetheless become evident and 'visible' whenever their ordinary, taken-for-granted application no longer works seamlessly. This is the case, for example, when people are taken out of their group environment, such as their nation or religion, and required to function in a different environment. Other national cultures follow rules that—though equally taken for granted by group members—differ

from the norms and behaviors that enabled the immigrants to function in their home environment. To recognize these differences as such, however, requires awareness of the 'invisible' rules incorporated into one's own life, and of the new rules equally 'invisible' to group members of the host culture. Frequently, such awareness results from conflict and collision between the way things are in the home and the host culture. As Wagner says, "Culture is what causes us to consider people of another culture as strangers" (W. Wagner, 1996, 28).

Our identities therefore are the product of all the rules and values that we have incorporated, largely inadvertently, into our lives through the process of socialization and through consistent immersion in the environment that created them. It is the image of ourselves with which we are familiar and comfortable that we can take for granted as the means of functioning in the environment in which we live. Friese emphasizes that social practices, cultural symbols, values, and discursive formations influence self-identity continuously; the way we perceive others and ourselves is intricately connected to these practices and symbols (5).

People's daily lives, however, are subject to constant and inevitable changes that originate outside of their immediate sphere of control, such as national and international, economic, social, and political developments. These changes require adjustment. Hence the set of rules established by a group, particularly in large-scale imagined communities, is always subject to change and therefore continuously evolving. The specific combination of components that create what we consider our individual and collective identities are the result of osmotic exchanges across boundaries of value and rule systems that may appear arbitrary to the individual. Both individuals and groups are

constantly evolving under the seemingly uncontrollable impact of this exchange because they are constantly required to negotiate the new meanings they encounter therein (Friese 5). Yet, as long as these changes do not interfere with core identity determinants, there need not be an experience of identity crisis. The sense of belonging that human beings feel, then, stems from their “conception of the community to which they belong,” Peter Wagner writes (37).

Cultural Change and Identity Construction

Steven J. Heine and Darrin R. Lehman stipulate that because human beings have such a long period of socialization, consisting of at least the first 15 years of their lives, the cultural system of meaning that they acquire during that period is deeply rooted in them. The cultural meanings and resources individuals rely upon are the main components in the construction of their selves. This speaks to the interactive relationship between culture and self. It also explains why our “culturally constructed selves are at odds with the cultural meaning system of [a] new culture” to which we are exposed when we, for instance, migrate (Heine and Lehman 307), or, in the case of East Germany, when the socio-cultural environment into which individuals were socialized disappears and is replaced by a different environment. The encounter of a new culture threatens the established identity because it necessitates changes to core identity markers and hence violates our need to maintain what we consider to constitute our essence.

Peter Marris explains this perceived threat via the notion of meaning attribution. While human beings habitually practice meaning attribution throughout their lives, they

acquire the social rules and values dominant in their imagined community, particularly during the formative years of socialization. We “learn to attach meaning to the things and people about us,” i.e. to interpret them based on the rules of our own culture and group, and we do so habitually in all kinds of situations “so that circumstances of life become increasingly manageable as more and more of them can be put into familiar categories” (Marris 8). In a new and unfamiliar environment, however, we may not be able to attribute meaning to or make sense of a situation because it follows different rules than those we acquired in our familiar home environment. According to Harry C. Triandis, our cognitive framework for thinking about the world, the ethnocentrism we learned through socialization and inadvertently practiced in everyday life, no longer works, especially if the host culture with which we come into contact engages in significantly different cultural practices (34-5).

Our failure to impose meaning prevents us from engaging in the appropriate behavior that would allow us to function in the respective environment. We are in danger of becoming “alarmingly disoriented” because “our ability to cope with life depends on making sense of what happens to us, and anything which threatens to invalidate our conceptual structures of interpretation is profoundly disruptive” (Marris 10). An environment in which our established notions and attachments, which constitute “the underlying determiners of relevance,” are challenged causes our established meaning system to disintegrate. Once we realize that we can no longer rely on the meaning system—constituted by the values and norms of our home culture—that we acquired via socialization, life will seem unpredictable. We can no longer impose interpretive frameworks upon the world around us in order to interact with it in

meaningful ways, and thus we feel vulnerable in the face of our apparent incompetence (15-16); the “continuity in the interpretation of life becomes attenuated or altogether lost... The loss may fundamentally threaten the integrity of the structure of meanings on which this continuity rests” (21).

Peter Wagner argues that such threats to one’s identity continuity result in identity crises. Such crises are constitutive of every individual’s life cycle (P. Wagner 40). While the most obvious crises occur with puberty, they occur whenever individuals enter an unfamiliar socio-cultural environment. Particularly the post-immigration experience of culture shock tends to result in identity crises. The duration and the depth of the disorientation experienced depend on the factors discussed earlier in the context of culture shock. However, it can be overcome like any identity crisis in which previously established notions and values are not applicable: people who face this situation have to realize and, more importantly, to accept the fact that all individuals are the product of different cultures, and they live according to different rules that determine the way they perceive the world.

To outsiders unfamiliar with its meaning systems, a culture remains unintelligible until and unless they become familiar with the frame of reference, the “habits of feeling, principles of conduct, attachments, purposes, and conceptions of how people behave” in the host culture. In other words, we need to assimilate because “assimilation serves to make the unfamiliar familiar” (Marris 9). Thus, continuity of meaning and identity can be re-established and the perceived crisis of identity can be overcome. Any individual who has ever experienced culture shock as a form of threat to their notion of selfhood will agree that this experience can have a profound impact on their self-image. The

most successful result of coping with the acculturative stress that accompanies the culture shock experience is the ability to 'oscillate' between the two cultural meaning systems to which the acculturating individual will now have access because s/he has learned the rules, and values of both systems and learned to function within them (W. Wagner, 1996, 19; 21).

Memory and Identity Construction

Maurice Halbwachs argued in *On Collective Memory* that individuals create memories via their interpersonal interaction with others and it is only via the interactively established frameworks that memories can be ascribed meaning (41). Likewise, memories and the interpersonal meaning systems that they constitute enable individuals to function in society. Our identity is based on our perception of self and others and grounded in the traditions, rules, and values dominant in our socio-cultural environment, which in turn ground our actions and behaviors. The origin of these traditions is the past experience embodied in and disseminated through artifacts of the cultural memory. They largely determine our sense of self and both in-group and out-group others. Halbwachs explains, "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these memories are continually reproduced. ... Through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 47).

Furthermore, memories are more than just the primary instrument we have at our disposal to retain the traditions of our culture, which we incorporate into our sense of self via symbols, conventions, or rituals. They also serve to preserve and convey to future generations the group's core underlying beliefs and perceptions that helped

create the traditions with which we seek to engage. Halbwachs believes that it is only through shared, communicative acts of remembering and thus perpetual engagement with the group's past that "traditional values, the society of yesterday, and successive periods of evolution" can be prevented from fading into obscurity or being forgotten altogether (*On Collective* 120).

Another purpose is that they establish group cohesiveness. Individuals can turn to other members of their group and/or cultural artifacts to engage in acts of collective remembering of the group's past. This perceived commonality in turn further fosters group cohesiveness because the collective memories individuals share with their in-group members tend to motivate them to "maintain contact with this group and remain capable of identifying with it and merging [their] past with its" (Halbwachs, *The Collective* 24-25).

As Halbwachs argues further, the forgetting—and thus the loss—of group memory occurs when we are no longer able to retrieve a memory because we no longer belong to the group in whose communicative acts it is conserved (*The Collective* 31). Lacking this contact, we no longer have the opportunity to enact group memory and thus the particular memory trace in the individual mind is no longer reinforced, which will eventually make it impossible to be reactivated. The absence of the group who shares the collective memory framework also means that the individual will no longer encounter retrieval cues that partially reactivate the memory trace and trigger its reconstruction. Thus, the group's presence—both actual and virtual in cultural artifacts—possesses a vital significance to the individual who strives for continuity of his or her essential self-identity.

While the group is thus essential for constructing individual memory and identity, according to Halbwachs, the process of constructing an in-group individual identity can cause individuals to misconstrue their memories in line with the expectations of other group members. Only memories that fit into the group's meaning system are regularly reactivated. Concomitantly, only those memories consistent with the group's self-image and its dominant beliefs are collectively remembered. The group's framework for memory recall and identity construction frames the possible self-identity of the individual. This close interaction between individual and group memory and identity construction largely remains abstruse. It only becomes 'visible' when conflicts between individual and group notions emerge. Astrid Erll argues: "we remember what corresponds to our self image and group interests, stressing similarities and continuities in the process in order to demonstrate sameness of the group" (17). By reconstructing the past "with the aid of present conditions and previously established reconstructions," we address the present needs of the group, thus indicating that we belong to the group (17).

Individuals, then, attribute personal meaning to memories that are shared by the group, strengthen these memories based on confirmation and support received from group members—either directly and immediately or indirectly via the consumption of memory artifacts—and thus incorporate group memory into their individual memory story, which in turn validates their selfhood. We rely, then, on what Halbwachs termed the group's collective or external memory, which largely encompasses events we did not experience personally (as they are located in the group's past), in order to locate what Halbwachs calls our internal, or autobiographical memory. The interaction of group

and individual memory thus allows us to locate ourselves in time and space and imbues our lives with meaning and purpose.

In her discussion of memory culture, Astrid Erll reviews sociologist Jeffrey Olick's core distinction between the notions of *collected* memory and *collective* memory. The term *collected* memory refers to the sum of the group member's individual memories. *Collective* memory, on the other hand, designates the composite of an imagined community's shared symbols, media, social institutions, and practices by way of a largely metaphorical use of 'memory.' Both *collected* and *collective* memories engage in discursive interaction (Erll 97). Without the framework created via social institutions, media and symbols, there can be no individual memory and hence no collected memory, since the latter constitutes the sum of individual memories. Likewise, there can be no collective memory in media and institutions without the individual, since it is individuals who actualize the potential embodied in institutions and media. Without this actualization, the potential remains essentially 'in limbo'. Only when actualized via media reception can it affect collective memory (98).

While the explanatory power of ever-expanding metaphorical uses of 'memory' does not always result in conceptual clarity, it does establish connections between phenomena such as tradition, canons, monuments, historical awareness, family communication, and neurological networks that would otherwise be considered rather distinct. Erll's expansive notion of memory culture designates a conglomerate of possible discursive relations between culture and memory—from neurological networks to cultural traditions—rather than the more narrowly defined group memory, including small-scale and imagined communities discussed by Halbwachs, and Jan and Aleida

Assmann among others. For Erll, collective memory is the sum of all organic, media, and institutional processes that receive meaning through the mutual influence between past and presence in a socio-cultural context (101). Her notion of collective memory as a semiotic system with social, material, and mental dimensions, which substantiate each other and in their interaction produce the collective memory, seems vague and overly inclusive. Unlike Wulf Kansteiner, Erll does not make the necessary distinction between the makers and the consumers of memory artifacts. By endowing objects with a specific meaning, memory makers possess the ability to “selectively adopt and manipulate ... traditions,” in an attempt to address and guide a particular audience. Consumers of any form of media artifacts, however, do not necessarily de-code the artifact in light of the intention. Audiences may also choose to “ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests” (Kansteiner, *In Pursuit* 12).

Erll’s notion of collective memory is beneficial nonetheless because it concretizes the traditionally rather vague concept which neglects the material aspects of collective memory. She defines collective memory as a conglomerate of mental codes objectified in material media and reproduced by members and institutions of the community in which they originate. Oral and written texts, which constitute Erll’s focus, are examples of media that enable people to share knowledge about the past of their imagined community (103).

To summarize, both individuals and groups (small-scale and large-scale) exhibit a desire for continuity and sameness over time; it is this stability that seems to constitute their essence. Reflecting on the past is the central determinant of how groups and individuals distinguish themselves from others. Remembering for the purpose of

identification therefore serves the significant purpose of legitimizing the self and the essence of different groups and individuals. This essence comprises the values, norms, behavioral patterns, gestures, rituals, and beliefs that are determined by a cultural community to be embodied in memory media as codes and symbols, in order to ensure the continuation of the community.

II. 3. Discursive Interaction between Memory and Identity in Literature

The previous chapter summary dealt with the existential contribution of memories to the identity process of individuals and groups, suggesting that they provide an anchor, particularly in times when there is a perceived threat to our sense of selfhood. Since we strive to maintain this selfhood constantly over time by differentiating ourselves from others but also identifying similarities between ourselves and others, cultural changes are perceived as a threat, as they halt or even replace what we have established as our identity markers – the values and norms, concepts and ideas we have integrated into our lives and views. But as individuals and groups are driven to establish and maintain a coherent and solid, legitimizing and meaningful self-image and identity, they are forced to resort to their past experiences, which embody the essential and formative moments in their personalities. In order to recapture these experiences, which are immaterial in nature, the act of remembering substantiates itself via a variety of media.

The following discussion will initially focus on memory artifacts and their function as a resource for the public to learn about its past as well as their contribution to the continuation of memories and memory traditions. Following is an analysis of the literary

medium, in particular the genre of Life Writing, as the seemingly most adequate platform for memory representation due to its reflexive, personal, and yet, interactive nature, that while narrating the memory story of an individual is able simultaneously to address and challenge the memories of its audience.

Mediating Memory and Identity via Memory Artifacts

In large-scale imagined communities, the act of remembering is facilitated by communication via media, particularly mass media like TV, popular literature and commercial cinema. Surely, these media can also fabricate history so that, while unreal in essence, unknowing consumers may accept a false truth as part of their memory. My forthcoming discussion of artifacts, however, focuses much less on the on the fabrication of memories than the facilitating process of remembering the past. The institutions that create artifacts inscribe particular versions of the past that enhance the dominant socio-political order to which they subscribe. The transmission of collective memories is therefore always characterized by power dynamics. The complexities involved in constructing artifacts that embody and disseminate cultural memory were illustrated by the more than 15-year long debate among politicians, artists, public figures, architects, and historians over the specific design and site for a Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The discussion about the commemoration of the Holocaust in the country that perpetrated it presents an excellent example of the intricacies involved in creating a symbol that represents the past in a way that would be considered adequate, appropriate, respectful, and inclusive. The assumptions and opinions of memory makers and memory consumers had to be negotiated, and, while the final result could not

please all the parties involved, the preservation of Holocaust memory continues, and the memorial, its makers hope, will ensure that future generations will continue to collectively remember this event.

As previously discussed, individual and collective memories can be comprised of similar characteristics and elements, since collectives and individuals interact. As individuals are always part of multiple groups, what an individual member contributes to any social group can therefore influence the memory of all groups in which the individual is a member. The act of communication enforces the exchange of information, personal as well as supra-personal, which the other participants in the conversation absorb in part or in detail, and return to the collectives to which they belong. It is because of this connection established between the various sub-groups of society—both direct, immediate, and indirect, given communication via media—that one person's memories can impact the individual and group memory of others.

In today's imagined communities, individual memories are closely related to collective memory, not primarily by direct, immediate communication, but rather via their embodiment in symbolic objects, which function as what Halbwachs calls reference points or landmarks for individual memory. For example, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial was intended to stabilize German Holocaust memory, and the Berlin museum *Checkpoint Charlie*, which is likewise a commemorative institution, is a reference point that enables all Germans to remember the division of Germany and particularly of Berlin. Similarly, the annual celebrations and speeches on Germany's "Tag der Vereinigung," celebrated on October 3rd to mark German unification, have served to

'streamline' collective German memory of past experiences – both those in which the remembering people were personally involved, and the events in which they did not personally take part, but rather learned about via different forms of media.

Commemorative events and monuments serve as orienting landmarks for collective memory as they summarize group history, providing members with core information about the event they mark. These landmarks serve as a point of departure for our reflections on the group's past (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 61). Illustrating the worldwide significance of commemoration through artifacts, the American war monuments in Washington, D.C., and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg can be considered as further examples that signify the attempt to represent and commemorate the past.

Pierre Nora's term for sites and artifacts at large that embody collective memory and support a sense of historical continuity, *lieux de mémoire*, is now widely used. Nora explains that such *lieux* first developed during the period of industrialization in the modern Western world, a period that was accompanied by the process of individualization. The accelerated speed of transformation that has characterized life in industrial and post-industrial societies has, Nora argues, destroyed memory in the form of lived tradition—the unconscious and unreflected continuation of older rituals and values—so that individuals have begun to fear the loss of their collective traditions, and, with that, of group cohesion and identity. *Lieux de mémoire* were consecrated because we started to require such 'dead' objects as reminders of our past, and because of their ability to incorporate different layers of meaning, which were formerly carried by lived traditions.

The existence of *lieux de mémoire* anchors collective memory by embodying it and thus saving it from the perceived threat of oblivion, for, as Nora puts it, “if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them” (12). Such *lieux* represent particularly the materialization of an imagined community’s collective memory. This process has branched out from the former monopolies of dominant memory, of the “great families, the church, and the state,” to the everyman. “Not only the most minor historical actor but also his witnesses, his spouse, and his doctor” feel “compelled to record his feelings, to write his memoirs,” Nora writes, arguing that “the less extraordinary the testimony, the more aptly it seems to illustrate the average mentality” (14). The omnipresence of ordinary people’s memories in cultural artifacts makes evident the fact that Western society has moved away from reference to the grand stories, historic myths and legends, for purposes of legitimization. Instead they tend to focus on the “tremendously dilated, multiplied, fragmented, decentralized, democratized” stories of ordinary individuals (14). Aleida Assmann argues that writing and the embodiment of past knowledge in artifacts “separates the individual from his/her knowledge” of the past and thus also the object of knowledge from its source (“Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis” 25). But embodiment is advantageous because it “fixates knowledge that is removed from lived communication.” Without the ‘solidification’ of embodiment in objects, this knowledge would be lost. Assmann indicates that without the signs and symbols of artifacts, collective memory can neither be created nor maintained in imagined communities because storing memory in material form provides the sole form for the transmission of collective memory (26).

Lieux de mémoire “materialize the immaterial” and thus preserve the past (Nora 19). However, some scholars have argued that objectification of memories, for instance via monuments, encourages collective forgetting rather than remembering because it represents a passive form of remembering and the memories are thus no longer held in active memory. According to Lynn Meskell “in preserving the monument the social obligation to engage in more active remembrance is partially removed. The monument’s inherent exteriority affects the internal experience of individuals” (169). She points out that as public display and instruments of musealization, monuments and other commemorative objects cannot adequately reflect individual memory, which is “internal and subjective” (169). In addition, monuments, by design, such as the example of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial illustrates, only reflect some of the aspects of the events that they commemorate. Other aspects are left out and thus subject to forgetting if they do not find advocates to support their memorialization.

Encompassing material, symbolic, and functional aspects, Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* and memory artifacts at large constitute a bridge between the past and the future. In principle, any existing object or site can become a *lieu de mémoire* when it is ascribed a particular meaning. However, frequently *lieux de mémoire* are purposefully created. In both cases the *lieux* open up a vast variety of interpretations due to constant socio-cultural changes that influence the interpreters. Not only physical objects but also commemorative acts like eulogies and national celebrations in the form of holidays or parades can be considered *lieux de mémoire* because, like physical artifacts, they symbolically commemorate a person or an event. Museums, archives, and monuments

are also *lieux de mémoire* as they are material reminders and representations that commemorate the past (Nora 12, 23).

Finally, Nora classifies narratives as *lieux de mémoire* in so far as they are “founded on a revision of memory” (21). Autobiographical texts, diaries, and memoirs are examples of *lieux de mémoire* because, as they signify a particular socio-political and/or socio-cultural moment in an individual’s—the author’s—life and strive to connect with a community, they exhibit not only “an awareness of other memoirs,” but also “the identification of individual discourse with collective discourse” (21-22).

According to Erll, Nora did not conceive of *lieux de mémoire* as signs that refer to the aspects of the past that *ought* to be remembered as determined by dominant discourses and institutions. Nora neither took the element of agency nor that of power relations into account. Erll explains that *lieux de mémoire* are not memory per se, but merely the media, or carriers of a collective memory, which encode information and encourage remembering but also forgetting (99). For Erll, collective memory is constituted and sustained by the associations between cultural codes and artifacts. She refers to memory artifacts and places as concrete forms and media that assist the formation of a cultural memory and identity.

Jan Assmann’s notion of “objective manifestations of cultural memory” (130) partially coincides with Nora’s idea of *lieux de mémoire*. As previously mentioned, Assmann distinguishes collective memory from the Halbwachsian communicative memory of small groups such as families, the latter being created inadvertently via the memory exchange and construction encountered in everyday communication. Yet

communicative memory contributes to the overall constitution of a group's collective memory. It does not require experts and is largely constructed in direct conversation.

Cultural memory, however, is comprised of commonly recognizable objects and ceremonies that refer to "fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)" (J. Assmann 129). That the events contained in the cultural memory of a large-scale imagined community date further back in the temporal horizon than three generations is paradigmatic for communicative memory. Accordingly, cultural memories appear to be further removed from the everyday, which explains why specialists, such as archivists, museum curators, and historians are trained to continue to interpret them. In the artifacts of cultural memory, "a collective experience crystallizes, whose meaning, when touched upon, may suddenly become accessible again across millennia" (129). This cultural memory is considered fundamental to communities as it serves to legitimize their existence (Erll 28).

Every community and society uses and re-uses these *lieux de mémoire* in every generation since they not only convey the self-image of the group, but also serve to stabilize and legitimize it by reinforcing and reemphasizing their shared knowledge of the past. To define itself, a group needs characteristics that unite its members by distinguishing them from other groups (Erll 28). Jan Assmann explains: "Cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ('We are this') or in a negative

(‘That’s our opposite’) sense” (130). Thus, the main purpose of cultural memory is to mark group identity.

Embodied in media—both objects and performances—cultural memory not only refers to the past, but is also determined by the present, the here and now of a group’s living environment and self-image. On the one hand, the group will only re-activate aspects of its past that are in sync with its present self-image. On the other hand, confronting group members with the collective past should challenge them to reflect critically upon the foundational aspects of their culture and identity. It is this continuous re-evaluation that supports change.

ErlI illustrates the institutional aspects of cultural memory with the case of the former GDR and West Germany: both societies attempted to create new self-images that would distinguish them from the Third Reich as well as each other. They continued to enforce their identity upon the following generations of Germans with the help of collective memory embodied not only in ceremonies, monuments, and memorials but also in literature, TV, and cinema. This was part of the challenge both sides faced when, beginning with the reunification of Germany, two separate cultural memories and identities had to be united. Rather than create one new memory, West German memory and identity were largely imposed on East Germany in a way that is reminiscent of cultural colonization (ErlI 28-30). Hence, the difficulty in establishing a cultural memory, valuable and representative of unified Germany, optimally displays the power dynamics involved in creating a nationally acceptable cultural memory.

Anthropologist James Wertsch adds an important aspect to the discussion of memory artifacts. He emphasizes distribution of cultural memory. He points out that,

regardless of their form, such memory artifacts constitute knowledge resources whose negotiation and mediation contribute to the distribution of collective memory. It is these resources which make cultural knowledge available to all members of society and which influence personal remembrances of events (Wertsch 26). Texts in particular are examples of such a knowledge resource. They can act as a cultural tool that is created and employed by one or more agents with the goal of disseminating knowledge of the past and thus influencing collective memory, as Erll pointed out by introducing the element of agency into Nora's discussion of *lieux de mémoire*. What Wertsch calls 'textual mediation,' then, is the specific process of making knowledge available to the broader public by storing it in semiotic form. The risk of restricting the perception of memory consumers is not only inherent in textual mediation but also in any other form of knowledge distribution, such as the design and building of monuments that involve dominant agents who follow a specific agenda. In textual mediation agents include, for instance, publishing institutions, literary agents, editors, and authors of texts who, while ensuring that larger groups of people are exposed to the same textual resources, always also have their own specific interests for promoting particular texts (Wertsch 26).

Literature and the Construction of Collective Memory

Literature possesses the ability to function as a mediator of collective memory. As Astrid Erll discusses in detail, a variety of processes and devices are involved in the construction of literary texts as memory artifacts. She argues that memory and literature are closely related due to similar characteristics involved in literary and mnemonic processes, such as selectivity, condensation of factors, and interactive referentiality. Erll

explores the specific construction of texts as memory media by highlighting the selective and configurative processes involved in creating a literary text. The construction of both literary texts and memory artifacts at large is based on selective and narrative ordering in the encoding processes of the memory makers and analogous processes by the audience.

How does literature, then, function as a memory artifact? Erll appropriates Paul Ricoeur's model of mimesis to explore literary communication as a form of collective memory construction encompassing the following three phases: narrativization of experience, structuring of textual elements, and reception of literary texts.

In the first phase of Ricoeur's mimesis model—called "Mimesis I," or prefiguration—elements of past events are selected to become part of the literary text. The author bases his or her selection on the potential referentiality of elements, which enhances their narratability and determines the referential quality of the text overall. The chosen elements can refer to material aspects, such as other media; mental aspects, such as patterns of thinking established by existing representations of the past; and/or social aspects, such as other memory communities or institutions. Following the selection of real life elements, which are only potential memory contents that have yet to be actualized in the memory culture, they have to be associated with a strong meaning in order to make them 'rememberable.' Authors may choose to give expression to memories of minority groups, forgotten objects and aspects, subconscious or non-articulated subjects, such as taboo topics, in order to construct a text that can provide new perspectives on the past that could not exist as such in the collective memory out of which the text originates (Erll 150-151).

In “Mimesis II,” the selected elements are integrated into a specific structure so that their connections create a particular story and a plot based on temporal and causal order. This is what Ricoeur calls the process of “literary configuration”, which as a process of constructing reality can also be considered as poesis. At this moment of textual construction, the previously selected elements merge and are newly arranged or re-arranged by separation, or de-contextualization from their original context, which was external to literature and will remain embodied in them as an oblique reference only as they acquire a new context within literature. Narrative devices are employed purposefully in this phase of the configuration to generate and endow the story with meaning through metaphors and symbols (Erl1 152). As “Mimesis II” is highly relevant to the issue of memory as a device in literature, I will explore the complexities of this phase in more detail after a brief overview of “Mimesis III”.

The final phase in Ricoeur’s model of literary communication is “Mimesis III,” the reception phase. At this refigurative stage, the world of the text intersects with the world of the reader and initiates the actualization of the literary text and its plotted elements through the audience. The notion of trauma represents an excellent example to show how its use in media influences audiences. Wulf Kansteiner explains that it has become too widely used, so that not only the immediate victims of trauma but also “those who suffer with them or through them” have been declared “participants and casualties of the process of cultural trauma” (“Genealogy” 207). Theorists in the field of cultural studies are thus considering the first-hand experience of trauma and post-traumatic stress ‘contagious’ elements, which, as their symptoms are represented in texts and movies, are assumed to replicate “in the minds of the audience and produce a collective trauma

which unites many individuals who have never experienced or directly witnessed acts of extreme violence” (“Genealogy” 207). Kansteiner calls this phenomenon ‘secondary trauma’ (“Genealogy” 198, 207). A significant amount of power over the audience is thusly attributed to representations of trauma. Kansteiner criticizes such “celebrating [of] the ubiquity of trauma in contemporary culture” as “disappointing in their limited understanding of actual historical trauma” (“Genealogy” 207-8). They are particularly misleading because, as he illustrates using the example of representations of slavery in mainstream American media, they may cause a sense of “loss of identity and meaning” (“Genealogy” 208). However, representations of slavery “also had a very positive, empowering influence on group identities in the USA” (“Genealogy” 208). In other words, trauma representations are destined to leave a lasting effect on their audience. Yet, this effect can be of a negative or positive nature for the recipient, or even a combination of qualities. Kansteiner thus emphasizes that the receptive process, in this case the reception of trauma representations, is far more complex than can be conveyed by the simplifying assumption that presenting trauma to an audience conveys to them the identical experience of a trauma victim. But he does not deny that the readers’ reality may be enriched iconically through the reception of the text, because the text potentially influences their perception of reality and their actions, something stressed by Erll as well (153). Thus, literature, like other media such as film and television, possesses the ability to influence reality by influencing social behavior (Kansteiner, “Genealogy” 209).

Ricoeur’s reception phase, hence, represents the intersection of texts and their collective reconfiguration as they are distributed to audiences. When large audiences

participate in the consumption of literary texts, the embodied memory narratives are re-introduced into the existing memory culture and the potentially dormant in memory artifacts is actualized. Or, as James Wertsch put it, knowledge resources are re-activated via the process of textual mediation. Of particular significance for the actualization of the memory potential encoded in literature is the official reception exhibited in newspaper reviews and feuilletons, bestseller lists, online discussion forums, the institutionalization of literary texts as part of school literature, and literary canons, as such interpretations have significant influence on the reception.

The interpretive community is comprised of 'ordinary' and 'privileged' readers. The latter include particularly literary critics and teachers. Readers at large analyze the structural elements and narrative strategies. They develop and negotiate the possibilities of meaning – as indicated by Kansteiner, who opposes views that suggest a simple message transferal from author to reader, in which the latter is denied the ability to critically assess the quality of the message and its meaning to him or herself ("Genealogy" 207-8). This process of interpretation initially and often exclusively takes place on the individual level of reception where the actualization of memory potential occurs. Some reader-response critics have argued that "readers produce their own textual structure of object, but the text still signals, guides, directs, and manipulates them" (Goldstein and Machor xii), thus indicating the highly debated role of the reader throughout the course of reception studies that initially denied readers any significant role in actualizing the interpretive potential inherent in literary texts (xii). Theorists of the Constance School of reception aesthetics, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, elevated the reader's contribution to the mediation of textual meaning significantly,

arguing that literature's true historical influence and reception becomes evident when "examining the readers' changing horizons and socio-historical contexts" which shape the literary text (xii). Iser explains, "The process of assembling the meaning of the text is not a private one, for although it does mobilize the subjective disposition of the reader, it does not lead to day-dreaming but to the fulfillment of conditions that have already been structured in the text" (Iser 49-50). In other words, readers construct their own worlds by means of a "dynamic act" (36) between their own disposition, which tends "to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending" (37) and the text in front of them. Nonetheless, they are very much guided by the textual structures and perspectives.

In my discussion of post-*Wende* memoirs as embodiments of cultural memory I will analyze the individual reception process via letters of readers and online discussions, which will show how readers integrate the author's autobiographical memories into their own life stories. The integration of potential and actualized memory into collective memory happens through the collective negotiative effort (Erlil 154-155), i.e., discussions in public media like the above-mentioned newspaper reviews and school curricula that are subject to institutional influences. Readers are partaking in "interpretive communities" – followers of groups of intellectuals "who accept and apply a common strategy and evaluate performances of it" (Goldstein and Machor xiii). They may be more or less consciously aware of the interpretive methods and trends to which they have been exposed, such as New Criticism, Phenomenology, Feminism, or Marxism, for example. One way or another, however, the readers' analytical process is inspired by interpretive practices employed within their literary and non-literary collective

and endorsed by the community in which they exchange their interpretive experiences. Given the importance of textual material in guiding individual reception, I will analyze the official reception of the memoirs by exploring newspaper and online reviews.

Since the production phase of “Mimesis I” remains largely outside of possible analysis, as there are few analyzable material traces--authors’ diaries and notebooks would be possible sources—my discussion of literary communication as collective memory construction will focus here on the subsequent two phases.

Aesthetic strategies employed by the author during the textual configuration encode a particular message into literary texts to which readers respond. Erll outlines five strategies that can be used to encode the past in literary texts – the experiential, monumental, historicizing, antagonistic, and reflexive modes. While Erll discusses these strategies in the context of fictional texts, they are also applicable to non-fiction with minor modifications.

When events are emplotted in the experiential mode, the reader is encouraged to perceive the narrated material, much like personal experiences, as part of his or her communicative memory. This is because literature produces the illusion that we are perceiving a particular fictional reality by evoking the sense of experiencing through the display of typical contents of everyday life and group memory (Erll 169). This illusion is created by means of aesthetic devices, such as intertextuality, interdiscursiveness, plot structures, genre-specific patterns, narrative agency, temporal and spatial setting, and others, which are also employed as part of the second, the monumental strategy. Literary texts can acquire monumental status as a particular display of a culture that aspires to long-term meaningfulness. A text that is characterized by the use of both the

experiential and monumental strategies addresses the reader's cultural memory as it strives to be accepted as a memory artifact that evokes meaningful associations with the group's past (Erll 170-176). Aesthetic devices are also used in non-fictional texts.

When the historicizing mode is employed, such as in historiography and historic novels, the narrated events are emplotted as part of a closed past. The past is presented as irretrievable, and the narrated events are no longer open to access in the present or future. In the historicizing mode, historic details remain alien and bear little or no resemblance to the group's present (Erll 177). Non-fiction authors can only draw from the material of a reality of which they have close knowledge either because they have encountered the narrated events themselves or researched them thoroughly. Thus, non-fiction literature only rarely employs the historicizing mode; it aims to present the more recent past as still closely associated with present reality and therefore more accessible or relatable for readers. Here, the past as depicted in memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies serves as an explanatory and interpretive instrument for the present.

In the antagonistic mode, counter-memories are created that challenge the dominating memory stories. The counter-memories may depict memories of marginalized groups or propose value hierarchies other than those that are part of the dominating memory culture. The contrast between competing memories can be achieved through devices such as narrative interventions and perspectives, a highly selective configuration of setting, plot, characters, stylistic and linguistic registers, modes of focalization and regulating access to the inner life of strategically selected figures, all of which highlight a contrast between the existing dominant collective memory and the alternative provided in the text (Erll 178-179). Erll explains that a

particular instance of the antagonistic mode is the use of the communal voice “we” as narrative point of view. As a means of self-authorization and self-empowerment for marginalized authors it not only encourages the implied reader to form a group memory with the collective narrator but also indicates the question of alterity – we as opposed to others with whom we do not share the illustrated experiences, interpretations and versions of the past. The effect of indicating contrasting memory cultures and structures can also be achieved with the help of other, more implicit strategies, such as omitting contents of collective memory or implementing new plot structures in order to rewrite existing versions of the past. Such strategies can, however, only be detected and appreciated if the audience possesses the respective contextual and knowledge background (181).

The antagonistic strategy seems particularly relevant for my project: texts that employ this mode possess, according to Erll, the capacity to affirm desired or revise undesired memory narratives, to challenge traditions, to legitimize and delegitimize social actions, to convey and deconstruct concepts of collective identity, and to establish, confirm or disavow normative hierarchies. These constructs play a highly significant role in the processes of individual and collective identification as they can be employed in the social negotiation between different versions of the past which establish versions of national self images, binding norms and values, traditions, and perspectives for the future (Erll 182).

The fifth and final mode of representation is the reflexive mode. It is employed to emplot the past in order to reflect upon it. This technique provides a reflexive quality that enables recipients to observe critically and reflect on past and present reality. Another

possible way to inspire reflection is the exclusion of essential subjects and objects from the newly created literary world so that their absence acquires a particular meaning. These methods of implementing the reflexive mode underscore the social forms and ways that produce a collective memory, as they position discourses, media, institutions, practices of memory culture, and powerful patterns of thinking and memory figures as a dominant element in the textual repertoire. Dialogues, ritualistic actions, even monument building by characters, metaphoric language and multiple perspectives can be employed to contribute to the reflexive mode implicitly, whereas direct speech of narrator(s) and characters, discussing social frames for individual memory or organizational patterns of memory narratives reveals a conscious and hence explicit effort to inspire reflection on the part of the reader (Erll 184-185).

With regard to narrative perspective, first-person narrations, both fictional and particularly non-fictional, have the greatest potential for representing individual memory. They make the individual memory observable as they simulate individual memory processes and highlight the two-fold view of memory through the experiencing and the narrating self. On the level of plot, the text conveys the experiences of an individual embedded in social contexts whose perception of events is shaped by a variety of collective frames of reference. On the level of narrative intervention, memory contents are displayed with the help of a first-person narrator who is most likely older and engages in retrospection, commentating, analyzing, and evaluating and thus attempting to create meaning. Such a literary display of the processes involved in reconstructing both the individual-biographical and the collective-historical past through a narrating persona can inspire reflections about the discrepancies between narrator's past

experiences and present interpretation, about individuality and cultural contexts of individual memory, about the construction, perspectives and localizing of memory and about the function of narration in creating sharable memory stories. Some first-person narrators are unreliable. Their versions of the past exhibit internal contradictions. This technique can indicate how individual memory is dependent on the present context of institutions, others' memories, and current interests. Often, the contradictions become evident to the readers only in comparison between textual and extra-textual reality. Readers therefore have to possess a detailed knowledge of the extra-textual past obliquely depicted in the text. Furthermore, the use of multiple first-person narrators is particularly well suited to explore memory in literature because it provides insights into the way communicative memory functions by presenting different versions of the same event. Each narrative voice may represent a different view paradigmatic of a particular social group, their interpretation of reality and the memory narrative (ErlI 186-187).

The memory embodied in literary texts has to be encountered by an audience in order to actualize the potential of memory artifacts, since the audience will be influenced by its encounter with interpretation of this particular construction of past reality. The interpretation of the audience functionalizes and activates memory by initiating the negotiative process of individual and collective memory that lies at the heart of memory media and artifacts.

Literature as Memory Medium

Media of collective memory are objects that function as storage entities for representations of the past and help preserve them over time. They are means for the

dissemination and circulation of the stored contents throughout time and space for the purpose of establishing and synchronizing memory communities. This is so because they provide the psychological cues that trigger acts of remembering among the audiences who will thus integrate the encountered memory, via the medium, with their own memories (Erll 137-183). Scholars such as Nora and Erll have outlined one of the most important roles of literary and non-literary texts as that of mediation of memory. Erll emphasizes that among memory artifacts, literary texts particularly establish a critical connection between individual and collective memory and thus fulfill the social dimension of memory media. By transforming them into narratable content and thus integrating them into collective memory, literary texts bestow upon personal experiences and memories a collective relevance. As means of communication memory artifacts at large and literature in particular also provide individuals with access to socio-cultural knowledge (123). Furthermore, the encounter with different memory media connects individuals with a larger collective by compelling them to remember or reflect upon their own and other people's experiences (141).

Literature, specifically, exhibits the core aspects of memory media. It stores representations of the past, circulates them among audiences, and establishes associations between the audiences' own memories and the past of their social group. When literary texts function as memory media, the constructive and aesthetic processes authors engage in to create literary texts—Ricoeur's mimesis and the rhetorical modes of representation discussed above—function to embody and disseminate memory.

As memory media, literary texts embody and solidify, and thus store past events. Making the individual and collective memory processes visible, literature allows readers

to observe and criticize aspects of their memory culture. Literature can give readers the illusion of observing the past immediately, but it can also guide readers' attention to strategies employed to construct a particular version of the past (Erl 166). Hence, like memory artifacts at large, literature circulates knowledge about the past. Given that even fictional texts refer to reality (if differently than non-fictional texts), literature has the potential to influence collective memory. Unlike non-fiction, fictional literature is perceived as a non-binding representation of the past. In other words, restrictions of reality do not apply here as much as they do in the case of non-fiction (160). Like all memory media, literature not only 'stores' and circulates representations of the past, it also integrates them with the individual memories of the audience members. Memory media provide the neurological cues that trigger readers' memories via the reception process.

Literature, then, constitutes a formative means in the process of collective memory construction, as it possesses the capacity to both construct new and affirm existing interpretations of the collective past. These textual versions of the past are actualized in individual as well as collective memory because we are subconsciously influenced by the literature we internalize. Literary models and schemata preform our encounters with reality and influence our most personal memories, so that literature serves as a frame for remembering. Thus, authors can be considered communicative partners for individuals and collectives in the process of forming a social memory. Halbwachs' anecdote about a walk through the city of London is a popular example used to illustrate this phenomenon. Halbwachs describes retrospectively how, during his first visit to London, he recalled a Dickens novel he had read during his childhood. This

occurred as he visited sights of the city because Halbwachs had interiorized Dickens's descriptions of them (ErlI 161). Representations of reality in fiction, however, are poetically produced realities rather than descriptions bound by the referentiality of historiography. The non-binding status of fiction enables such texts to create more freely and test out versions of reality that are subsequently related to the reader via the narrative.

It should finally be noted that the interaction between the material aspects of any type of memory media—comprised of structural elements—and their social dimension, i.e. function, is crucial for their role as mediators of collective memory insofar as representations of the past are produced and reviewed in a specific context within the memory culture. This context, ErlI argues, may be structured differently at different times because it is influenced by historical and cultural changes. Ironically, the meaning of memory can only be maintained when it changes with the context, i.e., when the representations of the past stay meaningful. In order to analyze memory media, one therefore has to view and critically assess them within the context of the specific cultural and memorial processes out of which they emerged (ErlI 136).

Adequate knowledge of the history of one's own and other memory cultures is also prerequisite to establishing and acknowledging an explicit correlation between a literary form and its cultural function as a memory artifact. In other words, it is in the hands of the reader to actualize literature as a medium of collective memory by connecting narrative mediation with the reality of collective memories. The successful interaction between textual configuration and reader thus explains why, according to

Erll, the narrative process is one of the primary activities in memory cultures that is always meaningful, powerful, and constitutive of reality and history (192-193).

While their meaning is subjected to external influences, all types of media, such as monuments, books, paintings or the internet, shape representations of the past and, through externalizing information, create memory collectives and cultures according to their own specific capacity by introducing a memory community to worlds unknown to them (Erll 125). Orality, for instance, possesses more freedom in representing a past than written or photographic media. However, regardless of their (im)material dimension and their technological structure, orality, written media, photographs, as well as images and sounds make up the overall reservoir of memory media and artifacts that embody cultural memory even though some of them seem more adequate and are therefore more preferable to encode memory than others (132-133).

Identity Construction through Memory in Life Writing

As explored above in my discussion of memory as the core element of identity construction, remembering the past usually helps individuals and groups to gain a sense of coherence in terms of the values, norms and behaviors they engage in. What defines us are the cultural values we have acquired during our socialization and the changes we have withstood or incorporated into our self-image, all the while maintaining our selfhood and our sense of sameness that anchors us in time and space. We may search for legitimization for who we are as group members and individuals for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Remembering where we came from and what we

have experienced in the past provides us with a sense of stability because we integrate this past into a current self-image.

In order to give a voice to our memories and to validate them publicly, we create memory artifacts, which embody these recollections, and as such constitute the symbolic representation of the principles that ground our existence. They convey the sense of historic continuity that is essential for both individuals and groups to function socially. While the objects that function as memory artifacts largely remain the same over time, their meaning often changes with transformations in our socio-political and cultural environment. Moreover, different aspects of the encoded memory are the focus at different times. It is because of this simultaneous solidity and flexibility—appearing constant while allowing differing interpretations—that memory artifacts are able to stay meaningful and continue to fulfill their function as ‘anchors’ for individual and group identity.

Literature, as explored in the previous sections, possesses particularly relevant qualities to serve as a mediator of memory, i.e., as a memory artifact. It provides a unique opportunity for individuals to merge collective and individual memory and identity. In the reception process, collective memory embodied in the text—often via the story of a paradigmatic individual—interacts with the memories of the reader and, as a result of this interactive, mediated communication, will likely redefine the reader’s view of self and, if the text is widely read, even the current group identity. Thus, in the reception process the memory potential represented in literary texts is actualized and becomes part of a given collective memory.

While all memory artifacts represent the past, they do not have to thematize memory explicitly. However memory can be the thematic core of a literary text that claims memory media status by making the process of remembering explicit rather than implied. Explicit reflections on the nature of individual and collective memory are particularly dominant in autobiographical or life writing. Halbwachs explains autobiographical texts as accounts that include within the history of the individual also the history of the social group. They differ from historical studies, however, precisely because of their focus on an individual life and the more subjective narrative voice, which can offer commentary and take on a particular tone (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 72). Authors of autobiographical texts, then, do not consider objectivity in the presentation of past events a priority but rather choose among their personal recollections to bring “greater coherence” to this life story (183).

Attributing meaning to one’s life story through coherence enables, according to Heinrich, “a process of self-awareness and self-comprehension” (21). We begin to understand ourselves better as distinctive individuals as we connect past events to the self. By situating our personal or social frame of reference in relation to an external frame our lives gain meaning. As Heinrich explains, “an individual can only evaluate [his or her] own experiences when they have been integrated successfully into temporal, spatial and personal order” (26-7). Narration is one of the devices that allow us to arrange our remembered experiences in a specific order and in the process attribute meaning to them.

Thus, one of the motivations for autobiographical writing is the notion of vesting our recollections with more coherence. The activity of narrating can be considered an

act of 'making sense' and, at the same time, communicating life events to others. Experiences are encoded into memory as fragments. Hence, except when communicated to others, they will rarely if ever be recalled and subjected to active reflection – the underlying principle that guides the telling of life narratives (Erll 87). According to Schacter, translating our experiences, those glimpses into our past that resemble pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle, “into tales of who we are” (73) provides us with insights into the temporal alignment of events we have encountered in our lives and thus into a story of our selves that seems intelligible and coherent to us. Mieke Bal argues that autobiographical memories, unlike “routine or habitual memories,” are “affectively colored, surrounded by an emotional aura that ... makes them memorable” (viii), but also introduces the potential for deviating from the facts. The memories presented in both the oral life narratives exchanged in everyday conversation as well as in the written narratives of autobiographers are mostly ordinary memories taken from the everyday life. Unlike the primarily oral everyday exchange of brief memory narratives, however, written autobiographical texts suggest an at least obliquely paradigmatic status as they, like all literature, represent the oxymoronic notion of the individual life that, although unique, signifies more than itself and thus carries meaning to similar lives of others in the group. Autobiographical texts are thus not only constitutive devices in individual quests for identity but also highly influential in establishing group identities, assuming they become part of a memory culture (Bal xi).

Marianne Hirsch explains the process by which life narratives become part of collective memory as a “memorial circle” that includes author and reader: while narratively constructing his or her past, the author engages with a series of past selves

that constitute the present self. Through the narrating of these images the reader is invited to “participate with [him or] her in a cultural act of remembrance” (Hirsch 7) that motivates the reader to actively remember his or her own past, which is both similar and different. The more the reader is able to relate to the remembering persona with whom they discursively engage via the medium of the narrative, the more actively (s)he tends to engage in recalling his or her own past in which (s)he contextualizes the textual material. The greater the similarity between the people and events referenced in the narrative and the reader’s own past, the more likely they are to function as retrieved cues for the reader’s own memories (Hirsch 7). As readers start communicating to other people both the memories they read about and their own memories recalled in the process, the memorial circle is continued and can be prolonged almost endlessly.

The discursive interaction between the readers’ and the author’s life narratives, which includes reflections on the acceptability of literary texts serving as appropriate representations of their group’s past, contributes to the creation of collective memory. When an individual and hence unique but also paradigmatic life experience is subjected to the narrative act of ‘making sense’ and represented to readers it condenses in the individual life a particular version of the group’s shared past. If the group can accept this version as embodying the values and norms they wish to embrace as their current self-image, they can utilize the text as representative of their own past in order to legitimize their existence and reinforce their essence as a group as well as the cohesion of their group (Erll 105). Autobiographical literature can therefore be defined more narrowly as a memory artifact that does not simply represent a condensation of cultural symbols—as monuments and other physical forms of memory artifacts do—but also narrates cultural

values and ideas and thus communicates more immediately with the memory consumer (105).

The autobiographical memories displayed and narrated in life stories are comprised of a combination of different elements of knowledge about the self that Schacter categorizes into knowledge of lifetime periods, of general events, and event-specific knowledge. Each of these segments has a specific function. Knowledge of lifetime periods (e.g., childhood, time at university, marriage) provides a kind of skeletal structure. General events, which are defined as extended episodes measured in days, weeks, or months (e.g., freshmen year, vacations, jobs), are more specific than lifetime periods but less specific than event-specific knowledge, and therefore provide optimal contact points for relating authors' and readers' autobiographical memories. Schacter explains that "instead of saying where they went to high school or recollecting a specific incident from a particular game, [individuals] would say 'I really enjoyed going to basketball games during high school'" (Schacter 90). Lifetimes are usually the departure in our search for general-event knowledge, which, in turn, causes memories of specific events (e.g., a particular birthday party, meeting one's spouse) to be activated again. Autobiographical memories consist of elements of all of these categories, which stimulate and trigger each other in the process of narration or, in the case of readers, reception (89-91).

The most memorable autobiographical texts therefore consist of a well-balanced amount of general and idiosyncratically personal recollections, as these texts provide insights into the narrator's past that will allow readers to integrate these memories into their own life stories. They capture our attention due to their form and aesthetic

arrangement of ordinary life events and stories as well as extremely painful ones. Heinrich creates an analogous hierarchy arguing that the recall of concrete events comprises the lowest level of abstraction. General impressions, thematic expansions based on continuous re-interpretations over time, and generalizations of one's own experiences and basic moods make up the following levels in Heinrich's hierarchy of abstraction in autobiographical memory. The more person-specific and hence unique elements add the kind of subjectivity, affective coloring and emotional aura indicated above that is characteristic of autobiographical non-fiction. Their enriched qualities explain why "autobiographical memories cannot be reduced to concrete events" (Heinrich 24). As I discussed in the chapter on memory, the rememberer always injects personal judgments and emotive tones into the communication of memories and the rememberer's present state of mind influences what is recalled. Likewise, the particular circumstances and social setting in which the rememberer recalls past events influences the reconstruction of the memory trace because, while aspects of the present situation color how the past is recalled, it also constitutes the motivational catalyst for remembering and hence ultimately also for writing an autobiographical text. This quest to reassure identity via memory arises specifically when an unsatisfactory turn of events in the present challenges deeply held beliefs and values. If old belief systems are shattered, we must revise our selves to adapt to the new environment. Narration offers the opportunity to do so because by narrating we re-order and re-interpret the past experiences that have determined our selves in order to gain a renewed sense of coherence and continuity.

Halbwachs points out that groups can reconstruct their past at any given moment. They do so to regain and uphold the equilibrium between present and past conditions for the purpose of continuity. While trying to make the past correspond to the needs of the present, “they most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it” (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 182). This distortion occurs because we tend to choose among the recollections we accumulated throughout our lifetime or the time of existence of our group by, for instance, eliminating some or rearranging their order, all for the sake of creating a past “according to an order conforming to our ideas of the moment.” The new conditions of the present provide us with the opportunity, or the challenge, of viewing the past from a different perspective, which allows us to “renovate and supplement” our remembrances. Life narratives present the perfect opportunity to do so because the past can be reconstructed, whereas the present cannot (Halbwachs, *On Collective* 183; *The Collective* 72-3).

Mieke Bal illustrates a significant function of narrating life for trauma victims as a supportive device in their quest for identity. She suggests that the state of incapacitation in which the experience of a traumatic event can leave its victims makes an integration of the traumatizing events of the past necessary in order to come to some sort of understanding. Interaction with others and communication of the experience to others can help overcome the victim’s powerlessness. In order to communicate it, however, the experience “needs to be made narratable” (Bal x). Engaging in the process of creating this particular narrative requires the victim—who thus becomes the author—to arrange the memory fragments and translate them into a story line that ‘makes sense.’ The eventual performance of this memory narrative for interlocutors can then initiate the

victim's healing process primarily because the recipient of the account recognize the precarious situation in which the narrator finds him or herself and can offer, besides empathy and solidarity, an outside perspective that displays the event in a different light and thus provides a degree of understanding for the victim. The interlocutor can be a therapist or any other person, including the implied reader of autobiographical texts, to whom the victim feels able to "bear witness [and] come into his- or herself in the present [by being given the opportunity to] bear the past" (xi).

This example stresses the interactive nature of the narrative process as also previously indicated. It includes not only the presentation of events but also the actualization of them through a receiving instance in order to be incorporated into cultural memory. Representation in a narrative or any other 'objectified' form grants us the opportunity to give expression to our experiences and re-experience our past (van Alphen 26). Susan Brison explains the significance of narrating our experience in terms of an act of reclaiming power when she writes that the

act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift [from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech or other behavior] to being the subject of one's own not only by transforming the traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community and reestablishing connections that are essential to selfhood. (39-40)

While Brison and Bal focus specifically on traumatic experiences, their arguments support the notion that a drastic change in any situation and for anyone, though not traumatic, can significantly alter previous views of ourselves to such a degree that we find it necessary to reevaluate our past—by reconstructing it—in order to reclaim our sense of self as well as reestablish power and control over our life. By providing a frame

for recreating aspects of the past, literature, specifically the life narrative, facilitates ‘uprooted’ people’s, such as trauma victims’, endeavors to strengthen the sense of cultural and historical continuity that is essential to their identity (Spitzer 94).

Life narratives in general and autobiographical texts in particular can be considered a type of memory artifact. Their creation and distribution enacts a communicative process that conveys a semiotically encoded message from a sender, the author, via distributing agencies and media to recipients. The semiotic code thus functions as a mediator of individual memory that is interpreted and incorporated into the larger group memory by the audience. As Nora writes with respect to *lieux de mémoire*, life narratives, such as autobiographies and memoirs, preserve, store, and “materialize the immaterial” (19) by encoding a version of the past in semiotic form. They provide the act of memory with an organizational structure that incorporates cultural meanings with which the author—and potentially the recipient—identifies or struggles to identify at a particular moment in time and space and which s/he shares with the interpretive community.

Like all memory artifacts, life narratives also serve to counteract a forgetting which can be the result of present circumstances – for instance if the existence and memory of a group is endangered due to their marginalization in a particular socio-economic and cultural climate. While collective forgetting is often intentional and serves ideological purposes, it is also adaptive. Schacter argues that with regard to individual memory this adaptiveness of forgetting prevents the ‘cluttering’ of our minds with “useless recollections of trivial information and events” (Schacter 80). If, however, elements considered to be essential cornerstones to individual identity are ‘abandoned,’

a challenge to one's identity will be the result along with a loss of the sense of meaning and orientation that defines our purpose as individuals. Remembering and, more specifically, communicating memories in narrative form thus constitutes an enactment of identity for individuals. Memory accounts provide coherence and a sense of continuity of the self. It is therefore a necessity for individuals and groups alike to remember repeatedly and to share recollections with each other.

For individuals, the repetitive retrieval of memories means that the stored memory traces become stronger by forming more associations, which in turn enables an even easier retrieval at a later point in time. Psychologists and neurobiologists have, according to Schacter, discovered that memory traces, i.e. patterns created by neural activation in the brain, that are frequently re-activated in recall processes may become more resistant to forgetting (82). Such acts of rehearsal can be practiced by thinking and talking about past experiences to promote connections and associations among them that provide better chances for the neuronal patterns of activation to meet matching retrieval cues. While individuals counteract forgetting by exchanging significant memories via narratives, the audiences of their accounts, if repeatedly exposed to them through textual mediation or communication, will integrate these 'second-hand' memories into their own memory in what Hirsch terms the 'memorial circle'.

This has important implications for the group in which individuals partake: In recalling the past, both their own or others', groups are able to maintain the values and beliefs with which they identify over time. Audiences of memory narratives carry the cultural elements incorporated in memories as they 'absorb' them into their own

memories and thus perpetuate them by telling their own stories in order to ensure the continued existence of the group as cultural entity. Halbwachs furthermore stresses that preserving such remembrances in written form prevents their loss, as “firsthand accounts from participants and witnesses may become scattered among various individuals, lost amid new groups for whom these facts no longer have interest because the events are definitely external to them” (Halbwachs, *The Collective* 79). The writing of memory stories thus enforces the materialization of the immaterial in order to grant future generations of a collective access to their past and the ability to connect with their personal and social identity. Simply put, life narratives have practical value as they serve as knowledge resources that contribute to the preservation and distribution of collective memory. This utilitarian aspect along with the unique formal qualities and possibilities embodied in non-fictional life narratives, which I will highlight in the following section, should be reasons enough to diminish claims that deny memoirs a legitimate place among autobiographical texts.

Memories and Memoirs

As I discussed in the previous section, giving narrative form to our fragmented memory by transforming the images into a coherent narrative constitutes a way of ‘making sense’ of the experiences we accumulate during our lifetime and therefore becomes our primary way of constructing and re-constructing our identity. According to Evelyne Ender, “our thoughts, emotions, pleasures, and intentions only acquire an existential relevance when our remembrance casts them in a narrative pattern and creates a self” (3). While constructing a memory story is a cognitively and socially

complex act, every individual accomplishes it, apparently effortlessly, almost daily in recounting personal memories to others in order to maintain “the biographical thread that defines their existence” (3).

Symbolic representations and particular language are the most effective forms of storing and distributing memory narratives, as they are the only means human beings have at their disposal of representing and narrating experiences. Ender compares the narrative construction of memory stories to the concept of architecture that enables the constructive process according to an initial vision and an end purpose. She writes that our words serve us to “create our inner world and map out our outer world” by naming whatever comes to mind (16). It is through this verbal performance, then, that memories, emotions, and sensations receive a contour through which we and our communicative partners recognize and, ultimately, attribute meaning to them. Our autobiographical memory can therefore be said to depend on the linguistic faculty because language provides the means of making past objects and sensations symbolically “present in absentia,” thus enabling the “architecture” (16) of memory narratives.

Moreover, language enables a “witnessing that opens up experience toward other human beings” (Ender 190) as it is always addressing an Other, i.e., the reader, who receives our accounts regardless of whether or not this interlocutor is implied or real. Giving expression to the inner world and integrating it into the outer world comprises an act of knowledge sharing that has communicative as well as pedagogical significance. It may, in other words, be the rememberer’s wish to engage in

conversation with another person but also to convey a message to that person in order to persuade and educate.

Autobiographical remembering “is immanent to the world of human experience” (Ender 190). It is an act in which all human beings engage in order to give meaning to the events they experience, share their experiences, and consequently define their place in the world. Through publication – whether as a book or, more recently, as an internet diary or blog – an individual’s memory story reaches out toward potentially infinite interlocutors who understand this story based on their own experience. This common understanding provides the space sought after by the rememberer to claim as their own, as their place in society and the world.

The memoirs that I will analyze in the following chapters are examples of this craft as they imagine, construct and script memories and thus give shape to “an existence that otherwise would be no more than a welter of disorganized physiological and perceptual events” (Ender 4). Personal pasts are brought to life in these memoirs. According to canonical research in auto/biography studies—e.g. by Paul John Eakin, Helen Buss, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Julia Swindells, and Evelyn Ender—memoirs constitute a sub-genre of autobiographical writing. Autobiographical writing, which is also called “life writing,” or “life narrative,” constitutes a form of nonfiction literature. As such it is distinguished from fictional prose, poetry, and drama but also from non-literary narratives such as historiography. It does not create an imaginary world like all fiction (Schneider 193). Instead it relies on the author’s memory as its “primary archival source,” which also distinguishes it from other forms of nonfiction that incorporate multiple forms of ‘objective’ evidence such as historical documents, interviews, and

archives (Smith and Watson 6). Schneider indicates that this may be why texts of the autobiographical genre, such as letters, travel reports, essays, aphorisms, and homilies were originally not considered part of literary communication, edited rather carelessly and mentioned only marginally in larger encyclopedias.

Buss concurs with Schneider's assessment and adds in her investigation of the memoir genre that, "because of their dependence on narrators who are never fully impartial, and often highly opinionated, memoirs have been considered to be both bad history (which assumes objectivity) and inferior literature (which prefers narratives that show rather than tell) (xv). This view of autobiographical writing in general has changed in the last two decades (Schneider 194-195). In the feudalistic era, auto/biographical writing was comprised of eyewitness reports in which the narrating 'I' constituted the reporter rather than the main subject. Influenced by the literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman* and the expansion of the middle-class in the 19th century, autobiographers started to concentrate more on working out particular traits in the personality and individuality of the author and his/her identity as formed through the exchange with outside conditions. These deep and detailed explorations of the rich and famous' personal identity have given way to autobiographies of ordinary people, particularly minorities, in the democratic-pluralistic age.

Despite its status as nonfiction, autobiographical texts share a number of characteristics with fiction. Firstly, all literary narratives are based – to a greater or lesser extent – on the author's memory, i.e. the recall of fragmentary images that represent specific experiences of the past, which in a constructive process are reconstructed and emplotted. As I have shown in the previous discussion, our memories

do not ‘mirror’ what happens in reality because subjectivity interferes during the act of experiencing and encodes an event as a composite of memory images. Experiencing an event is therefore always already an interpretation of the event as we filter the images and sounds of our environment through our personal and unique perspective. As subjectivity is closely related to imagination—the predominant device in fictional literature—categorizing autobiographical writing as nonfiction in the sense of anti-fiction has invited criticism.

Acknowledging autobiographical writing in general and the memoir in particular as a literary genre and granting it a place within the canon of literary genres has been a slow process. Complicating this issue further, Helen Buss explains, nonfictional literature like memoirs, autobiographies, and diaries is a unique form that combines features of fictional literature as well as of nonliterary genres, such as the historical narrative, journalism, biography, and the essay.

Discussing similarities between life writing and fiction, Smith and Watson add that autobiographical texts are often (mistakenly) called novels because “both share features we ascribe to fictional writing” as, for example, plot, dialogue, setting, or characterization (7). Confounding the matter further, many writers often blur the boundaries between genres, in particular between life narrative and the first-person novel. Novels have been presented as autobiographical narratives that narrate the life stories of fictional characters, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, or Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, and, more recently, much of Philip Roth’s fiction. The only signal to readers that

indicates to them that what they are reading is a novel—and not an autobiographical narrative—is the authorial name on the title page that is different from that of the protagonist (Smith and Watson 8).

The most obvious characteristic, then, that differentiates life narratives from fictional narratives is, as Philippe Lejeune explains, that autobiography encompasses equivalence of author, narrator, and principal character, i.e., the kind of narration termed by Gerard Genette and H. Porter Abbott as *autodiegetic* (Smith and Watson 5). Readers rely on the “convergence of authorial signature and narrator” (8) which establishes what Lejeune calls an “autobiographical pact” that affirms the ‘identicalness’ of the name on the title page with that of narrator and protagonist. This pact between reader and author is established either in the obvious way indicated above—the name of the narrator-protagonist is given in the narrative and identical to that of the author’s name on the book cover—or more implicitly “at the author-narrator connection.” The latter can take, according to Lejeune, two forms: it can be implied in titles such as “Story of My Life,” or “Autobiography” that clarify that author and first-person narrator are identical, or it can be established at the beginning of the text “where the narrator enters into a contract vis-à-vis the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the ‘I’ refers to the name shown on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text” (Lejeune 13). The trust invoked in readers by the autobiographical pact assures them that the events recounted are based on the author’s memory and that they do not need multiple forms of objective evidence in order to establish further credibility.

The autobiographical pact also binds the life writer to a temporal space in a way not encountered by novelists: less restrictive obligations involved in fictional writing, which does not address reality directly, offer the fiction writer the freedom to “situate their narratives at any time in the past, present, or future” (Smith and Watson 9). While autobiographers can also cover the past even beyond the writer’s birth and “offer an imaginative journey into the future,” they have to abide by the rules of the pact between them and their readers that requires them to draw on the material of their memories rather than on their imagination. They must therefore “anchor their narratives in their own temporal, geographical, and cultural milieu” so that their credibility as representatives of their genre remains intact (9).

While limited in its main temporal setting, the temporal construction of narrated events in the memoir and autobiographical texts at large is comparable to that of fictional texts, such as the novel, as memoirs can freely arrange scenes from the past and present regardless of chronological order. Contrary to the requirements that the traditional novel has to obey, however, the episodes displayed in memoirs do not have to be connected to each other for reasons of internal consistency and verisimilitude. Their ‘connection’ is the “temporal, geographical, and cultural milieu” in which memoirists anchor their narratives (Smith and Watson 9).

Furthermore, the memoir employs devices from fiction. It may construct dialogues, use metaphors, other literary tropes, and vivid descriptions for that reason (Buss 23). Smith and Watson underline, as mentioned earlier, that life narratives share features, such as plot, dialogue, setting, and characterization, with fictional writing (7), yet they are distinguished by the origin of the material which is imagined in fiction and

derived from remembered subjective reality in life writing—although the ways in which some writers recount scenes from the past possess a certain imaginative quality too, as Buss argues (19).

Memoirs not only share certain features with fictional prose but even with lyrical poetry and drama. Equivalent to the voice used in most lyrical poetry, for example, the narrative voice employed in memoirs constantly works on an intimate and personal level to integrate past facts and feelings with the present moment of recollection. The emphasis on emotions, or ‘felt realities’—originally stressed in the “Romantic movement’s formulation of the voice of lyric poetry”—that memoirists explore in relation to the sensations and feelings provoked by an event is another common characteristic between these two genres (Buss 15). In addition, as a form that is relatively independent from traditional notions of style, memoirs are capable of tolerating, “like poetry, all sorts of figurative language, as well as alliteration and even rhyme” (23).

Parallels between drama and memoir can be found in the aspect of performance. This is evident in memoirs through accentuation of the performance of the self that is similar to a character in dramatic acts. As the episodes, into which memoirs are often structured, may offer different portrayals of the same self at different times and locations, they resemble theatrical performances in which specific circumstances shift earlier displays and characterizations, thus likening the self to subjects tossed about by the influences of their immediate environment so that they “can never be pinned down” (Buss 20).

Besides using narrative devices traditionally ascribed to fictional literature in a modified manner, the memoir also draws on other modes of nonfiction, such as

journalistic writing, which is not a mode of life writing but with which it nonetheless has the use of research skills in common. The journalist, however, has to consult a rather broad and veritable knowledge base in order to acquire information that is relevant and versatile enough to approach a particular subject, whereas the memoirist seeks to place his/her personal story within very specific social, historical, and cultural boundaries, namely those of his/her known environment (Buss 18). In other words, while memoirists may employ other texts and many artifacts at large, unlike journalists, they are not required to do so and can solely rely on their memories.

And while, unlike fiction, life narratives are committed to the historical rather than the imaginative world, they are not equivalent to historical narratives that chronicle events. The events recounted in historiography are factual in the sense that they provide a record based on verifiable evidence and a narrative mode striving for objectivity, whereas memoirists and autobiographers offer subjective truth that is most of the time influenced by personal agendas—such as justifying personal perceptions, upholding reputations, disputing other accounts, settling scores, conveying cultural insights, or inventing desirable futures (Smith and Watson 10). Narrating history furthermore would not suffice for a text to be considered a memoir – the narrator’s self, his/her views, thoughts, and emotions need to be injected into the events s/he recounts (Buss xiv).

Nonetheless, historical narratives are often compared to, if not (mistakenly) equated with, life writing because both genres are nonfictional texts and thus there is a factual basis underlying both of them (Buss 19). Differentiating them, however, is the fact that the memoirist injects a great amount of subjectivity into his/her rendition of

factual events due to his/her fundamental reliance on personal memory and experience as a primary source. In fact, biographies, although constituting a different mode of nonfiction, are more similar to historical narratives in the way facts are accounted than autobiographies or memoirs. While biographies and autobiographies/ memoirs thus are distinguished from each other in this aspect, they express the same interest in the life story of an individual within a particular socio-cultural context. In other words, biographies and autobiographical texts focus on relational aspects of an individual life (Buss 19).

In terms of its stylistic and thematic approach, the memoir can be considered closely related to “another very old (and also underrated) form” of nonfiction, namely the personal essay (Buss 23). Both forms are able to go beyond artistic exploration and style and address a political purpose by not only providing plain information or only depicting characters and rendering stories but by discursively exploring ideas. Buss argues that as it is “blending literary and historical narratives, psychological and sociological concepts, factual and imaginative language” the memoir, by channeling the stylistic strategies of the essay, can offer commentary on diverse “issues of human culture” within the frame of personal anecdotes (23).

Since Montaigne’s *Essais*, the essay has been characterized by its use of vernacular language, which mirrors its democratic aspiration to reach larger audiences. Such a non-traditional, realistic linguistic code may be held partially responsible for the increasing fan base of the memoir. This base may also be drawn to it because this genre attempts to connect with its readers by focusing on a specific personal life within the context of larger society. Readers of these episodic life stories feel more enticed to

identify with narrator's autobiographical accounts. The "sense of direct person-to-person communication" that is promoted through a more direct and realistic narrative style along with the identifying potential of the memoir has great potential to inspire and motivate the reader and perhaps even change his/her view of the world (Buss 24). Authors of memoirs often appear rather 'non-authoritative' due to these qualities and due to the fact that most of them, particularly those publishing within the last decades, are not writers by profession but ordinary people just like their readers. Moreover, they resonate more intensely with readers because they readily acknowledge the existence of multiple viewpoints and self-assessments as opposed to "the singleness of viewpoint that traditional narrative voices project" (Buss 25).

Buss summarizes the flexible and elastic nature that the practice of memoir proves to be as a "complex blending of genres that borrows from the whole past of writing practice, while it seeks to write a different way of being in the world for the future. ...[It] can combine the techniques of fiction with essay writing, the personal with the public dimension of an experience, and the documentary account with poetic and evocative recreations of experience" (25). The hybridity of this genre repudiates generic classifications and their canonical dominance, which, as Laura Marcus argues, it transcends rather than transgresses (14).

Memoir vs. Autobiography

The autobiography has become the dominant form of life writing to the point that memoirs are often equated with autobiographies although there are important distinctions between these two forms. Most importantly, autobiographies cover the

complete life span of the individual up to the moment of narration rather than, as is the case in memoirs, specific periods within that life that have significance in terms of the individual's personality and development. Buss explains that this "narrowing of the lens" in memoirs to zoom in on particular events "helps create the dramatic nature of the memoir with its scenic quality" (Buss 23).

Autobiographies furthermore emphasize linear narration in order to tell the whole life that seems to be more conveyable in a largely chronological succession of events (Buss 23). Memoirs, on the other hand, predominantly feature episodes describing the events that are deemed most significant by the narrator to narrate his/her life. For this reason, only some aspects of the narrator's life are at the center of memoirs, illustrating what made this individual the individual s/he has become.

As I discuss three memoirs and one text that merges aspects of the memoir genre with those of biography, the following discussion will focus on memoirs rather than autobiographies or life writing at large. And since I seek to differentiate memoirs from autobiographies with a focus on the former, the latter largely function as a contrast rather than a subject in itself. Moreover, as the discussion over these two core life writing genres is vast and complex, I simplify matters here by solely interrelating the arguments of preeminent life writing scholars like Phillippe Lejeune, Paul Eakin as well as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson whose arguments are most pertinent for my project.

Phillippe Lejeune describes the differences between memoir and autobiography in terms of a lack on the part of the former to fulfill certain criteria that define the latter. Lejeune's contributions to the efforts—meant to draw more attention to autobiographical texts—are undoubtedly significant as is mirrored in the fact that many other scholars

exploring autobiographical writing have been inspired by him and cite him frequently. He defines autobiographies as “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (4). This definition excludes biographies (which are not written by the person concerning his/her own past but that of another), the 1st-person novel (in which author, narrator, and protagonist are not identical), and the self-portrait or essay (which are neither literary narratives nor necessarily retrospective) in addition to the memoir (4).

The latter in particular is distinguished from the autobiography, according to Lejeune, insofar as its subject is less the individual per se than aspects of his or her environment that serve to exemplify influences on the individual’s life. Smith and Watson concur with this analysis when they describe the memoir as a “mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant. [It] directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (198). Therefore, unlike the autobiographical ‘I’ that displays and examines the individual’s interiority, the “I’ or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and ... dialogical” (198). Memoirists emphasize relationships with other people and other aspects of their environment in order to outline predominant factors contributing to their personal development. This does not mean that memoirs are less personal or inward looking than autobiographies – they simply construct this inwardness and subjectivity with the help of different ‘building blocks’, i.e. via aspects of the individual’s environment.

Paul Eakin contends that instead of employing the “illusion of self-determination” that dominates the first-person narrators of autobiography, memoirs tend to focus more on the relation between the self and the environment, or the relational self, or relational life. Memoirs traditionally portray the ‘I’ in terms of witnessing the story of something or someone else with whom the ‘I’ has a kind of relationship. In this way, Eakin argues, they defy the autobiographic myth of the autonomy of the self, established through notions of autobiographical writing as “literature of the first person ...: *I write my story, I say who I am, I create my self*” (43).

Eakin criticizes Philippe Lejeune as one of the supporters of this isolationist model of identity in traditional autobiography, inspired by the philosophies of Enlightenment – developed and supported, among others, by Kant and Leibniz – of the independent and self-enclosed individual who rests securely in him or herself and is not perturbed in his/her essence by outside factors. Only with the rise of feminist criticism has this model slowly been eroded as inapplicable particularly to the “contours of women’s lives” (47). The increase in women’s memoirs in the last decades thus confirms the fact that it is mostly socially and intellectually marginalized groups who tend to engage in public attempts to locate their identities and claim their place in society through life narratives. It also draws attention to the idea that the self is increasingly considered to be a social entity as these memoirs primarily focus on interpersonal relationships such as daughterhood, motherhood, and marriage and therefore reveal the memoirists’ realization that personal experience is indeed a shared experience (Swindells 207).

The argument that the stylistic openness of the memoir form promotes the display of relational aspects of selfhood has prompted critics such as Mary Mason, Domna Stanton, and Joy Hooton to propose it as an alternative model of autobiographical writing for women, which, according to Eakin, is however also applicable to men's life stories (50). This model views "identity through relation to the chosen other," and constructs "the self as related rather than single and isolated" (47) because "the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others" (43). In other words, selfhood is substantiated through relations with both its physical and social environment. This notion is part of a long-standing discussion of the self as either an instance of personal autonomy and self-sufficiency in rejection of society's values or as socially situated in communitarian terms. As this discussion is complex but does only marginally relate to my exploration of memoirs of East German childhood as cultural artifacts, I will only briefly allude here to the fact that the 'I' of memoirs indeed embodies the relational self – as I will investigate, among other aspects, in selected East German childhood memoirs – which will prove to be a significant characteristic differentiating it from other forms of life writing.

Moreover, the 'I' in memoirs possesses a reflective quality combined with a high degree of reflexivity that Buss identifies as an instrument used to "unveil experience in order to shunt a personal, and political, truth" while it, at the same time, continuously questions the subject's positioning "both in language and discourse, at a specific historical moment or in a particular cultural space" (17). The higher degree of reflexivity and reflection constitutes another critical differentiation between memoirs and autobiographies due to the personal as well as political nature of the memoir.

The episodic and frequently non-chronological structure of the memoir enables this political nature as it allows the memoirist to admit that personal experience and history cannot always be transformed into a linear and coherent story in which the specific chronology of events defines the narrating person at the moment of giving expression to his/her memories and thoughts. Buss calls the memoirists' method of shaping the self "braiding" and defines it as a "strategy of resistant subjects in which features of identity are brought together in combinations that are not traditionally recognized as those that constitute a human subject" (34). In other words, the memoirist does not construct the story of his/her self, and thus his/her identity, in a coherent fashion out of chronologically aligned and highly linguistically structured memory images like autobiographers do. Rather, they attempt to structure their story in correspondence to the fragmented and surprising occurrence of memory images and follow them, all the while reflecting upon the subjective experience of remembering those events. During this process the reflexive 'I' may experience shifts and changes in the way it previously evaluated its selfhood, which requires the reader to follow the train of thought and reflection actively.

Active participation by the reader and apparently aimless twists and turns by the narrator in his/her search for a sense of self are attributes that are uncharacteristic of traditional autobiography. While it may be a rather untraditional method of narrating one's life story, the practice of memoir seeks to mirror the experience of remembering.

The memory collage that consequently takes shape is the result of a formal choice that memoirists can make due to the liberties provided by the genre. Thus they can utilize nontraditional structures as well as a blend of styles and devices drawn from

other genres (Buss 68). It enables them to exhibit their conscious and constant attempts at self-(re-)evaluation in order to locate the self within the social and cultural moment. This explains why the memoir is such an appealing genre to members of marginalized groups who feel that their experiences are either misrepresented or lacking any kind of representation or recognition in society.

Based on the discussion of features that characterize the memoir as a genre I conclude that compared to autobiography it seems more appropriate when writers attempt to construct the self against the traditional notion of completeness and wholeness that is pursued in traditional autobiographies. And while there certainly are postmodern autobiographies, most notably those by Roland Barthes and Vladimir Nabokov, they do narrate the autobiographer's whole life rather than a significant phase and seem to constitute the exception that proves the rule. As such, it is memoirs that appear more suitable to bring an understanding of the individual to the surface that recognizes them, in Buss's words, as "embedded, embodied, localized, constituted, (and) fragmented" beings (68). Hence this genre projects multiplicity within a frame that provides enough room "to explore the hold of systems of power, oppression, and exploitation," (69) whereas autobiographies tend to engage their readers less actively and often lack a narrative voice that is outwardly conscious of its reflexive engagement in the act of remembering.

The following analysis of East German childhood memoirs will involve a structural analysis based on the characteristics of the genre outlined in this section as well as a thematic analysis that is grounded in the larger subjects of memory, identity

and the construction of identity through the act of remembering discussed in the previous chapters.

Chapter Three: *Ostalgie* – Explorations of a Discourse

The euphoric popular response to the peaceful revolution in the fall 1989 and German unification in 1990 among East Germans was followed by disappointment about the economic and socio-cultural transformations after the *Wende*. Particularly the rising unemployment rates and the increasing sense of having been colonized by the West gave rise to resentments toward West German hegemony and a counter-discourse developed. It rejected the wholesale dismissal of the East German past and particularly the notion that ordinary lives had been impossible in a dictatorship and that living under constant oppression had disciplined East Germans into becoming obedient subjects and participants in their own subjugation. Among many, if not most East Germans, a sense of nostalgia for the past soon emerged that became known as *Ostalgie*. Initially reflected in the return of East German products to store shelves, it depicts the GDR past in predominantly nostalgic terms. In the early 1990s, it came to dominate many newly published literary texts, particularly memoirs about childhood and youth. The authors of these narratives, who were born in the GDR between the early and late 1970s, comprise a new generation of writers, and their accounts range from the naïve and uncritical nostalgia of Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* to the critique of such a mode of representing the past in Claudia Rusch's ironically titled *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*. As these two texts reflect the two poles of the *Ostalgie* spectrum, I will discuss them in exemplary analyses in the following chapter.

III. 1. Nostalgia

The nostalgic state of mind is commonly understood as retrospection marked by a melancholic longing for a lost paradise. The term ‘nostalgia’ is derived from Greek *nostos* (the return home) and *algos* (pain) (Jacoby 5; Ender 138), and it is close in meaning to the English *homesickness* and the German *Heimweh* (Jacoby 5). The nostalgic person is compelled to idealize the past as the ‘good old days’ in order to fulfill present emotional needs (5). The melancholic sense of loss which the nostalgic person feels is due to a yearning for something—an object, a place, or a person—that begins after separation from it, or, as Jacoby describes it: “*Le temps* must be *perdu* before the *recherche* can begin” (9). Historically, nostalgia was originally categorized as medical concept and a disease most prominently expressed in the seventeenth century among soldiers who were away from home and showed symptoms associated with dislocation, such as strong mood swings, loss of appetite, and the pressing desire to return home (Austin 4-5). Johannes Hofer explored the diagnosis of nostalgia—also referred to as “hypochondriacal melancholy” and “philopatridomania”, i.e. a “mourning for the lost charm of the Native Land” (qtd. in Austin 6)—in his dissertation of 1688, “*De Nostalgia oder Heimwehe.*” Linda Austin explains that Hofer and his contemporaries viewed it as an illness that is a “protracted form of grief based on physical and ideological separation from one’s native space” (Austin 6). More explicitly, she continues, nostalgia was defined as an associative disorder capable of blocking the fluids in the mind (and body) and damming up in specifically those nerve channels of the brain which store impressions of the native land so that sufferers evinced “stupidity of the mind—

attending to nothing hardly, other than an idea of the Fatherland” (qtd. in Austin 7) which consisted predominantly of serene images.

Nostalgia thus describes a longing for the primal feeling of wellbeing in harmony with the surrounding world. Jacoby traces the meaning of nostalgia back to religious discourse by creating a connection to the expulsion from Paradise to which we all long to return. Psychoanalytic interpretations similarly see nostalgia as longing to return to a lost paradise, namely the mother’s womb, or at least the longing for maternal care and protection, “to be cradled in conflict-free unitary reality” (9). Ultimately, the phenomenon of nostalgia constitutes any form of longing related to the experience of personal fulfillment, salvation, and harmony to overcome the sense of self-alienation (9) that has taken place due to separation from a time and/or place retrospectively considered harmonious. Thus, nostalgia is the attempt to reconnect with the object, person, place as the key to regaining that inner harmony.

Nostalgic longing also reflects a striving for continuity and coherence of the self and the efforts to uphold a stable sense of self-identity. The “nostalgic”, as Austin (3) refers to the person affected by nostalgia, feels alienated from an earlier state of happiness and wholeness. Therefore, s/he embarks on a search for the past and for the self that were lost due to circumstances beyond one’s control. And the only instrument for that is remembrance. While the quest for a lost self and a lost past are related, the search for selfhood does not always necessitate nostalgia. Nostalgia rather constitutes a particular mode of perceiving one’s past that is usually embraced by individuals who are in distress about present conditions in their life and feel that they have been

unjustifiably separated from the place in which they believe to have experienced complete happiness and harmony.

As nostalgia indulges in visions of a “vague and disconnected past,” it is strongly related to memory insofar as the act of nostalgic recall emulates the imaginary re-inhabiting of a familiar place (Austin 15). Austin argues that “people reminisce about their home(land) or any kind of familiar place, from which they are currently far away” (2) and thus underlines nostalgia’s link to memory. Therefore, nostalgia shares with other, non-melancholic quests for selfhood the regressive moment since remembering is a conscious regressive effort towards oneness with past states of being. But the nostalgic rememberer carries this regression furthest by indulging in homesickness for the lost paradise (Jacoby 9), whereas the non-nostalgic rememberer is able to gain access to the past without such heightened levels of emotion.

Andreas Huyssen likewise sees melancholic remembering as one of two modes of relating to the past: While nowadays “we rather think of memory as a mode of representation and as belonging ever more to the present,” the way the German Romantics perceived memory was as a way to bind themselves closer to the past, and melancholia was one of its determining manifestations (3). The Romantic idealization of the past was a response to the social and industrial progress of the times that instilled the notion that the old world and with it the old ways of living were being destroyed (2) which resulted in a disruption of the coherence of self-identity because it unbound the ties between past and present. The origins and foundations of traditional values were weakened “to the extent that national traditions and historical pasts are increasingly deprived of their geographic and political groundings,” as Huyssen explains (4).

Industrialization, urbanization, and modernity, therefore, promoted not only social and economic progress but also a turn toward the past as people concerned about the stability and continuity of their lives attempted to hold on to familiar concepts, structures, and environments. Romanticism thus introduced what Huyssen calls “modernity’s permanent lament [about] the loss of a better past, the memory of living in a securely circumscribed place, with a sense of stable boundaries and a place-bound culture with its regular flow of time and a core of permanent relations” (Huyssen 24).

While it is clear that what we often consider to be a “better past” is an illusion conceptualized in the face of unsatisfactory conditions in the present, this notion is also an eternal dream that has accompanied humankind for centuries and still inspires melancholic longing for the past today. Huyssen argues that the reason for this phenomenon is our ongoing attempt to “secure some continuity within time, to provide some extension of lived space within which we can breathe and move” (24). There are times when we feel most vulnerable and stressed because of constant requirements to re-learn and acquire skills in order to adapt to a changing environment, evolving technologies, and political notions (24). We then flee, in Maurice Halbwachs’s words, “from society in order to oppose the present society with the past one,” and we indulge in memories of a better past because we persuade ourselves that “the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past,” especially the past of our youth and childhood (*On Collective* 48, 49). Memory is comfort, Huyssen similarly postulates (11), especially when it is a memory that recalls scenes of a past such as our childhood in which we felt protected from outside pressures and intrusions. These

scenes consequently provide a safe haven for us to turn to when we need to re-acquaint ourselves with the feeling of stability, innocence, and security.

Like Huyssen, Evelyne Ender argues that one should not only stress nostalgia's extremes in a negative light but also emphasize its positive aspects: "It enables us to imagine our experience of the image of past happiness, and it satisfies a powerful yearning for good memories that all of us experience at one time or another" (140). She sees nostalgia as the driving emotion that leads us to our past and as possibly embodying the saving power of remembrance (140). Martin Blum likewise argues that despite the discredit nostalgia has received as a "historically inaccurate and invalid perspective on the past" (137); it also possesses positive features such as serving as an "important register of the present and essentially as a democratic expression." He furthermore writes: "In part those whose official history has been marginalized, silenced, or has never been deemed worthy of official recognition find nostalgic memories the only repository of their past" (137). It is due to this circumstance that the nostalgiac, according to Ender, tends to "find more reality in things remembered than those that can be perceived concretely in the present," and willingly submits him- or herself to a kind of "emotional haze" that is the inexhaustible world of memories in which the true object of nostalgic desire is "nowhere to be found" (141, 142).

Nostalgia as a Result of Culture Shock

Nostalgia is a common reaction to the experience of culture shock such as that faced by East Germans following the opening of the inner-German border. When individuals encounter difficulties during the process of adapting to the new cultural

environment, they are likely to succumb to a sense of frustration about their apparent failure to understand the foreign cultural values and indulge in nostalgic remembering as a form of escape. Wolf Wagner emphasizes that the idealization of notions and values pertaining to the old cultural environment from which the adapting individual is separated is often a result of frustration (1996, 19).

When nostalgia results from culture shock, it reflects the idealization of something from which we are separated—a familiar place or face from the past—paired with a rejection of the circumstances that cause feelings of dissatisfaction, inadequacies, and incomprehensibility. Individuals may be overwhelmed in a completely new and foreign territory—whether geographically or ideologically speaking—because the separation from the old results in the loss of familiar conditions. Individuals become accustomed to the culture they live in, and in following the basic human desire for continuity of the self they have a strong desire to uphold this familiarity as it informs their sense of self-identity. The familiar is, therefore, the fundamental ingredient to their selfhood, and sustaining it is severely threatened when unfamiliarity—in the form of political, cultural, or economic changes—intrudes even if the unfamiliar seemed desirable initially. When change threatens individuals' sense of order and customs, an identity crisis may occur. Peter Wagner describes such a crisis as an “experience of destabilization” (60). Change is perceived as a threat in particular when it calls “into question the orientations that had given stability and direction to the actions and the life” of the individual (60). Wagner explains that any convergence of particular psychosocial conditions can easily disturb our efforts at maintaining our personal identity and self-knowledge in which we are constantly and naturally engaged and that guide our

everyday actions. Crises of orientation are most likely to occur when exactly those notions and norms are challenged that determine and orient our behavior and action (64). Such a challenge occurs, for example, when the individual confronts a new cultural system and is more or less required to adapt by integrating new cultural habits and values into his or her behavior and actions. In other words, culture shock is likely to cause identity crises. In order to repossess the identity that seems lost or useless within the new social environment, individuals have to reconnect with the past self through remembering. In doing so, they inject the frustrations of the current situation into their memory work, which results in the idealization of one's own culture. Thus, nostalgia is likely to result from identity crises as a means of recovering the lost self.

Particularly the first and second generation of East Germans who spent the majority of their lives in the GDR but also the third generation whose voice became dominant in generating the counter-discourse to West German hegemonic claims in the new millennium continue to negotiate the complexities of their acculturation processes. The latter reflects the culture shock experienced after unification and the ensuing identity crisis initiated as East Germans had to critically engage with previously held values, ideals, and convictions as they were confronted with West German reality. Although East Germans had some knowledge of life on the other side of the border through West German TV and radio, which had been widely consumed in GDR households, Dieter Mühlberg argues in his analysis of post-*Wende* cultural assimilation that East Germans could not easily transfer that knowledge and put it to use in their own everyday life once the country was no longer separated. They were certainly able to learn and find strategies and techniques to adjust, "but many East Germans have not

yet [as of 2002] achieved an inner coherence among all the details of their personal and public life” (3). Mühlberg even suggests that most people among the three East German generations may never fully assimilate because they will always make at least minor faux pas that remind them and others that they are always also subject to another mindset and pattern of meaning. Hence, only the generations who have not been socialized in the GDR have a better chance at overcoming the Cold War legacy of the East-West binary and predominantly identify as German.

Wagner points out that the culture shock that East Germans experienced or as of 1996/1999 were still experiencing derived primarily from the dramatic imbalance in social conditions. The most significant change for East Germans, who had never experienced unemployment, were the mass layoffs after 1990 due to company closures: In 1994, every eleventh household was without salaried income in the East, whereas the unemployment rate in the West was half of that. By then, the average income per person in the so-called new federal states had only increased to about 64.5% of that available to West Germans and in 1991 it had been as low as 40.6% (W. Wagner, 1996, 38). According to the Institute for Economic Research in Munich, even in 2006 East Germans on average still earned only about 69% of the West German per capita income (www.mdr.de, August 29, 2006). In addition to the experience of having their life's accomplishments devalued and unappreciated, East Germans experienced the culture shock in material terms of impoverishment and economic disempowerment (W. Wagner, 1996, 39). Many perceived the loss of financial security as a loss of control over their own life that even exceeded their sense of powerlessness during the dictatorship of the GDR government. Their previous lives and accomplishments seemed

meaningless as they watched helplessly how West German institutions and regulations took over. Consequently, Wagner argues, a sense of impotence, failure, and dizziness spread through East Germany that was barely recognized as such by West Germans (40). East Germans who did find new employment were confronted with socio-cultural differences to which they had to adjust. In East Germany, a place of work also constituted the center of most people's social circle as most employees worked in the same position and company for decades and even their entire professional life in the course of which they developed intensive and extensive social networks among their colleagues. In the new capitalist system, based on strict hierarchies which require both compliance and competition as well as frequent changes in companies and positions, the stability and predictability of the past work life and the sense of collegiality were greatly idealized in a nostalgic flight from present conditions into fantasies of an idyllic past. While GDR citizens coupled personal and professional lives out of necessity, whether to get ahead or simply to get along with colleagues, to acquire desired but rare goods like water melons or bananas via the "underground" barter society that had developed in the GDR, these social networks played a significant role in people's self-identity. With unification and the introduction of Western systems, however, these networks dissolved quickly and the competencies people had acquired in navigating them through years and decades were useless. And the notion of work changed from constituting the center of such social networks to a means of earning a living (Mühlberg 5; W. Wagner, 1999, 63).

Wolf Wagner provides a number of examples for cultural changes in other fields of life that contributed to the general feeling of *Ohnmacht* and powerlessness of East

Germans, particularly in the decade after the fall of the Wall. Given that there was, officially, no unemployment in East Germany, creating a reputable image of oneself for superiors was something about which GDR citizens did not have to worry. With unification, however, Western standards and values became dominant insofar as money and success are now perceived as the ultimate guarantees for happiness. The problem for East Germans was thus not only to find jobs that earn enough money but also to identify a scale that could indicate their rate of success, personally, culturally, or professionally (W. Wagner, 1999, 73-81). Another example Wagner discusses is everyday communication which was structured based on different systems of signification and social interaction in East and West: While West Germans communicated with acquaintances or strangers on a rather superficial level that avoided intimate personal details with the potential to embarrass them or convey the impression of inferiority, East Germans favored topics that included difficult personal experiences in order to create a level of intimacy and equality among each other (138). As West Germans were little aware of the socio-cultural significance that creating intimacy through so-called sharing had in the GDR, they (mis)understood the mode of discourse as complaints that gave rise to the figure of the *Jammer-Ossi* (138). A final example concerns the desire for harmony that is more important to East Germans as a smallest common denominator, while West Germans favor a more direct approach pointing out differences and mistakes as a preventative measure and more efficient cooperation (144). This list of changes affecting most East Germans in different aspects of life can be continued, but these examples should suffice to indicate the drastic nature of changes in everyday life caused by the *Wende*.

New requirements demanded of East Germans that they change old patterns and ways of thinking in order to assimilate to Westernized society and to distance themselves from the values and attitudes learned under Socialism. This familiar world was to be forgotten as it was without meaning and value for the future prosperity of unified Germany. The familiar, therefore, seems irreversibly lost and with it, the past self. Hence, it is understandable that the first and second generation of East Germans are hesitant or skeptical to relearn everything and, more importantly, to devalue their whole past life, and long to return to the familiar world by immersing themselves in the past through remembrance. Active recall serves as a reminder of the way things used to be—from a subjective standpoint—and indicates the deficiencies of the present. It is a natural reaction to the perceived crisis of identity that acculturating individuals experience as they face the demise of (almost) all the values, norms, and ethics that made sense in the past and that made up the world in which the self felt secure and at home. Hence, when acculturating individuals feel at the lowest point of their culture shock experience, they recall the past melancholically in its most positive light as this seems the only way to regain a sense of the lost self. Nostalgia is thus a very likely a side effect of the culture shock experience, and for many East Germans the only possible anchor to their sense of self and respect for themselves.

As it allows individuals to repossess a sense of their selves, nostalgia can have positive effects—as long as one does not ‘wallow’ in it while losing track of the presence: It can help East Germans, for instance, to rebuild their views of themselves and their self-confidence by creating a positive self-image based on their past experiences and accomplishments and thus aid them in adjusting to new structures and

systems. Wolf Wagner explains that to view the other negatively, or to blame the other for one's problems, while aggrandizing the self as part of the escalation phase in culture shock is advantageous insofar as it reconstructs the self-confidence that was lost in the previous phase – the second, so-called U-curve phase of culture shock – because individuals had felt overwhelmed with the newness and foreignness of the cultural environment regardless of how much they had wanted to be there (23). This transformation of fear into action no longer directs aggression inwards (which would lead to an acceptance of negative images of one's own group created by the dominant other) but outwards and towards the other, i.e. members of the foreign culture (23). To the nostalgic, the other is embodied in everything that is perceived as wrong, incomprehensible, and strange. The present represents a threat to self-identity, whereas the past represents all that is needed to re-establish the familiar harmony. Thus, remembering is not only an escape from the present but also an attempt to reach out to the old self, to all that represents one's essence.

While nostalgia thus enables individuals to uphold their identity, it also constitutes a form of escapism and as such both minimizes efforts to resolve conflicts in the present and reinforces apprehensions about the future. Furthermore, it has a negative impact on the relationship between the individual or the group and the perceived other: The emphasis on the contrasts between two cultural groups reinforces, in Wagner's view, ethnocentric sentiments which provoke tensions rather than encouraging more harmonious relationships between the members of both groups (25). East German nostalgia can thus be disadvantageous to the country as a whole as it prevents East and West Germans from coming closer and familiarizing themselves with one another to

bridge the gaps between them instead of widening them (23). Nonetheless, more than two decades after unification many East Germans have embraced a culture commonly known as *Ostalgie* that celebrates the memory of all things GDR in order to recall a familiar lifestyle.

Ostalgie

First used in stand-up comedy (Blum 136), the term *Ostalgie* is a portmanteau word composed of the German *Ost* (east) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia) that denotes East German form of the general notion of nostalgia. Initially, *Ostalgie* was considered as a “fond glance backward to a fallen world based on socialist security and full employment, communal solidarity and progressive welfare programs” (Betts, 2003, 191). This “fond glance” soon evolved into the desire to recapture the experience of living in the GDR, which in part transformed it into a materialist quest for so-called *Ostprodukte*, products produced and consumed in the former GDR. Paul Betts describes this paradoxical situation as follows: Before German unification, “GDR goods served as source of perennial dissatisfaction and embarrassment,” whereas Western products “served as unrivaled cultural capital.” The latter were available for East Germans either in the *Intershop* for West German currency or in so-called *Westpakete* sent to them by relatives or acquaintances across the border. Following 1989, however, West German products seemed to have lost most of their appeal. *Ostprodukte*, however, became “emblems of pride and nostalgia” as the symbols of a vanished world and “newly idealized fragments of a crumbled identity” (Betts, 2003, 195). In addition to making a comeback in grocery stores across the new federal states, some of the *Ostprodukte* are

marketed specifically in opposition to Western products and, interestingly, also in response to the dissatisfaction of so many East Germans. Slogans such as “Der Osten hat gewählt” for Kathi baked goods, “Super Illu. One of us” for the *Super Illu* magazine, or “Ich rauche Juwel, weil ich den Westen schon getestet hab” for Juwel cigarettes—in allusion to the successful Philip Morris advertising campaign of Marlboro cigarettes highlighting the slogan “Test the West”—indicate the commercialization of East German memory. More importantly, they reflect the notion of failed expectations, victimhood, and survival, catering to East Germans who are trying to regain their sense of self by clinging to remnants and symbols of their past (Bach 549). *Ostalgie* is thus embedded in a variety of discursive areas and easily detected by both East and West Germans as they are familiar with its use and purpose.

The specific connotations of *ostalgic* sentiments, nevertheless, differ depending on the interpreter’s background and perspective: While most East Germans understand *Ostalgie* as a representation of original heritage and culture and wish to use different material, linguistic, or ideological expressions of it as a way to distinguish themselves from the Western identity, it is perceived by West Germans as a delusion and a pathetic longing for the Socialist past (Bach 546). Unacknowledged by the latter, the decisive aspect of the *Ostalgie* phenomenon to East Germans is a sense of loss embedded in it. It was caused by the metaphorical relocation from the former GDR to unified Germany, during which East Germans lost their status. They had acquired a degree of prestige among the Eastern European nations in terms of their accomplishments in technology and industry that was furthered by their apparent overnight gain of Westernization by means of popular uprising in 1989. Yet, once the GDR was incorporated into West

Germany, their status sank radically. This sudden decline was exemplified by the unemployment and lower wages that were supposed to be transitional elements, but soon became entrenched aspects of life after unification. The second-class status of East Germans continues to highlight “the failed promise of unification to bring the East up to the level of the West” (Bach 548). It also intensifies their dissatisfaction and frustration supporting in turn the persistence of nostalgic feelings.

Ostprodukte have become *lieux de mémoire* insofar as they function as the material traces that preserve the past and to give meaning to “all forms of witnesses, even those usually deemed insignificant” (Blum 137). They were invested with meaning and “the imagination and knowledge of the remembered” due to the culture shock crisis that brought about anxieties about the present and/or the future. Blum proposes that *Ostalgie* is “symptomatic of the type of drastic changes that leave large parts of the population dislocated and experiencing a profound sense of loss that leads them to question the validity of their previous lives and their very identities” (137-8). As history is memorialized, this population is given the opportunity to reclaim it in order to attribute new meaning to this history. Blum thus stresses that the aforementioned democratic element of nostalgia as remembering allows disenfranchised groups whose past is not deemed important enough to become participants in official history (138). East Germans are a disenfranchised group within the larger context of German reunification because their former homeland has literally been erased by history; their achievements dismissed, their experiences considered worthless. They have been left to wonder about their place in German history and the continuity of their individual biographies. Hence, as personal experiences have been “considered highly conspicuous, or

downright discredited in the official discourse of German history,” *Ostalgie* and its material manifestations seem to be the only way for East Germans to express some kind of resistance to the “physical erasure of everything that is connected with the GDR” (139).

Besides the material representations of *Ostalgie* in the form of *Ostprodukte*, East German memory is also embodied in literary texts. One of the more recent narratives is Julia Schoch’s 2009 novel *Mit der Geschwindigkeit des Sommers* which narrates the despair of a woman whose life in the GDR centered around the longing for a better life and whose dreams were crushed as her desire for freedom was fulfilled. It is the literary expression of an aspect of *Ostalgie* raised by Bach who postulates that it does not necessarily represent the longing to return to GDR life as it was. He argues that it is rather a “longing for the fantasies and desires that were once possible in that past” (547). As the widely available West German television broadcasts disseminated images of even ordinary people living in fictional worlds of plenty, they generated a sense of longing in the GDR where personal restraint and hard work were promoted as primary elements in creating a harmonious future in a utopian state (547). The longing for both such harmony and the acquisition of a West German lifestyle comprised the particular East German “mode of longing” that was “premised on an unattainable object of desire” (547). This desire seemed to be fulfilled partially with German unification and East German integration into West Germany. However, East Germans quickly discovered that attaining the kind of lifestyle they had mistakenly perceived as the West German standard was impossible, and, as a result, their disappointment was magnified and could only be soothed by mental time travel into the past. Signifiers of *Ostalgie* allow for

such travel – be they mundane material objects invested with personal meaning or narratives and films that focus on GDR memories.

Ostprodukte do not only function as mementos and means of repossessing history, but they also play a significant role in literature. Since 1990, East German memory has become the subject of memoirs and (auto)biographies and the naming of *Ostprodukte* in them has been established a device used to create collectivity between narrators and readers based on the recognition of the objects regardless of the degree of privacy attributed to them. In the GDR, “there was little variety of goods, no brand-name competition, and many products introduced in the 1960s stayed in production until 1989 with little or no change in content or form” (Betts, 2003, 200). A consequence of this “aesthetics of sameness” (200), many GDR products could function transgenerationally as markers of this particular culture and identity. The communal quality of *Ostprodukte* is apparent in how East Germans “still bond over certain standardized and mass-produced commodities” and that “catchwords are enough for mutual recognition, and to start a lively conversation” (201) among those East Germans who connect their past with those products and names. Naming products, such as *Rotkäppchen* Champagne, *Haloren* chocolates, *FRÖSI* magazine, or *Lada* cars in any context but particularly in personal narratives immediately generates identificatory notions for East Germans for whom the recognition of specific products not only triggers personal memories but also targets their ‘lost’ biography and history. They feel a bond with the person naming the products because it indicates their shared past in a country that has vanished. Mentioning East German TV shows and characters, such as *Pittiplatsch* and *Schnatterinchen*, GDR-made furniture and appliances, GDR artists, or

simply East German cities that used to be industrial or technological centers, creates the same effect.

These *lieux de mémoire* have been invested with personal meaning that can reinforce a sense of solidarity with other East Germans based upon the shared experience of GDR everyday life. Thus they have served to bridge “individual and society, private and public memory since 1989” (Betts 201). More importantly, they have offered East Germans the only possibility of returning home. While it is only a form of mental time travel, it has been considered the only cure for the physical symptoms of nostalgia and homesickness. Linda Austin explains that by the late eighteenth century people suffering from nostalgia had realized that not only did remembering their past “generate aesthetic pleasure” but that “copies and replicas” of objects reminiscent of this past could fulfill the same purpose (3). Friedrich Schiller, for example, while a student of medicine at the Stuttgart Military Academy from 1774 to 1780, treated a young man named Grammont who had succumbed to nostalgia with long walks in the countryside that would generate familiar feelings of home and offered mental relief and physical freedom. Subsequently, Schiller turned to the pastoral “as realm of an imagined past” evoking native scenery in his treatment of nostalgia and thus contributed to its transition from a medical to an aesthetic concept (5). In the eighteenth century, particularly literature depicting childhood memories and peaceful nature, such as in pastorals, became a means to treat nostalgiacs. The beneficial effects were believed to derive from the simulation of an idealized surrounding for which homesick individuals nostalgically long and with which they would consequently identify. In an attempt to

achieve a similar effect, East German memoirs recreate a world of the past to which former citizens of the GDR can escape.

In the following, I will explore how East German childhood and youth are represented in two post-*Wende* memoirs, Jana Hensel's nostalgic *Zonenkinder* and Claudia Rusch's anti-nostalgic *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* as well as their respective reader reception that actualizes the potential embodied in *lieux de mémoire* to impact collective memory. The significant responses to both memoirs particularly by East Germans of the third generation indicate that they still experience a nostalgic longing for their childhood and youth and reject the claim that ordinary lives were solely determined by the power structures of the dictatorship as represented in West German discourse. However, the reception of both memoirs indicates that readers also reject both Hensel's claim of typicality expressed in the narrative *We* she employs and her naïve and uncritical embrace of *Ostalgie*. And while Rusch's memoir criticizes the idealization of the GDR that is paradigmatic for much of post-*Wende* engagement with the past given by depicting her family's first-hand experience of oppression in the dictatorship, she represents the opposition movement in the GDR that sought to democratize Socialism in idealistic terms and clearly identifies as an *Ossi* as the core of her sense of who she is. She also stresses the differences between her own criticism of East German power structures and West German discourse as she retains some of the socialist ideals she acquired as part of her socialization in the opposition movement and thus defines her past and present subject position in opposition to West German claims of hegemony.

III.2. Embracing Ostalgie in Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*

As *lieux de mémoire* or memory media, literature can function as a carrier of collective memory. According to Astrid Erll, such literary narratives share aspects of memory stories communicated in everyday life, such as the process of selection and narrative configuration. Through these processes autobiographical storytellers select elements from their lives among the facts, impressions, and participants. And like the writer who has an array of literary genres and devices at his or her disposal, the person seeking to convey memories in everyday communication can use different narrative techniques to do so (145). Writers, for example, relay events to their readers by means of a narrative voice that serves to guide the reader's attention and awareness. Similarly, non-literary storytellers recount their memories in everyday conversation by using narrative perspectives specifically chosen to portray the remembered events in a particular light and in a particular atmosphere.

Nostalgia is one of the perspectives narrators may choose to convey their story. It constitutes a special lens through which they represent past events to the reader. Being portrayed and perceived this way, these events acquire a specific coloring and mood. In *Zonenkinder*, which I will analyze in the following section, Jana Hensel conveys her memories in a highly nostalgic mode. Therefore, an analysis of her text has taken the possibility of memory distortion into consideration. As I discussed earlier, the process of remembering is subject to distortion due to current circumstances which influence the way events are recalled. When nostalgia plays an important role in remembering, it will lead to an idealized and largely uncritical notion of the past. Hensel's nostalgia reflects her strong sense of homelessness in post-unification

Germany, of conflicted identities, and particularly loss of a past she had barely come to know before it disappeared forever. In fact, her nostalgia may be so intense because its object is even more a construct than the past the generation of older siblings, from whom she expressly differentiates her own cohort of *Zonenkinder*, the ten- to twelve-year olds at the time of the *Wende*. This perspective and her decision to only supplement her own childhood memories by evidence that would reinforce rather than challenge them blinds her with regard to the dominant power structures in the GDR and the effect they had on ordinary lives as she simply was too young to have memories of the countless and subtle forms of everyday oppression in real-existing socialism.

Narrating Loss to Convey Ostalgie

Hensel evokes the sense of nostalgia immediately in the title of her first chapter, “Das schöne warme Wir-Gefühl” (The Warm Fuzzy Feeling of Togetherness). The first memory she depicts is one of communal spirit at the demonstrations in Leipzig in 1989 that she experienced as a twelve-year-old with her mother and then traces back to the days and objects of her early childhood. Given her lack of a critical stance toward the object of her recollections, the author is unaware of the irony in depicting East German communal spirit at demonstrations demanding democracy that would be victorious in establishing democratic structures but also led to the dissolution of both the country of her childhood and the communal spirit she remembers. Hensel’s account also lacks acknowledgement that the sense of togetherness she experienced at the demonstrations was directed against a regime that enforced its dictatorial power structures through both the secret police or *Stasi* as well as its countless informants or

inoffizielle Mitarbeiter who had been bribed or threatened into informing on their colleagues, neighbors, relatives or even parents, children, and spouses.

Instead, Hensel traces the sense of togetherness she finds lacking in her present life from the demonstrations back to her childhood which she depicts as a utopian fairytale land. Despite the fact that at the time *Pioniernachmittage*, *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, and meetings with *Patenbrigaden* were often experienced as dreadfully boring and a waste of time, Hensel depicts them in idealized terms. After unification, the once well-structured afternoons of elementary and high school students, involving, for example, community service such as collecting newspaper and bottles for recycling or spending time with peers in athletic organizations, disappeared and were replaced with endless hours of TV watching. Other GDR staples were likewise replaced with substitutes – *Puffreis* with popcorn, *Trommel* with *BRAVO*, *Kaufhallen* with *Supermärkten*, *Nickis* with T-Shirts, and *Polykliniken* with *Ärztelhäusern* (Hensel 20-21). Hensel enumerates these changes that were visible immediately following the *Wende* to stress the perception that her childhood has turned into a fairy tale or a museum “that has no name and no address and that few people are interested to open” (20). She emphasizes throughout her memoir that her *Heimat*, the GDR, was lost in the rather speedy process of its abandonment. In 1989 and 1990 most East Germans were eager to forget the GDR quickly, “lange wollten wir sie vergessen, wünschten uns nichts sehnlicher, als dass sie so schnell wie möglich verschwinden würde” (Hensel 14) (“Nothing remains of our childhood country—which is of course exactly what everyone wanted” [Hensel, trans., 4]). At that point in time, it was easy to part with the familiar because the desire to live a West German life was finally about to be fulfilled. The

author points out that only when life in the GDR was over and the reality of the new life in a capitalist, consumerist, and individualist society set in, did East Germans slowly start to realize what they had lost (14). Due to the widespread initial willingness to shed the GDR past so readily, it now seems harder to go back and rediscover this *Heimat*. Nonetheless, Hensel feels the need to do so because she fears “den Boden unter meinen Füßen nur wenig zu kennen” (14) (“that we no longer have any idea where we stand” [Hensel, trans., 4]) and to be unable to reconnect with where she came from, with her background and identity. Things, places, streets, even school subjects were no longer called by the same name, and, contrary to her West German friends, she can no longer go back to the home of her childhood, experience the old stores and old smells. Facing this dilemma, Hensel realizes that the new German community does not seem to include her. Apparently she belongs to the group of East Germans who, she realizes in conversations with West German and other Western European peers, does not share their socio-cultural points of reference. As an outsider she cannot join this particular memory group and wonders what to do with her childhood memories that have gone out of fashion “like a summer dress” and “were not even fit to make conversation at a party” (26). This sense of being out of place is representative of the identity issue most East Germans were subjected to during and immediately after the *Wende*: At that point of time, life in the GDR started to become somewhat of a taboo issue in the frame of East-West German communication. The cultural and professional experiences of the GDR were ridiculed and de-valued while East Germans were required to adjust to the dominant norms and values. Hensel illustrates that in the new socio-political environment, their past lives and memories suddenly seemed valueless and useless.

The socio-economic and cultural markers that allowed them to affiliate with their particular group had disappeared while substitutes were not yet in place to guide East Germans in forming a new identity.

As my earlier exploration of culture shock and acculturative stress factors shows, such a sudden erosion of one's cultural and existential basis is likely to cause the individual to experience an identity crisis. During this crisis the individual realizes that once familiar signs and cues of the culture with which they identified, both consciously and subconsciously, are no longer applicable. This renders the new environment unpredictable and disorienting during the adjustment period. Furthermore, East Germans were anything but encouraged to acculturate into West German society as the dominant culture did not accommodate their identity transition; instead, it ascribed to the minority the notion of inferiority. Upon gaining awareness of many rather negative aspects of capitalism, such as systematic unemployment and social insecurity, East Germans also felt less interested in furthering their integration. While in 1989 they favored assimilation euphorically, resistance to Western values soon ensued and inspired in many East Germans an overwhelming desire to return to what in retrospect seemed the more humane and idealistic society of their past. Jana Hensel seeks to voice and explore the identity crisis of this group of East Germans. As she stresses frequently that her childhood is lost, she imparts her memoir with a strong sense of nostalgic sadness. Consequently, *Ostalgie* and the yearning for the lost homeland are the dominant themes in *Zonenkinder*. They inform her quest for an identity that she and other members of her generation of East Germans can embrace. Moreover, these

themes are a means to help reconcile the experience of a childhood and adolescence in the GDR with adulthood in unified Germany.

Recollection represents the only possibility of a return to the old world for which many East Germans longed in the wake of the unsatisfactory *Wende* changes. Literature has become the primary means of engaging with GDR memories, and, at the same time, retaining them in order to be acknowledged and accepted as historically valuable by future generations. It proves to be the ideal memory medium, as I have discussed in my earlier analysis of the relationship between memory, identity, and literature. Generally speaking, with the help of literary texts, future generations can resort to the socio-cultural knowledge base embodied in memories for such relevant purposes as legitimizing their collective belonging and create a sense of coherence with regard to their identities. Literature, furthermore, possesses the ability to mediate memories as it aids the distribution of cultural knowledge that characterizes a specific time and place. Literature thus operates as a significant link between individual and collective memory. This is accomplished through the narrative process as it makes personal experiences relevant for and accessible to the larger collective. Moreover, the narrative devices implemented in the text strategically act as psychological cues that enable the act of remembering, and ultimately the creation of more memory stories, in audiences. Finally, as it is circulated among different populations, literature also performs a synchronizing function: It ensures that memory communities receive an equal amount of memory-based socio-cultural knowledge from which to select material they deem appropriate at a certain time and under certain conditions.

It is particularly to life narratives that the capacity to make sense has been ascribed. The ordering of life events, narrating them as memory stories and attributing meaning to them, allows the writers to make sense of their lives. Choosing the literary genre of memoir for *Zonenkinder* allows Hensel to do exactly that: to create meaning through narration and re-claim a her personal past and self-identity that were lost and forgotten in the course of grand socio-economic and cultural reorganization and transform them into cultural memory. The author hopes that remembering her own roots might provide the stability and direction many East Germans fear to have lost during *Wende* turmoil. As I have illustrated earlier, literature can, in its function as a memory artifact, not only provide a public forum to represent the existential values incorporated in life experiences but also aid in analyzing these experiences. This process occurs when the rememberer integrates the experiences temporally, spatially, and personally into a social frame of reference (Heinrich 26-27). Our narrated experiences thus represent the “tales of who we are” (Schacter 73). They simultaneously construct our identity by generating coherence and continuity that inform our sense of self and self-worth. The self-confidence gained was much needed by East Germans as they were confronted with a deep sense of disorientation and socio-cultural inferiority caused by the drastic changes that required them to reject beliefs and values acquired during their GDR socialization. The experiences that had shaped their identities were devalued, i.e. declared useless for the new society. In addition to such disappointment by the socio-economic system that had been at the center of their hopes and desires, the demands to adjust to this system as speedily as possible seemed unmanageable and, hence, frustrating as they required East Germans to adopt a new identity – becoming Germans

and abandoning their GDR identity. Transformed into passive recipients of new cultural values, they were, therefore, marginalized as a group because of their widely perceived inability to contribute anything valuable to the process of unification. These are the aspects of the present that function as motivational catalysts for writers like Jana Hensel. She and others like her convey their autobiographical knowledge to give her marginalized group a voice and reestablish a certain degree of power and control over their lives. Their hope is that the reconstruction of the past will lead to a renewed sense of continuity between the past and the present self for themselves as well as their readers. And while memoirs about GDR childhood and youth thematize the past and arise out of the need to deal with unsatisfactory conditions in the present, they also point toward the future by encouraging readers to seek a coherent self that incorporates their East German socialization.

The Collective 'We' of Author and Audience

Besides the personal quest for identity and belonging that most memoirs represent, they may also purposely aim for a deeper connection with the audience that goes beyond expectations that authors of other literary genres may nourish. Most memoirs represent ordinary life experiences in order to draw attention to the fact that, while personal, their stories are also very often illustrative of problems and conflicts that other individuals may experience. The goal then is to encourage a group consciousness that will empower members to re-claim their past and repossess the experiences that made them who they are. Hensel's aspirations are markedly collective as she attempts to convey the experiences of her childhood in the form of anecdotes and subjective

reminiscences of her memory of the GDR. In order to create a collective memory and to perpetuate knowledge of the GDR, Hensel's memoir reaches out to her readers by referring to specific events, people, and objects that reflect and symbolize the particular time period, which, as the author stresses repeatedly, has been lost. She employs these familiar entities as cues that trigger the readers' memory in order to initiate their own recollections. Due to the intricate knowledge of GDR lifestyle displayed and the fact that she engages in little cultural translation West German audiences would need, Hensel's implied target audience is East Germans who are, like herself, members of the generation born in the GDR in the mid-1970s. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that most of the reader responses to this memoir published in Tom Kraushaar's exploration of the *Zonenkinder* phenomenon are indeed written by members of this generation. (To aid the understanding of potential West German readers, Hensel appended the text with a very brief German-German lexicon that explains some typical GDR terms, objects, and phenomena.) The readers of *Zonenkinder* are, regardless of their background, given the opportunity to travel back in time to an atmosphere and lifestyle represented by *lieux de mémoire*. The challenge to which Hensel aspires—that of creating a memory collective—explains, among other things, her almost aggressive use of an overwhelming number of GDR references from common food and furniture to TV shows, GDR celebrities, and school activities. Not only are they the memory fragments that reappear in the author's consciousness as a result of her time travel back to her own childhood. They also operate as *lieux de mémoire* for the readers to generate a sense of awareness of their origin and the things they have in common with other East Germans. As I explained in the analysis of the process of remembering, the

tendency to distort the actual event is strong due to the influences at the time when the event was encoded as well as the time of its narration. The memory stories inspired by some of the many GDR artifacts Hensel mentions during the eight chapters are inherently idiosyncratic. Their subjectivity is the main characteristic of life narratives due to the author-narrator correlation. Nonetheless, because the objects that function as *lieux de mémoire* in *Zonenkinder* were so broadly available and commonly used in the GDR, East German readers will have no difficulty recognizing them and recalling their own experiences upon the encounter.

At the beginning of the text, Hensel immediately seeks to connect with her primary audience by pointing out that she is part of the East German in-group because she grew up in Leipzig and knows what she is talking about. She also attempts early on to recreate a very specific atmosphere familiar to anyone used to GDR public transportation, not only in Leipzig: the experience of taking the rather outdated tram in which the doors “sich nie richtig schließen ließen, sodass der Wind eiskalt hereinpiff, während man sich auf den beheizten Ledersitzen den Hintern verbrannte” (11-12) (“didn’t shut tight. An ice-cold draft would blow in through the cracks, while you burnt your butt on the overheated leather seats” [Hensel, trans., 1-2]) Hensel’s description of this memory scene in which she accompanies her mother to one of the early *Montagsdemonstrationen* as a thirteen-year old thus invites East and West German readers alike to recall TV images of East Germans demanding reforms and democracy through such now well-known protest slogans as “Wir sind das Volk” (We are the people). Most Germans today are aware of the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9th. They will remember that these demonstrations—first in Leipzig,

in September of 1989, then in other major East German cities, such as Dresden, Halle, Magdeburg, Berlin and Rostock—were the precursor to the *Wende*. The atmosphere at this time was undoubtedly one of celebration and expectation, a sense of elation, and hopes for a new beginning. The political apathy and indifference that once characterized GDR-citizens was transformed into activism inspired by the notion of actually putting into practice many of the ideals that had informed the ideology embraced by the GDR government. Hensel does not indulge in this celebratory mood too long, however, for it is her goal to recast this particular historic moment as the beginning of the end of her childhood paradise, and thus the dividing line between two worlds:

Dies hier [ist] erst der Anfang, ... all das würde dazu führen, dass die Mauer fallen und unser Land bald verschwinden und alles mitnehmen werde, sodass nichts mehr von ihm übrig bliebe... (13)

This was just the beginning, ... that the walls would fall and the German Democratic Republic—Communist East Germany—would soon disappear without a trace, taking everything we had known with it.... (Hensel, trans., 3)

For most East Germans, the euphoria in the Fall of 1989 quickly gave way to a sense of post-*Wende* dystopia. This development is depicted by Hensel as her departure into adolescence and the loss of her childhood world that now seems like a fairy tale. She also compares her mental time travels to a museum visit. She suggests that like the childhood of her generation who also grew up in the GDR, hers is unidentified, without meaning, unacknowledged and anchor-less because this museum does not have a name or an address (25). A name could attribute meaning to the museum by granting it existential credibility, and an address would make the museum visible to the public as it could be located and found on a (mental) map. But without

name or address, the stories of a GDR childhood may indeed seem like strange tales from a different world, a world that vanished as its inhabitants sought to generate a post-*Wende* identity.

Many of the responses to *Zonenkinder* gathered by Tom Kraushaar express agreement with Hensel on this particular issue. Readers wrote that Hensel returned to them memories they had long forgotten (77, 91), that she described a common lost past very true to detail (85, 90), and they appreciate her attempt not only to capture the GDR atmosphere of their childhood but also to retain and distribute knowledge about it (88; 92). Some readers also mention that they are thankful for this book because they have grown tired of renouncing and disguising their past (87- 88). They admire Hensel for her courage to provide a space for a lost identity (89, 91) as many of them are still struggling to locate their selfhood between GDR childhood and adolescence and adulthood in unified Germany. Like Hensel, they have developed a sense of being different which she describes as particularly striking when she is in the company of people of her age who did not grow up in the GDR. When these peers swap childhood stories, they are able to bond over the exchange of memories (26) because the *lieux de mémoire* of their childhood still exist, or if not, are still talked about. Among a group of West Germans and other Western Europeans, Hensel's memories, however, are utterly different and incompatible and can thus not function to include her in the conversationally generated group identity. She identifies her own group as "zwitterige Ostwestkinder" (54), which loosely translates as "hermaphroditic east-west-children" and refers to East Germans like herself born in the mid-1970s who were in their early teens during the *Wende*, or "children of reunification" as Hensel's translator Jefferson

Chase calls them (50). Hensel's readers share Hensel's peculiar identity as the majority of their responses indicate. Due to their exposure to largely similar conditions in the same time period, this imaginary in-group consists of members who have similar experiences and, therefore, similar memories about life in the GDR. They also share in the sense of disorientation following the *Wende* during their final years of high school as well as their gradual adjustment to West German norms and values. Hensel's memoir thus constitutes a *lieux de mémoire* as it connects her to this group and creates a collective memory for this particular demographic whose identity rests on the extraordinary experience of growing up in a country that no longer exists.

Hensel mentions the earmuffs she wore at the *Montagsdemonstrationen* to evoke the fashion trend at the end of the eighties and relate even such everyday objects to the beginning of the end of the GDR. On the following pages, she describes the changes in her daily school life that took place in the course of the *Wende* due to the Westernization in the school system and the curriculum. Not only did the large framed photographs of Socialist leaders disappear from classrooms, but so did organized afternoon activities and assemblies, sports competitions, as well as youth TV shows and magazines (15-19). Hensel relates these unique GDR experiences briefly but allows herself at times to indulge a little bit longer in one or the other memory scene: For example, in her account of the *Milchdienst* and of the options for drinking one's milk in a cool way. She also reminds East German readers of the fact that dentists used to be located in many schools and that students had to visit them regularly so that the unpopular drilling noises and the smell of antiseptics was part of everyday life at school. Sharing these memories, Hensel's narrative tone exhibits the simultaneity of joy and

sadness paradigmatic for nostalgia. It may, furthermore, reflect the fact that at the time these experiences were considered to be rather dreadful as their school life was strictly organized. While there was a degree of choice in terms of possible after-school activities and the degree of their involvement in the youth organization, all students were expected to participate in one or another *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and demonstrate their loyalty to Socialist ideals and values. For East German readers, these recollections will serve as cues for their own experiences. However, since Hensel is part of the generation of “zwitterige Ostwestkinder,” she also relates her discovery of exciting Western consumer products, such as *Kinder* surprise eggs, *Milka* chocolate, popcorn, *BRAVO* magazine, board games, and comic books (17-19).

Other events and processes to which Hensel refers as symbols of the *Wende* are, for example, the campaigns to re-name places, events, buildings, professions, and streets. New names aimed to suggest new beginnings and, naturally, to dispose of old meanings. But as new languages are generally never acquired easily, especially without repeated practice and full immersion, East Germans continued to see the old referent behind the façade of the new signs. They were constantly reminded that something foreign that had invaded their home. As they perceived the two layers of old and new everywhere, East Germans continuously compared the present and the past, finding predominantly fault with the new and comfort in the old world. As a consequence of the restructuring of all aspects of society, East Germans soon sensed that the degree of communal relations was significantly lower in the new environment than it had been in the GDR. Hensel explains,

War früher der kleinste Anlass recht gewesen, alle einzuladen, sah man sich heute gerade noch zu runden Geburtstagen, goldenen Hochzeiten

oder Jugendweihen. Erinnere ich mich an meine Kindheit, dann sehe ich wilde Gelage bis tief in die Nacht vor mir.... (77)

In the old days, we used any excuse to throw a party and everyone in the family was invited. When I think back on family occasions from my childhood, I remember everyone celebrating deep into the night.... (Hensel, trans.,76)

She continues to describe common East German party essentials, such as the ‘good’ schnaps, GDR peanut puffs and coffee, Bulgarian wine, the famous *Rotkäppchensekt*, and *Eierlikör* in little chocolate waffle cones. These parties often ended with loud discussions of the unbearable current situation in the GDR and the desired, because better, conditions ‘over there’, in the West (78). Once again, Hensel dwells on the familiar, thus connecting with readers who remember the same products and events based on the cues provided. The “memory spark,” as Kraushaar calls it, indeed ignited the recollections of her audience. The following reader, for example, describes how she remembered a long forgotten figure from an East German children’s book, mentioned in Hensel: Reading *Zonenkinder* “war wie eine Wärmflasche für meine Erinnerungen, den plötzlich konnte ich mich an so vieles erinnern... Was habe ich diese Platte (*Alfons Zitterbacke*) geliebt! Vor allem das Kapitel im Schwimmbad oder wo er für Mutti Anchovis kaufen sollte” (“was like a hot water bottle for my memories because suddenly I was able to remember so many things... How I loved the *Alfons Zitterbacke* record! Especially the chapter in the swimming pool or the one in which he was to buy anchovies for his mother”) (Kraushaar 77). Another reader recognizes the landscapes of his childhood in Hensel depictions:

‘Wir waren auf Wäscheplätzen, in Hinterhöfen, unter Kastanienbäumen und Pergolas oder rauf Rollschuhbahnen zu Hause gewesen.’ Ich weiß sehr

gut, wo es dieses alles gab. (Kraushaar 83)

'We were at home in courtyards between laundry hung out to dry, in backyards, under chestnut trees and pergolas or in roller skating arenas.' I know very well where all this was.

From the German *amazon.de* website for *Zonenkinder* Kraushaar selected, among others, a review of a reader who likewise shares many of Hensel's experiences that he recalled upon reading the memoir: "Ich ... hatte an sehr vielen Stellen das Gefühl, mit dem Kauf dieses Buches meine Erinnerungen schriftlich fixiert in den Händen zu halten" ("many times I had the feeling that I was holding my own memories in written form in my hands") (90). And another reader sums up the remembering process that Hensel's memoir initiated for many readers by expressing that "sobald man an sie erinnert, fallen einem dazu unendlich viele eigene Erlebnisse ein... Und jeder Gegenstand aus der DDR ruft eine Melancholie und überschwengliche Wiedersehensfreude in mir hervor, den ich hänge an dieser Erinnerung namens DDR" ("as soon as one remembers all these things, one also recalls an infinite number of personal experiences... And every GDR object mentioned causes me to feel melancholic but also happy about this reunion because I am fond of this memory called GDR") (Kraushaar 91).

The memory scenes, on which Hensel chooses to elaborate – *Milchdienst*, dentists in school, East German family parties – convey a nostalgic mood because they represent the level of event-specific autobiographical knowledge. Schacter asserts that the representation of this particular knowledge in memory stories adds a more personal and intimate quality to the narration. It serves to increase the degree of authenticity as such inside knowledge can only be gained through in-depth participation in an event

(89). Heinrich adds that the lowest level of abstraction of autobiographic knowledge, i.e. event-specific knowledge, encompasses an emotional aura that the rememberer has created for specific events over time (Heinrich 24). While they provide readers with insights into the narrator's perception of events, if her account is too specific, it does not function as cues for their own recollections. While Hensel narrates predominantly on a level that allows readers to generate their own memories, she also incorporates more idiosyncratic experiences in order to signify reliability and stability, security and safety for both herself and her readers. While she intersects representative and idiosyncratic experiences in a harmonious way, Hensel relates her idealized past with the rather confusing and disorienting environment of the immediate post-*Wende* years by establishing harsh contrasts: Instead of *Milchdienst* every student was now responsible for their own refreshment; many dentists' offices in schools closed; and family get-togethers are much more somber and less frequent as the adults were struggling to orient themselves and make ends meet. Presenting these differences, Hensel addresses the widespread unhappiness of many East Germans with their status quo and creates a bond between them. As she inspires them to return to their past by following the cues provided in the memoir, i.e., scenes of Hensel's own childhood, members of her generation may regain a sense of their selfhood that was lost or covered up as West German ideas and values came to dominate their *Heimat*. The effectiveness of this approach is illustrated by many of the readers' responses, as for instance this one:

Am Ende bleibt für mich die Erkenntnis, dass die Zeit von 1982 bis 1990 ... ganz wesentlich zu meiner Charakterbildung beigetragen hat und mir jetzt noch hilft, mich selbst zu finden. ... Es fühlt sich gut an, zu wissen

oder zumindest zu ahnen, wo die eigenen Wurzeln liegen und dass nicht alles immer so identitätslos war wie heute. (Kraushaar 83)

In the end, what remains for me is the realization that the years between 1982 and 1990 ... significantly contributed to the evolution of my character and still continue to inform my efforts to find myself. ... It feels good to know, or at least to have an idea where my own roots are and that not everything was always as faceless as it seems today.

Sacrificing the Personal for the Sake of an Ostalgie Collectivity

Although some readers found their own experiences reflected in Hensel's memoir, it stirred up an "unusually polarized debate" in Germany, in which "no one remained indifferent" (Cammann 63). Most of the negative critique she received focused on two related aspects: her use of the narrative "we" and the lack of more individualized memories. Jens Bisky called Hensel's memoir too generalizing (Kraushaar 30), a sentiment shared by non-professional critics. For example, a reader from East Germany objected to the use of this narrative device as "disturbing because not everyone shares the same experiences and viewpoints" (90). Readers seem to disagree with Hensel primarily on her representation of the parent-child-relationship after the *Wende* (90). She describes East German parents, i.e. the generation born between the late 1940s and the early 1960s who spent most of their lives in the GDR, as having lost themselves with unification, which resulted in a reversal of the parent-child relationship as the children adapted faster and more easily to the new environment. (Hensel 49-50). She was also criticized for employing the West German stereotype of the *Jammer-Ossi*, as for example in this excerpt:

Zu oft hatten wir solche Gespräche schon erlebt: wie sie milde begannen und doch damit endeten, das Neue zu verfluchen oder die alten Zeiten

wenigstens zu verteidigen... Ohne Unterbrechung würden sie uns über Arbeitslosigkeit, soziale Kälte, Korruption im Bundestag, die ostdeutsche Misere und den Bundesdeutschen, ... in seiner natürlichen Umgebung aufklären müssen. Wir konnten es nicht mehr hören. (Hensel 71-72)

We had been through too many of these “discussions”—they always started calmly and always ended with our parents cursing everything new and defending everything old... Scarcely pausing for breath, they would lecture us about unemployment, social anonymity, political corruption, economic hardship, and so on. (Hensel, trans. 69-70)

In order to avoid embarrassing their parents for their ignorance or incompetence in adjusting to Western standards, Hensel writes, her generation started both to hide their lives from their parents and their parents from their lives (72). And using an East German stereotype, she considers the resulting distance characteristic of West German parent-child-relations. She not only conflates different modes of and socio-cultural reasons for distances between parents and children and does not account for it as a necessary part of the individuation process, Hensel also overgeneralizes and portrays her observations as indicative of the experience of all East Germans of her generation. Some of her readers find these strategies problematic, arguing that the post-*Wende* experiences of East German adolescents were much more diverse than Hensel postulates:

Einige Sätze deiner Schrift empfinde ich allerdings ähnlich schmerzhaft wie einen Hammerschlag auf den eigenen Finger. So z.B.: ... “Die Wende hatte uns alle zu Aufstiegskindern gemacht....” Ich weiß von einigen ehemaligen Mitschülern..., dass sie vor kurzem ihre Lehrstelle verloren haben, ihr Geld für Wetten oder Rauschmittel draufgeht etc. Da sind manche Absolutheiten schon der Hammer. (Kraushaar 84)

I find some of the sentences in your memoir as painful as a hammer blow on one’s own finger. For example: ... ‘The *Wende* made us into career children....’ I know from some former high school friends... that they have recently lost their jobs, and that they now spend their money on betting or drugs. I find some of your absoluteness therefore hard to take.

In deinem Buch empfinde ich es daher als nicht ganz zutreffend, dass unsere Eltern ein bisschen hinter dem Mond leben sollen. ... So richtig hinter sich lassen können sie die DDR noch viel weniger als wir, aber das ist, scheint mir, ganz natürlich.... (Kraushaar 85-86)

I feel that is not entirely correct that our parents supposedly live a bit behind the moon, as you state in your book. ... Although they can leave the GDR behind even less than we, it seems to me only natural....

Using the narrative “we” to generalize her own experiences, Hensel employs a strategy that Astrid Erll considers indicative of marginalized authors who wish to encourage readers to form a memory collective and thus empower themselves. The communal “we” reflects an antagonistic mode of narration as it evokes the notion of alterity, “us” versus “them,” in-group versus out-group (181). This narrative strategy conveys identifying values in the sense that readers may realize that they are part of a group whose members share their ideas and values. However, while it strengthens self-perceptions and in-group bonds, it promotes separatist feelings in distinguishing clearly who does and does not belong to the group. The collective “we”, therefore, appeals to those East German readers who are questioning their identity and will feel included in, or at least addressed as belonging to the in-group Hensel generates by invoking a shared past and juxtaposing them to West Germans as the out-group who have different experiences, for instance, in parent-child relations, consumer goods, and the *Wende*.

Although it is a noble goal to create an East German memory collective in order to preserve knowledge about the GDR, Hensel’s approach neglects the differences among East Germans as the critical reader reactions indicate. Doja Hacker summarizes them by stating that the “collectivizing ‘we’ upsets her East German peers... and the

plural form seems provocative” (56), and Alexander Cammann considers the it part of the reason why her memoir seems superficial: It generalizes the *Wende* experience despite its manifold variations on the personal level (64).

The second major point of critique about Hensel’s memoir is the seemingly random accumulation of GDR objects and events as a narrative device that the author-narrator employs to provide numerous cues for her readers to trigger their own personal memories. According to Cammann, her countless lists are too all-encompassing and non-specific:

Im Buch weckt sie zwar anfänglich die schönsten Hoffnungen: “...und so werde ich mich auf die Suche nach den verlorenen Erinnerungen machen.” Doch die werden rasch enttäuscht: Zu oft schon hat man sich an die Produktpalette der untergegangenen DDR erinnert, als dass man sich mit Beobachtungen wie “statt Puffreis aßen wir Popkorn, die ‘Bravo’ ersetzte die Trommel” zufrieden geben würde. (Cammann 64)

In her book, she raises the most wonderful hopes initially: ‘...and thus I will set out to search for the lost memories.’ But these hopes are disappointed very soon: Too often have we been reminded of the array of GDR products to be satisfied with such observations as ‘instead of puffed rice we ate popcorn’ or ‘the Bravo replaced the *Trommel*’ (East German youth magazine).

Hensel mentions countless *lieux de mémoire*, but she does not convey the memories she personally connects with these objects. Even if she does, for instance, when she writes about the cool ways to drink milk at school or the presence of dentists there, she avoids getting too personal and, instead, claims to be speaking for an imagined collective in the “we” voice. Heinrich characterizes this mode of remembering as impersonal because the rememberer does not focus on the self and does not portray the personal meaningfulness of an event (30). Schacter similarly writes that this “observer” stance conveys memories from the perspective of the remembering person

as a group member. The rememberer seems more detached, less emotionally involved, and the memory narratives appear more objective (21). This strategy makes them excellently suitable to become part of a collective memory because they are more likely to function as cues and elicit similar responses by a larger group of recipients (Schacter 27). Cammann criticizes Hensel's approach as non-representative of the process of remembering. Instead it marks a schematic, "odorless" and "non-intense" (Cammann 65) attempt to reach a broad audience. And according to Arndt, Hensel merely "archives a material world" (40) and recalls the GDR retrospectively as a "material paradise... comparing GDR goods and events with West German counterparts that, due to their different ideological significance, could never be considered equivalents" (41). Additionally,

This technique does allow her, however, to provide memory cues to a large number of readers. By listing such an incredible amount of specific memory objects, Hensel employs an important argument in memory theory that suggests a highly proportional correspondence between the number of cues provided and the probability of initiated recall (Schacter 64). Hence, her cues must remain short and contain only minimal personal information so that the "all-around connectivity remains unthreatened" (Cammann 65). Nonetheless, readers who expected more actual memory work by the author, i.e., insights into her personal life and the particular conditions and circumstances that shaped her identity, were disappointed when reading *Zonenkinder*.

Hensel's representation of the GDR is highly nostalgic: She paints the past as the 'good old days' by invoking a great amount of everyday objects and transforming

them into museum pieces or, as Bisky put it, into objects in “Vitrinen für Kurzbesucher” (display cabinets for short-term visitors, 31). Her attempts at remembering the GDR as lived reality result in what Ingo Arend describes as a “*tour sentimentale* [sic] through the lost country of her childhood” (37). Arend suggests that Hensel’s nostalgia makes even the most renowned German Romantic, Joseph von Eichendorff, look like a realist (37). Her most melancholic reminiscences include, for instance, an emotional description of the *Pioniergeburtstag* celebrated in GDR schools on December 13:

Als Kind überkam die Euphorie mich bereits am Vorabend. Ich hatte Mühe einzuschlafen. Immer wieder setzte ich mich im Bett auf, immer wieder überprüfte ich, ob die Pionierbluse und das Halstuch noch an ihrem Platz auf dem Stuhl gleich neben meinem Bett lagen. Der morgige Tag, das wusste ich aus den letzten Jahren, würde aufregend werden und meinen ganzen Einsatz fordern. (Hensel 113)

... the night before, I’d be so nervous I couldn’t get to sleep. I’d keep getting up to check whether my Pioneer blouse and scarf were laid out on the chair next to my bed. Tomorrow was the big day and I wanted to look my best. (Hensel, trans., 121)

Similarly, Hensel indicates that, as a child, she discovered a love for books that would not only pose challenging questions, such as “Wer bin ich? Was kann ich? Was will ich? Wem nütze ich? Wer braucht mich?” (94) (“Who am I? What do I want? Who can be useful to me? Whom do I need?” [Hensel, trans., 113]), but also answer them with the help of Socialist values that would teach even the young members of society to serve their country by acting in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist worldview (Hensel 94). Alexander Cammann criticizes these intense and unreflected recollections as exaggerations because “so östlich wie bei Hensel war der Osten zu DDR-Zeiten nie” (“the East was never as eastern in GDR times as it was according to Hensel” (64). Hensel’s excessive love of GDR traditions, such as the *Pioniergeburtstag* are actually

contrary to the experience of most children and adolescents, who perceived annual parades, festivals, and weekly school assemblies as nuisances. Readers are given the impression that Hensel's past self was the model child of Socialist ideology and as such would perhaps have preferred the continuity of her old life to her present situation. Her excessive idealization of the GDR results from her unhappiness and dissatisfaction with her current situation. Michael Pilz interprets Hensel as "openly melancholic" and as having "tendency to glorify things" (44). Her nostalgia results in the omission of such core aspects of GDR reality as its political organization as a dictatorship with strict censorship, the omnipresence of the infamous *Stasi*, the indoctrination of children with Socialist ideology and paramilitary training taught in high school, the existence of opposition groups, political prisoners, the restrictions on GDR citizens—except for retirees—from visiting West Germany or any other non-Socialist country (Arend 38). While she may not have known about these realities as the thirteen-year old experiencing self, her adult narrating self should, nevertheless, have reflected on the context of her idyllic childhood (Hacker 57). Hensel's *Ostalgie* reflects her own longing for a lost past and a present she can embrace based on a sense of belonging. The majority of reader reviews indicates that this state of mind is paradigmatic for the sense of loss and disorientation among her generation of East Germans. The focus of this memoir, then, is the re-creation of a happy childhood past, which may explain why *Zonenkinder* fails to critically illuminate crucial aspects of the GDR and to provide a more comprehensive and balanced view. As such, it differs radically from Claudia Rusch's memoir that I will discuss next.

III.3. Disclaiming *Ostalgie* in Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*

Unlike Hensel, Rusch neither claims to speak for her generational cohort of East Germans nor does she engage in nostalgic idealization of the past to compensate present needs of identity negotiation. In fact, the contrast between Hensel's sentimental fairytale of the land and life she never quite knew but longs for all the more and Rusch's somber account of ordinary life under *Stasi* observation, which she at times depicts using humor and the perspective of the naïve child as distancing mechanisms, could hardly differ more and as such constitute opposite poles on the *Ostalgie* scale. However, while Rusch recounts the harsh realities of living in a dictatorship, including her father's imprisonment for political reasons and his death in prison, the intentional sowing of distrust in and destruction of families through the *Stasi*, and her own decision to find a way to leave the GDR and thus her mother upon turning 18, she does not employ West German discourse. Moreover, her account of the altruism and idealism that motivated people like Robert Havemann and other friends of her mother to endure all of the repressive measures in order to reform Socialism by democratizing the GDR indicates that she both still shares some of these ideal and finds them lacking in the present. In other words, while her account of everyday life in the dictatorship depicts aspects of this past that contradict the *Ostalgie* discourse, she does not employ West German discourse in her critique but the ideals of the East German opposition movement. Although her account is thus critical, Rusch does express loyalty to her *Heimat*, the place and time of her childhood. Last but certainly not least, she also comes to realize that while she defined herself in opposition to GDR ideology at the time, after unification, she too was an *Ossi* and came to embrace it and seek to positively redefine

it as a counter-identity to the superficiality and emptiness of her West German generational cohort depicted in Illies *Generation Golf*.

Anti-Ostalgie

Rusch's memoir stands out among GDR life narratives because it avoids the nostalgic point of view that other memoirists have employed. She does so by directly addressing subjects that were ignored in the *Ostalgie* wave. She does not shy away from mentioning the restrictions placed on citizens deemed dangerous by the government and their enforcement by the *Stasi*. In this respect, she mentions Wolf Biermann, the famous singer and songwriter with nonconformist views on Socialism, who was eventually expelled from the GDR and stripped of his citizenship in 1976. Another example Rusch incorporates that shows how the freedom of speech was censored is Robert Havemann, chemist and public intellectual, who was put under house arrest in the same year because he spoke out against dogmatism in Socialist ideology. As she lived in Havemann's neighborhood and her mother was friends with him and his family, Rusch was exposed to the common occurrence of *Stasi* officers watching Havemann's home to whom her family referred as cockroaches as they were lurking everywhere (Rusch 16ff). Her most personal confrontation with *Stasi* practices, however, occurred only after the *Wende* when she learned that not only had her father died during his imprisonment in Rostock in 1967 but also that her mother's closest friend had spied on them for the *Stasi*. Rusch also speaks of the propaganda TV broadcast *Der schwarze Kanal* (The black channel) that was designed to illustrate the evils of capitalism and promote Socialist consciousness among viewers. Rusch,

furthermore, acknowledges the attempts of hundreds of citizens to escape the GDR while risking not only the security of their families, who could be imprisoned as accomplices, but even their own lives when they tried to get across the fortified border between East and West Berlin or sought to escape via the Baltic Sea to the northernmost parts of West Germany (Rusch 11). The author-narrator juxtaposes these sobering realities of life (and death) in the GDR with accounts of harmless and humorous aspects of everyday life like nudist beaches and singing competitions. Rusch's openness about the vast diversity of experiences in the GDR and her willingness to share her own conflicted memories signifies honesty to her readers and an attempt not to create an embellished GDR past. Rusch's writing strategy thus differs significantly from that of Hensel whose narrative emphasizes primarily nostalgic remembering.

Rusch's anti-nostalgic stance is not only evident in her critique of oppressive practices but also in her lack of referencing GDR products, artifacts, or names for their own sake. Instead she integrates the *lieux de mémoire* into her recollections. She also explains them in the text itself, particularly acronyms unfamiliar to West German readers as the *POS* school type (59), which indicates that her implied audience includes them. And while Rusch's texts like Hensel's provides cues that generate memories of their own childhood among East German readers, she does not employ the narrative *We* and its claim to generational representativeness of experiences. Instead, she conveys everyday life in the GDR through personal and idiosyncratic accounts and encounters with that past. The emphasis is, therefore, on the reader's ability to follow Rusch's act of remembering, for which she employs the experiential mode of narrating, rather than

encouraging them to engage in their own memories during the reception. While East German readers may not experience as many moments of recognition upon the encounter of memory cues, Rusch's memoir serves the important function of providing a less one-sided representation of GDR reality than do *ostalgic* accounts.

Stories about the East German secret police, for example, have been published and discussed at large before. *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, however, gives a personal view of the effect of the *Stasi* on individuals' lives – an effect that gave them the “Gefühl, abnorm zu sein” (“feeling of being abnormal”) (Rusch 40) as well as threatened and trapped (45, 70, 98), and instilled in them the desire to be more inconspicuous (35). Rusch does not shy away from communicating these emotions to her readers as they constitute an important moment to connect with them by conveying authenticity and evoking empathy for her particular life story rather than seeking to generate an in-group based on a notion of collective sameness. She takes readers along with her into the world of her past – a strategy that allows them to gain more knowledge about this socio-cultural context. The memory space Rusch generates is not a nostalgically longed for utopian past where, for example, all GDR sweets tasted delicious, but one rooted in her reality:

Manche Ostsüßigkeiten gibt es jetzt wieder. Ich finde das meiste schlicht eklig. Ich habe sie damals verweigert, und ich esse sie heute nicht. Es ist nichts Prinzipielles, aber ich boykottiere Angriffe auf meine Geschmacksnerven. (Rusch 88)

Some of the GDR sweets are back on the shelves again. I find most of them simply disgusting. I rejected them then, and I also do not eat them today. Not as a matter of principle, but I simply boycott attacks on my taste buds.

One could characterize Rusch's narrative perspective as anti-*Ostalgie*. She almost seems to have written her memoir against texts like Hensel's that indulge in nostalgic depictions of the GDR. Beyond the examples cited above, she also sharply criticizes GDR policies that essentially imprisoned the people as they were not allowed to travel to non-Socialist countries. She relates how in 1996 she took the ferry to Sweden as she used to dream of doing as a child. While she had not renewed her passport even though it expired on the day of her departure, a German customs officer extended her passport without any problems. She juxtaposes the ease of travel after the *Wende* with the severe restrictions before (Rusch 14-15). And she even relates her resentment and hatred for the GDR when she recounts that she found out that her parents had meant for her to marry a family friend from France so that she would not have to stay in the GDR:

Mir liefen die Tränen über das Gesicht. Ich hätte meine Eltern vielleicht nie wiedergesehen. Sie wussten das. Gegen alles, was ihnen wichtig war, hätten sie mir geholfen, das Land zu verlassen. ... Kalter Hass fackelte in mir auf. Es gibt Dinge, die kann ich der DDR nicht verzeihen. Das Zerstören von Familien gehört dazu. (133-134)

Tears were streaming down my face. I would never have seen my parents again. They knew that. Against everything that was important to them they would have helped me to leave the country. ... Cold hatred surged inside of me. There are things I cannot forgive the GDR. The destruction of families is one of them.

Rusch's representation of her GDR childhood is thus emphatically anti-*ostalgie*. And it was not only in retrospect that she became critical of the country in which she grew up: due to her mother's influence she had been aware of its cruelties and injustices before it disappeared. Confronted with the wave of *Ostalgie* that started less than a decade after unification, Rusch's memoir addressed the injustice at the core of any dictatorship and

the experience of oppression as part of everyday life that other memoirists, most notably Hensel, had effaced from theirs.

While nostalgia is not an option for the author due to her life's circumstances, it is important to acknowledge that she does not portray herself as a victim of GDR tyranny. On the contrary, she explains that most East Germans had learned ways of violating rules, not by disobeying but by subtly undermining them. For instance, her school principal knew which majors and career plans would favor a student's admission to the *Erweiterte Oberschule (EOS)*, where only some five percent of East German students were able to attend grades 11 and 12 in order to receive the *Abitur* and subsequently go to university. And knowing that she could be denied higher education without any explanation, Rusch also knew that her participation in the *Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ)* was necessary:

Ich war innerlich nicht darauf vorbereitet, dass sie mir ernsthaft in der DDR das Abitur verweigern würden. Weil ich aber wusste, sie konnten, versuchte ich so wenig Angriffsfläche wie möglich zu bieten. War ich zu den Pionieren noch freiwillig gegangen, wurde ich FDJ-Mitglied nur wegen des Platzes an der EOS. ... Wenn schon ans System verkauft, dann richtig. (61)

I was not emotionally prepared that they would deny me the *Abitur* in the GDR. But because I knew that they could, I tried to offer as few reasons as possible to do so. I had still joined the pioneers voluntarily but became a member of the FDJ only to gain a spot at the EOS. ... If I had to sell myself to the system, I was determined to do it right.

This passage shows that GDR life subjected Rusch to an ethical conflict. Hers was not a worry-free childhood as she was caught between her loyalty to her parents and efforts to prevent herself from getting in trouble with school authorities. That Rusch had been used to the outsider status since her childhood may explain why, unlike Hensel, she

does not seem to have a problem identifying herself as an East German. On the contrary, she even extends the notion of *Ossi* to include Eastern Europeans with whom Rusch writes that on several post-*Wende* occasions she felt a close bond. For instance, at a friend's wedding she bonds with a young Russian woman over some Soviet songs they had both learned in school, and she remembers celebrating the new freedom with her and three Czech wedding guests:

[Einer der Tschechen] holte eine große Flasche Becherovka aus der Tasche. Das kam genau richtig. Fröhlich leerten wir den ganzen Liter Schnaps ... erzählten Ostblock-Witze und brachten immer neue Toasts auf die Freiheit aus. Es war wunderbar. Ossis unter sich. Der Warschauer Pakt am Mittelmeer. (138)

(One of the Czechs) unpacked a large bottle Becherovka. That was perfect. Happily we emptied the whole liter of schnaps ... told old jokes from our Eastern bloc countries, and toasted again and again to our freedom. It was wonderful. *Ossis* among themselves. The Warsaw Pact at the Mediterranean Sea.

This sense of community with people from other East European countries rather than primarily with East Germans may be an example of the influence of Rusch's mother's understanding of socialism not as defined by the GDR state but as a brotherhood and equality between people of all socialist nations. But regardless of its origin, it allows Rusch to extend the term *Ossis* to Eastern Europeans at large. Sabine Klomfass observes that while Rusch embraces the new freedom, her community "is not West Germany but rather a new multicultural Europe" (Klomfass, *literaturkritik.de*). She, therefore, evades the dilemma faced by those East Germans suffering from a crisis of identity in the wake of the *Wende*: the simultaneous desire to integrate fully and become German in a unified Germany retain an increasingly defensive East German identity due to their perceived lower status as second-class citizens.

As Rusch creates a life narrative that challenges the predominantly *ostalgic* ways in which the GDR has been remembered, her memory stories function in part as a counter memory. As such, Rusch may encourage more readers to reflect critically upon both the GDR itself and how its collective memory had been negotiated between the dismissive West German arguments about the uselessness of GDR experiences in a unified Germany on the one hand and the likewise one-sided GDR nostalgia on the other.

Rusch's Atypical Childhood

The fact that Rusch experienced and was aware of some of the oppression that also characterized ordinary life in the GDR means that some of the memories she depicts are not paradigmatic either for her generation or for East Germans at large. As such, she does not claim that her experiences represent those of her generational cohort of East Germans, which is reflected in her choice of the first-person narrator to indicate the singularity of her life story. Unlike Hensel, who frequently switches from the first person singular to the first person plural, Rusch indicates that her experiences differ from her East German peers. She states early on that it was her mother's association with opposition circles that sought to reform the GDR into a Socialist democracy that introduced her to politics and critical thinking more generally. Her mother raised her to be critical of what she saw and heard as a child and to make informed distinctions between people one could trust and those who wanted lip service. Christiane Rusch's connection to Robert Havemann and his circle of critical Socialists meant that her family lived under constant surveillance of the *Stasi* at least since they had come to live in the

Berlin suburb of Grünheide in 1976 if not before in conjunction with her father's imprisonment. Having parents who rejected the GDR's so-called real existing Socialism because they were convinced 'true' socialists, Rusch argues, gave her the advantage of knowing exactly "in welchem Land ich groß geworden bin" ("in what kind of a country I grew up") (Rusch 35) and not being tempted to idealize the GDR after its demise. This distinguishes her from those GDR children who have no experiential knowledge of oppression and persecution.

Rusch's atypical childhood spent in close proximity to the opposition movement continued to some extent in her life immediately following the *Wende*, which was rather privileged compared to that of the average East German. For example, she relates that her first trip to France, to which she had been looking forward ever since she was a child, was interrupted by an interview request from the *ZDF*, one of the two major German public TV stations. The station was looking for a person from East Germany and went out of its way to pick up Rusch by car from Paris to ensure that the interview could take place. They also arranged for a train ride back for her to continue her vacation in France. Even though Mainz, the location of this station's headquarters, is fairly close to the French border, it seems as if she received privileged treatment. Particularly to East German readers, it may seem as if she betrayed their past to the West that had won the Cold War anyway and even bragged about it, as the following response indicates:

Eine Jugend, wie sie in diesem Buch beschrieben ist, haben bestimmt nicht einmal 5 Prozent der DDR-Bürger erlebt. Sicher gibt es solche Fälle, aber wenn ein ehemaliger BRD-Bürger (man kann auch Wessi sagen) dieses Buch lesen sollte, bekommt er einen falschen Eindruck von den damaligen Verhältnissen. Das Buch... ist .. ziemlich realitätsfern.

Not even five percent of GDR citizens have experienced an adolescence such as described in this book. Surely, there were such cases, but if a former citizen of West Germany (also called *Wessi*) was to read this book, (s)he would get a false impression of the situation back then. This book... is... not based in the real world. (Hartung, *amazon.de* 5/13/2004)

Not only this vacation in France and the interview but also her participation in a group trip of 1,000 young East Germans who were invited to France by François Mitterrand in 1990 may seem like both Rusch's life in the GDR and after the *Wende* were atypical and that she, therefore, did not belong to the in-group, i.e., that she was not a 'real' *Ossi*. Some of her readers criticize what they consider her outsider status; for example, a reader from Potsdam comments on *amazon.de*: "Eine Jugend, wie sie in diesem Buch beschrieben ist, haben bestimmt nicht einmal 5 Prozent der DDR-Bürger erlebt... Das Buch ist... ziemlich realitätsfern" ("Most likely less than 5 percent of GDR citizens have experienced an adolescence such as it is described in this book. The book is... very distant from reality") (*amazon.de* May 13, 2004)

While her life in the GDR was atypical and, to a certain degree, privileged, it was certainly not without difficulties. While she had the necessary grades and participated in the *FDJ*, her mother's involvement with the opposition movement threatened Rusch's chances to continue her education after graduating from the *POS* at the end of 10th grade and attend the *EOS* through 12th grade in order to receive the *Abitur* and go to university. Although her *POS* principal intervened and Rusch could get the education she wished, she experienced the impact both the planned economy and the political oppression could have on ordinary people's everyday lives first-hand. Moreover, she describes in numerous passages that some of her teachers referred to her when trying to set a bad example for non-conformist thinking. While Rusch

considers herself privileged in the sense that she was allowed to see and learn about things in the GDR from which most other children were shielded, she is also grateful to her parents for allowing her to live her own life:

Ich habe die Entscheidung meiner Eltern, in der Opposition zu leben, nicht mitgetroffen... Heute bin ich ihnen dankbar. Sie haben mich damit privilegiert. Ich weiß genau, in welchem Land ich groß geworden bin. Niemand kann mir unterstellen, ich wüsste nicht, wovon ich rede." (Rusch 35)

I did not participate in my parents' decision to live in opposition... Today I am thankful to them for that. They privileged me by doing so. I know exactly in which country I grew up. No one can insinuate that I do not know what I am talking about.

GDR politics, the *Stasi*, and travel restrictions impacted Rusch's most personal experiences: Her dream of visiting non-Socialist countries could not be fulfilled due to the GDR travel limits imposed on citizens. Her first love was doomed because it happened to be to a boy who was part of a French group visiting the GDR and whom she would never see again because of the closed borders. Rusch is even critical about receiving additional lessons in mathematics at the Humboldt University because, while she was enthusiastic about math, she explains with hindsight, "Unter Anleitung junger Dozenten erhielt man zusätzlichen Mathematikunterricht, um das kostbare Potenzial, das da fürs sozialistische Prestige heranwuchs, beständig zu fördern. Wissenschaftlicher Beutefang à la DDR" ("Young lecturers taught supplemental math lessons in order to constantly further the valuable potential that talented students embodied for the socialist prestige. Scientific hunt for prey made in the GDR") (41). And she remembers her father's love of Neil Young as symptomatic of East German's

fondness of music or anything else for that matter originating west of the border because “Musik stand für Hoffnung” (“music stood for hope”) (124).

Rusch’s childhood, then, is indeed atypical and, therefore, not representative of life in the GDR as a child and an adolescent, as some of her readers have criticized. Rusch, however, does not claim it to be so. She acknowledges, for instance, “(ich) war kein typisches DDR-Kind, aber ich war ein hundertprozentiges Produkt reformkommunistischer Ideen” (“I was not a typical GDR-child, but one-hundred percent the product of Reform-Communist ideas”) (Rusch 132). Nonetheless, there are elements in her childhood that she shares with other East German children, as she relates in her memory of her first visit to West Berlin in 1989:

Hier gab es alles. Sogar die Sachen aus dem Westfernsehen. Ein Universum an Möglichkeiten tat sich auf. Ich konnte alles haben. ... Hier... offenbarte ich, dass auch ich ein ganz normales DDR-Kind war. Nicht die Stasi allein, auch die Mangelwirtschaft hatte meine Kindheit geprägt. In dieser Hinsicht war ich nicht besser und nicht schlechter als die anderen dran. ...Auch ich hatte ein Defizit aufzuholen. – Und ich tat es. (78)

Here everything could be had. Even the things from West German TV commercials. A universe of possibilities opened itself up for me. I could have everything. ...Here... I revealed that even I was a normal GDR-child. Not the *Stasi* alone but the GDR economy of scarcity had determined my childhood. In this respect I was no better or worse off than the others. ... I, too, had to make up for insufficiency. And I did.

What appears to be a contradiction—the fact that Rusch considers her childhood atypical but also portrays herself as a normal child of the GDR—dissolves when we recognize that, by being immersed in the same cultural context at the same time as other East Germans, Rusch’s memories reflect a particular side of life in the GDR. They obtain value because her story is atypical within a typical environment. Furthermore, the author must receive credit for using the memoir genre to speak out for a group of East

Germans that is doubly marginalized within dominant German collective memory because they share neither the West German dismissive contempt for nor the *ostalgic* idealization of the GDR. For Rusch, her self-identity reflects her love-hate relationship to the GDR. She fondly remembers spending her summers at the Baltic Sea, visiting Christmas markets with her mother in Berlin, participating in state-sponsored afternoon activities for students, and travelling to Prague. But she also remembers that her childhood was restricted by GDR policies and that she experienced political oppression in her family. The critical undercurrent that pervades Rusch's memoir reflects that she remembers East Germany as both the country of fond childhood memories and of oppression. Having to negotiate these contrary experiences in her memory, prevents Rusch from remembering her past too nostalgically.

Self-Discovery through Anti-Ostalgic Memory Stories

By narrating her memories, Rusch allows the reader to accompany her in this process of self-exploration. This quest is seemingly solely for herself, and she does not need to state explicitly that she is trying to make sense of her life by reflecting on selected memory scenes from her present point of view. She is able to connect with readers by reflecting particularly on the influential relationships with people who have shaped her: her mother and grandmother, as well as family friends from (the former) Czechoslovakia, Italy, and France.

Her mother had a powerful influence on her intellectual development as she made Rusch aware of a level of hypocrisy in the so-called real-existing Socialism – a hypocrisy that the average GDR children hardly ever confronted. She was also close to

her maternal grandmother, despite the fact that Rusch's mother had briefly suspected her of having cooperated with the *Stasi* and having provided them with information about her husband, Rusch's grandfather. Not only does this suspicion turn out to be unfounded but the grandmother harbored similar feelings about the GDR government and their secret police as her daughter:

Sie hätte nicht mit der Stasi geklüngelt. Selbst wenn sie gezwungen worden wäre. Sie hasste dieses System. Sie hätte es uns sofort erzählt. Meine Großmutter wusste gut, wie man die Stasi ihrer Macht berauben konnte... Offen legen, dass sie einem zu nahe traten oder man etwas unterschreiben musste. ... Sie hätte uns niemals verraten. Wir waren ihre Familie. Alles, was davon nach dem Krieg noch übrig war. (113)

She would not have associated with the *Stasi*. Even if she had been forced to do so. She hated this system. She would have told us immediately. My grandmother knew well how to deprive the *Stasi* of their power... Bringing to the open that they approached you or that you had to sign something. ... She would never have betrayed us. We were her family, and everything that was left of it after the war.

It becomes clear that the anti-government sentiments ran deep in Rusch's family, and, given the strong bond among these three women, young Rusch was inevitably going to inherit a good share of this attitude.

Further aiding this development was the friendship of Rusch's mother with Milena and Josef, a couple from Prague, who in age could have been her grandparents. They had left during the uprising of the Prague Spring in 1968 and become their unofficial guests. "Niemand hat mich als Kind mehr beeindruckt als diese beiden Menschen" ("Nobody impressed me more as a child than those two people") (51), Rusch writes, not least because of their cosmopolitanism. They opened up to her a world of oriental fairy tales information about customs in the faraway countries of Asia. Rusch and her mother took to those two "wunderbar chaotischen, warmherzigen Tschechen" ("wonderfully

chaotic, kind-hearted Czechs”) (54) and many visits by and to them after their return to Prague followed.

In addition to the Czech couple, her mother also had French and Italian friends. Claudio, a follower of Robert Havemann’s theories from Italy, inspired Rusch’s early interest in his home country. In his letters to Rusch’s mother, “schrieb (er) von den sieben Hügeln Roms, von der Sonne auf den Dächern der Stadt, den Plätzen, den Menschen, dem Tiber. Sie waren überschwänglich, romantisch und voller Leben” (“he wrote about the seven hills of Rome, about the sun above the roofs of the city, the places, the people, the Tiber River. They [the letters] were exuberant, romantic, and full of life”) (32). When he visited, he took Rusch for walks, carried her on his shoulders, sang Italian songs to her and told her stories about this exotic land (33). As a child without a father, Rusch became attached to the Italian father figure and Italy engendered her desire to travel abroad and became a magical place that functioned as the stand-in for all that lay outside the GDR borders.

France became another object of her childhood fantasies after she befriended Pierre, who was able to travel freely as part of the Allied Forces, in a summer camp. A sort of big-brother figure, he subsequently visited East Germany frequently and joined the Rusch family in many family celebrations. It was the contact with many foreigners as a child that generated Rusch’s *Fernweh*, her yearning to see other countries, and her most desired country was France: “Ich wollte schon als kleines Mädchen nur eins: Französin werden... Frankreich hatte bereits einen festen Platz in meinem Herzen” (“As a young girl I already wanted only one thing: to become French... France already held a firm spot in my heart”) (68). Subsequently, however, she came to realize that the dream

to live in Paris was simply a projection of her desire for freedom from oppression and the threatening GDR environment to which she was exposed:

Ich hatte eigentlich keine Ahnung von der Stadt selbst. In gewisser Hinsicht war sie austauschbar. Meine Sehnsucht hätte vermutlich genauso gut New York oder Rom gelten können... Diese verklärte Beziehung zu Paris hatte etwas Symptomatisches. (147-8)

Actually I did not know anything about this city. In a way it was exchangeable. My yearning could have been just as well directed at New York or Rome. ... This imaginary relationship with Paris was symptomatic.

It is because of these childhood memories that Rusch's post-*Wende* identity seems less conflicted than that of Hensel, for example, as she prefers foreign countries as her new home rather than West Germany.

While her mother's international friends inspired Rusch's longing for the world outside the GDR borders, she credits one person within the system who had a particularly important influence on her personal development. As briefly indicated earlier, the principal of her *POS* school took an interest in her academic success, made her feel included and protected because she took Rusch seriously, and enabled her to transfer to the *EOS*, thus take the *Abitur* and continue on university. Even after she was transferred to an administrative position in her district, she was willing to help Rusch with her application to study at a university. For instance, the principal provided such practical advice as choosing an economically relevant major on her application so that she would most likely be accepted. Rusch does not characterize the principal further and does not give her a name, but it is nonetheless evident she influenced Rusch's development enormously.

Rusch employs here a technique that is used distinctively by memoirists and differentiates their genre from autobiographies. As I explored in the earlier chapter on “The Memoir Genre,” theorists such as Philip Lejeune, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, and Paul John Eakin have stressed that a relational self-identity is dominant in memoirs whereas an isolationist and independent view of the self is featured prominently in traditional autobiographies. As the development of the self occurs in a particular historical situation and a specific social and cultural environment, relationships with other people and the socio-cultural context generally are very influential. The personal experience that is gained through the constant exchange with others is, furthermore, not self-contained and isolated but shared both through subsequent communication and the fact that most experiences are socially shared with others. Rusch’s explorations of memories that connect her to other people in her life are a good example of the significance of the interaction between external influences and the evolving self. Helen Buss compares the development of the self to the act of braiding: various aspects and features of identity, the strands to be intertwined through braiding, are created based on these outside influences and together, like the finished braid, make up a unique and complex being (34).

In *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, Claudia Rusch recollects the different strands of her personality based on memories of family, friends, and other significant influences in the context of everyday life in the GDR that not only included experiences of childhood bliss but also of oppression. The self she portrays evolves throughout the text – from a young naïve child who feels protected by the presence of police officers hiding near her house to a teenager who feels increasingly threatened by their ubiquity, to an almost

bitter and angry young woman rejecting any nostalgia relating to her home country. Rusch creates a memory collage for the reader as well as for herself. In attributing coherence, and consequently meaning, to her memory fragments, she employs a self-reflexive narrative technique. Buss considers this characteristic of memoirs, which distinguishes this genre from autobiography because it signifies the process of active evaluation of memories and reflections narrated by the rememberers and their incorporation into the self-image.

The most remarkable instance of self-reflexivity is Rusch's harsh rejection of GDR nostalgia that shows her bitterness about the interference of the GDR government with the innocence of her childhood years: "Ich jedenfalls habe keinen Grund, mich an meine entbehrungsreiche Kindheit zu erinnern" ("I for one have no reason to remember a childhood full of deprivations") (88). She refuses to engage in nostalgia even with respect to products that East Germans once neglected in favor of scarcely available West German products available primarily in the *Intershop* stores and for West German currency only. Rusch admits that she never really liked GDR sweets in the first place, and, given her experience of *Stasi* surveillance due to her mother's political associations, there is little in her GDR experience about which to be nostalgic. Nevertheless, Rusch realizes that part of her identity is undeniably comprised of the experiences of her childhood and adolescence in the GDR. This revelation is part of the recollection of her high-school graduation ceremony for which she was asked to give the commencement speech. Instead of denouncing teachers who had supported and enacted the oppressive structures and enjoying a quasi-victorious moment, she decided to praise those who had been open for critical questions and willing to give students

space to express their concerns at the time. With the knowledge at the time of her speech that the GDR would soon disappear, she remembers finally acknowledging her past:

Drei Monate bevor sich alles für immer auflöste, nahmen wir doch noch die Identität an, die wir so sehr von uns gewiesen hatten. *Wir* waren auch DDR... Nicht nur diejenigen, die uns in ihre Schema pressen wollten, waren ein Teil dieses Landes, sondern auch die, die aus uns wache Köpfe gemacht hatten. Kurz vor Toresschluss ... (wurde) ich Staatsbürger der DDR. (100)

Three months before everything dissolved forever we accepted the identity that we had rejected so strongly. *We* were also the GDR. ... Not only those who wanted to make us fit into their system were part of this country but also those who wanted to encourage us to think for ourselves. Just before the doors closed ... I became a citizen of the GDR.

Rusch thus realizes and acknowledges that while she did not have a typical East German childhood, she belongs to the larger collective of East Germans whose lives were radically altered by the *Wende*. In proudly claiming her GDR citizenship, she distances herself from West Germans and indicates that it was not unification but a democratization of Socialism in the GDR that the East German opposition movement had wanted and that she embraced those ideals. In writing her memoir, she engaged in creating a counter-memory to *Ostalgie*. However, she voices her rejection of the GDR power structures and their destructive effects on the everyday lives of ordinary people from the perspective of the East German opposition movement. Rusch's mother and her friends believed that Socialism is an inherently democratic ideal and that it could be put into practice in the GDR. And although Rusch did not share the latter belief anymore as her decision to leave East Germany upon turning 18 indicates, she neither rejected the former ideal nor embraced Western materialism as a viable alternative. Her memoir

reflects the transformation in her identification and an ongoing process of critical self-assessment. Self-reflective and self-critical, she neither loses herself in bitter resentment nor engages in embellished nostalgia. By inviting readers of *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* to also engage in a more critical memory of the GDR, both individual and collective, than the discourse represented by *Ostalgie*, her memoir participates in the ongoing negotiations of how the GDR should be remembered.

The two memoirs I discussed in this chapter represent polar opposites with regard to the aspects of East German everyday life ought to be collectively remembered. Hensel nostalgically longs for a past she never quite knew given that she only turned 13 in 1990 and thus reconstructs meticulously based on her journalistic research. She recounts the countless objects of East German childhoods to invoke a past that she more imagines than remembers and thus depicts via the Romantic trope of nostalgic childhood memories as a fairy tale. Despite the much-criticized use of the narrative *We* to claim typicality of her childhood, she does specifically distance herself from the third generation of slightly older siblings and thus only seeks to speak for the cohort of *Zonenkinder*, the ten to twelve-year olds at the time of the *Wende*. As deserving of critique as her naïve engagement of *Ostalgie* is, Hensel employs it to provide a counter-memory to the entirely negative representation of the GDR and East Germans in hegemonic West German discourse. While she thus attempts to write against the predominantly negative representation of the GDR, her condescending portrayal of her parents and their generation indicates that her perception is in part influenced by West German values.

As Hensel only claims to speak for the *Zonenkinder* or *Ostwestkinder*, as she also calls them, who were neither quite East German nor properly West German, it was the third generation who were in their late teens in 1990 who constitute the last real *Ossis*, as Rusch almost proudly writes of her new-found East German identity that she acquired in the last months of the GDR's existence but continued as a counter-identity to her West German cohort after the *Wende*. Rusch's experience of growing up in the GDR opposition movement was rather atypical. Yet, its uniqueness is also the reason for her rejection of idealizing the past in nostalgic memories of the GDR. Nevertheless, she acknowledges her subject position to be that of a GDR citizen and *Ossi* in unified Germany and, like Hensel, rejects their negative identification imposed on East Germans by those who believe they won the Cold War. However, as the memory of communal spirit during the demonstrations in Leipzig that serves to open Hensel's memoir and Rusch's pride in her fellow East Germans during the peaceful revolution indicate, it was East Germans who dared to protest against the dictatorship and brought it to an end. And despite their contrary representations of childhoods spent in the GDR, it is in this memory and the rightful pride in their East German identity that results from it that even such disparate accounts converge.

Chapter Four: Remembering the East German *Heimat*

The changes permeating East German cityscapes after the *Wende* have influenced how their inhabitants perceive and understand their *Heimat*. The cities that constituted their home have been westernized almost to the point of unrecognizability. East Germans mourn the loss of this home in different ways – a process that is embodied in the concept of homesickness or *Heimweh*, a construct that describes the longing for a sense of belonging on the part of an individual looking for shelter and harmony in a geographically defined place. People invoke this concept in particular when they have experienced some form of alienation from their environment and are trying to reconnect with their selves—selves that are perceived in spatial terms as disunited from their origin. The emotional component in any representation of *Heimat* and the notions of *Heimweh* cannot be underestimated. It is the key ingredient as it influences the outward expression of a deeply individual perception, which frequently is the result of disappointment and disagreement with the current spatial as well as cultural and social situation.

The Heimat Construct

Peter Blickle writes that concepts of *Heimat* represent a culture's "spatialized interiority" (1). In other words, there are no maps of *Heimat* because it is an emotionally charged and individually imagined space that tends, in addition, to be idealized particularly when in need of stability and reassurance. Hence, as Blickle explains, *Heimat* "has played a crucial role in many historical moments of German self-perception since that late 18th century: It was deployed as part of the partisan counter-Napoleonic

sentiments during the first decade of the 19th century,” it was used again shortly before the establishment of the European union by those opposing it, and it was (and is) used “by at least some of those responsible for xenophobia-driven attacks on foreigners in many German cities” (6).

Apparently, the perception of a threat to the existence of the current state of one’s homeland encourages people to rely more heavily on preconceived *Heimat* notions structuring this space as a territorial sheltering place providing safety and confidence as long as it remains in its (imagined) unchanged state.

Representing an abstract concept, the term *Heimat* embodies multi-referential qualities. Jean Conacher established the following five thematic interpretations of this instinctual feeling of belonging: geographical/physical; familial/social; ideological/political; personal/individual; and dynamic/creative. *Heimat* as geographical/physical interpretation pertains to the concept of cityscapes, which I will explore further in this chapter. For Conacher this is the “archetypal sense of *Heimat* as a feeling of belonging to a geographical place,” such as a country, district, or town (102). It is mostly in retrospective that the notion of *Heimat* even comes to mind and is attributed to a particular place. It is after distancing ourselves from the particular physical site that we become more devoted to this particular place and return to it in memories. The mode of exile, however, influences our perspective on *Heimat* and most likely determines the degree of nostalgia with which we look back on it: If a person is displaced by war or other factors that require emigration for the sake of survival, identity is much more shaped by losing and being without *Heimat* than it would be if (s)he had left for personal reasons not based on urgent necessity (104). The displaced person

may, therefore, remember his or her *Heimat* more nostalgically, while the latter may even perceive it as a positive and encouraging experience to have moved to a new geographical place.

In its familial/social connotation, *Heimat* refers to family and social relationships as well as to the sense of safety and refuge provided by a particular community of individuals, which are predominantly portrayed as very harmonious (108). Most often, however, the *Heimat* community is stable in the sense that it is anchored to a physical location, so that the members of the community define the geographic place and vice versa.

Heimat as ideological/political interpretation, then, connotes the main ideological mindset connected to the political space considered as *Heimat*. Thus, whether individuals consider a country their *Heimat* also depends on their identification with the ideology embraced by the majority of the community, which serves as a bonding factor (110). In other words, whether people can identify with the commonly practiced moral and political philosophies of their community determines their sense of belonging to this particular community. The loss of a shared community that was based on the same values and core beliefs will understandably be more unsettling than distancing oneself from a collective with whom there was only little or no identification in terms of political ideology.

It may seem that the arguments to establish the three criteria—geography, family, and ideology—all converge in the notion of a spatiality that is locally defined. Conacher, however, makes an insightful observation which challenges the assumption that *Heimat* is geographically determined when she explores the fact that modern life is

subjected to frequent changes, instability, and fragility. She explains, “given the changing nature of global society, one’s birthplace or the geographical area or ideological space in which one lives has become a matter of chance and, now that change has become a feature of modern living, feelings of belonging can no longer be perceived as a constant in one’s life” (112). Conacher’s explanation appears exaggerated to a certain extent: while present society has undeniably changed significantly from only a few decades ago particularly in regard to the possibilities of travel and people’s ability to work and live wherever they choose, it is questionable whether or not most people would not consider their place of living, home town or city an identifying aspect in their lives. It seems more probable to assume that people’s sense of belonging as determined by a geographic place may—due to higher rate of migration, travel, and cultural influences—be more temporary. Yet, it can be assumed that most people, regardless of their mobility status, have a specific geographic place in mind that they would consider their childhood home, or *Heimat*.

Conacher’s fourth category anchors the *Heimat* construct in personal/individual interpretation. Self-determination guides the individual subject to recognize and take possession of “a sense of belonging, a sense of *Heimat*” (112). Therefore, “Heimat is something not to be sought in external circumstances but rather in the self,” and it should not constrain individuals, rendering them dependent or impotent (113). This line of thought leads Conacher to the fifth and final interpretation of *Heimat* as a dynamic/creative construct. If the sense of *Heimat* is not only determined by geography, social relations, or political views, it can also be acquired through identification with a particular occupation, such as devoting oneself to science or any other non-ideological

subject or creative outlet that allows individuals to imagine and mentally inhabit as their *Heimat*.

Conacher has established categories of internal and external factors that significantly contribute to the individual ideas of *Heimat*. They clarify mainly the fact that personal notions of *Heimat* are comprised of various degrees of significance. Personal priorities influence the particular make-up of the characteristics of one person's *Heimat* and differentiate it partially or greatly from another person's sense of belonging. Traditionally, however, external factors, such as geography, family, and ideology are the common denominators that determine one's physical and mental home. As the following discussion about the East German sense of homelessness will show, internal factors—Conacher's idea of a personal and creative determination of *Heimat*—are much less applicable in a scenario that is characterized by radical social, political, and economic changes. As their country disappeared in the course of history, for East Germans their loss of *Heimat* is largely determined externally. Yet, to generate a new sense of self and belonging in the new country, they need to generate a *Heimat* for themselves individually and creatively, and it may be less determined by ideology, geography, and even family.

Although an abstract concept, *Heimat* is also embodied in the form of a landscape or cityscape. The notion of cityscape that I employ in this chapter reflects a concept of space that provides the basis for emotional attachment. It refers to the spatial organization of cities and the habitual experience of this environment in the everyday lives of its inhabitants. Most individuals perceive it as necessary to feel anchored in one location or another as a stable and trustworthy frame for life's

challenges. This attachment directly informs their sense of identity. Cityscape, and spatiality in general, play an important role in the connection individuals establish with their *Heimat* insofar as it is not only the four walls of their home but their socio-physical environment that anchor the individual locally. People identify not only as individuals and group members, but their sense of self and belonging is also informed by the structural and architectural layout of an environment they know well. This landscape provides a sense of sameness and continuity that offers refuge particularly in times of change. A neighborhood that is familiar—be it a city block, a small town or even a city—functions as a point of orientation and, depending on how long one has inhabited this space in order to form emotional bonds with it, a point of identification. Accordingly, a place that individuals came to know well during their childhood because they experienced major developmental markers there (e.g., first best friends, kindergarten, school) will by most be considered their *Heimat*. When it is lost either because one left voluntarily or was forced to leave, it can become the object of nostalgic longing in the form of *Heimweh* or homesickness. Cityscapes can thus be located at the intersection between *Heimat* and identity.

Loss of Heimat

When we remember our childhood home, most of us recall certain places, such as schools, streets, street corners, or stores. As cities and towns change in infrastructure and physical appearance over time, most people find these places to be different than how they remember them when they visit after a long period of absence. East Germans' sense of disorientation and loss of *Heimat* derives also from the

superficial spatial unrecognizability itself but, more so, from the meanings embodied in the changed façades. The *Wende* seems to have declared their emotional attachment to their hometowns as ill directed as the structures incorporated their *Heimat* in the ideological and familial sense of the notion as established by Conacher. The spatial changes in the East German *Heimat* thus appear to have disrupted the identifying connection between the spaces and their personal memories.

As the notion of *Heimat* is closely interconnected to the individual's sense of selfhood, the loss of *Heimat* through forced or voluntary emigration will cause a significant change in selfhood. The subjective experience of such a loss can be compared to the phantom pain experienced after an amputation, which usually appears shortly but also up to two years after the amputation of a body part. It is a psychic experience through which the senses deceive the amputee by re-producing the sensation of the missing part as if it were still present. Elisabeth Grosz argues that the primary reason for the occurrence of phantom sensations is the sensory quest for physical wholeness and coherence (73). And since a continuous body image constitutes a core aspect of self-identity, the sense of physical coherence reflects a quest for the coherence of the self. The experience of phantom pain not only signifies a search for completeness but also the pain of any loss.

Analogously, a loss of *Heimat* will also significantly alter one's identity as the spatial markers that anchor individuals are lost or at least radically changed. As an integral part of collective and individual identity, *Heimat* represents stability, "a consistent and abiding sense of self and bodily boundaries, [it] requires and entails understanding one's position vis-à-vis others, one's place at the apex or organizing

point in the perception of space” (Grosz 48). The stable ground provided by *Heimat* constitutes the point of origin of “a perspective on the world, and becomes a source for vision, a point from which vision emanates and to which light is focused” (47). The sense of disorientation described in theories of culture shock following emigration to a new cultural territory is thus the result of the loss of this spatial origin and ‘original’ perspective. The subsequent sense of *Heimweh* can thus be conceptualized in analogy to the notion of phantom pain. While the latter constitutes a sensation in response to physical loss, the former is caused by the loss of spatial coordinates of identity. It constitutes an attempt to reassemble pieces in order to achieve wholeness and expresses a longing for the past sensation of belonging and being one with the social and spatial environment.

Losing one’s *Heimat* can be the result of a variety of causes: Radical political changes, particularly warfare, for example, result in large numbers of people seeking refuge in other countries for an indeterminable amount of time. Poverty likewise forces families and individuals to leave their homeland for better opportunities or even survival elsewhere. It may also be personal unhappiness or an unfulfilled sense of adventure that compels individuals to emigrate, leave everything behind, and start over in a new cultural environment. In the case of East Germany, however, those who neither left nor want to leave their city, town, or village most emphatically voice the sense of *Heimweh*. Their *Heimweh* is the nostalgic longing for an idealized home that was lost after unification as they missed the security and community of their former life even though they certainly do not wish to live in an authoritarian state again. In other words, they would like to regain their *Heimat* in familial and social terms but not in ideological terms.

They still inhabit the same physical space in which the longed-for past life took place, but it is part of a different country in the present, so that East German *Heimweh* represents a unique phenomenon. While the changes in the former GDR share aspects of the transitions in other Eastern European countries and perhaps in South Africa after the end of apartheid, the loss of selfhood and home seems more closely related to that of conquered and colonized people. Although it was a predominantly voluntary annexation by West Germany, the term colonization has been used in both academic and non-academic discourse to describe the post-unification experience of East Germans. Moreover, colonization of East Germany happened in the sense that the West German economic, social, political, and legal systems took effect immediately after unification as they were judged superior, thus giving West Germany the status of an occupying or colonizing power.

Heimatverlust is also a consequence of the ambitious efforts to become one country and nation by modernizing the deteriorating infrastructure in the so-called five new federal states in order to symbolize a new beginning: streets, schools and, in the case of Karl-Marx-Stadt, even cities were renamed, and historical town and city centers were restored; massive urban development projects, such as the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, were undertaken in order to mark the beginning of a new economic, social, and political order. But as both, the physical structures as well as their names changed beyond recognition within only a few years, visual anchors were lost for the inhabitants. While the restoration of streets and buildings greatly enhanced their outward appearance and the living standard of the occupants, most spaces of past everyday life like neighborhood stores, cinemas, restaurants, cafés, and nightclubs were closed

down. The newly developing infrastructure erased the memories embodied in these institutions. Although streets were renamed—usually without consultation of locals and even of those who lived in the particular street—many East Germans found that the physical organization of the city, i.e. its division of space through streets, remained one of the few recognizable aspects of their lost *Heimat* that they now nostalgically remember. This situation confronted them with a paradox; while the institutions of their *Heimat* no longer existed, the past is still present to some extent geographically as the overall division of space in towns and cities remained the same and remnants of the lost *Heimat* were incorporated in the renovated cities. Cityscapes thus reflect both the past and the present, and several memoirists draw on this physical simultaneity in their construction of an integrated identity. While the new world of united Germany is represented, for example, in the myriad of new stores, malls, and supermarkets that provide the kind of commercial paradise unavailable in the GDR, the old world is also omnipresent in city infrastructure, for instance, in the newly renovated facades of old buildings. To East Germans who have lived a city or town their whole lives, these buildings places, and streets are embodiments of their everyday memories and serve as *lieux de mémoire* connecting the past and the present.

The Tradition of Heimat and City Representations in German Literature

German literature has long valued the bond between man and nature and established a representational history of landscapes and cityscapes. Both fictional and non-fictional literature gives expression to the longing for a lost *Heimat*, thus reviving memory images for readers. Landscapes and nature elements were of significance in

literature already in the Bible, for instance the Books of Mark and Job, or the Song of Songs of Solomon suggest a likeness between nature and man. They have since been widely employed as devices to metaphorically signify human nature (Langman 37). For example, darkness, wilderness, woods, or stormy weather have been employed to suggest secrets, sins, and mysteries, whereas bright summer scenery is used to indicate youth, innocence, and happiness. In a similar fashion, such natural phenomena as fog, light, water, rainbows, spring, or fall are motifs, which allude metaphorically to mindsets and attitudes of protagonists (Daemmrich 607). In German literature, the relationship between humans and nature was firstly recognized, though not explored in depth, by the so-called Anacreontic poets between 1740 and 1750 who represent nature as a constitutive part of society, community, and friendship. Nature is also predominant and depicted as an idyllic place of refuge in poems of the young Goethe and Schiller, Lessing, Lenz, Mörike, von Hagedorn, and Klopstock (Brenner 63). Writers of the mid - to late eighteenth century – the literary periods of Storm and Stress as well as Romanticism – featured nature most prominently in their work by drawing imagery from it in order to symbolize human emotion. Their primary goal was to create a counterpart to the notion of reason that was valued so highly by Enlightenment philosophers. Thus we find representations of nature to indicate mood states, for instance, in the works of such otherwise diverse writers as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Joseph von Eichendorff, and Adalbert Stifter. Goethe's epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther, 1774) became the work that was most representative of the Storm-and-Stress period as its protagonist was caught between a newly emerging notion of the individual striving for self-fulfillment and

the old status-based structure of society. An abundance of descriptions of the landscape and the weather serve Goethe to denote the emotional conditions in which Werther finds himself. Subsequently, Goethe's narrator in the novel *Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities, 1809) describes a variety of 'crimes' committed against nature for the sake of human enjoyment in order to allegorically indicate restraint and conservatism in society. It is clear that the writers of the early 19th century were well aware of the relationship between nature and civilization and sought to represent it as an integral part of their texts. Particularly, Joseph von Eichendorff became famous for praising nature in his poems and songs to the extent that they acquired folkloric status due to their celebration of German landscapes. In promoting German folklore traditions, Eichendorff joined the efforts of his contemporaries Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, who published collections of German folk songs under the title *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn) in 1805 and 1808 as well as of the brothers Grimm, who collected and published their famous fairy tales previously known only in oral tradition as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales) in 1812 and 1815 (Brenner 127-8). These popular and well-known songs, legends, tales, and poems celebrating the German landscape as *Heimat* mark the successful attempt to map Germany as a place of home and belonging in the face of the Napoleonic occupation.

In the 1820s, a period of restoration began in the German-speaking states as a direct outcome of the Karlsbader Beschlüsse of 1819, and intellectual, cultural, and literary life was subjected to strict censorship and political persecution. Consequentially, an affinity towards apolitical topics and the inner life developed among German writers,

promoting the establishment of the novella and a focus on rural life and *Heimat*. After the failed revolution of 1848, the political climate remained conservative, and literary texts returned to apolitical subjects after the brief interlude of pro-revolutionary *Vormärz* literature. Besides Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Adalbert Stifter stands out as one of the most influential writers of the *Biedermeier* era. He pioneered a deeply integrated description of nature and landscape into his stories—his collection *Bunte Steine* (Colorful Stones) was published in 1853—which focus on the struggle of the individual against the overpowering forces of nature, society, and history as well as man's resignation to these powers as part of human destiny.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the blossoming of symbolic poetry as well as the novella genre in the literary period of Poetic Realism. One of its outstanding representatives, who embraced his local landscape in poems as well as novellas, was Theodor Storm. Idyllic and sometimes melancholic, his depictions of nature focus on its potentially destructive power. This aspect of his oeuvre is most prominently featured in the ending of his novella *Der Schimmelreiter* (The Rider on the White Horse). In this work, the author vividly describes a dike breaking, causing the sea to flood the plain. This event is the cause of his wife's and child's death, and, therefore, plays a significant role in indicating of the protagonist's state of mind. In reflecting a character's inner emotional state, Storm employed the symbolic depiction of nature in the Romantic tradition. His landscapes "fulfill a crucial role of reflecting [and] translating mental states, the *paysage intérieur* [as] man looks to nature as a mirror of himself" (Dierick 164). Storm stresses the strong relationship between an individual and his *Heimat* in his novellas and poems. The majority of his works are set in the northwest

region of Schleswig, an area fought over by Germany and Denmark in the First and Second War of Schleswig (1848-1851 and 1864) and the Seven Weeks War of 1866. He lived in his *Heimat* area for most of his life with the exception of 13 years in Potsdam and Thuringia where he moved for professional reasons. He identified strongly with the region of his childhood and employed it as the settings and themes of his works.

Though emphasizing the positive aspects and transfiguring the negative ones by means of symbols, allegories, and (leit)motifs (Brenner 161), Poetic Realism can be seen as the first literary movement that made nature and *Heimat* landscape an important part of its call for a poetic observation rather than the idealization of reality. Realist authors focused on nature and the idyllic *Heimat* landscape not least because of the socio-economic situation in their regions: The first wave of industrialization gave them a foreboding sense of modern times when as urbanization developed along with the establishment of factories in cities, and many left their villages and century-long traditions in order to support themselves and their families. These developments explain why *Heimat* literature published in the second half of the nineteenth century focused primarily on rural life and nature as counterparts to urban civilization, such as in the novels of Theodor Fontane and Fritz Reuter in Germany, Johanna Spyri in Switzerland, and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Ferdinand von Saar in Austria. As writers experienced the second wave of industrialization, their texts begin to reflect one of the main themes in the literary world of the beginning 20th century, city life, and its impact on the human psyche. In 1905 German Expressionist artists founded the group “Die Brücke” in Dresden and in 1911 “Der Blaue Reiter” in Munich, to counter their sense of the alienation between man and nature generated through the city. The increasing

interest of expressionist writers in the city as a creative subject was inspired by their literary predecessors. The Naturalists wrote during the last three decades of the 19th century, which were marked by the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 but also by economic depression, high unemployment rates, and the spread of urbanization. For the Naturalists, the literary treatment of the countryside was no longer dominated by idyllic “naturalness, simplicity, morality and vitality” but rather became the context of “stagnation, decay, madness, and death, and of hostility, xenophobia, brutality, even bestiality” (Dierick 161-2). The narratives of this period describing city life are likewise critical, depicting it as characterized by animosity and hostility due to the nervousness caused among the urban population. Georg Simmel, for instance, compared the different impact of life in a the countryside to that in city in his 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” He argued that

lasting impressions, the slightness in their differences, the habituated regularity of their course and contrasts between them, consume, so to speak, less mental energy than the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli. ... [T]he metropolis creates these psychological conditions—with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life. (325)

According to Simmel, everyday life in the city requires more energy as it is a place that is in constant change and movement, full of people, technology, and noise. Given the radical newness of the urban experience, many people of the early twentieth century reacted with culture shock to its fast-paced mode of life. The Expressionist artists and writers became known for their treatment of this experience, for instance in Emil Nolde’s city paintings, Georg Heym’s poem “Die Stadt” (The City), Johannes R. Becher’s poem “Berlin”, or Alfred Döblin’s novel *Berlin, Alexanderplatz*. They depicted the inherently

modern sense of disconnectedness, alienation, ambiguity, incoherence, and fragmentation experienced by city dwellers at the time. In order to express the emotional and mental state of being characteristic of their time, expressionist writers employed narrative and poetic devices such as a faster rhythm, collages, and montages that mirrored the lack of reflection the fast-paced modern life no longer allowed. It was their way of coping with the overwhelming presence of dirt, disease, poverty, and greed as a consequence of industrialization and urbanization in all major European cities. Although it was a short-lived movement, German Expressionism shed new light on the relationship between modern man and his urban environment. It also depicted the “modern attitude towards nature, landscape, and *Heimat*,” namely that man’s “relationship with his natural environment is one of submission or domination, it seems, but never one of parallelism and harmony. ... Here also lies one of the roots of the changed concept of *Heimat* in modern literature. The divorce of man from *Heimat*, rather than his life within it” (Dierick 166). Looking in particular at the stories of Thomas Bernhard and Ingeborg Bachman from the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dierick argues that German literature started to represent individuals as “deprived of landscape and *Heimat* as stable points in a constantly advancing process of alienation,” and therefore to display them as “essentially without roots. *Ortslosigkeit* replaces *Heimat*” (167). It needs to be emphasized here that the literature analyzed by Dierick is Austrian and West German literature where the concept of *Heimat* was a taboo for decades due to its implicit reference to Germany’s nationalistic past including heavily nationalistic connotations of everyday terms, including *Heimat*.

Given the dominant discourse of Antifascism in East Germany, which conceptualized fascism as an extreme form of capitalism, the nationalist connotations of *Heimat* were replaced by a new meaning that signified the GDR as the home of peace and social justice. In order to distribute this ideologically informed notion of *Heimat* and ensure its longevity, children learned numerous poems and songs about their beautiful *Heimat* that was portrayed as one of happy people, diligent parents, sunny skies, and the white doves of peace. Although most East Germans have come to understand the ideology behind their Socialist upbringing, including the highly structured school life and promotion of a Socialist culture, their connection to the landscape and cities where they grew up is still strong.

Their sense of loss is reflected in nostalgic expressions of *Heimweh*, ranging from lamentation or complaints in everyday conversation—which explain why East Germans have been derogatively referred to as *Jammerrossis*—to more artistic outlets, such as creative story telling. For many East Germans, the loss of their home initiated a deep sense of uncertainty and instability with regard to their present and future and hence their identity. Like their physical environment represented in cityscapes, their inner, psychological structures, too, had to be ‘renovated’ in order to adjust to the changed reality. Yet, their past is an essential part of who they are today and cannot simply be forgotten. Remembering their childhood and youth along with the specific temporal and spatial environment in which it was experienced has therefore become a literary subject particularly for the new authors of the last GDR-generation in both fiction and particularly in non-fiction.

While they narrate their own inherently idiosyncratic memories, they offer numerous cues in depicting the physical environment of everyday life in the GDR that may trigger the reader's own memories. Hence, while East German readers may not identify with the author's narrative style, political opinions, or specific social situations in the narrator's past, they can embrace these texts as attempts to reclaim the visual aspects of a past that has been erased. Particularly in the case of life writing in general and the memoir in particular, writing constitutes the attempt to "regain a public history" that was to be excluded from a society's future (Buss xii). As an "act of self-making" (xii) and a "process of reality-building" (xvi), these narrators strive to "locate the living self in a history, an era, a relational and communal identity" (xii) and thus give meaning to this life. As unification diminished the value of the past for the East Germans, the authors interrogate their own and/or their friends' and family's relationship with the complexities of a lost culture in order to repossess it and give it significance. As Buss writes, "there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narration" (64) because, as the experiences and stories of a life are reiterated, the self receives significance and is thus empowered. It is this empowerment that makes autobiographical writing particularly suitable for the purpose of self-discovery for both the narrator and the reader who acknowledges the self and its past in the act of reading. I will, therefore, discuss Robert Ide's memoir *Geteilte Träume* and Jana Simon's auto/biographical text *Denn wir sind anders* in the following and explore the special representation of everyday life in cityscapes and their relation to the narrator's sense of self in these texts.

IV. 1. Remembering Childhood Places in Robert Ide's *Geteilte Träume*

According to journalist and department director for the Berlin-Brandenburg region of the newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* Robert Ide, there is a sense of longing for the familiar *Heimat* among members of his generation of East Germans. They nevertheless do not want to turn back time and live in the GDR again. His visit to the small town of Marienberg in Saxony, where he grew up, illustrates the typical East German experience, namely the loss of a sense of *Heimat* and belonging after the *Wende* in places that simultaneously signify the presence and absence of the past. Ide describes the process of change in East German cities and towns as a process of depletion. New and unfamiliar spaces remain empty because the old traditions can no longer be lived in them and life is to a much greater extent lived in the home rather than the public sphere and thus new traditions have not developed. Upon visiting his hometown, he notices that it is being restored and restructured as part of a renovation program that has to be completed by 2012. Nevertheless, like most historic East German towns, it attracts no visitors, and the next generation continues to leave to find jobs the West because of staggering unemployment rates of almost twenty percent in most East German towns and regions. Those who have not left live with a lack of future perspectives in what Jens Bisky (2011) describes as the comfortable poverty that results from long-term unemployment when the benefits are modest but granted indefinitely and no change to this situation is expected. The kind of mourning Ide observes seems twofold: He describes it as a silent *Heimweh* of the parental generation, who long to find a sense of security and stability that is similar to what they experienced in the GDR. His own generation, however, seeks the lost childhood *Heimat* and its ontological security away

from what no longer is their home, which they either leave for ‘the West’ or via the imaginary travel of *Fernweh*.

East German Cityscapes

Robert Ide illustrates change in East German cityscapes and his reaction to it at the very beginning of his memoir using the example of the building that used to house, among other offices, the *Interflug* Airline travel agency. His mother was employed there before the *Wende*, and it is used now as a nightclub. As the club bouncer announces to Ide that he can enter because, “Ich glaub, Du warst schon mal hier” (“I think you have been here before”) (9), he is referring to the more recent past, meaning that Ide has frequented the club before. Nonetheless, Ide expands on this passing remark and describes the building in great detail, switching between observing the present situation of the experiencing self—such as getting into an elevator with others ignorant of the building’s history—and reflecting about this past. Ide’s memory is triggered by such details of the building as the floor and wall materials, dusty imprints on walls that indicate the place where pictures once hung, and the walls and ceiling of the elevator itself. In the midst of a loud party crowd Ide cannot help but remember:

Ich hätte jetzt auch Lust zu tanzen, doch in mir steigen Erinnerungen auf und ein Gedanke, den ich am liebsten vertreiben möchte: Wenn das meine Mutter wüsste. Hier im Haus des Reisens saß sie mit blau-weiß gestreifter Bluse, roter Weste und grauem Seidentuch vor würfelförmigen Computerbildschirmen und bot Fernreisen ans Schwarze Meer und den Balaton an. An der Wand zeigte ein bronzenes Relief ein Flugzeug mit DDR-Emblem, das über alle Ozeane flog. Einmal pro Jahr durfte auch ich durch die Sicherheitsschleuse, dann ging es in dem silbernen Fahrstuhl hinauf in die Schalterhalle von Interflug. Bei der Betriebsfeier schenkte mir der Weihnachtsmann ein Iljuschin-Flugzeug aus Plaste, das ich mir ins Kinderzimmer übers Bett hängte. (10-11)

I too would love to dance right now but memories are coming up and a thought that I would rather chase away: If my mother saw this. She sat here, in the House of Travel, wearing a blue-and-white pin-striped blouse, a red vest and a grey silk scarf in front of cubic computer screens, offering travels to the Black Sea and Lake Balaton. A bronze relief on the wall displayed an airplane with the GDR symbol that flew across all oceans. Once every year even I was allowed to enter through the security gate, and ride the silver elevator up to the *Interflug* service desk area. At a company Christmas party, Santa Claus gave me a plastic model of an Ilyushin airplane, which I hung over my bed in my room.

Ide is not only taking an elevator ride to a club but into his childhood. He invokes the core subject of his memoir, the divided dreams of parents and children after the *Wende*, to which the title refers, in the opening sections. He describes his mother as a typical East German who was proud of her job and her country and who would be disappointed if she saw what had happened to her former work place. His memories are often spatially anchored and dominated by tone of sadness and loss, and he needs to consciously remind himself to stop reminiscing: “Genug damit! Ich will die alten Bilder jetzt nicht” (“Enough of this! I do not want these old images now”) (11). He has achieved a life as a *Gesamtdeutscher* that he always wanted. Yet, facing the desolate interior of a building that was part of his mother’s life and thus his own childhood, he feels compelled to remember the fate of the GDR airline and its employees. It, like other East German companies, was privatized and either radically downsized or closed after the *Wende*. East Germans who were accustomed to fulltime employment and despite criticisms valued their work and considered their colleagues a core part of their social world lost their value in the new economic order and literally became useless (11). Ide’s identity is thus more conflicted than he had thought: “Ich bin angekommen im Haus meiner Kindheitsträume und im Leben meiner Eltern. Und könnte doch kaum weiter

weg von ihnen sein” (“I have arrived in the house of my childhood dreams and in the life of my parents. And yet, I could not be further away from them”) (11). The building signifies the simultaneity of past and present, but in its radically altered state and function it visualizes particularly the loss of the past in a way that his parents could never have imagined. It thus symbolizes the present social and mental environment that is not what anyone expected and wanted after the *Wende*. As it prompts an unsuspected process of remembering in Ide, this building can be considered his *madeleine* that inspired him to undertake more visits with places and friends in order to remember the past.

A journalist by profession, Ide systematically researched his memoir by visiting significant places from his childhood, including his old school. While the institution has been widely criticized in the West-German discourse that dominates the official German memory of the GDR, Ide creates a counter-memory when he remembers that it was actually in his *Polytechnische Oberschule* where he was first introduced to a critical thinking. The teacher responsible for it was a member of the *Neues Forum*, a political movement formed in September 1989 by Katja Havemann, the widow of Robert Havemann. The group called for democratic reforms and was deemed a subversive organization by the SED, the governing party in the GDR. When Ide revisits his school, this teacher is the school principal but lacks the hope and optimism she had emanated in the GDR and seems melancholic. His old school building has likewise changed. While kids roam the hallways as he and his friends had, the building is different. The walls have been painted, the smell “nach Bohnerwachs und zerkochten Kartoffeln” (“of floor wax and overcooked potatoes”) (45) is gone as are the obligatory bulletin boards

praising Socialism. And while Ide writes that, “natürlich ist das alles richtig so” (“of course all of this is as it should be”), the loss of the past is, nonetheless, difficult for him. And as in the building where his mother used to work, his school, too, retains traces of this past, however often it has been painted over or physically altered.

The simultaneous absence and presence of his everyday life in the GDR in the physical infrastructure are also the underlying motivation for Ide to invoke the eerie present of other East German cities where extensive renovation of historic centers and a modern infrastructure make them superior to most West German cities but these efforts did not produce the intended outcome:

Doch die sanierte Trostlosigkeit hat ein anderes, bedrückendes Gesicht: In die renovierten Kulissenstädte Zittau und Schwerin verirren sich kaum Gäste, die Einheimischen tragen halbleere Stoffbeutel durch die Einkaufscenter, öffentliche Kultur wird kaum geboten. ... Äußerlich mag es dort so aussehen wie in Duisburg ..., doch innerlich sind die Menschen mit einer weitaus größeren Bürde belastet. (71)

But the remodeled desolation has a different, depressing face: Hardly any guests find their way into renovated historic cities like Zittau and Schwerin, the locals carry half-empty bags through shopping malls, hardly any cultural events are offered. ... Superficially, it may look like Duisburg ... but the people are plagued by a much greater psychological burden.

The inner lives of East Germans thus present a stark contrast to the outward appearance of their renovated hometowns and cities. These renovations of the physical environment now also signify the new problems of unemployment and devaluation of the GDR past which changed the overall mood from the optimistic euphoria in 1990 to a resigned acceptance of the bleak status quo, a pessimistic outlook to the future, and nostalgia for the more secure and stable past. Ide describes the transformation of his grandparents' hometown of Wolkenstein in Saxony, where he used to spend his

vacations as a child. It is a beautifully renovated city but lacking in public life not least because it reflects the social divisions of capitalism: “Die Lebensverhältnisse haben sich aufgesplittet, die Hecken sind höher gewachsen. Nun schaut jeder nach seinem Rechten und beklagt, da sind sich immerhin alle einig, den fehlenden Gemeinsinn” (“The living conditions have been fragmented, the hedges have grown higher. Now everyone is looking out for his own best interest and complains—at least here they all agree—about the lack of a sense of community”) 1(87).

Ide also explores the changes to the infrastructure and the everyday lives lived in it in an area known as the Mansfelder Land in of Saxony-Anhalt that was one of the areas where privatization and deindustrialization had some of the most devastating consequences. An energy vortex in the GDR, it has lost over half of its population who moved away leaving mainly older people, particularly men, behind. The area surrounding Eisleben contains an array of unused and crumbling industrial sites, overgrown train tracks, and rusty shovels. Ide juxtaposes the distant past and the potentially explosive present generated by recent demographic and socio-economic developments: “Wahlplakate sind zu sehen: ‘Wehrt Euch! DVU’, ‘Taschen leer, Schnauze voll. Die Republikaner.’ Martin Luther wurde hier geboren. Sein Geburtshaus ist eine Ruine.” (“Election posters for right-wing political parties are everywhere: ‘Defend yourselves! DVU’, ‘Pockets empty. Fed Up. The Republicans.’ Martin Luther was born here. The house where he was born is in ruins”) (216). Ide’s reminder of Eisleben’s cultural heritage underlines the dire social situation in the area. (In 2007, when Ide’s memoir was published, the Mansfelder Land merged with another region into the new district Mansfeld South Harz in an attempt to save and rebuild the area.) These

examples of urban, town, and rural areas paint a rather sobering and dreary picture of post-*Wende* East Germany despite the fact that a modern infrastructure developed and historic towns were beautifully restored.

Ide's exemplary discussions of the changes to the appearance of villages, towns, and cities in the former GDR are integrated into his investigative project of showing the vast disparities in the lives and consequent difficulty in communication between the second GDR generation to which his parents belong and his own, the third and last generation of East Germans. While both generations had been optimistic and enthusiastic about the future in 1990, it was only the younger generation who, at least to outward appearance, was able to make the transition. However, while their parents have largely remained locked in the past, his own generation is caught between the contradictory feeling of "Ankommen und einer nicht vergehen wollenden Sehnsucht" ("arriving and a never-ending longing") (19). It was this internal conflict that motivated him to take a closer look at current everyday life in the former East Germany in general and the relationship between those two generations. In particular, he examines a situation when the past is both absent and present in the painted-over and re-designed infrastructure and nostalgically longed for as the popularity of *Ostprodukte* indicates. As Ide puts it, "überall, wo ich hinkam, ist das Damals in das Heute eingraviert" ("Everywhere I went, yesterday is engraved into today") (19).

Ide's Heimat and Heimweh

As cityscapes are part of the physical and spatial environment that grounds individuals in their sense of who they are and where they came from, Ide writes about

Berlin-Pankow, where he moved as a child from Marienberg, Saxony, to reveal more about his background. He relates that his family lived in close vicinity to a guarded property that functioned as a guesthouse for the GDR government. Recalling a favorite childhood prank, he describes how he and a friend would throw chestnuts across the wall surrounding the property to annoy the policemen there. Unlike Hensel and Rusch, Ide does not primarily write about his everyday life in the GDR, but the focus of his memoir is on the decade after unification and how it affected his own and his parents' generation as well as the relation between them. The chestnut episode is one of the few and brief personal memory stories about his childhood in East Germany that Ide does share with his readers. And while he does provide some details of his past life throughout the book, unlike Hensel's, his narrative is not overtly nostalgic. The fact that he is aware and critical of the difficult socio-economic situation in the former GDR does not mean that he idealizes the past. While a sense of loss is palpable when he describes the infrastructural and personal transformations after the *Wende*, he uses a predominantly analytic and at times ironic narrative tone as if to keep difficult memories at bay by avoiding an overly emotional account of the past. Ide's rationalization of emotion culminates in presenting three core emotions into three math formulas: "Hoffnung = Mut + Verzweiflung" ("Hope = Courage + Despair") (183) is his analysis of a childhood friend's decision to open up a business. "Mut = Hoffnung – Verzweiflung" ("Courage = Hope – Despair") (183) constitutes his comment on the courageous defiance of odds displayed by his friend's mother. And "Verzweiflung = Hoffnung – Mut" ("Despair = Hope – Courage") (192) is the formula he arrives at for an ill-advised local advertising campaign in Wolkenstein. While these formulas may be Ide's attempt to

simplify the complexity of factors determining East German reality, they also add a sarcastic element to his account of the situations described that are symptomatic as they exemplify the larger phenomenon of unemployment and business failures throughout the former East Germany after the *Wende*. Generalizing emotional reactions into abstract theorems could indicate a lack of empathy for the individual, but it may also reflect the author's attempt at analysis by reducing complexity to essentials in order to grasp and cope with the widespread sense of devastation and desperation.

Employing such an analytic and seemingly unemotional narrative tone, Ide is keeping the distance of the professional reporter from the people he visits and interviews in Saxony, even if they are his extended family of "Onkels, Enkel, Cousinen und Großnichten" ("uncles, grandchildren, cousins, and greatnieces") (184). As a journalist, he not only relates his own notion of *Heimat* in both geographical and social terms but also and especially that of his relatives and childhood friends. While Ide identifies Wolkenstein and the Erzgebirge generally as part of his past *Heimat*, he relates only one memory that indicates a personal, emotional connection to this or any other place. The reason for this can be found in his intention of depicting both less and more than his personal memories, namely the relation between his own and his parents' generation before and after the *Wende* as his subtitle *Meine Eltern, die Wende und ich* (My Parents, the *Wende*, and I) indicates. To explore this relationship,

habe ich mich mit meinem Kinderbuchhelden Alfons Zitterbacke auf eine Reise in meine DDR-Kindheit begeben, habe Lehrer und Vorbilder von einst getroffen. Ich habe auch alte Jugendfreunde aufgespürt, mit denen ich die rasenden Tage des Umbruchs erlebte, um nachzuforschen, was aus ihren Träumen geworden ist. (19-20)

I set out with my childhood hero, Alfons Zitterbacke, on a trip into my GDR childhood, met teachers and role models of the past. I also tracked down

old friends with whom I experienced the fast-paced days of the transformation in order to find out what happened to their dreams.

Although he does recall aspects of his childhood, the entire memoir contains only one episode that connects Ide identity to a local marker of his childhood. When he visits Wolkenstein, he takes a walk in the countryside as he used to with his aunt Ruth, who would often tell him the moral tale about a fir tree that wished to have golden needles, was granted this wish, and, as people and animals picked up all those golden needles, remained completely needle-less. Advocating for modesty and simplicity, this story seems to lead Ide back to his origin and essence as a reminder to stay grounded; upon remembering this story, he realizes, “am Goldbach sind alle Tannen grün. Ich atme tief ein. Heimat kann ganz einfach sein” (“at the Goldbach creek all fir trees are green. I take a deep breath. *Heimat* can be that simple”) (199). It is particularly the idiosyncrasy of the episode and lack of sentimentality in relating it that differentiates Ide’s account from Hensel’s and the *Ostalgie* phenomenon generally.

While his sense of *Heimat* thus derives from his memories of particular places, it is also informed by memories of family and close friends, particularly his childhood friend Ilonka, who functions as a leitmotif throughout the book. It is only when we also read Ilonka as a metaphor that we discover that Ide is, in fact, telling us that he too is holding on to his past. This becomes particularly evident in the last paragraph of the memoir in which Ide relates attending Ilonka’s wedding. He writes:

Du kannst jetzt loslassen, sage ich mir, als sie aufsteht, einen netten Kerl namens Ingo an der Hand, und ‘Ja’ sagt”... “Mich erleichtert dieser Gedanke, denn nur mit ihm können wir Freunde bleiben ohne einen wehmütigen Blick zurück. Ich habe etwas verloren, ich habe etwas gewonnen. (222)

'You can let go now, I tell myself, as she stands up holding the hand of a nice guy named Ingo, and says 'I do.' ... "This thought is a relief for me for because only like this can we remain friends without looking back melancholically. I lost something, I gained something.

Ide experiences both Ilonka's marriage and by metaphorical extension German unification simultaneously as the loss of an important part of his past as well as the gaining of what could be a lifelong friendship that will retain the memories of his past. Ilonka represents and personifies his own past as she is and has been at Ide's side since childhood:

Ich laufe mit Ilonka durch Pankow und denke daran, was wir hinter uns gelassen haben: die kuscheligen Nischen einer durchorganisierten Kindheit, das neugierige Austesten der Grenzen, dann der rasende Rausch der Freiheit, die Ernüchterung der Einheit. (203)

I am walking with Ilonka through Pankow thinking about the things we left behind: the cozy niches of a well-organized childhood, the curious testing of limits, then the fast-paced intoxication of freedom, the sobering effect of reunification.

Although Ide closes his memoir by stating that he cannot and will not look back nostalgically, there are moments in his narrative that reveal an emotional reaction to some of the changes he describes. He points out rationally, for instance, that the transformations he observes in his former school building are for the best. But he also admits: "Mich schmerzt es trotzdem" ("It nonetheless pains me") (46). He also does not take the renovation of his vacation town Wolkenstein lightly as he reveals that it pains him to see this renovated, quiet vacation town empty and its school becoming one of 800 educational institutions that have been closed down in Saxony (200). Finally, the calm, matter-of-fact tone he employs to illustrate the stark contrast between Eisleben's

present-day active right-wing culture and its historic call to fame as the birthplace of Martin Luther reveals that this development is one to which he wants to draw people's attention. Here he employs a grammatical change in syntax in order to make his point: the narrative and syntactical style changes into simple sentences consisting only of one main clause rather than the complex structure used in the rest of the book, thus causing a slight but noticeable disruption in the reading process (216). Before he points out the disconnect between past and present that exists in Eisleben in this paragraph, he raises the question "Hier soll die Zukunft des Ostens liegen?" ("This is supposed to be the future of the East?") (216). Indicating his doubts that this region of East Germany has economic or social potential because he fails to recognize any signs for such a claim, Ide implies that, while Eisleben and its surrounding area had a promising past, its present does not give cause for an optimistic look towards the future. The factors that may have influenced this development are, as the readers can conclude from Ide's earlier discussion, partially rooted in the aftermath of the *Wende*. The only initiatives that claim to be interested in resolving the issues appear to be right-wing groups, as Ide's choice of election slogans shows. In this short paragraph, Ide clearly calls for a more active approach by all the affected parties to take matters into their own hands in order to direct the course of their *Heimat* into a positive direction. Although short-lived, such an activist agenda—recalling a positive past in order to initiate active change—is unique for Ide's narrative and clearly distinguishes him from other East German memoirists.

Ide's narrative tone is also not completely free of melancholy or sentimentality when he reveals that the beautification processes undertaken in the East German

regions that he had known as a child affect him emotionally. While, or perhaps because, he is excluding himself from the generally pessimistic mood in these places, Ide is able to convey that East Germans, in particular the older generations, are mentally and emotionally not able to simply exchange the land and cities that are their home for shiny new surfaces. They refuse to trade in their 'old' memories for the challenge of creating new ones in an environment that, in only a few years after the *Wende*, has come to represent instability, insecurity, and loneliness. The towns and cities they live in now are not the same embodied by their image of *Heimat*. It is possibly this realization—along with the 'scientific' facts of remembering and forgetting—that explains why there are so few personal memory stories in Ide's memoir: He intended to depict post-*Wende* mentalities in post-*Wende* land- and cityscapes. The latter no longer contain visible memory cues that can trigger personal remembering of childhood experiences. Thus, their survival is endangered because they will not be re-called as often as memories whose cues are easily accessible.

However, Ide's narrative style does not offer his readers too many memory cues as he refuses to reveal his childhood past in all its complexities by offering more detailed memory stories, for example. This may be intended because a more personal account of his childhood will not only draw too much attention to himself, which is not his goal, but also will individualize his stories too much so that readers would not be able to identify with them. It is thus easier for his audience to find a common ground and connection with Ide because the anecdotes about the places of his childhood are similar to childhood experiences of most East Germans. Since everyday GDR life was structured very homogenously and unitarily across the nation—including city and

regional infrastructures, educational system, and consumerism--Ide's East German audience is able to establish a sense of connection with his narrative.

The Reception of Ide's Representation of a Loss of Heimat

Beyond newspaper reviews and reader responses on amazon.de, the website *www.geteilte-traeume.de* offered a core resource for the analysis of the official and vernacular reception of Ide's memoir. It provided a space for readers to post their reactions to which the author would at times respond, and he would also post letters by readers he had received. However, it was unexpectedly taken down in 2011.

Birgit Walter calls Ide's memoir in the subtitle of her review in the *Berliner Zeitung* "Noch etwas Unnützes aus der Reihe der DDR-Erinnerungsbücher" (April 23, 2007) ("Another useless book among those remembering the GDR") and argues that not much happened in Ide's life, but he writes a book about it nonetheless. However, most reviews of *Geteilte Träume* in East German newspapers were either brief and neutral and served primarily to announce its publication (*Schweriner Volkszeitung* 4/30/2007; *Nordkurier* 3/20/2007; *Märkischer Sonntag* 3/11/1007), or they were largely laudatory. They focus primarily on his attempt to explain the generational discrepancies in adjustment to life in unified Germany. Intergenerational silences ensued not least because many young East Germans left their families behind as they opted for careers and a sense of hope and a future the East could not offer and moved to the former West Germany and (e.g., *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* 4/21/2007; *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 4/25/2007). Like some of the reader responses on amazon.de, the official reception also positively reflects his journalistic research in that he not only relates his own

experiences but shows an interest in the opinions and experiences of other East Germans, among them his two close friends and his extended family (*Neues Deutschland* 4/21/2007).

East German readers who contacted Ide directly and whose letters and emails used to be available at www.geteilte-traeume.de indicated that they saw their own sense of homelessness, conflicted identities, and their sense of guilt for leaving their families behind reflected in his memoir and praised his realistic if bleak depiction of the situation in East German cities and towns. Jens Bullerjahn, for instance, wrote in a letter to the author: “Ihre Momentaufnahme in jenen wenigen Seiten gibt die gefühlten Farben der Menschen und der politisch-gesellschaftlichen Situation im Mansfelder Land sehr gut wieder” (4/16/2007) (“Your snapshot represents the mood of the people and the political and social situation in the *Mansfelder Land* very well”). Another reader writes that she could relate well to Ide’s representation of the difficulty East Germans faced in starting over completely, and that she has learned to be thankful for the opportunity to experience two different political systems in her lifetime (12/6/2006).

The vernacular reception reflected in the reader responses on the amazon.de entry for *Geteilte Träume* indicate that readers appreciated Ide’s interviewing his contemporaries such as family members, childhood friends, teachers, and local politicians. They, moreover, commented on the loss of the family unit among those East Germans who left for careers in the West as Ide did and who found that they shared their dreams with their parents in the GDR and during the *Wende*. In the years since then, however, their lives and the divided dreams to which the title refers reflect a generational division other than the more famous ‘wall in peoples’ heads’ and a

speechlessness between the two generations. As the family unit constitutes a core aspect of a sense of home, Ide's text itself and the focus of the vernacular reception on this subject, as the following comments reveal, indicates the significance of this loss:

Anhand von vielen Geschichten und Schicksalen schildert der Autor sehr eindrucksvoll, welche unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen Jugendliche und ihre Eltern nach der Wende gemacht haben. ... Viele Themen von damals werden heute einfach nicht mehr angesprochen. Die älteren Menschen erzählen nicht und die jüngeren Menschen fragen auch nicht. (*amazon.de* 4/18/2007)

By means of many stories and fates the author depicts impressively the different experiences young people and their parents have had after the *Wende*. ... Many subjects from then are not addressed any longer. The older people do not talk and the younger people do not ask.

So war's... Kindheit und Heimat auf einen Schlag verloren... seitdem heimatlos... orientierungslos... und, ja du hast recht; nie drüber geredet mit den Eltern... (email to the author, 5/3/2007)

That's how it was... lost childhood and *Heimat* at the same time... since then without a home... disoriented... and, yes, you are right: never talked about it with the parents ...

IV.2. Mourning the East German *Heimat* in Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders*

Unlike the texts discussed previously, Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders* is not a memoir but a biography of her friend Felix. After his suicide while serving a prison sentence for dealing drugs, Simon sought to understand his life in general and his development after the *Wende*, when he became part of the Berlin subculture of bouncers and right-wing hooligans. Although it also constitutes a life narrative, as a biography Simon's own life is not the primary subject. However, the brief introductory paragraph reveals that she had known Felix since she was sixteen years old. And her narrative voice reflects both their emotional closeness at that time and during the period

of reconnecting just before Felix's suicide, as well as the detachment caused by their estrangement after the *Wende* and necessitated by her professional status as a journalist who needs to retain a critical distance regarding her subject of investigation. Moreover, the circumstances of her own life are integrated into the text to the extent that they relate to his both in the similarity of their lives before and the radical difference after the *Wende*. She employs her own successful identity transition as a means of comparison in seeking to understand Felix's failure to create a future for himself after German unification. Nevertheless, as a biographical third-person narrator, she distances herself from her subject to a greater degree than the autobiographical narrators versus their own lives in the memoirs of Hensel, Rusch and Ide. But like their memoirs, her biography of Felix is written with the intention to reflect an exceptional life that was, nevertheless, representative of those among their generation who failed to establish a new life for themselves after the *Wende*. As such, Felix's life and death are intended to be part of the collective memory of both the GDR and the radical changes unification introduced to the lives of its citizens.

Cityscapes in Denn wir sind anders

Simon describes the disappearance of places, sites, and institutions associated with her childhood, and the sense of loss that connects her with Felix as well as other East Germans who share similar memories of a cityscape that constituted their *Heimat* and, as such, a consistent, reliable axis for their sense of self and home. She cannot relate to and identify with the new or renamed places and discusses the lack of orientation they cause as one of the main coordinates of Felix's life, which was

dominated precisely by the feeling of being different and not belonging. As her title indicates, this experience of loss distinguishes them from their West German peers to the extent that the difference constitutes the core of their counter-identity – a theme similarly explored by Hensel, Rusch, and Ide. Yet, unlike the narratives of these other East German authors, Simon's story lacks the happy ending of the protagonist's arrival and assimilation in the post-*Wende* reality. As such, her auto/biography expands the discourse of collectively remembering the GDR to include accounts of failed identity transitions when the loss of home and *Heimat* could not be compensated.

Although Felix suffered neglect and abuse by his parents as well as subtle racism due to his ethnically mixed heritage as the child of a South-African mother and a German father, he also experienced an ordinary GDR childhood in Johannisthal. This was a small town on the verge of becoming a suburb of East Berlin. He had to rely on the physical space of his hometown, the regularity of school, and his training sessions in martial arts, as well as friends like Simon to provide stability in his life and take over the parenting functions of shelter, orientation, and care because his parents did not fulfill their responsibilities.

The changes following German unification caused a deterioration of the support systems Felix had established for himself, as GDR youth organizations disappeared and many young East Germans, including author Jana Simon and most of Felix's other friends, left their hometowns for the West. As a result, Felix was catapulted into a life marked by instability and loss for which he sought to compensate through a reliance on his body and particularly the judo skills he had acquired over the years as he came to experience violence as the only powerful and empowering means of his identity.

Simon's investigations of the circumstances of Felix's death leave the author and her readers to wonder whether and to what extent German unification contributed to Felix's failed life and suicide. Simon does not reminisce nostalgically about their lost *Heimat* – she merely emphasizes that it constituted their home and provided stability and reliability for East Germans, which many of them find lacking in the post-*Wende* period.

At the very beginning of the biography, Simon gives her readers a visual image of Schönevide, a suburb of Berlin where Felix's grandparents still live and where he spent a fair amount of time during his childhood: It is a positive change that this town has experienced since the *Wende*. During GDR times, semiconductors, power transformers, and cables were produced here and caused a constant odor of burnt rubber that made it hard to breathe and left a grey layer of dust on walls of buildings and window sills. Since the factories were closed down, it smells of linden flowers, the people—predominantly men—are wearing jackets in friendly colors, and seem to have a great amount of spare time. Nonetheless, she writes, “Er muss sich hier gefühlt haben wie am Ende der Welt” (“He must have felt here like this was the end of the world”) (7). Like most towns in the former East Germany, Schönevide has superficially undergone a change for the better with renovations that make it look and even smell better, clean and modern, but they also lost a lot of their population due to a lack of employment opportunities. Hence, mostly retired men are left who have not too much else to do but walk their dogs, and a sense of stagnation prevails.

After an intricate look at Felix's family life that extends to the history of his grandparents in South Africa, which she relates to his abusive parents, Simon explores how Felix was treated as and often felt as an outsider within his *Heimat*. As the son of a

South African woman, he was separated separated by skin color from his peers, and his weak and sickly constitution prevented him from enjoying his childhood like other children. Nonetheless, he considered the Berlin suburbs of Johannisthal and Schöneeweide his *Heimat* and always remained loyal to this area regardless of the fact that the memories of growing up there were anything but idyllic. In order to understand Felix's life before and particularly after the *Wende*, Simon describes their hometown, Johannisthal, via the literary convention of land- and cityscapes functioning as the protagonist's mindscapes. She does so by condensing it to the four main attractions around which their lives revolved when they were younger: the *Delikatladen* (specialty-goods store), the movie theater, the ice cream parlor, and the dance club. All of these institutions disappeared after the *Wende* and now only exist in her memory. The specialty store became a bank, the small, one-screen movie theater was torn down and a modern multiplex erected in its place; the ice cream parlor was renovated and sells none of the original ice cream, yet, more flavors of ice cream than before; and their club, where would go as teenagers to drink and dance together, became a bar dominated by dubious looking men drinking alcohol early in the morning (36-38). The fact that these places, which embody childhood and adolescent experiences shared with friends and/or family, have been transformed to the extent that they no longer resemble those memories leads Simon to stress on more than one occasion in her biography that their childhood has been erased (47) or is in ruins (169). These sites were more than a place to meet friends or be entertained. To Simon and Felix, they were also constituted important places of refuge to distract them from the "allgegenwärtige Melancholie" ("ubiquitous melancholy") (38) and a fearful expectancy of the future that the events of

Chernobyl, the Cold War, and environmental destruction brought about. Simon remembers the childhood niches of her hometown as a refuge and, literally, common ground for the young people of her generation in her area. They enjoyed the delicacies obtained in the fancy specialty foods store. They also bonded by making fun of the lumpy East German ice cream, by going dancing and drinking every weekend at their club, discussing the events of those nights with their friends at school the next day. In their movie theater “träumte sich die Johannisthaler Jugend in eine andere Welt” (“the youth of Johannisthal dreamt themselves into another world”) (36). These sites and places were part of their identity, and when they were closed or renovated beyond recognition after the *Wende*, Simon, Felix and their peers no longer felt at home there. They never took to the new and modern buildings that replaced their old ones as these represented the new era of post-unification Germany and the ubiquitous transposition of West German institutions onto East Germany that threatened their sense of self.

While discussing the importance of these four sites of GDR youth culture in her hometown may have been an attempt to create a sense of understanding for it among West German readers; more importantly, these memories would create a bond between the author and her East German readers because these four places existed in every East German town and were constitutive parts of growing up in the GDR. As Simon describes each one of them, East Germans remember the *Delikatladen* in their hometown, their movie theater and the movies they watched there and with whom, the ice cream store and the taste of GDR soft-serve ice cream, the *Diskotheek* they frequented with their friends as well as all the stories around them that they shared. Simon realizes that because these places disappeared alongside all East German

institutions, Simon realizes that his old friends may have been so important to Felix because they gave him a sense of continuity and the reassurance that this life really had existed (48). And it was the simultaneity of the dissolution in Felix social network as his friends, including Simon, left home to attend university, and in his physical environment that radically destabilized his sense of self. And despite the significant difference in their post-*Wende* lives, she considers Felix to be “noch einer von den alten Freunden, einer von denen, an denen sie hing, weil sie mit ihnen ein untergegangenes Land, ein untergegangenes Leben teilte” (“still one of those old friends, one of those people she was attached to because she shared with them a lost country, a lost life”) (245).

Simon echoes Jana Hensel in her sense of frustration that recounting their East German past for West Germans was difficult because of the constant need for intercultural translation and repeated explanations (Hensel 26). Simon’s reflections on her and Felix’s hometown after its post-*Wende* transformation thus also serve to establish the counter-identity asserted in the biography’s title.

Sie waren zusammen aufgewachsen, in Johannisthal, einem Ort, den es eigentlich gar nicht mehr gab. Nur die Häuser, die Ruinen ihrer versunkenen Kindheit and Jugend, standen noch. Alles andere hatte sich verändert: Die Atmosphäre, die Autos, die Straßenlaternen, die alten Läden hatten zugemacht und in den Schaufenstern würden nie mehr die Produkte ihrer Kindheit liegen... Sie trauerten nicht, dazu hatten sie ihr Land zu sehr verabscheut. Es gab nur eine unbestimmte Sehnsucht, nach Menschen, mit denen man die verschwundenen Erinnerungen teilen konnte, die mit PW, Cola Wodka, Spaniens Himmel, Ernst Thälmann, Eiscreme mit Grießklümpchen und Major Mendel dasselbe verbanden wie sie. Denen sie nichts erklären mussten und die nichts ‘seltsam’ oder ‘exotisch’ fanden. (169-170)

They had grown up together, in Johannisthal, a place that did not really exist any longer. Only the houses, the ruins of their lost childhood and youth, were still standing. Everything else had changed: The atmosphere,

the cars, the street lights, the old stores had closed down and the products of their childhood would never again appear in their store windows... They were not mourning, for that they had detested their country too much. There was only an undetermined sense of longing for people, with whom one could share the lost memories, who associated the same things with *PW*, *Cola Wodka*, *Spain's Sky*, Ernst Thälmann, lumpy ice cream, and *Major Mendel*, to whom they did not have to explain anything and who did not find anything 'curious' or 'exotic'.

Thus, for both Simon and Felix *Heimat* is not only constituted by the immediate physical surroundings of their hometown, i.e., the geographical aspect, but also includes the participants in the socio-cultural environment of the GDR who formed an in-group that shared in Halbwachsian collective memories about childhood and youth in East Germany. As such, the East German past is strongly linked to their sense of self-identity because the memories provide refuge and safety in the unstable and confusing post-*Wende* world and often constitute the only stable component in their lives.

Heimweh as Longing for Stability and Control

Although Felix's life is anything but representative, his post-*Wende* experiences constitute an extreme version of and thus epitomize the sense of disorientation that most East Germans felt due to a loss of control over their lives and the devaluation of their experiences. As Wolf Wagner argued in his discussion of the *Wende* experience as a form of culture shock, East Germans lost not only the system of political and social norms to which they had been accustomed to in the GDR, but more importantly they lost the assurance of knowing their physical as well as the socio-cultural environment, where they knew how to observe a code of conduct. East Germans who were beyond their teenage years in 1990 were well aware of political and economic limitations and had learned how to navigate their life within these limits. Entering a new socio-cultural

environment and thus losing one's respective competence initiates a challenging process of adjustment. As individuals in such a situation are unclear about the social expectations and behavioral rules of the new society, some become highly disoriented and frustrated. Self-doubt and distress can be the result and lead to animosity toward and great disappointment in the new social order to such an extent that these individuals gain a new and often romanticized appreciation of their lost *Heimat*. For East Germans, this sense of *Heimweh* could not be projected onto an existing socio-cultural environment as not only the political institutions and the economic order, but also the physical surroundings of their cityscapes changed at a rapid speed. Some of them, therefore, started to feel as if they had been trapped with no place to which they could safely return to recover.

For Felix, the experience of culture shock escalated because in his search for continuity, respect, and belonging he turned to the wrong people. Having grown up in an unstable and abusive home and experiencing the complete dismantling and devaluation of the cultural belief system to which he had been accustomed in the GDR, Felix expresses a particularly strong sense of homelessness and *Heimweh* that immigrants often have to confront at the beginning of their life in a new environment. He also represents an extreme case in terms of how to cope with his struggles to adjust: Having been practiced extreme sports like boxing and martial arts since childhood, Felix used violence to both gain respect within his new peer group and as a temporary escape from reality as the brutal fights often put him into a state of ecstasy that made him forget all else:

Felix hatte ihr einmal erzählt, es sei wie ein Rausch, bei dem man alles vergesse, was einem vorher wichtig gewesen war. Die Welt würde schmal

wie ein Tunnel, es existierten nur noch er und der Gegner... Sein Körper befand sich im Kriegszustand, produzierte zu viel Adrenalin, das ihn berauschte... Alle Gedanken schienen nur noch aufs Vernichten konzentriert. Er fühlte keinen Schmerz mehr, oder nur wie durch eine dicke Wand hindurch. Angst, Euphorie, Lust auf Gewalt, Spannung mischten sich zu einer Art Schwerelosigkeit, losgelöst von allen irdischen Problemen. Nichts war mehr wichtig. (88-9)

Felix had once explained to her that it was like being intoxicated, when you forget everything that had mattered before. The world would become narrow like a tunnel, only he and his opponent existed... His body was at war, producing too much adrenaline which intoxicated him... All thoughts seemed only focused on the destruction of his opponent. He no longer felt any pain, or only as if through a thick wall. Fear, euphoria, desire for violence, and tension converged into an apparent lack of gravity, detached from all earthly problems. Nothing mattered any more.

Felix deals with the overwhelming task of adjusting into the new system in his own misguided way – he becomes a bouncer at popular nightclubs in the former East Berlin and the owner of a dubious massage parlor. Moreover, some of his new peers are involved in dealing drugs, which eventually leads to Felix's arrest, conviction, and suicide. Whether and to what extent he was aware of his new friends' illegal activities, Simon cannot definitely establish. What mattered most to Felix was the sense of comradeship and in-group loyalty his new friends seemed to provide. They shared a particularly strong sense of East German counter-identity and sought stability and continuity by being part of a group of extreme outsiders as East German bouncers and hooligans. As Simon explains: "Es ist ihr Versuch, der westlichen Gesellschaft, von der sie längst Teil sind, etwas entgegenzusetzen. Sie erleben, dass nichts sicher und für immer ist – kein System, keine Arbeit, keine Freundschaft, keine Liebe" ("It is their attempt to counter the Western society of which they have nevertheless become a part. They realize that nothing is certain and forever – no system, no job, no friendship, no

love”) (111). The new freedom brought about by the *Wende* was overwhelming and destroyed any sense of stability because it enabled, encouraged, and even enforced radical changes in the socio-political sphere that impacted the personal lives of all East Germans. As reaction, Felix “sehnte sich nach etwas, das nicht flexibel war, das sich nicht über Nacht auflösen würde wie sein Land und alles, was einmal sicher schien” (“was longing for something that was not flexible, that would not dissolve over night like his country and everything that once seemed certain”) (112). Simon recognizes this need for continuity as her own and expresses sympathy for Felix’s reaction to the new situation. She writes that she also tends to hold on to her old friends and is deeply saddened when they leave. Having experienced GDR life and the *Wende* together, Simon understands and shares Felix’s need to belong somewhere and to give his life a kind of regularity and structure, despite the fact that she chose a different life than Felix who seemed to be lost in his own personal chaos that was exacerbated by the socio-political changes after 1990:

Er war 24, hauptberuflicher Türsteher, Massagesalon-Betreiber, Kickboxer, Bach-Liebhaber, Indianerfan und Hypochonder... Die Rollen seines Lebens schienen sich zu verwirren. ... *Dabei habe ich vergessen, dass ich so, wie ich bin, immer noch stark bin, dass ich nicht auch noch so tun muss.*” (101)

He was 24, bouncer by profession, owner of a massage parlor, kickboxer, Bach enthusiast, a fan of American Indians, and a hypochondriac... The roles of his life seemed to get confused. ... *In all this, I forgot that I am still strong just the way I am, that I do not also have to pretend.*

Simon quotes from Felix’s diary throughout the biography, and this cited passage reveals his belated insight into his own situation. He was always aware of his status as an outsider, a boy of partly South African heritage in the GDR and the only mixed-race

child in his hometown, and subsequently the only bouncer who was comparatively petite and moreover not fully Caucasian in the right-wing scene. Despite the sense of empowerment and respect he achieved within his new in-group, Felix was partly aware of his physical differences from the other group members as well as of the fact that this group had an outsider status within the larger German society. While they also could not offer him the permanence and consistency that he needed in the long run, it may have been the familiarity of the outsider status that attracted him to them initially as it provided a sense of continuity for Felix after the *Wende* because he knew that “Heimatlosigkeit war bedrohlich” (“Homelessness was dangerous”) (200).

In her very personal account of Felix’s life, Simon emplots his biography in a way that indicates that she considers his development after 1990 anything but typical, nevertheless, as indicative of the identity problems faced by all East Germans, including herself. She uses Felix’s extreme and self-destructive development to demonstrate the consequences the radical changes—politically, economically, socially, and culturally—in East German society had on individuals. East Germans were not only accustomed to a stable set of rules and an organized lifestyle, as any person would who was a citizen and active cultural participant in a country since their childhood. They had also formed an emotional attachment to their physical surrounding, regardless of whether or not it was modern or pretty. The streets, squares, and buildings of their hometowns were identity markers that contained important memories. These physical anchors disappeared along with their jobs and their friends, and many East Germans, including Felix and Simon, felt that their past lives were being erased and devalued as positive responses by her readers indicate.

The Reception of Simon's Representation of Heimat and Homelessness

The public reception of *Denn wir sind anders* in newspaper and online reviews focus primarily on Felix's biography and the fact that Simon provides some insight into a specific social scene that took hold of East Berlin during and after the *Wende*. As Eva-Maria Schnurr argues in *Der Spiegel*, Simon's work is "ein Buch, das mit der detaillierten Schilderung der vergangenen zehn Jahre, vor allem der Berliner Türsteher- und Hooligan-Szene, ein bislang wenig beachtetes Kapitel der Nachwende-Gesellschaft einfängt" ("a book, which offers a detailed depiction of the past ten years, particularly of the Berlin bouncer and hooligan scene, and thus captures a chapter of post-*Wende* society that has been granted little attention") (28/2002). Among the reviewers, it was particularly Tobias Temming who discussed Simon's own rather than Felix's biography in *literaturkritik.de*. In the review he argued that her sense of loss reflects a collective mood and as such is symptomatic for other East Germans who spent their childhood in the GDR and struggled to re-orient themselves during and after the *Wende* years. After all, East Germans lost not only their sense of *Heimat* with regard to the radical change from the familiar notion of full employment to the unfamiliar situation of soaring unemployment rates, but they also saw their past lives socially devalued as so-called real-existing Socialism declared a failure in the dominant post-1990 German collective memory.

Reader responses support Temming's argument that both Simon's own and Felix's story represents a whole generation of *Wendekinder*, "deren Vergangenheit im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' mit einem Schlag ausradiert wurde" ("whose past in the 'real-existing Socialism' was abruptly erased") (*amazon.de* 4/4/2007). This reader

further characterizes the *Wendekinder* as a generation of East Germans who do not feel at home in either the East or the West of Germany and who are thus searching for an identity and long for a sense of home (*amazon.de* 4/4/2007). The majority of reader responses on *amazon.de* express their ability to relate to Simon's text on such a personal level: "Man macht eine Wanderung durch die eigene Jugendzeit in Ostberlin. Wer sich nur ein bisschen in dieser Szene auskennt, wird viele Paralelen [sic] entdecken" ("You are walking through your own youth in East Berlin. Whoever knows this scene only a little will recognize many parallels") (*amazon.de* 12/18/2002). Another reader explains: "Dieses Buch ist sehr interessant zu lesen, da ich 28-Berlin "OST" [sic] selber diese Zeit hautnah miterlebt habe, fühle ich mich beim lesen [sic] oft in meine eigene Jugend zurückversetzt" ("This book is very interesting to read, as I, 28 and from East Berlin, have intensely experienced this time myself, I frequently felt transported back into my own youth as I was reading it,") (*amazon.de* 4/25/2002). More detailed insights into their reading experience, such as the specific impact of certain passages and what particular memories they trigger, are, unfortunately, missing from these reviews. If readers write that they connected with the biography, it was primarily because they had spent time in East Berlin during the *Wende* period and thus could relate to places and streets mentioned in the story. Schnurr likewise underlines this spatio-temporal aspect of the biography when she writes that "Jana Simon nimmt ein bisschen wehmütig Abschied von einer Zeit und einer Stadt, die es so nicht mehr gibt: Ost-Berlin" ("Somewhat melancholically, Jana Simon takes leave of a time and a place that no longer exists: East Berlin.") (*Der Spiegel* 8/2002).

The difference in the tone and nature of reader responses received by Simon as well as Ide when compared to those of Hensel is remarkable: Although they explicitly stated that they were able to relive certain moments of their own past as they were reading Simon's and Ide's life narratives, unlike Hensel's readers, they did not feel compelled to share memory stories. The reason for this may be that the memories both Simon's and Ide's readers recalled during the reception process were brief and fleeting as both authors narrate specific life stories that capture the readers' attention, but unlike Hensel's more general account, leave little room for readers to delve into their own memories. Thus, despite the much criticized generalizations and comparatively minimal personal accounts in *Zonenkinder*, it seems to have been precisely this feature that made it so successful as a memory artifact and resource for remembering as it provided readers not only with memory cues but also with the freedom to explore them further and remember their own childhood and youth in the GDR and their lives after unification.

IV.3. *Heimat* and Identity in Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*

Jana Hensel was criticized for an exaggeratedly nostalgic depiction of her own childhood and more generally the GDR past in *Zonenkinder*. Although the criticism is justified to some extent, Hensel seeks to explore precisely the relationship between nostalgic memories of her physical and mental *Heimat*-scape and its lasting influence on her identity. While Simon carefully chooses and limits the extent of her own memories, embodied in specific places she shares, not least because she writes a biography rather than a memoir, Hensel connects most of her descriptions of GDR

products and places with personal memories. One example of this narrative style is Hensel's impression of the new Leipzig:

Die Straßenbahn hielt, und so konnte ich den Augustusplatz, der früher Karl-Marx-Platz hieß, genauer betrachten. Damals war hier der Sitz der Leipziger Universität, und das hochgeschossige Verwaltungsgebäude galt als Erkennungsmerkmal der Stadt... Heute, nach der Sanierung, gehört der Riese einer Bank, und ganz oben prangt in schwarz-rot-goldenen Farben das fette Logo des MDR. Es sieht aus wie eine DDR-Fahne ohne Emblem, dachte ich noch, aber da hatte die Straßenbahn ihre Türen schon geschlossen. (35)

When the tram stopped I could take a closer look at the Augustus Square, which used to be called Karl Marx Square. Back then this was the seat of Leipzig University, and the high-rise administrative building was the emblem of the city... Today, after the renovations, this giant belongs to a bank, and the logo of the East German MDR TV station shines forth from its top in black-red-golden colors. It looks like the GDR flag without its emblem, I thought, but the doors of the tram were already closed again.

Hensel represents this glimpse of Leipzig as a composite image, analogous to a double-exposure photograph in which the present and past exist simultaneously as well as through the allusion to the theater of memory because the doors of the tram open and close like curtains to a stage. Although it changed significantly, the square with the former university tower remind Hensel of growing up in Leipzig. Despite the fact that East Germans were made to believe that their past must be hidden from public sight, for those who remember it, the past is always present, even if it is covered over by new names and facades. And because their memories are all they have left to remind them where they came from and who they are, they have become so significant for many East Germans.

In narrating her cityscapes, Hensel does not nostalgically idealize the sites and the past they embody. For instance, she writes: "Vor dem Moritzhof lag die breite

Johannes-R-Becher-Straße. Sie war früher, wenn auch nicht besonders schön, die Hauptader des Viertels gewesen” (37) (“The street in front of the Moritzhof was named for Johannes R. Becher. It was never a very nice looking street, but it had always been a main neighborhood thoroughfare,” Hensel, trans. 31 [trans. altered]). Despite its unappealing appearance – which stood out even more when compared to renovated quarters – this particular street is an embodiment of childhood memories. In this specific passage, Hensel shows that her view into the past is not always clouded by nostalgia.

Employing a panoramic technique, Hensel subsequently, narrates what she sees and hears of her *Heimat* while looking out of the window during a train ride. While she sees some regions that have blossomed as, for instance, by restoring old castles, she also frequently overhears West Germans expressing their disbelief in how deteriorated other places look (28). This narrative technique allows Hensel to provide an overall impression of the current state of her *Heimat*, which indicates the newly developing differences between rural areas and the few thriving urban centers like Leipzig after the *Wende*. The success story of post-*Wende* Leipzig is metonymically embodied in the newly renovated central train station.

Hensel admits that arriving by train in Leipzig “gab mir ein wohliges Gefühl..., das man als Heimatgefühl bezeichnen könnte” (27) (“made me feel good. It made me feel at home” [Hensel, trans. 19]). Yet, so much has changed that the train station she used to know no longer exists as it was transformed into a “hochglänzender Servicetempel” (30) (“a hugely popular new temple of consumerism” [Hensel, trans. 20]). Like a handful of other train stations in East Germany, few urban centers, most famously the central station in Berlin, have been renovated and expanded to the extent

of making it unrecognizable to the people whose memories they no longer fit and who, therefore, can no longer associate with these sites emotionally. Although proud of how beautiful her hometown now appears to visitors, who admire the modern storefronts and extensive bike paths, it is no longer the city of her childhood (30-31).

However, other parts of East German cities, primarily those further away from the center, have yet to be restored and modernized. Hensel depicts their monotony in terms of similarity:

Vorbei an dem Studentenklub Moritzbastei und der Stadtbibliothek verliess ich die Innenstadt Richtung Süden und glaubte plötzlich, in Ostberlin, Chemnitz und Gera gleichzeitig zu sein. Wie sich doch die ostdeutschen Vorstädte glichen: Da gab es Connys Container und Rudis Resterampe, Sonderpostenmärkte und Discounts ohne Namen und ohne Ende und jede Menge Schlecker und Drospa ... Die Schaufenster dazwischen waren mit bereits verblichene[n] Werbezetteln beklebt, die wie Grabsteine an die vielen vergeblich geträumten Kleinunternehmerträume gemahnten." (36)

We passed the student center and local municipal library, leaving the city proper for the southern suburbs. Suddenly, I could have just as well been in East Berlin, Chemnitz, or Gera. The neighborhood looked like any run-of-the-mill East German satellite town with its cheap high-rise apartment buildings. It had countless no-name discount stores, bric-a-brac retailers, and cut-rate drugstores. ... The deserted storefront windows of the Mom-and-Pop shops that couldn't compete were covered with faded advertisements that marked, like gravestones, the dead dreams of small-time entrepreneurs. (Hensel, trans. 29-30 [trans. altered])

This is also the post-*Wende* East Germany Ide predominantly describes in *Geteilte Träume*. In contrast to Ide's representation, however, Hensel goes further in personalizing her cityscapes. For instance, she estimates how often she walked along Johannes R. Becher Street from her family's apartment and her high school, passing the district library, a liqueur store, and street corners where she met or parted with classmates (37). She walked down this street so many times that she knew each

individual cement slab as she skipped over or stepped onto the cracks between them. Hensel ends her mental walk down memory lane with the comment that this street also no longer exists (37-8). Like Simon's childhood places, Hensel's street also disappeared very quickly: The student cafeteria was replaced by a parking structure, the hill where she played with friends made way for a fitness center. All these transformations lead her to believe that "Heimat, das war ein Ort, an dem wir nur kurz sein durften" (38) ("*Heimat* was a place we only knew for a short time" [Hensel, trans. 32]).

The last passage in particular illustrates how the cityscapes of her childhood inform Hensel's identity as she employs physical markers of cityscapes as memory cues. And while some passages in *Zonenkinder* reflect Hensel's *Heimweh* for her childhood home in an overtly nostalgic tone, making her stories seem unreal and fairy-tale-like, she displays great skill in demonstrating in only a few passages the personal meaning a physical environment can acquire simply by encountering particular sites and situations often enough to form an emotional attachment. Neither Ide's nor Rusch's and even Simon's texts contain such extensive and personal accounts of the relation between their hometowns and their sense of self. In Simon this is due to the fact that she writes a biography of Felix's life rather than a memoir of her own. And unlike Hensel, the other three authors are journalists and thus most likely subscribe to the notion of balanced representation. Moreover, their less nostalgic tone also reflects that, while they are only about five years older than Hensel, they belong to the generation of older siblings from which Hensel explicitly distances herself and thus excludes from the 'we' she employs throughout her text. While they were the disillusioned generation critical of much if not most of the practice of real existing socialism, for Hensel the GDR

remains the fairy tale land of her childhood. She mourns its loss to the extent of describing the disappearance of her *Heimat* as akin to the loss of a life and something familiar which was painful to lose (14). It was her first life, as she calls it, and she had taken it for granted until it was gone (15).

To conclude the discussion, it can be established that Peter Blicke's argument that the notion of *Heimat* becomes more important in times of a perceived threat to its existence clearly applies to Ide, Simon, and Hensel's memoirs. They pursue the remembering and narrating of their *Heimat*, which is the atmosphere and appearance of the East Germany in GDR times, because it is an existential part of their identities. As the last generation that consciously experienced life in the GDR, they are the last "witnesses" that can give personal accounts of this part of German history that is deemed to be forgotten or otherwise remembered in a false light. For these authors, the distance from their *Heimat* that prompts its recall is less temporal or spatial than it is visual and emotional. Their confrontation with the cityscape in its post-*Wende* appearance—whether already beautifully reconstructed or in a dilapidated pre-renovation state—triggers memories that were initially formed in that environment and, thus, are emotionally anchored there. Ide, in particular, describes how the transformed cityscapes impact older generations who seem to cling to their memories more than his own, the younger generation. Yet, Ide himself admits that upon visiting his old school and the building where his mother used to work he feels an emotional connection to his past that, although facades have changed, are evoked by the traces retained in these old walls. Jana Simon's illustration of the interaction between spaces and identities

enhances Ide's approach as she describes her friend's fate as closely connected to the sense of disorientation caused by post-*Wende* reconstruction and renaming projects. East Berlin's cityscape provided an emotional anchor to Felix to whom the places of his early childhood embodied the essence of his selfhood and identity and whose life derailed as he mourned the disappearance of familiarity and friendship that he had cherished in those places. Simon also makes a clear statement with the title of her work, which can be interpreted as a plea to recognize East Germans' loss of *Heimat* as unique and not comparable to the changes experienced by West Germans (if any) as a result of German reunification. However, Jana Hensel's depiction of the intersection between *Heimat* and identity seems to be most impactful as she is able to use spatial markers as cues that recall memory stories. She, then, proceeds to narrate these stories in order to reconstruct her own and, by the use of the narrative "we", the identity of all East Germans of her generation. Most of the letters to and reviews of Ide and Simon's memoirs agree with their representations of the GDR past and announce that these texts inspired their remembering. The potential to address an audience collectively has thus been activated. However, as their readers do not provide personal memory stories, it remains unknown whether Ide and Simon indeed elicited such active memory retrieval as was evident in the responses to Hensel's narration.

Chapter Five: The *Ossi* as the *Wessi*'s Other – Constructing *Ossi* Identity in Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders*, and Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*

East Germans constitute a socio-cultural cohort because they share core experiences in their lives in the GDR and after the *Wende*. It is particularly the experience of the radical social, political, and economic changes after unification that sets them apart from their West German contemporaries. Although the geographic division is gone, their GDR heritage and socialization are still, or perhaps even more so now, the determining factor in their identity. Moreover, they perceive their difference primarily as an inequality because their wages are still lower while unemployment rates are often double those in Western states. Adding to that the widespread perception that their pre-*Wende* work and experience are considered irrelevant and useless because the disappearance of the GDR, many if not most East Germans feel that they are second-class citizens.

Within this group, however, there are large differences pertaining, firstly, to age: As most of the memoirs under discussion show, the third and last generation adjusted easier to the post-*Wende* changes by adopting Western social, cultural, and economic systems faster than their parent and grandparent generations who had lived in the GDR longer and whose identity was more determined by these life experiences. Secondly, within the same generation, experiences in their lives in the GDR can differ, as Rusch's and Simon's texts show in particular. Thirdly, a comparatively small age difference of some five years also significantly changes how the GDR is remembered as Hensel's memoir indicates. Despite these differences, all East Germans or *Ossis* faced

disorientation, frustration, and devaluation of their past during and after the *Wende* as they were struggling to find their way and their place within the new society.

Moreover, since stereotypes play a large part in intergroup behavior, East Germans sought to redefine their devalued past as significant and valuable and transform the negative meaning of the term *Ossi* by defining themselves as the *Wessi*'s positive Other.

This chapter first discusses theoretically relevant terminology that illustrates the identity-related incentives of individuals to other themselves by forming and joining groups and by redefining stereotypical notions. Analyzing this subject matter in the three texts that have been discussed earlier will deepen the understanding as well as significance of these primary sources and exemplify different ways by which East Germans of the third generation seek to positively redefine negative *Ossi* stereotypes. Jana Hensel exhibits nostalgia for a lost *Heimat* while ignoring a vital element of its characteristic: the fact of the GDR was a dictatorship. Claudia Rusch describes her anti-nostalgia and fills in the blanks left by Hensel about the *Stasi*, but also stresses that neither she nor her dissident mother embraced West German values. And Jana Simon speaks out against the generalization of the East German and the *Wende* experience and shows the dire consequences the loss of self and home had for her childhood friend.

Group Belonging and the Role of the Other

The *Heimat* construct is closely linked to the notion of identity. Peter Blickle explains that people organize their space and time, and their selves, which they define in interaction with their social groups, in order to create meaning and make sense of

their overall being (66). To have a geographically specified anchoring place not only grounds the individual based on earliest memories and experiences, it also provides a sense of belonging to a place and time in the larger history of things. It serves also to tie the individual to a group of people who also consider the place an essential part of their identity. As Blicke argues, *Heimat* is the spatial concretization of childhood experience and emotional attachment to friends. Its local dimension incorporates friends and family as “parents and personal ties are expressed in terms of space” (61). Personal experiences of and emotional ties to spacio-temporally anchored ingroups, then, define the sense of *Heimat* generally. Moreover, when people consciously decide to identify with a particular group, they seek unity, shelter, support, and orientation and base their sense of belonging usually do so because of a shared experience, background, or vision that is not shared with other individuals or groups who thus constitute so-called outgroups. Individuals in any society are members of more than one ingroup because of the roles they embrace within their social circle, i.e., they can be practitioners of a certain profession, followers of a certain religious or spiritual denomination as well as a parent, friend, and child all at the same time. The unique combination of social roles, group memberships, along with the behaviors and views connected to all of them, are the key components of any individual’s identity (Hogg and Abrams 9).

Continued involvement with a specific group has an impact on an individual’s perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors as well as their overall view of themselves and others inside as well as outside of the group. Group membership can even influence the way experiences are remembered due to the meaning systems established within the group and the expectations of other members that – more or less subtly – emphasize

sameness to increase group cohesion (Erl 17; Halbwachs, *The Collective* 24-5). The individual is, in turn, also able to influence the group and its other members to differing degrees. While, for instance, such exemplary political and spiritual leaders as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi, or Martin Luther King, Jr. accomplished great changes in politics and society, the impact of an individual is greatest on small groups like families.

Social psychologists have suggested that group belonging is an intricate part of individual identity that speaks to the social aspect of identity. As I discussed in chapter one, Paul Eakin criticizes isolationist models of identity and instead advocates the notion of the self as defined by relations with others (43, 47). Their relationships are essential to their self and identity, and hence, as Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams argue, group belonging has “important self-evaluative consequences” (Hogg and Abrams 7) as all group members adjust and assimilate to a certain extent in order to underline similarities and stress group belonging.

Individuals inevitably enter into relationships with others as an essential part of their identity because groups “fulfill individual and societal needs for order, structure, simplification, and predictability” (Hogg and Abrams 18). They serve an adaptive function as they provide cognitive schemas and behavioral guidelines “without which we would not be able to act at all – we would be overwhelmed and paralyzed by overstimulation” (16). While one is born into groups like family, social class, and nation, when individuals chose to join groups, they do so because they assume that identification with the same values and ideas of others is ultimately for their advantage as they acquire not only a support system to pursue a specific cause but also assurance, guidance, and orientation. The decision to join a group indicates that the

individual seeks a specific role or characteristic that defines membership in this particular group and is “important, salient, of immediate relevance, or of personal value” (20) to the individual at that point in time because it validates and/or reinforces their opinions, attitudes, or beliefs (97; 102), and, ultimately, strengthens their sense of self. The tendency or quest for seeking group membership is part of the likewise continuous efforts to establish and maintain a coherent self and ensure the continuation of one’s essence, which, according to Heidrun Friese, in turn effect interaction and communication with others (Friese 1).

Seeking membership in a socially desirable group often reflects a sense that one belongs to a group of lesser standing. Social status constitutes a major component in intergroup relations, and the dynamics triggered by a group’s perceived social standing guide the process of social comparison. Belonging to a low-status or high-status group influences people’s sense of self-worth. Tajfel and Turner established that, for instance, members of subordinate groups often internalize the social evaluation of themselves by others as inferior or second-class, and incorporate it into their sense of self by evaluating their own identity and that of fellow group members negatively (11; Hogg & Abrams 26). However, while an individual may interpret his or her own association with a superior group as a step into the direction of improving his or her social status, it may appear as a demeaning action to the other group members. In other words, it is important to point out that the personal decision to seek a higher social status is most likely more complicated in the sense that the individual is not only striving to join one social group but also exiting, or actively rejecting another group. This latter group may seem to be of a less desirable status to the individual, yet, it comprises one, if not the

original, identificatory base which this individual chooses to leave behind. The aspect of repercussions and consequences for the individual's identity clearly needs to be addressed more in research on status change among groups and individuals.

In their role as group members, then, individuals recognize that they are different from others who are not part of their group. The notion of 'othering' is, thus, an inherent element of social identity that marks all "that which is one's own and that which is of others" (P. Wagner 35). Social psychologists call this process social comparison. According to Serge Moscovici and Geneviève Paicheler, it is the human tendency to "evaluate their abilities and opinions. ...When an individual feels uncertain or threatened with regard to his opinions and abilities, he will tend to evaluate them through comparisons with the opinions and abilities of others" (Moscovici & Paicheler 253). Comparing and othering provide the means to define one's own position within a social order in relation to other groups with similar or contrasting characteristics with which one may or may not seek to affiliate. For a satisfactory view of oneself and one's group, the "ingroup must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from relevant outgroups" (Tajfel and Turner, 16). Moscovici and Paicheler likewise argue that "within the system of values in Western civilization, these comparisons will be directed upwards" and that they "will be made between oneself and those who are seen as superior" (253). The reason for this tendency is that individuals commonly "strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity" (Tajfel and Turner 16), and from both an imagined and an actually inferior position, superiors are most often viewed in a positive light as being more influential, resourceful, and, consequently, more powerful and respected. Members of a group that is perceived as inferior often "attempt to cast aside

their subordinate social identity with its potentially negative connotations and material inferiority in favor of a dominant group's social identity and concomitant material advantage and positive evaluation" (Hogg & Abrams 27-28).

When a group is considered socially desirable, ingroup favoritism tends to develop as a defense against too many outgroup members who seek affiliation to ensure continued high status and desirability. Moscovici and Paicheler explain, "ingroup favoritism and discrimination are reactions to situations of frustration or uncertainty which are expressed through the avoidance and rejection of others so as to preserve one's own identity" (252), a process that frequently invokes bias and stereotypes.

The Role of Prejudice in Social Comparison

The process of social comparison provides a foundation for self-evaluation, which occurs on a continuous basis as individuals strive to either achieve or maintain a positive self-image and identity. A very specific moment in which we compare groups socially is the experience of culture shock, or acculturative stress. Only when individuals, who find themselves in a new cultural setting, engage in comparing their home culture with aspects of the new culture, can they start adjusting to the new environment. Comparing oneself with other individuals and groups within the same cultural environment is a regularly occurring event given the aforementioned constant evaluation of one's social standing. The result of such comparison can be in favor of one's own group, the ingroup, or the comparer may realize that another group has a higher, more prestigious, and thus, more desirable status and seek this affiliation (Moscovici & Paicheler 253; Cast, Stets, and Burke 70).

As a consequence, ingroup favoritism may develop in order to underline the social superiority of one group over another. Moreover, Tajfel and Turner argue that ingroup bias generally is a “remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relations” and shown to occur already at “the mere awareness of the presence of an outgroup” (13). Establishing a positively distinguished view of the ingroup is essential for the individual in order to establish and maintain a positive social identity, which is often achieved through the biased and distorted perception of people who are not considered part of the ingroup. Under the influence of bias and prejudice outgroups and individual outsiders appear inferior on one or more levels. According to Joel Cooper and Russell Fazio, the way preconceived notions inform attitudes towards outgroups collectively as well as their members individually is by providing “a frame of reference that influences and maintains evaluations of outgroup behavior” (184). Cooper and Fazio categorize the consequences of these attitudes, which are always unfavorable toward the other, into three types: Firstly, these attitudes distort the evaluation of outgroup behavior; secondly, they lead to the creation of distorted evidence or proof in order to confirm the bias; and, thirdly, they prevent any outgroup behavior that contradicts the bias from disconfirming it because it is considered the exception that confirms the rule (184).

Stereotypes have a defining function insofar as they represent “beliefs that all members of a particular group have the same qualities which circumscribe the group and differentiate it from other groups” (Hoggs & Abrams 65). Cognitively, stereotyping is a form of mental categorization that occurs usually without conscious awareness in order to condense the amount of information the mind receives from the environment by reducing ambiguity.

By discounting members of competing groups as inferior, negative stereotypes serve to enhance the image of self and ingroup and are therefore directly linked to the notion of social identity. According to Hogg and Abrams, individuals categorize themselves, their attributes, traits, skills, and accomplishments in order to locate their place in society, i.e., to define the social self: “Just as when we categorize others, we place them in a box and accentuate their stereotypic similarities, so too... [do] we categorize ourselves.... Self categorization is the cognitive process underlying social identification, group belongingness, psychological group formation... and is also responsible for rendering behavior and cognition stereotypic and normative” (Hogg and Abrams 74). By locating the self socially and culturally, we affirm the relevance of relationships with other people, acquire a sense of significance, meaning, and value within a cultural environment. Celia Cook-Huffmann furthermore argues that social identity is “that part of an individual’s self concept which derives from the knowledge of his or her membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. ... Social identity, thus defined, includes a sense of the ‘self in-relation-to-the-world’ and looks at the individual defined in relation to the group” (115). As the self is inherently social and relational, individuals go to great lengths to maintain or improve their group affiliations as they seek to remain or become—in their eyes—better than members of the outgroup and in clear differentiation from them. The struggle to uphold their own positive self-image can cause them to “indulge in prejudice: extreme and rigid stereotyping probably accompanied by overt behavioral discrimination” (Hogg and Abrams 74).

Not all individuals engage in negative stereotyping to the same degree, and not everyone does so under any given circumstances: The degree to which prejudices are used in self-definition varies depending on contextual factors and the social categorization that is addressed and hence becomes salient in a particular situation. According to Hogg and Abrams, “different contexts cause people to categorize self and others in different ways and hence to generate different stereotypic perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors” (75). Moreover, stereotypes are “not merely idiosyncratic generalizations which are coincidentally or by chance made by a number of people” (75). Rather, they constitute shared views formed on the basis of social processes that necessitate individuals to conform more strongly to group norms (75). Stereotypes are, therefore, considered part of the individual’s “identity-negotiation process,” which reflects and reinforces the natural tendency towards conformity within groups, to stress aspects shared by ingroup members, and thereby strengthen “group cohesiveness and the ability to act in a unified manner” (Coy and Woehrle, 6). Bias and prejudice are not only cognitive but social phenomena because they “originate in everyday social interaction and furnish individuals with a commonsense understanding of their experiences in the world” (80). They are socially accepted means to explain the world by transforming the unfamiliar into the familiar, and as such they provide a framework for interpreting our experiences. Based on these shared cognitive schemata, individuals obtain and maintain a repertoire of expectations, anticipations, predictions as well as a ‘standard,’ “against which events, occurrences, and experiences are compared” (80) in a (non-conscious) effort to verify and validate their own beliefs. Consequently, stereotypes inform how individuals perceive, encode, store, and recall their experiences.

We can, then, identify three major social functions the process of stereotyping fulfills: Firstly, it serves to differentiate one group from another, especially when group status and prestige seem threatened with the goal of enhancing the image of the ingroup in contrast to others. Secondly, it preempts the struggle to come to an understanding of “complex and usually distressing large-scale social (or non-social) events” (77) by instrumentalizing what have become commonsense representations in order to assign blame, for example, by identifying a ‘scapegoat’ group. Thirdly, it enables the stereotyping group to justify the negative actions committed or planned against their target group (77) due to the distortion in the initial process of evaluating outgroups. Ultimately, stereotypes express and reinforce intergroup antagonism and competition that can, in extreme cases, escalate to the point of war and genocide. Particularly in situations of conflict “the contentious parties draw from available cultural resources to construct the other as villainous foe” through stereotyping (Petonito 19-20).

In any given society, social groups compete with each other for resources and power within the frame of an established hierarchy of dominant and minority groups. Stereotyping of both the ingroup and the outgroup functions as a means to either maintain the existing order if the established groups are satisfied with their place in the hierarchy, or to aspire to a better position. When groups of a different cultural background need to interact, the use and spreading of stereotypical notions can indicate which direction the intergroup contact is taking, whether it tends toward assimilation, integration, segregation, or conflict.

According to Adrian Furnham and Stephen Bochner, assimilation constitutes “the swallowing up of one culture by another”; in other words, a group may gradually adopt

or be “forced into adopting customs, values, life-styles and language of a more dominant culture” (26). The first generation engaged in assimilation will face great challenges, but their struggle will enable the following generations to be an intricate part of the dominant culture and “to become culturally and usually also physically indistinguishable from the mainstream, resulting in the virtual disappearance of the minority culture” (26). The process of assimilation is made more difficult for the minority group if prejudices exist, for example, that they are “backward, primitive, or overdue to join the (current) century” (27) because the assimilating group must adopt the denigration of their own group in order to blend in with the majority group. As Furnham and Bochner argue, feelings of inferiority, self-rejection and even self-hatred may be the result. The dominant culture remains relatively unaffected by the assimilation process and usually shows only slight modifications in their overall worldview and value system based on the minority influence depending on their openness and tolerance. Within this category, John Berry differentiates further between a ‘melting pot’ and a ‘pressure cooker’ situation. The first refers to the acculturating group’s free choice to give up their former identity completely in order to blend into the dominant culture. The latter situation matches Furnham and Bochner’s notion of assimilation more closely as it entails an involuntary adjustment into a dominant culture that requires turning away and even against one’s former identity (Berry 244).

The notion of integration describes a situation in which newcomers to a culture or minority groups in society become part of a superordinate group while maintaining their own core identity and having the respect and tolerance of the majority group. Fully integrated groups will be able to feel a sense of belonging and respect within the larger

social network, but also identify with the smaller cultural group, from which they originate (Furnham and Bochner 28).

Segregation, on the other hand, is the attempt to keep cultural groups within one society physically, socially, and culturally separate thus disenfranchizing the minority – or perhaps even the majority, as, for example, in the South African system of Apartheid as well as Jim Crow laws in some Southern states of the U.S.. History has proven, however, that, as both of these examples of segregation show, this practice is usually unsuccessful (28). While segregation describes the rejection and domination of the minority by the majority, Berry argues that the former may also reject the latter and refuse to give up their original cultural identity and seek to avoid interaction with the dominant group, he refers to this phenomenon as separation (Berry 244). Both separation and segregation marginalize the minority. Thus, integration constitutes the most desirable form of cultural contact among different groups.

According to Furnham and Bochner, genocide constitutes the most extreme example of conflict between disparate groups. In this case, the superior group eradicates or plans to eradicate “all members of another group with whom they came into contact” (25), and stereotypical images of the opposing group, which often include non-human traits, serve to legitimize their actions both to themselves and others from whom they may even seek approval and support.

Berry, furthermore, argued that a variety of factors influence the direction of cultural adjustment for minority groups or individuals who are trying to find their place within a new society. Among them are such more personal variables as age, gender, level of education, social status, self-confidence, and level of flexibility as well as

variables pertaining to the dominant group such as the existence of a social support system and the degree to which the superior group accepts and respects the newcomer group. Another key aspect that determines whether the acculturative stress will be high or low and the role stereotypes will play in the mutual perception and interaction is the quality and quantity of prior knowledge and contact between the acculturating group and the host culture (250-1). And while each individual must make an effort and get to know the new culture, this process occurs in interaction with the larger socio-political climate, i.e., whether cultural groups co-exist competitively or cooperatively. I will discuss in the following that forty years of politically and socio-economically different ways of life and the inequality of post-*Wende* interactions that to many East Germans resembled that of colonizer and colonized reflect and reinforce the antipathy and bitterness in inter-German relations since 1990.

German Otherness after the Wende: East Germans vs. West Germans

As we define our identity by differentiating ourselves from those we perceive as different, the Other serves a critical purpose. When the self becomes aware of others, it initiates a process of reflection on a variety of aspects and characteristics of the self as well as the others that includes comparing and differentiating. The role of those considered other is, then, is to function as a cue that initiates the process of social comparison and thus determines the individual's and group's status in society, i.e., to evaluate their standing within a hierarchy of social identity of the individual and the group. It is, however, not simply any other individual and/or group with which we compare ourselves; rather, the outgroup "must be perceived as a relevant comparison

group... similarity, proximity, situational salience are among the variables that determine outgroup comparability” (Tajfel and Turner 17).

West Germans constitute the core comparison group for East Germans precisely because, on the one hand, both groups are much alike as they share a cultural, political, and social history, and, on the other hand, the forty years of separation generated significant differences in everyday experiences as well as belief and value systems. Before 1989, West Germans functioned as the idealized Other as East Germans related to them through a sense of *Fernweh*, the longing to be with and like their West German counterparts. Although many East Germans did believe that the socialist GDR was ethically the better Germany, they certainly considered the lives of West Germans as more exciting and adventurous, comfortable, and luxurious. At least this was how it appeared on West German television and how family members visiting their relatives in the GDR presented their lives: They were dressed fashionably, had better consumer products from coffee to cars, and generally seemed happy and free.

While East Germans tried to emulate West Germans initially after unification, the latter rejected these attempts of chameleon-like transformation. Shortly after unification, a sharp division was drawn by East and West Germans based on social comparison to the respective Other: West Germans, now called *Wessis*, perceived East Germans as incompetent, complaining ungratefults who lacked initiative, skills, and confidence. East Germans, or *Ossis*, saw West Germans as arrogant and superficial know-it-alls. This derogative *Wessi* image constitutes the reaction to the West German rejection of emulation. It also helped East Germans to whom the negatively defined *Ossi* identity was attributed to positively distinguish themselves from the *Wessi* Other. This was

achieved by renegotiating the other-inscribed identity based on a nostalgically idealized past and self.

Dieter Mühlberg argues that West German culture was not completely alien for East Germans; all but those living in the easternmost parts of Saxony and the farthest Northeast had a good reception of West German television channels, and significant numbers were in contact with relatives in the West through mail, the much-desired *Westpakete*, as well as occasional visits. Despite these possibilities to follow developments in the West, Mühlberg argues, “they could not know the Western structures and institutions, which were introduced into their world in 1990” (3). While East Germans adapted relatively fast to new economy, technology, laws, politics, media, administrations, and social institutions, they have yet to achieve a sense of inner coherence in exercising their new roles as employees, subjects of law, parents, neighbors, colleagues, citizens, and consumers in a new socio-political order (3). While integration constitutes the optimal mode of inter-group contact, in the post-*Wende* situation assimilation, segregation/separation, and conflict dominated.

Mühlberg argues that only the generations who were only minimally or not at all socialized into GDR society will be able to assimilate, whereas those generations who have lived in the GDR most of their lives will adjust partially and fragmentarily, thus engaging in the modes of intercultural contact of conflict and separation. The latter will never be able to completely act in accordance with the new norm, which indicates that they are still connected to another system of meanings and values. For instance, they will misunderstand social situations, speak and act differently, be unable to seize opportunities, and lack the sense of self-assuredness for which West Germans are

known and admired but sometimes also criticized (3). Mühlberg spells out the consequences of the post-*Wende* culture clash that affected East Germans, particularly the older generations, much more than their Western counterparts. The image of the *Ossi* encompasses distorted and exaggerated versions of Mühlberg's observations, which degrades them into submissive and cowardly people, who lack initiative and useful skills. They are seen as backward and unproductive and said to complain often instead of taking their fate into their own hands (W. Wagner 89). This image spread relatively fast after unification. Like all stereotypes, it developed based on a "method of abstract deduction... far from any empirical foundation" (89). Wolf Wagner explains that the notion that the GDR as primarily a dictatorship in which this form of government dominated everyday life became the premise on which observations and opinions were based. It was assumed that GDR citizens were exposed to the political system for forty years and therefore unable to form a sense of right and wrong. They were, furthermore, supposedly unable to express their opinions for forty years, which must have made them submissive and cowardly.

Similarly, East Germans quickly generated a notion about the stereotypical West German as a "merciless egotist" and an "elbow person" because capitalism generates a competitive society (107). Relying on the cold-war ideology, they had internalized to a significant extent the prototypical *Wessi* that came to represent all negative aspects of capitalism. In addition, the composite figure also encompasses a rejection the colonizer Other who makes East Germans feel inferior. This may not be intentional because as East Germans are often unaware of new West German modes of conduct, they feel

insecure and embarrassed and perceive the West German who does know how to act in accordance with dominant norms as the *Besserwessi* or know-it-all.

All encounters with the respective Other who fits the stereotype serve to reinforce the stereotypical notion. Even counter-examples appear as a confirmation of this notion as they are perceived as the exception that confirms the rule, or as an idiosyncratic individual rather than a representative of a particular group. This process of stereotyping is very common: we tend to perceive our reality both selectively and in terms of mental schemata that are culturally determined and acquired in the socialization process and direct our perceptions in a way that confirms those schemata (Wagner 89). Given the significance of socially acquired schemata in the processes of perception, encoding, storage, and retrieval, they determine the process of remembering. Since both our social environment and our state of mind thus inform the encoding process which transforms an experience into a memory engram or schema (Halbwachs, *The Collective* 73; Schacter 21), strong emotions like bitterness and resentment, disappointment and dissatisfaction naturally color the perception and memory of any experience negatively. The perception of the *Wende* by East Germans who remember life in the GDR is an excellent example of this process: the course of their lives was changed to a different extent than they had hoped and expected. As a result, they often forget that the opening of the Wall was initially greeted with excitement and relief because the disappointments about the *Wende* changes informs their present state of mind.

East German identity evolved in a socialist society that allowed for little disagreement with the political system and generated a largely shared mode of life with few social differentiations. While some East Germans genuinely believed in the ideology

and sought to improve their society, others went along with what was asked of them but withdrew into personal life. Still others appeared to conform but maintained an internal opposition, and a small minority explicitly criticized existing policies and practices. Given the wide availability of West German radio and TV programs, they were well aware of another way of life that permitted more freedom and provided vastly superior consumer goods. The media representation of a different kind of life in West German society was, thus, a core part of the everyday life in the GDR East Germans and informed their identity.

The general euphoria that accompanied the opening of the inner-German border in 1989 informed the initial East German experience of West Germans. However, it quickly became clear that unification also meant the end of the life that they knew, and instead of an extension of the prosperous West Germany of the 1980s they experienced ubiquitous factory closings and omnipresent unemployment, new social institutions and laws, including debates about pension rights, all of which severely destabilized their everyday lives and consequently their sense of self. The majority of East Germans quickly became disillusioned with regard to the previously idealized West German way of life and experienced what Peter Burke describes as a disruption in their identity process due to the severe acculturative stress. The *Wende*, then, promised to change everything and did, though not as expected. Nonetheless, it was a life-changing event for all East Germans that affected their identity development by requiring drastic changes to their personalities in order to adjust to the new environment. And since “life events related to identities are more likely to produce distress than other life events” (Burke, 836), acculturative stress played an important role in their daily lives after the

collapse of their old belief system, no matter to what extent it had been informed by the ideology of late socialism.

Both Mühlberg and Wagner argued that one of the most significant changes for East Germans was the radically different role work played in post-unification Germany. In the GDR, the place of work constituted a center around which everyday life was organized (Mühlberg 4; Wagner, 1999, 47-48). Most East Germans worked in the same company or institution for their entire lives and interacted with their colleagues not only there but also in their personal lives as friends and neighbors. The majority of GDR citizens viewed their place of work as “angenehme Orte des Zusammenhalts” (“enjoyable places of togetherness”) (Wagner 53). The social networks that connected work and personal life enabled them to locate resources for scarce consumer products. And since most large factories also conveniently offered childcare facilities, a doctor’s office and even small grocery stores on site, and vacations as well as summer holiday camps were organized through the work place, there was little need and little space to a personal life that took place elsewhere, except the home itself. While the place of work was thus a space of togetherness and intense social contacts, the inherent scarcity of jobs in capitalism makes employment a commodity one has to fight to attain and constantly compete for with immediate colleagues. Contrary to their work environment in the GDR, the new environment subsequently became a major source of stress, insecurity, and frustration.

The radical change in the social role of work for East Germans is only one aspect of the repeated disruption of identity processes during their acculturation. The overall distress plays a significant role in their perception of West Germans and the values and

ideas they embody, which are seen as the root cause of their problems. East Germans are, furthermore, disappointed in West Germans for their ignorance and lack of interest in the history of everyday life in the GDR that informed how many East Germans still feel and think today, and their lack of comprehension for their accomplishments then and the immense difficulties they face now. As Mühlberg writes, West Germans react with amusement and bewilderment to the struggles of East Germans to learn about Western democracy and lifestyle, and hardly notice any criticism of their system originating in the so-called new states (3). Personal frustration, envy, and misunderstandings fuel antagonistic behaviors and the creation of stereotypes on both sides, which is why relations between East and West Germans are still strained to this day.

Writing the Self and Other

Life writing can be an act of reclaiming an individual past as representative of a collective experience in order to inscribe it into collective memory. A number of memoirs have represented life in the GDR and the difficulties and acculturative stress in the two decades after the *Wende*, including the relationship with the West German Other throughout this process to enter these experiences into collective German memory. While only Hensel's and to a lesser extent Rusch's memoir have entered the canon of contemporary German literature, to the extent that it still exists, in a literary landscape of multiple canons, an increasingly diverse and still growing canon of such post-*Wende* literature is developing.

While the tone in East-West relations has become less aggressive, many, if not most, East Germans still harbor feelings of disappointment, inferiority, and resentment. Depicting the Other negatively in general and in life writing in particular constitutes a core strategy to boost the image of the individual and the collective self. In trying to repossess both the East German past and the more than two decades since 1990 by narrating its individual experience, the memories are infused with images of the West German Other. The literary texts reflect that East Germans had expected support, respect, and appreciation for their difficulties in adjusting to Western culture and that, as those hopes were disappointed, the image of West Germans changed from an ideal and aspiration to the object of rejection and the embodiment of disillusion.

The memoirs represent personal and idiosyncratic experiences as prototypical for the third generation in East German society before and after the *Wende*. Given the autobiographical pact in which authors of life narratives engage, their texts are ideally suited to represent the complex interaction between personal lives and their socio-political context in the interest of inscribing representative experiences into collective memory. The subjects raised in the East German life narratives that I will discuss below relate to the representation of the East German self in relation to the West German Other reflect and generate an affirmative identity against the negative *Ossi* stereotype. They seek to convey that East Germans do not have to deny or devalue their past in order to integrate themselves into the dominant Western culture. On the contrary, since they have experienced life in two radically different societies and have experienced a complex and difficult transition between them, they simultaneously occupy the advantageous subject position of insider and outsider in unified Germany.

The degree to which negative stereotypes persist among East Germans varies depending on the generation. The following discussion will reflect the experiences of the third East German generation, which is often described as the disillusioned generation and whose members were in their late teens and early twenties in 1990, as well as the generation of the *Zonenkinder* who, like Hensel, spent only their childhood in the GDR, and their adolescence and young adulthood in unified Germany. While both generations believed to a much lesser degree in the official GDR ideology than their parents, they did spend part of their lives in this society and share some experiences with both each other and their parents' generation. Therefore, they are able to relate to the latter and understand their values, conflicts, disappointments, and resentments even if they only share them to some extent as they could adapt faster to post-*Wende* life. As they also share some core life experiences with their West German generational cohort, the authors and the generation they represent constitute an intermediary between the ideas and ideals embodied by the parent generation and the new dominant discourse represented by West Germans at large and their peer group in particular, which may enable them to function as mediator.

Most importantly, the memoirists reevaluate the imposed negative identity of *Ossi* in positive terms, asserting that their past lives in the GDR constitute advantageous experiences which West Germans lack. In other words, while the *Ossi* stigma defines the East German self as lacking in sophistication, skills, knowledge, experiences, these authors redefine the concept by casting *Wessis* as lacking – in the valuable experience of having lived in two different politico-economic systems and occupying both the position of insider and outsider that is prototypical for all immigrants.

Although Jana Hensel engages extensively in *Ostalgie* in her memoir *Zonenkinder*, she nevertheless disrupts the *Ossi-Wessi* dichotomy when she describes her generation of East Germans as neither *Ossi* nor *Wessi* but rather as “zwitterige Ostwestkinder” (“East-West hermaphrodites,” [Hensel, trans. 72]). While she underscores the East Germans’ perception of themselves as different from West Germans, she also rejects the separatist *Ossi* identity based on the total rejection of the *Wessi* as the negative Other of the parent generation. The young East German authors insert their memories as cultural artifacts into the public sphere, thus asserting the value of their experiences as a stance against the dominant West German memory that devalued them entirely. This re-valuation of being different is most pronounced in Simon’s *Denn wir sind anders*—where the affirmative assertion even serves as title—and Rusch’s *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*. While both texts constitute critical accounts of pre-*Wende* life, including *Stasi* surveillance, child neglect and abuse, as well as latent racism, and as such are not nostalgic in the uncritical way Hensel represents her childhood, they nevertheless assert a positively defined *Ossi* identity as competent and defiant, accomplished and independent, for their generation.

V. 1. The Idealization of *Ossis* in Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder*

Hensel positions her East German generation between their parents and their West German peers. Frequently employing the pronoun ‘we’ like Florian Illies in *Generation Golf* in order to speak for a whole generation, she casts them as a supposedly uniform group who are united by the supposedly same experience of an East German childhood between GDR children’s TV programs, books, magazines, and

sweets on the one hand and the experience of community at after-school activities on the other. In fact, she represents the differences between East and West German cohorts of the same generation in a scene in which Hensel is in France and cannot share in the nostalgic memories of childhood with Western Europeans as she does not remember the TV shows, books, and songs of they bond over. She then comes to understand that she only shares a childhood past with her East German peers. This realization forms the motivating factor in her initially hesitant, but increasingly more confident self-identification as an East German. While her nostalgia for childhood memories is a phenomenon central to the Occident, it also reflects an increasing confidence in her East German identity that she seeks to convey to her peer group to likewise strengthen their sense of self. Hensel describes the relationship between the generation that became adolescents and young adults in the 1990s and their parents as another significant difference between the East and West German cohort because the former had to cope in their formative years with disillusioned and frustrated parents whose life experiences have been questioned and devalued.

And while Hensel recasts East German Otherness in positive terms by nostalgically idealizing her childhood, she does not reject post-unification culture created by West German discourse but simultaneously embraces it even to the extent of adopting the negative stereotype of *Ossis* in her account of the parent generation, including her own parents. She explicitly designates them by the neologism *Osteltern* ("Eastern parents") and describes them as lost and unable to adjust to the new circumstances. She creates the above-mentioned neologism *zwitterige Ostwestkinder* to

designate her own generation to locate them between the *Osteltern* and the Western culture of their adolescence and young adulthood.

Memorializing a Generational Experience

Central to Hensel's memoir is that she engages in extensive *Ostalgie* as the generation whose experiences she seeks to inscribe into collective memory only spent their childhood in the GDR. She explicitly differentiates her generation's experience from that of their only slightly older siblings, whose adolescence in the late 1980s has been extensively represented as diverse and idiosyncratic. These differences could be even starker than those of the so-called *Generation Golf* named after the VW car used by Florian Illies to designate the equivalent West German generation in his book title. The experiences of the *Zonenkinder's* slightly older siblings were represented, for instance, in novels like Thomas Brussig's *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (On the Shorter End of Sun Avenue), short story collections like Jakob Hein's *Mein erstes T-Shirt* (My first T-shirt) and memoirs like Sascha Lange's *DJ Westradio*. However, while Hensel gives the *Zonenkinder* generation its own voice, in depicting their childhood as largely uniform and identical as indicated by her choice of the narrative 'we,' her memoir also reflects the negative West German stereotype of life in the East as dominated by the dictatorship and thus leaving little room for individual differentiation. That said, her depiction does also reflect the reality to a significant extent as childhood experiences generally are much more uniform than those of adolescence, precisely because it is in this coming-of-age phase during which individuals assert their individuality.

Hensel casts as a unique experience that formed the core identity of her generation having experienced their childhood in one society and their adolescence and early adulthood in another and radically different political, social, economic, and cultural system. German unification coincided with their coming-of-age and, thus, had an enormous effect on their worldview and sense of self. And while the appendix in which she defines words and phrases for East German entities indicates that the composite figure of the implied reader includes West Germans, her primary intended audience is her own generation of *Zonenkinder* whose difficulties to define an identity form a core narrative strand in the memoir. For instance, she considers it a generational experience that in the early 1990s she wanted neither to acknowledge her East German origin, nor did she want anyone to think she was from West Germany either:

Nach der Wende aber kam mir *Ich bin Deutsche* nie so richtig über die Lippen, und aus dem Westen wollte ich gleich gar nicht mehr sein. Stets und ständig setzte ich an, Erklärungen über meine Herkunft anzufügen. (40)

After the Wall, I didn't want to admit that I was German, and I no longer wanted people to think that I came from the West. ... I was forever qualifying and explaining my identity.... (Hensel, trans. 34-35)

However, like many of her generation, she subsequently begins to identify as an East German, and, in moving to Berlin, for example, decides to live in one of its Eastern rather than a Western districts because “das war ein ungeschriebenes Gesetz” (42) (“It was an unwritten law” [Hensel, trans. 38]).

Aside from one West German friend, Hensel's conversations about her background are mostly with international travelers or friends from other countries. She writes that it is especially difficult to convey what is specific to her generation's past and

thus different from the childhood of her non-German cohort because it no longer exists as a place one can visit and that despite some changes still allows a sort of time travel into one's childhood but only exists in her mind as fragments of a distant world.

Given the geographic and political East-West dichotomy, whenever Hensel emphasizes her own and her generation's East Germanness, the West is at least implicitly cast as the Other, and thus it seems as if the East is less a specific place than a construct to mark that which is not the West. And while Hensel seeks to positively redefine East Germanness and, for instance, imagines Leipzig as the blossoming center of a new art scene, once she takes a good look at reality, she admits that much of the East is still dominated by a "miefigen Nachwendealltag" (41) ("dreary post-*Wende*-life," Hensel, trans. 37 [trans. altered]). She even writes that "der Osten war oft nichts anderes als das, was wir in unserer Fantasie daraus machten, doch als Gegenstück zur Bundesrepublik erfüllte er in jedem Fall seinen Zweck" (74) ("often, the East was nothing more than what we made of it in our imagination, but it undoubtedly fulfilled its purpose as a counterpart to the Federal Republic," Hensel, trans. 72 [trans. altered]).

Immediately following the *Wende*, East Germans were enthusiastic and optimistic about their prospects of assimilating quickly and becoming like the West Germans who had been their ideal Other based on representations in West German media. Social comparison by East Germans in the pre-*Wende* years, therefore, initiated the eagerness to imitate West Germans. Subsequently, they first sought to pass by adapting their clothes and then also acquiring West German mannerisms, gestures, and modes of communication, assuming that such superficial changes would suffice. Hensel remembers her own experience of this phenomenon:

Dabei haben wir in den Anfangsjahren jede freie Minute genutzt, um den Westen zu beobachten, zu erkennen und zu verstehen. Wir wollten ihn täuschend echt imitieren ... Ich wollte ebenso Bescheid wissen, und so lief die Bildmaschine in meinem Kopf ständing, ich scannte alles um mich herum und registrierte die Gesten, Begrüßungsfloskeln, Redewendungen, Sprüche, Frisuren und Klamotten meiner westdeutschen Mitmenschen. (60-61)

In the first years after reunification I spent every spare minute I had studying the West, analyzing what I saw and trying to understand. The goal was the perfect copy. ... I wanted to know everything everyone else knew. My brain was a perpetual scanner, registering the body language, the behavior, the slang, the haircuts, and the wardrobes of my fellow citizens from the West. (Hensel, trans. 58-59)

Despite these efforts to assimilate, Hensel writes that “jeder sah sofort, wo wir herkamen” (60) (“There was no mistaking where we were from – we just couldn’t get it right” [Hensel, trans. 58]). Finally, when she noticed that most of her fellow West German students appeared blandly uniform in their efforts to show off the latest fashion, hairstyles, and make-up trends, Hensel stopped trying to be someone she was not and embraced her double identity. However, while at that point she seemed to have achieved her initial goal of superficial assimilation and passed for a West German most of the time, especially since she had also unlearned her Saxonian dialect, she admits that this was also not what she wanted and “seltsamerweise machte es mich jedes Mal traurig, wenn jemand glaubte, ich sei aus Nürnberg oder Schleswig-Holstein” (64) (“strangely enough, every time someone thought I was from the West, Nuremberg or Schleswig-Holstein, I felt sad,” Hensel, trans. 62 [trans. altered]).

Nevertheless, *Zonenkinder* also reflects the fact that this generation has internalized negative West German stereotypes of East Germans’ and particularly their misguided attempts to imitate West Germans, which is most prominently reflected in

Florian Illies' mocking of East Germans in *Generation Golf*, where his self-ironic stance adds only little to minimize its scathing arrogance:

Wir sahen alle unglaublich albern aus. Wir trugen genau jene Schnitte und Kombinationen, über die wir uns dann fünf Jahre später lustig machten, als die glücklichen DDR-Bürger es wagten, in diesem Aufzug über die Grenze zu kommen. (Illies 24-5)

We all looked unbelievably silly. We were wearing exactly the kinds of styles and ensembles that we would make fun of five years later when the happy GDR citizens dared to cross the border in this kind of look.

On the one hand, Hensel admits to participating in the experiments in assimilation via fashion and thus aligns herself with her fellow East Germans. On the other hand, she remembers those failed assimilation attempts from the West German perspective that conceives of East Germans as old-fashioned and uncool and thus as yet another indicator of their inaptitude and incompetence. Employing the narrative 'we' mode again, Hensel, furthermore, writes that her generation considers Dresden's and Leipzig's economic and cultural ascent as arrogance, that East German politicians are either naïve or suspect and particularly criticizes chancellor Angela Merkel. She ends her tirade by writing that the image her generation of *Zonenkinder* has of East Germans is one of disrespectful and aggressive teenagers in cities like Neubrandenburg and skinheads in places like Magdeburg who terrorize campgrounds at the Baltic Sea because such are the dominant media representations (73). Furthermore, Hensel writes that the parent generation seems to desperately try to maintain the generational hierarchy by demanding order and discipline from their young-adult children of Hensel's age (73-4). Accordingly, Hensel agrees that her generation's view of their East German *Heimat* is ambivalent and that they cannot share with their ambivalence with their

parents because it would destroy their remaining ideals and whatever confidence they may have left. These passages, in which Hensel depicts East Germany via negative West German stereotypes as a hopeless case, are contradictory to the warm feeling of coming home early on in her memoir (27), which she admits to have whenever she travels to Leipzig. The positive and negative depiction of East Germans in *Zonenkinder* indicates her continued ambivalence towards this aspect of her own and her generation's conflicted identity between. Their difficulties to determine a less conflicted sense of self can be ascribed to the fact that the *Wende* happened when they were in the midst of adolescence, the years in which identity markers of a familiar environment are recognized and integrated via negotiation processes of acceptance and rejection. In other words, Hensel's generation, born in the mid to late 1970s, was just becoming socially aware of the society and culture in which they were growing up, when virtually all of the things that marked their environment as familiar were altered: renamed, renovated, or in most cases simply gone. Their identity process was thus from the first a completely different set of norms and rules than what they had been taught up to this time. They were children of the GDR coming of age in post-unification Germany.

West German Ignorance and Lack of Interest in Post-Wende Relations

Hensel introduces the inequalities and discriminations that East Germans face by relativizing these problems in an unfair comparison with the horrific situation of an Algerian friend who had to fear for her family's survival during a time of civil unrest and massacres in Algerian villages:

Warum sollte meine algerische Zimmernachbarin im Marseiller Studentenwohnheim... sich für die Unterschiede zwischen Ost und West

interessieren? Deutschland war ein reiches Land. Dass ein Großteil meiner Landsleute sich als Menschen zweiter Klasse fühlte und unter Arbeitslosigkeit litt, verstand sie wohl. Aber sie hatte Schlimmeres gesehen. (40)

My next-door neighbor in the dormitory in Marseilles, an Algerian woman, called home every night to find out if any of her family had been killed in the daily massacres back then. There was no reason for her to be interested in the differences between East and West. Germany was a wealthy country. She probably understood that the majority of East Germans felt like second-class citizens and that many of us were out of work—but she'd experienced far worse. (Hensel, trans. 35-36)

She further extends the notion of lack of interest in the specificity of her East German identity to her friends among the international students in Marseille at large:

[M]eine Zuhörer nahmen die Informationen, ich sei zwar Deutsche, aber aus Leipzig, aus Ostdeutschland und also aus der ehemaligen DDR, mit jener freundlichen Nachsicht auf, die man für Desinteresse halten konnte. (40)

... the people on the receiving end of these explanations digested the information—that although I was German, I really came from Leipzig in East Germany, i.e., the former GDR...—with what might be described as well-meaning disinterest. (Hensel, trans. 35)

While Hensel seems to consider it somewhat understandable that people in other countries are only moderately interested in the conflicts between East and West Germans, she criticizes the persisting ignorance among West Germans regarding East-West differences. She relates encounters of herself and her friends with West Germans, such as a conversation she had with one of her West German friends. He is annoyed that East Germans stress their difference: for example, at an East-West soccer match most of the seats are taken up by East Germans who enthusiastically support their team. Displaying ignorance with regard to soccer culture, Hensel even considers her

friend's loyalty to the team of his West German hometown an instance of anti-East-German sentiment:

Warum er aber, nachdem er nun schon mehr als zehn Jahre an der Spree wohnte, noch immer an seinem Kölner Heimatverein hing, brauchte ich nicht zu fragen; das verstand ich auch so. (44)

[He] didn't have to explain why he, despite having lived in Berlin for more than a decade, still rooted for Cologne's perennially mediocre team—it was natural, Cologne was his home team. (Hensel, trans. 39)

However, her friend likewise displays ignorance in not recognizing the significant extent of shared soccer past and West Germany in that most fans will support their home team regardless of where they currently live just as he still roots for his team from Cologne after living in Berlin for a decade. He did rightly recognize the added level of support for East German teams as a form of *Ostalgie* pride, and Hensel in turn criticizes his lack of understanding of its role in East German identity transitions and their need and desire to celebrate their heritage in the face of ubiquitous devaluations of their lives and selves. Dolores Augustine writes that “in the West, many expected Easterners to reject their communist past swiftly and to adapt to West German values” but, “overcome by a growing sense of loss and powerlessness, many eastern Germans responded with attempts to bolster indigenous leaders who had not directly participated at the top levels of the old regimes and were suitable for leadership roles in the new Germany” (564). Seeking figures that represent an affirmative East German identity, many also found these in soccer teams as well as such as prominent athletes like boxer Henry Maske, swimmer Franziska van Almsick (145-150), biker Jan Ullrich, soccer player Michael Ballack, or skier Sven Hannawald (147). They functioned as evidence against the

dominant West German stereotype that everything in the East was worthless and out to be discarded and thus gave them a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.

Furthermore, Hensel rejects the negative perceptions that many West Germans, “süddeutsche Rentnerpärchen” (“South German retirees,” Hensel, trans. 20 [trans. altered]) in particular, have acquired based on cold-war stereotypes and post-*Wende* train rides through the so-called “Five New Provinces” where most small towns resemble each other in their quiet gray emptiness, and the industrial ruins of closed-down factories enforce the idea of hopelessness and decay. To them the dilapidated towns and factories signify life under political oppression rather than the emotional toll of East Germans who were most affected by the economic downturn in those areas. These West Germans react with “Abscheu und ... Hass auf den menschenunwürdigen Kommunismus” (28) (“contempt for the inhumane Communist system” [Hensel, trans., 20]) because they are unaware that while there certainly were serious economic problems in the GDR, most of these factories were shut down after the *Wende*. In having served not only as economic centers for East German cities and towns, they had also provided the workers regular income, social networks, and a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Hensel, thus, stresses again the idea that West German ignorance and unwillingness to learn about the current problems in East Germany and their causes is impeding the improvement of relations between East and West Germans.

A further issue burdening East-West-relations is the notion that West Germans carried the financial burden of the unification. Not only do many of them falsely assume that only they rather than all Germans pay the misnamed solidarity surcharge of five percent of their income tax for the economic reconstruction of the East, but they expect

gratitude from East Germans for it. West Germans also expect that after more than two decades East Germans will finally be able to create an economy that no longer needs such benefits when, as Jens Bisky argues in *Die deutsche Frage*, it was in fact the Federal Government together with the so-called *Treuhandanstalt* (an institution created after reunification to privatize the entire East German state economy) that created an economy in the East that would be dependent on these subsidies for at least two, if not three more decades. Hensel criticizes the condescension and ignorance illustrated by the view that East Germans ought to finally begin pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and the almost parental pride in the visible improvement of the infrastructure in the East, such as renovations of historic towns and cities and highway maintenance, that West Germans feel. She recounts the dinner conversation of an East German friend whose West German acquaintances essentially brag by claiming that the financial means for all the improvements in the East came from their pockets (68). Hensel's subtly sarcastic tone when describing her friend's occasional entrapment in these kinds of discussions, which seem to follow a predictable pattern, reveals that she rejects the West German condescending way of talking to and about East Germans.

However, Hensel's critique of West German ignorance and lack of interest does not lead her to nostalgically idealize the East in the years after 1990. For instance, she criticizes the parental generation: While this generation acknowledge the positive changes in both their social, political, and economic environment at large and their own lives in particular, they tend, according to Hensel, to constantly complain about issues such as unemployment, lack of community, corruption among German politicians, East German misery generally, and they reject the West German as the Other responsible

for all their current problems (71-2). She, furthermore, writes with regard to her own generation's relation to their parents:

Unsere Eltern waren in keinem Nachwendealltag angekommen. Zu Hause wurde nur mit Ostzunge gesprochen, und wenn wir der Meinung waren, das Ostdeutsche schon abgelegt und vergessen zu haben, dann würden wir diese Sprache eben wieder lernen müssen. So einfach entließ man im Osten die künftigen Generationen nicht aus der Pflicht. (74)

Our parents had not arrived in a post-*Wende* life. At home we spoke with Eastern accents, relearning them, if necessary, for the occasion. No matter how much effort we had exerted trying to speak like everybody else, the East wasn't going to let our generation off easy. (Hensel, trans. 72-3)

Besides West Germans, Hensel, as illustrated, also depicts the parental generation as unable to embrace the new life, as her own generation's Other. While she can empathize because she shares some common ground with them, the fact that, unlike her parents, her own ingroup did arrive in a post-*Wende* reality divides the two generations permanently. Hensel considers the different *Wende* experiences not only as a determining factor in the relationship between East German parents and their children but also as crucial in causing older East Germans to embody the negative stereotypes West Germans attribute to them.

Hensel's simultaneous use of West German stereotypes and criticism of West German ignorance and overly patronizing attitude towards East Germans contradict each other. However, she clearly differentiates between two generations of East Germans, and while both are cast as Others by West Germans, Hensel clearly rejects this with regard to her own generation, but partly shares in the negative stereotyping of the parent generation. Nevertheless, Hensel's generation shares core aspects of their identity with both the West German and the parental Other, and it is this double

consciousness that determines their conflicted identity. According to Hensel, her own generation is ready and willing to move on, enjoy the advantages of living in a free world, and make the best of their opportunities. On the other hand, they are also always brought back to their roots by their parents to whom they feel loyalty and whose opinions they understand and even share to a certain degree. Hence, she terms them *zwitterige Ostwestkinder* and describes them as a generation that is highly motivated to prove the East German stigmas wrong at times it seems even regardless of losing sight of their origin in the process:

Unser Blick ging nur nach vorn, nie zurück. Unablässig das Ziel vor Augen, taten wir gut daran, unsere Wurzeln so schnell wie möglich zu vergessen, geschmeidig, anpassungsfähig und ein bisschen gesichtslos zu werden. Dabei machte es keinen Unterschied, ob unsere Eltern Maler, Heizungsmonteur, Fotografen, Zahnärzte, Lehrer oder Pfarrer waren. Wir waren die Söhne und Töchter der Verlierer, von den Gewinnern als Proletarier bespöttelt, mit dem Geruch von Totalitarismus und Arbeitsscheu behaftet. Wir hatten nicht vor, das länger zu bleiben. (72-3)

The fall of the Wall had transformed each of us into something akin to a child prodigy, upon whom great expectations were placed. It was crucial for us to forget our roots as quickly as possible. We had to become flexible, adaptable. It made no difference whether we came from a family of painters, plumbers, photographers, dentists, teachers, or priests. We were the sons and daughters of history's losers – mocked by the victors as proletarians, people to whom totalitarian conformity and the reputation for laziness clung like a bad odor. We did not plan to keep it up. (Hensel, trans. 71 [trans. altered]).

She even concludes that “Wir sind die ersten Wessis aus Ostdeutschland, und an Sprache, Verhalten und Aussehen ist unsere Herkunft nicht mehr zu erkennen. Unsere Anpassung verlief erfolgreich” (166) (“We are the first West Germans from East Germany, and neither the way we speak, nor the way we behave, nor the way we dress betrays our origins. Our assimilation has been a success,” (Hensel, trans. 164).

While she seeks to assimilate into the dominant society, she rejects an Other-defined East German identity and hesitates to define herself as East German initially. However, she embraces this identity when she is able to at least in part positively redefine it. Nevertheless, her ambivalence with regard to both East and the West Germans and the aspects of each group she and her generation embody indicates that the assimilation was not as successful as she thinks.

V. 2. Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders* and Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* as a Critical Appreciation of East German Otherness

The critical reflection on the mutual perception of Otherness between East and West Germans that is largely lacking in Hensel's *Zonenkinder* is more pronounced in Jana Simon's and Claudia Rusch's life narratives. What distinguishes the last generation of East Germans from their West German cohort is not only the difference in TV shows and books consumed in their childhood and adolescence or even the difference in everyday life generally but, according to Rusch, the constant presence of the secret police in the lives of GDR citizens. Shaping the worldview of most East Germans significantly, it seems inconceivable how Hensel could fail to mention the activities of the *Stasi*. By focusing on this influential experience of her GDR childhood, Rusch's text not only attempts to critique the oftentimes exaggerated nostalgia in GDR memories, but also to counteract the stereotypical West German notion of being a victim of *Stasi* observation.

Jana Simon also goes beyond Hensel's superficial claim that East Germans primarily connect as a group through reminiscences of TV shows, books, and songs as

well as memories of a sense of community in extra-school activities in the GDR youth organization. She writes that East Germans were struggling individually and as a group to hold on to things that made their past and their present meaningful, which distinguishes them from West Germans who were not faced with such existential challenges. West Germans were not forced to doubt themselves and reconstruct their identity, which is why, according to Simon, they often display an attitude of arrogance and indifference, dispositions that are alien to East Germans in their struggle to re-build their self-confidence, to familiarize themselves with their radically altered *Heimat*, and to find a new direction for their lives. Simon constructs a positive image of East Germans as their life experience encompasses two completely different socio-economic and political systems.

To exemplify the personal struggles of East Germans during and after unification in finding their place in the new society, Simon's childhood friend Felix may represent an extreme case of disorientation, self-doubt, and frustration as he turns to violence in the hooligan scene of Berlin. Yet, Simon's choice to primarily tell his story of failed acculturation rather than her own successful one indicates the seriousness of the challenges her generation faced and which not all of them were able to master.

Jana Simon - Exemplifying the East German Struggle

Simon depicts the cycle of violence and illegal activities in which Felix gets involved and his eventual death as a consequence of the collapse of East Germans' social networks. She also self-critically shows an extreme example of the lack of support people were willing and able to offer one another in a time when each of them

had to find their own way of coping with the changes and of adjusting their lives. Simon argues Felix needed a circle of friends, particularly in this time of transition in the 1990s, because it reinforced such values as stability, loyalty, familiarity, and, given the destructive atmosphere at Felix's home, his friends could be considered a substitute family. However, Felix experience of a loss of his old group of friends became typical:

In jenen ersten zwei, drei Jahren nach dem Mauerfall zerbrachen fast alle alten Freundschaften. Auch ihre Freundschaft zu Felix ging damals zu Ende. Es war, als sei nicht nur das Land untergegangen, sondern mit ihm auch für untrennbar gehaltene Beziehungen. Es war, als bemerke man das erste Mal seine Unterschiedlichkeit. Die einen wurden linksradikal, gingen weiter täglich auf Demonstrationen und schmissen Steine gegen das neue System. Andere wurden rechts, entdeckten plötzlich deutsche Tugenden und Traditionen. Die extreme Erfahrung zu erleben, wie ein Land zusammenbricht, scheint auch extreme Antworten zu fordern. (50)

In those first two, three years after the fall of the Wall almost all old friendships ended. So did her friendship with Felix at the time. It was as if not only had the country ceased to exist but with it relationships that were thought to be inseparable. It was as if one noticed each other's differences for the first time. Some became left-wing radicals, continued demonstrating and throwing stones against the new system. Others embraced a right wing orientation, suddenly discovering German virtues and traditions. The extreme experience that a whole country collapses seems to demand extreme responses.

Given the sudden freedom to choose their own beliefs and ideals as well as professional careers, Simon's generation of East Germans, born in the early to mid-1970s, were faced with and at times overwhelmed by the seeming limitlessness of the available choices that would determine their lives in the immediate and distant future. Their initial focus on their own lives in the years following the *Wende* is, therefore, all too understandable. For Felix, however, it was too radical a disruption in his identity development as his social network disintegrated. His failed integration into the new society indicates that the self is a deeply social entity as it was precisely the extreme

changes that led him into the hooligan scene and eventually to his suicide. His struggle to establish consistency and a sense of permanence in his life became evermore important to him because the experience of losing a meaningful relationship in his life was not new to him as his biological father left the family when Felix was only two years old. While he was too young to have consciously remembered this event, Simon writes, “ein Gefühl des Verlustes, der Verunsicherung war zurückgeblieben” (“a feeling of loss, of uncertainty remained”) (18). In addition, he was unable to develop a close relationship with his mother as she suffered from depression and expressed her anger and frustration in his neglect and physical and emotional abuse. Hence, developing relationships based on mutual trust and respect was not an easy process for Felix, and the acculturative stress was higher for him than for the average East German. Not only had he lost almost all the environmental anchors that attached him to his personal past and identity, but his loss was intensified by his unstable sense of self due to his childhood experiences and the complete loss of those stabilizing relations he had created with close friends. Felix’s *post-Wende* experience, then, can be interpreted as a traumatic process that reinstated old feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

Average East Germans, whose background had been more stable throughout their lives in the GDR, may not have had such intense reactions to the collapse of their support system, but their emotional responses of feeling uncertain, disoriented, and vulnerable are nonetheless profound, virtually unanimous, and, among East Germans, commonly acknowledged. The remaining sense of community, as Simon also emphasizes, stems from their shared memories. Members of her generation reconnected many years after the *Wende* less because of similar experiences in their

present lives than because of their common past that they were now ready to acknowledge and appreciate:

Früher, ein Wort, das diese Generation der in den siebziger Jahren Geborenen zusammenhält – das einzige vielleicht. Sie hatten dieses komische Land noch miterlebt, das später unterging, sie waren sich einig in ihrem Hass dagegen oder in ihrer Gleichgültigkeit. Später vereinigten sie sich in ihrem Kindheits- und Jugenderinnerungen. (25)

Back then, a notion that holds this generation born in the seventies together, perhaps the only ones. They had still experienced this strange country that disappeared later, they had been united in their hatred or indifference towards it. Later, they united in their memories of childhood and youth.

Sharing similar childhood events which they experienced in a particular cultural and socio-economic environment is thus a significant means for these East Germans to reestablish the bonds between each other and to ascribe the meaning and value to their past life that has been disrespected and unappreciated as indicated by their negative portrayal in the dominant media.

However, another aspect that unites this generation was their initial eagerness to imitate West Germans during the immediate post-*Wende* years, a characteristic also stressed by Hensel. But as they tried to appear like West Germans in order not to stand out, they became even more insecure and precisely unlike West Germans (64). Felix, however, was not someone who tried to disguise his East Germanness. Since the GDR environment was the one of the few constants offering him orientation and stability, he tried to hold on to it by joining the East Berlin hooligan scene. Simon describes his choice as a way to fight the new system, to gain a sense of power and control by intimidating others.

The path Felix followed after the *Wende* represents his decision to take matters into his own hands, and, thus, it indicates the opposite of West German stereotypes of East Germans as complaining, lacking initiative, drive, and the ability to seize opportunities: Although a questionable choice, Felix saw an opportunity to gain control over his life and was willing to work hard towards his goal of being an accepted and respected member in the bouncer scene of East Berlin. However, *Denn wir sind anders* also reminds its readers that younger East Germans tend to support neo-Nazi groups and right-wing parties to a greater extent than their peers in the former West Germany. Wolf Wagner even added a chapter in his second edition of *Kulturschock Deutschland* in 1999 to discuss this issue. For instance, in 1998, thirty percent of all first-time voters in Saxony-Anhalt voted for the right-wing extremist *Deutsche Volksunion* (German People's Union). Wagner explains that in general, the turn towards the political right increases proportionately the lower both the level of education and income are. He writes that it is the losers of the *Wende* of all ages, but particularly among the younger generations, who are attracted to militant right-wing groups because, like the left-wing PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), they constitute a counterculture to Western-dominated German political discourse and practice (176). It is not so much an attempt to actually gain political power than the to be part of an avant-garde group in everyday life, at work, at home, and in their hometown that makes right-wing ideas and activities increasingly attractive to younger East Germans (176-177). Wagner's analysis is confirmed by the fact that Simon considers Felix's motivation to join this group in his hometown of (East) Berlin to be a need for community, continuity, and respect. However, Simon neither intends to support the stereotypical notion of East Germans

supporting neo-Nazi interests nor does she exculpate Felix. By emphasizing how much they have grown apart since the early 1990s, she expresses her disapproval of his choice to engage in violent and xenophobic behavior. At the same time, she doubts his true motivations because “dass Felix jemals ‘Sieg Heil’ geschrien hatte, glaubte sie nicht” (“that Felix ever shouted ‘Sieg Heil’, she did not believe”) (Simon 82). She argues that he needed to feel powerful and in control, and that after the dissolution of his old circle of friends only his association with bouncers and hooligans could fulfill this need. Although he was comparatively petite, they respected him because of his superior command of judo, which he also used in street fights. In a conversation in 1999, years after they had last seen each other, Felix told Simon “dass ihn dieses rohe Mann-gegen-Mann fasziniere. ... Das sei die absolut höchste und reinste Form des Kampfes” (“that the rawness of man-against-man fascinated him. ... It was the absolutely highest and purest form of fighting”) (92). Simon tells Felix that she does not understand his fascination, but the more she disagreed with him, the more he defended himself and sought to provoke her. As she insists on questioning his belief in honor and unconditional loyalty, he acknowledged her arguments but did not accept her criticism. Simon found out later that at the time of this conversation Felix had already started to doubt the ideals his hooligan friends embraced, yet he needed to uphold the appearance of strength.

Simon portrays her peers in East Germany as a generation that “rang nicht um ihre Vergangenheit, ... [sondern] um die Gegenwart” (“was not struggling for their past, ... but for their present”) (103) as well as their future:

Sie lernten neue Freunde kennen, fingen an zu arbeiten oder zu studieren. Sie machten dabei sehr unterschiedliche Erfahrungen,

zumindest dachten sie das damals, und das entfernte sie voneinander.
(103)

They met new friends, began to work or attend university. They had very different experiences, at least that is what they thought back then, and that distanced them from each other.

The social pressure after unification to have and express a political point of view further increased their difficulties as it was something all East Germans had to learn. Simon's generation in particular was characterized by indifference towards the GDR regime (25ff). Many of her friends recognized the impotence of the political actions and demonstrations they had to perform as part of their education. But they conformed and acted as was asked of them because they did not see alternative options, and a refusal to participate would not have been tolerated in dictatorship (44f). Nonetheless, while mandatory and unenthusiastic, the participation gave them a sense of community, determined their daily lives and who they were, and they feel connected to their past after it has disappeared (36). Simon identifies what exactly it is that East Germans have lost with the disappearance of the GDR:

Schwerer als der Verlust ihres Landes, das Felix' Generation nie besonders geliebt hatte, wog für sie der Verlust der Eindeutigkeit. Vorher war immer klar gewesen, wo der Feind stand, ... Gut und Böse waren eindeutig verteilt, das Leben bis zum Tod vorgeplant und vorhersehbar. Erst als es weg war, dieses Leben, merkten sie, wie sehr es auch schon ein Teil von ihnen gewesen war, wie sehr dieses Denken – alles ist immer schwarz oder weiß – sie geprägt hatte. (49)

Harder than the loss of their country, which Felix's generation never particularly loved, was the loss of clarity. Before it was always clear where the enemy stood, ... Good and Evil were clearly defined, life was planned in advance and predictable all the way until death. Only after it was gone, this life, they realized how much it had already been a part of them, how much this way of thinking – that everything is always either black or white – had formed them.

More explicitly than most other authors of life writing narratives on this subject, Simon creates an affirmative counter-memory to the dismissive neglect of her generation's experience in Illies' *Generation Golf* and in turn characterizes their lives as dominated by excessive consumerism, boredom, and superficiality as it "kreiste in einem fort immer nur um sich selbst" ("circled continuously only around itself") (103). Torben Ibs likewise argues that the pre- and post-*Wende* experience of East and West Germans is of such a different nature that the respective other side simply cannot understand them. There were no changes for West Germans in the fall of 1989 as East Germans were peacefully demonstrating, holding candle vigils, freely and publically debating the future of their country at work and at home for the first time, illegally crossing the Austro-Hungarian border, and occupying West German embassies in Warsaw and Prague in order to be able to leave the GDR. Likewise, unification did not intimately disrupt West German life the way it did for East Germans. For West Germans, all of this happened on TV and not in their personal life. Ibs writes that, "undeniably there was a positive, emotional connection with the events, but for the Western majority they were not experiences that affected their own life and their daily routines. German reunification was experienced as a singular event, similar to a world championship. The only thing remaining was a new, additional line on their annual tax report identified as the *Solidaritätszuschlag* ("solidarity surcharge") (63).

Simon's generation is the last one who was immediately affected by the social, political, and economic transformations after 1990 in so far as they had little time to adjust before significant life choices were necessary. They had just finished school or begun the professional path that had been planned, organized and structured within the

Socialist system. Yet, suddenly they were to make sense of a new system and use the new freedom they had not known before constructively. Disorientation and insecurity were therefore common among them and for some, like Felix, led to questionable choices, while others, like Simon herself, chose more wisely.

The notion of East Germanness Simon narrates, then, is one of being the Other, the one that had to come to terms with a completely new life situation while their Western peers barely recognized and acknowledged their struggle. This West German indifference was unexpected and frustrating to East Germans and the ascription of being inferior complicated their situation even further. As a result, many East Germans developed a certain degree of ingroup favoritism, most clearly exemplified in Felix's rejection to have West German friends: "Felix hatte nie enge Freunde aus dem Westen, er lehnte sie ab. Sie waren zu anders" ("Felix never had close West German friends, he rejected them. They were too different") (104). Favoring East German friends in a time of insecurities and misunderstandings reinforces a sense of loyalty and belonging that seemed necessary as an act of empowerment for many East Germans.

In her choice of title, *Denn wir sind anders* ("Because we are different") Simon indicates both an affirmative East German identity and one that unites her generation. However, she also shows that while the *Wende* was a determining experience for her generation, in narrating the significant differences between her own and Felix's lives, she stresses that it was not a unanimous experience. And while she clearly does not exculpate Felix in his wrong choices but seeks to understand them in the context of his life before 1990, her narrative seems like an emphatic reply to the dismissiveness and

arrogance of Illies' single mention of the difficulties of his generation's East German cohort that "jede Fusion hat ihre Verlierer" ("in every merger there are losers") (193).

Claudia Rusch – East Germans Beyond the East-West Dichotomy

Claudia Rusch chose not to engage in the East-West opposition as she focuses on the time before 1990 and consequently rarely mentions West Germans. She does offer an insight into her childhood view of West Germany, and describes one rather atypical encounter with West Germans: she had the opportunity to participate, as a representative of young East Germans, in a television talk show on one of (West) Germany's largest broadcast channels, the *Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen*. As she was vacationing in France when she received the phone call, the *ZDF* representatives arranged for her trip from France to their headquarters in Mainz, Germany, in a Mercedes limousine and included an overnight stay in a hotel (81-83). The circumstances of this encounter with West Germans—and their resourcefulness—describe a unique situation Rusch was privileged to experience. This being her only detailed account of a personal meeting with West Germans, Rusch is able to avoid the use of negative stereotypes of West Germans because she engages in a social comparison that illustrates the economic differences between East and West Germany—she describes how impressed she was by the car that picked her up—without judgment but rather natural, unbiased amazement. Thus, readers cannot detect a tendency towards ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination in Rusch's memoir that is based on stereotypical images.

Nonetheless, the notion of the Other is at the forefront of Rusch's narration. In fact, she employs a twofold notion of the Other. She depicts the East German Secret Police, *Stasi*, and their representatives and unofficial informants as the Other as they identified supposed opponents of "real-existing" Socialism in order to suppress any counter-discourses. While some East Germans became victims of *Stasi* surveillance and even imprisonment for nothing but telling a political joke, others, like Rusch's parents and close family friends, had openly declared their disagreement with GDR politics because they wanted to improve the state by realizing the Socialist ideals. The *Stasi*, in turn, considered the opponents to be the Other. Post-1990 discourse largely dismissed the Socialist opposition movement like Rusch's family and the close circle of like-minded friends because they did not seek to end the GDR but rather to reform it and thus did not embrace the new society in post-unification Germany. Moreover, this lack of differentiating between East Germans indicates a lack of knowledge among West Germans about the different spheres in GDR society. Yet, the members of this opposition movement were different from average GDR citizens who largely complied with official policies and practices; at great risk and disadvantage for their personal and professional lives, the intellectual dissidents opposed government policies and repressive measures of the authoritarian regime, such as falsified election results, limited personal freedom generally, and freedom of expression in particular. While the government and its institutions like the *Stasi* displayed an eagerness to rid the country of so-called unwanted elements, many dissidents refused to leave precisely because they sought to make their country what they thought it should and could be and at times

used the West German media to put the GDR government under pressure, which in turn led to constant observation by the *Stasi*, enforced house arrest, and imprisonment.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend challenges its readers by offering a more diverse picture of life in the GDR than largely nostalgic memoirs like *Zonenkinder*. It contradicts the idea that citizens of the former GDR comprised one coherent group with similar ideals and experiences. Rusch spends the majority of her memoir describing a past before German reunification that does not invite nostalgic reminiscence, but rather invites her audience to critically readjust previously established notions of the GDR. She reminds East Germans that, while the GDR government had provided their citizens with a secure life and income, including free childcare, free education through college, and nearly free health care, they also commanded obedience and compliance with their policies. Robert Havemann, one of Rusch's mother's dissident friends, is a name commonly connected with the opposition movement in the GDR. He passed away in 1982 while under house arrest. The main focus of the dissidents was protection of the environment and of human rights as well as opposition to stationing Soviet nuclear weapons in the GDR. While Western democracies saw an increasing interest in these issues in the 1970s, which also fueled East German opposition, the latter particularly opposed the totalitarian claim to power by the SED, the major GDR party. As the Assistant Appointee for Stasi Records, Jens Schöne, writes:

Jede abweichende Meinung [stand] sofort unter der Androhung von Verfolgung und Strafe. Jede Kritik, sei sie noch so vage oder zurückhaltend, konnte als 'feindlich-negativer' Akt gewertet und entsprechend geahndet werden. (68)

Any divergent opinion was threatened by persecution and punishment. Any criticism, however vague or hesitantly, could be understood as 'hostile-negative' act and avenged accordingly.

Instead of allowing for a discussion and expression of politics and policies within the realms of civil society as in Western democracies, the GDR government consequently curtailed and constrained such efforts. The situation of dissidents and, given the principle of guilt-by-association, their families and followers was, thus, marked by regular visits and threats as well as constant surveillance and the search of apartments in their absence by the *Stasi*. While organizations such as the *Neue Forum* and the *Robert Havemann Society* sought to establish democratic socialism in the GDR at great danger to their careers and freedom, after the *Wende* they put their efforts towards inscribing the GDR opposition movement into collective German memory and prevent its forgetting. None of the other life narratives I discussed included the fate of dissidents in the GDR and after unification. Such an omission indicates that it is not only absent from West German discourse but also unappreciated in East German memory. Rusch's narration of her childhood, which was to a significant extent spent in the shadow of her mother being under *Stasi* observation, indicates that nostalgia for this totalitarian state constitutes a way of remembering that lacks the necessary criticism. And while she depicts some of those experiences in a humorous way and does not engage in the simplistic West German discourse that rejects virtually everything East German, she clearly casts the GDR regime, its politics and institutions, particularly the *Stasi*, along with the unofficial informants of the *Stasi*, who were not part of the government per se, as the Other.

Besides rejecting the *Stasi* as the Other and suggesting that members of the GDR opposition movements, i.e., the *Stasi* victims, inhabited the role of the Other, Rusch also portrays her own childhood and youth as different from most East Germans

to indicate that life in the GDR was far less homogeneous than West German discourse before and after 1990 suggested. Although she could not grasp the complex methods and far-reaching consequences of *Stasi* observation as a child, the experience of her mother's fear as well as her political views meant that Rusch's life in the GDR was different from that of most children and adolescents. Naturally, there were also similarities in her socialization and that of her peers as she participated in the same propagandistic ceremonies and youth organizations that made children good GDR citizens. Furthermore, like most other East Germans, she fondly remembers the so-called *Intershops*, the store in which East Germans could acquire Western products for West German currency, particularly its intense smell and bright colors. Rusch and her family were able to enjoy such items only if someone in their circle of friends was able to travel to the West. Thus, they shared the experience of idolizing Western goods with most East Germans who likewise only acquired them either through packages from West German relatives or presents given to East German relatives allowed to travel there. She experienced these consumer products, from clothes to chewing gum, like most other GDR children as brighter and cooler, and thus as status symbols. And while she considers German reunification, in hindsight, to have liberated her in the sense of making her excruciating decision to leave the GDR and thus her mother and friends for the West, she does not idealize West Germany in any way. She even recounts her disappointment upon hearing the news of the opening of the Berlin Wall as it meant the end of unification and thus of the GDR rather than the democratic socialism her mother and other dissidents had envisioned in a reformed East Germany:

Das war das Ende. Montagsdemos. Neues Forum, Friedenswachen, alles umsonst. Kein reformierter Sozialismus. Die Mauer war gefallen und der

Weg zu Aldi war offen. Das war viel zu früh, das bedeutete Wiedervereinigung. Und die passte nicht in meinen Plan. (75)

This was the end. Monday night demonstrations, New Forum, Peace Watch, it had all amounted to nothing. No reformed Socialism. The Wall had come down, and the path to ALDI was open. This was way too early, this meant reunification. And that did not fit into my plan.

Rusch had intended to finish high school and then marry a foreigner in order to leave the GDR, either a friend who was going to live in France with his French father after school or a French friend she had met during a summer vacation at the Baltic Sea. When she revealed this plan to her mother and stepfather after the *Wende*, she found out that they had made similar arrangements that would allow her to leave. Her mother's efforts to develop Rusch's political conscience – for instance by explaining such symbols of the opposition movement as the “Schwerter zu Pflugscharen” (“Swords into Plowshares”) to her which symbolized their call for disarmament – had taken root (35-39). Yet, unlike her mother, Rusch no longer sought to stay in the GDR seeking to reform it. And while she was a typical child of the GDR in her love of the *Intershop* and her admitted ignorance of the vast number of cocktails available at a bar in West Berlin, she did not engage in GDR nostalgia. For instance, the mention of East German products did not arouse nostalgia because her memory of this country was overshadowed by its intolerance and suppression.

Nevertheless, Rusch emphasizes that despite her different experiences in the GDR compared with her cohort, she felt that this country was a part of her and that she was a part of it (100). Thus, she underlines that it determined her identity process as it provided a feeling of belonging to a particular time and space and is part of her childhood experiences of friends and family. With her memoir, Rusch raises critical

awareness of the fact that not all East Germans had the same experiences but rather were a diverse group of individuals. Some were ignorant of government techniques to suppress dissent; others collaborated to differing degrees because they or their families received threats from the *Stasi*, and yet others genuinely believed in the ideals of socialism, even if they criticized its practice in the GDR. Hence, one cannot subsume the lives lived in East Germany under one composite as many West Germans have done and as nostalgic memoirs like *Zonenkinder* also do. Moreover, Rusch also diverges from the likewise simplistic West German stereotype that all East Germans rejected socialism, both in its ideals and practice, and emphasizes that despite the fact that she had intended to leave the GDR, she would have preferred to see its existence continued with socialism reformed rather than a unification with West Germany.

The exploration of issues of stereotyping in these three memoirs illustrates that East German authors of the third generation of former GDR citizens clearly position themselves in opposition to their West German peers. They reject biased notions distributed in West German discourse that portray East Germans homogeneously as economically backward, financially burdensome, sentimental of old times, and incapable of adapting or taking initiative. Through the process of othering, which is based on a social comparison of both sides, they emphasize their social belonging as distinguished and unique in its experience. By doing so these authors attempt to create a positive identity for themselves and their East German audience who they assume to encounter similar conflicting issues of selfhood and identity. Thus, they contribute towards East Germans' positive view of themselves in order to raise the self-esteem of the collective,

which has been affected by their social status. Since the *Wende* the larger collective of East Germans – predominantly of the first and second generation of former GDR citizens – have perceived themselves as subordinate to West Germans due to a lower social status. This can be attributed, partially, to what Tajfel and Turner describe as the process of internalization of inferior characteristics ascribed to them by West Germans as well as by members of their own group. It is for this reason that they do not aspire to seek affiliation with the “superior” outgroup of West Germans but show a high degree of loyalty towards their ingroup. They also acknowledge and are not ashamed of the fact that their identity is determined by their childhood experiences in the GDR. Writing their memoirs, they stand up for themselves and attempt to repossess the past that has been declared useless throughout Western determined *Wende* discourse.

Their criticism is broadly directed at Western stereotypes of East Germans, but their specific target is the consequence of preconceived notions that ignore, among other particularities, inter- and intragenerational differences. Narrating their own specific background they attempt to counter these stereotypes: Jana Hensel does so, minimally, by differentiating the adaption process of her own from the parental generation of East Germans and by addressing West Germans’ lack of interest in the problems of former GDR citizens. Yet, she goes into great lengths of creating a specific image of East Germans that, although characterized by nostalgia and retrospective, enhances the meaning of their history as a highly relevant aspect of their current selves. Claudia Rusch emphasizes more critical aspects of GDR life that explore the problematic interaction between repressive government acts against citizens as an essential part of GDR life and her own loyalty and sense of belonging to this *Heimat*. And Jana Simon,

finally, directly confronts the ignorant homogenizing of East Germans by giving an intense and detailed account of her friend's pre- and post-*Wende* experiences; the irreconcilability of GDR values with Westernized society and exodus of not only his friends but his entire support network play an undeniable part in Felix's demise.

With the threat of the disappearance of GDR history due to forgetting, these memoirists may have come to the realization that the legitimacy of the collective that they consider their ingroup and their cultural home needs to be reestablished and continually supported. Thus, while their primary goal is the location of their selves socially and culturally, they not only strive to achieve a sense of significance and meaning within a cultural environment that has denied them credibility and value but also to promote the significance of relationships between them and other East Germans, which can potentially reestablish a collective sense of belonging among them and their readers. Ultimately, the memoirists of this generation demand respect for pre-*Wende* lives of East Germans, for their struggles during and following the *Wende*, and the adjustments they have had to make in their way of life as well as their way of thinking.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In 2011, Germany commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall. For the nearly thirty years of its existence, the Wall had not only divided the city and separated families but also become the symbol of the Cold War. It is now commemorated at the memorial site in Bernauer Straße, and while currently more than 100,000 people visit the site every year, in the early 1990s there was little interest in commemorating either the division or the 136 people or more (Schlusche 123) who were killed during their attempt to flee the GDR by crossing the fortified no man's land of the border zone (*Der Tagesspiegel* August 3, 2011). As it most visibly embodied the oppressive methods used by the GDR government to rein in the citizens, the Berlin Wall was quickly dismantled thus erasing yet another aspect of the East German past from collective memory. This occurred just as East Germans were starting to realize how the far-reaching changes that were the results of the unification would affect their everyday lives from then onwards. Traces of the Wall thus vanished almost unnoticed across the whole city of Berlin, and by 2000, only about 500 meters of the once 44-kilometer section between East and West Berlin of the structure that entirely surrounded the latter had remained, split into three segments, at their original locations. However, soon it became evident that to recall the location and appearance of the Wall as part of the cityscape became increasingly difficult for Berlin residents (Schlusche 115). Since 2004, the proposal to mark the ground where the Wall had been to serve as a memorial site met with widespread support from experts and politicians across party lines (116). There was also a consensus, particularly among members of the post-Wall generation who lacked personal memories of it that the remaining material components of this part

of the city's historical legacy should be preserved (Ahonen 141). This need to retain the emblem of the German division in collective memory is reflected in the vast number of visitors the site attracts every year. The Wall has now become "a theme of great fascination for tourists, who generated a growing demand for wall tours, guidebooks, and various mementos, contributing significantly to the revival of interest in the vanished border that was evident by the end of the [1990s]" (Ahonen 140).

Aside from the historical physical Wall separating East and West Germans, Peter Schneider's apt metaphor of a continued *Mauer in den Köpfen* ("Wall inside the heads") to characterize the continued economic and political, social and cultural division between Germans after unification has become widely known and accepted (Ahonen 133). More than two decades after unification, the separation still needs to be overcome so that "es wächst zusammen, was zusammen gehört" ("it will grow together what belongs together"). Although Willy Brandt did not actually use this famous phrase in his famous speech on November 10, 1989 as widely believed, but only subsequently added it to a published version of it (Hensel, *Achtung Zone* 11-12), it has become emblematic of post-unification collective memory. Schneider's metaphor adequately described the situation as it appeared before the publication and discussion of East German childhood memoirs; rather than growing together, the divisions between East and West Germans seemed to become more and more solidified. As Jens Bisky, long-time journalist for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the son of former PDS chairman Lothar Bisky, supports this view as he writes in his 2005 book *Die deutsche Frage: Warum die Einheit unser Land gefährdet* ("The German question: Why reunification is a threat to our country"):

Nach der Wende hat sich eine eigene ostdeutsche Identität herausgebildet, ein deutliches Bekenntnis, nicht dazuzugehören. Dem

entsprechen auf der anderen Seite Desinteresse, Ignoranz und Umerziehungsphantasien. Die Brüder und Schwestern in Ost und West stehen denen im jeweils anderen Landesteil ebenso nah oder fern wie etwa Österreichern. (9)

After the *Wende*, a distinct East German identity developed grounded in a sense of exclusion. West Germans on the other hand are characterized by disinterest, ignorance, and reeducation phantasies. The brothers and sisters in East and West feel as close to or different from each other as they do with regard to Austrians.

Moreover, most West Germans did and still do not realize that unification generated a significant economic stimulus that postponed the recession that had begun in the FRG in the late 1980s and misinterpreted it as solely caused by the transformation of the problem-laden East German economy. West Germans likewise continue to falsely believe that only they rather than all Germans have to pay the so-called solidarity surcharge of 5.5 percent of their net income due to the misnomer in order to finance the economic consequences of unification.

However, apart from an increase in taxes, while West Germans faced no major transformation to their way of life, East German lives were radically altered. The changes included such mundane everyday experiences as shopping, as one had to not only get to know an overwhelming amount of new consumer products but also understand that in a capitalist economy prices for the same product differ both between stores and even at the same store at different times. Large-scale changes included the introduction of the West German educational, economic and social systems, changes to the symbolic markers of national identity as embodied in the flag and national anthem, as well as Western value systems and ideologies. Furthermore, the place of the GDR and the unification process in West-German-dominated collective memory underwent significant fluctuations and generally represented East Germans in predominantly

negative terms and led to the construction of a positive and defiant East German identity as a counter-identity to the one imposed by hegemonic collective memory. East German attitudes towards their collective past changed from an initial sense of exuberance and embrace of the new freedoms coupled with an overall rejection of all that had been to the often uncritical idealization of the past known as *Ostalgie* when it became apparent the brave new world of consumer capitalism they had only known from West German television brought many disappointments in reality, most importantly large-scale unemployment and the disappearance of social support systems. Jens Bisky summarizes the situation in the new millennium poignantly:

Der Osten hat nach 1990 einen beispiellos raschen Wandel erlebt, die Gesellschaft ist nach wie vor schwach, viele leben in prekären Verhältnissen. Die Transferzahlungen haben hier für Ruhe und Ordnung gesorgt. Aber der Grund blieb schwankend, Soziales, Politik und Wirtschaft ohne Halt. ... Es gibt keine Aussicht auf Angleichung der Lebensverhältnisse in Ost und West, ... keine Aussicht auf ein Wachstum, ... keine Aussicht, dass kulturelle Differenzen zwischen Ost und West plötzlich verschwinden." (22-23)

The East experienced an unprecedentedly rapid transformation after 1990, the society still remains weak, many live in precarious conditions. The so-called transfer payments from the West that subsidize the economy ensured peace and order. But the ground remained unstable, social conditions, politics and the economy remained out of balance. ... There is no chance that living conditions in East and West will converge, ... no chance of growth, ... no chance that cultural differences between East and West will suddenly disappear.

The life narratives I discussed, all of which appeared in the first decade of the twenty-first century, reflect and embody the current and ongoing debate about the collective memory of the GDR that must include critical account, thus avoiding dangers of exaggerated *Ostalgie* such as ignorance and complete rejection of the present. While there are differences in how this nostalgic idealization of the East German past has

been expressed during the more than two decades since unification, its continued presence and significance for constructing and maintaining a defiant and positive identity as East Germans is indicated by its embrace by the third and last generation. Despite the fact that they only shared little of their parent's and grandparent's idealism, the life narratives of Jana Hensel, Jana Simon and Robert Ide represent the auto/biographical experience of growing up in the GDR in entirely positive terms. This is particularly apparent when compared to such accounts of the same subject matter as Rainer Kunze's sarcastically titled *Die wunderbaren Jahre* from 1976, which could only be published in West Germany and led to the author's emigration enforced by the unbearable practices of *Stasi* surveillance. Compared to Kunze's collection of short prose texts about the oppression experienced even and especially by children and adolescence in the GDR, even Rusch's memoir could be almost considered nostalgic. While she had decided to leave the GDR and thus her mother with little chance of seeing her again, she recounts the story of her father's death in an East German prison, and her memoir is dominated by the experience of constant surveillance, she recounts the idealism and sense of community that existed among the socialist opposition movement in the GDR which greatly impacted her early life in nostalgic terms.

And while most East Germans are not mourning the end of the political regime, many still nostalgically long for their childhood and youth and readily and uncritically employ the symbolism of products that remind them of these times. They embrace, for instance, the annual commercial fair OSTPRO that has been held in major East German cities, such as Leipzig, Erfurt, Potsdam, and Halle since 1991. Open to the public, the fair promotes the distribution and purchase of such products made in the so-

called five new provinces – from lentils and sausages to cosmetics and candy. While the popularity of these products among East Germans reflects the larger trend in Western culture to buy locally produced things, visitors also embrace the nostalgic sentiment. One of them, who was interviewed for *Spiegel Magazin* at the Berlin OSTPRO in 2009, for instance stated that she surely appreciates living in freedom now but added that frequents the fair because “man fühlt sich hier so zu Hause” (“one feels so at home here,” *Spiegel Online* May 16, 2009). While consumer products made in the GDR were considered unfashionable at the time, they have become symbols of an idealized past in the context of contemporary Western culture where nostalgia is expressed in the retro fashions from clothing to furniture in the past two decades. The popularity of East German products thus not only reflects *Ostalgie* but also the general phenomena of childhood nostalgia and retro design.

The relevance of a more positive collective memory of the East German past than the one that dominates West German hegemonic discourse was also indicated in November of 2011 at the annual political gathering of the CDU, the major conservative German party, in Leipzig. Their youth wing, the *Junge Union*, generated another round of debate with regard to East German political symbols, most of which have already been outlawed as unconstitutional. They not only advocated to extend the ban to all *Ostprodukte* but also suggested that they constitute equivalents of the swastika and other symbols of the Third Reich. However, East German members of the *Junge Union* who were asked for comments by the local newspaper *Nordkurier* were adamant that this proposal is excessive and insensitive. One of them explained that “solche Themen gehen den Menschen im Osten des Landes sehr nah, darum muss sensibel damit

umgegangen werden” (“such topics affect people in the East deeply, and therefore have to be handled sensibly”) (*Nordkurier.de* November 20, 2011). Another East German member commented that “wenn man ihnen diese [Symbole] wegnimmt, geht auch ein Stück Identität verloren” (“if you take these symbols away from them, they lose part of their identity”). East German products and symbols have become mementos of happy childhood memories and markers of an identity whose common denominator is a positively reinterpreted difference from West Germans. While their popularity is part of a larger trend for both retro fashion and design and locally made products, they also express the basic human need to solidify inherently fleeting memories via physical objects that anchor them in the inevitable flow of time and thus provide the sense of stability and reassurance necessary as the core of self-identity precisely because it, too is forever changing.

As fragile and fleeting as memories are, their meaning and the process of remembering in particular extend far beyond momentary time travel. Autobiographical memory possess an existential function because it memories provides us with a sense of self and makes us part of communities that range from the small groups like families that Maurice Halbwachs theorized to the imaginary communities like nations that Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger analyzed. Memories thus possess the potential to achieve a meaning beyond personal boundaries as they may initiate the formation of a community of remembering through the act of sharing. Members of the same memory community base their association with this particular group on its shared collective memory and the basic commonalities in much of the structure and form of their individual memories. This allows them to relate to each other as group members, a form

of cohesion that establishes a sense of belonging to ground the individual and define the group as such. Groups generate physical representations of their shared memory, such as monuments and memorials, the names of public places from streets to cities, ceremonies and holidays, and, literature and films. Such representations imbue select aspects of the past with significance and legitimize the group that has emerged based on these experiences. As they constitute present interpretations of a past event, such memory artifacts often generate public discussions, for example, about the location and design of a monument. Moreover, they embody the hope of the individual and the group that the core of their past and its meaning will be remembered by future generations, even if the latter will reinterpret and thus repurpose them to commemorate their own past, and that the memory artifacts pay respect to the accomplishments and experiences of previous generations. Literary representations in general and particularly the diverse forms of life writing lend themselves well to represent the process of remembering in its fragmentation, spontaneity, and relatability as well as indicate the collective aspects and significance of individual memory stories. Therefore, I explored both aspects of literature as memory artifacts in four life narratives written by East Germans born between 1971 and 1976 and published between 2002 and 2004, that depict childhood and adolescence in the GDR and, to varying degrees, young adulthood after unification.

The first and second East German generation tended to have more difficulties adjusting to post-unification life than the third generation and the metaphor of a “Wall inside their heads” can therefore undoubtedly be attributed to those older generations. Despite their more successful acculturation, the memoirs and auto/biographies of the

younger East Germans by and large represent their childhood and youth in sync with the Western notion of lost innocence. However, within a more or less nostalgic narrative frame, some of them have also created critical accounts of the oppression experienced in the dictatorship. Yet, despite their critical stance towards the GDR as a political regime, this last generation actively engages in a counter-memory to the dominant West German discourse that frames memories of the GDR as so profoundly obsolete that such experiences are not deserving of either commemoration or respect.

While partaking in nostalgic recollection of GDR life in varying degrees, they also narrate in order to reclaim the essence of this past as the center of their early socialization and identity process. Their memoirs demonstrate that East Germans—albeit predominantly the younger generation—are willing to overcome the division that was intensified by stereotypical notions on both sides and ready to embrace their unique life experience as the privilege to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of two socio-economic and cultural systems.

Jana Hensel, for example, explicitly rejects negative West German stereotypes of East Germans, even if she implicitly indicates that she has internalized some of them herself, particularly in the pity that borders condescension expressed in her account of her parent's generation. This generational divide is paradigmatic for her generation of *Zonenkinder*. Ide's memoir focuses precisely on the complex and at times difficult relationships between his own cohort, the slightly older siblings from whom Hensel explicitly differentiates herself, and their parents. And while Simon shares with Hensel the emphatic rejection of negative East German stereotypes, unlike Hensel, both she and Ide belong to the sibling-generation, and both did not internalize such biases

despite the fact that they have spent the majority of their adulthood in Hamburg and Munich respectively, i.e., cities located in the former West Germany. And although Rusch is the most critical in her representation of the GDR and the *Wende* of the four authors whose life narrative I explored, she likewise deconstructs dominant West German preconceptions in providing a differentiated representation of the role the *Stasi* played in everyday life, and she strongly identifies as East German.

Many East Germans at times still experience coming-out moments when they disclose this aspect of their identity, which like both homosexual and Jewish minority identities is in many cases not immediately perceptible. However, analogous to the terms 'gay' and 'queer,' they continue to re-define the identity marker of *Ossi* in affirmative terms against West German condescension. Rusch, for instance, proudly asserts: "Wir waren die letzten echten Osis" (We were the last real *Ossis*, 101).

This last generation of East Germans shares core socialization experiences in their childhood despite different lives after the *Wende*. Their commonalities further reside in the experiential knowledge of radically different socio-political, economic, and cultural values and norms than those dominant in the present, which they increasingly consider to be both an advantage they have over their West German peers and a group-defining bond. According to Wolfgang Emmerich, such a bond significantly contributes to the formation of a generation, or *Generationszusammenhang*, a term used by Karl Mannheim to whom Emmerich refers. It is created when individuals participate in shared experiences as members of the same socio-historical entity that result in shared behavioral norms, concepts of value and meaning, and collective actions as a result of these experiences (143). Despite the fact that Hensel's use of the

unifying *We* was widely criticized and the life narratives of East German childhood and youth indicate significant diversity of experiences among the last generation, they do constitute a generational cohort that is distinct from both their parent generation and their West German peers. It is a portrayal of this generation in all its complexity and the reinforcement of re-defining *Ossi* identity in positive terms that the thematic sub-genre of life narratives I explored in exemplary cases contributed to collective German memory. According to Norbert Kron's article that I referred to in the introduction, some of the authors may "sich mit Händen und Füßen dagegen [wehren], als Teil einer neuen Bewegung zu gelten" (emphatically reject the notion that they are part of a new movement, *Der Tagesspiegel* November 17, 2002). However, as I sought to demonstrate, there are core aspects in both the life narratives themselves and their reception, in which their potential to impact collective memory is actualized, that support the argument that these narratives constitute a thematic sub-genre of life narratives that represents the dominant mode of remembering East German childhood and adolescence during the brief *Wende* period as well as young adolescence after German unification.

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ABSTRACT**REMEMBERING EAST GERMAN CHILDHOOD IN
POST-WENDE LIFE NARRATIVES**

by

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Advisor: Dr. Anne Rothe**Major:** Modern Languages (German Studies)**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation explores how East German childhood is remembered in four exemplary auto/biographical texts that appeared in the early years of the twenty-first century. In Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, Jana Simon's *Denn wir sind anders*, and Robert Ide's *Geteilte Träume*. The depiction of childhood memories is moreover contextualized in the radical social, political and economic changes after the *Wende* and their effects on former East Germans as individuals and as a group. Written by authors who constitute a generational cohort who were born in the early to mid-1970s, these life narratives engage in the construction of a counter-memory to dominant West German discourse which devalues virtually everything East German. As such, the literary representation of East German childhood memories constitutes an attempt to define *Ossi* identity in positive terms and emphatically reject the ascription of a self-concept in terms of lack and insufficiency imposed by the new West German masters. Yet, despite the similarity of seeking a

reevaluation of the GDR that does not reflect West German hegemonic discourse, the texts depict different aspects of both the past and the present and also differ, at times quite significantly, in their representation and evaluation of everyday life in East Germany. In my analyses of the four primary texts, which I group together in various combinations in each chapter to explore the respective themes by comparison, I contend that the similarities are due to the authors' shared generational background in terms of their physical exposure to GDR life and the differences due to individually different experiences based on family history as well as the intended purpose of their narration.

Chapter One provides an overview of the key theoretical frameworks I employ in analyzing the primary texts. These include the concepts of collective trauma, individual and collective memory and identity as well as discussions of the function of autobiographical texts as memory artifacts in the construction of collective memory. Subsequently, I discuss the four primary texts with regard to thematic clusters. In Chapter Two, I explore the notion of nostalgia and specifically analyze the phenomenon of a nostalgic longing for the East German past known as *Ostalgie*. While it constitutes a counter-narrative to West German discourse which solely represents the GDR as a dictatorial regime by representing positive memories of ordinary life, *Ostalgie* idealizes the past to the extent of historical inaccuracy by effacing the interaction of oppressive power structures and ordinary life. Chapter Three turns to the notion of home and *Heimat* as it informs the identity quest of many East Germans who spent their childhood in the GDR. I analyze their sense of loss and longing expressed as *Heimweh* as well as the representation of childhood places and their disappearance in the changing

cityscapes in the so-called five new provinces. Chapter Four explores the representation of stereotypes East and West Germans formed about each other during and after the *Wende* as part of the authors' acculturation process and their identity negotiation between East and West.

As I explore the life narratives as embodiments of cultural memory, I integrate an analysis of their reception into my discussions. The texts represent the authors' individual memories of their childhood experiences in the GDR. Upon publication as literary texts, they become cultural artifacts and as such embody a potential for (re)constructing collective memory. However, this potential needs to be actualized in the reception process. Therefore, I explore the official and vernacular reception of the auto/biographical texts in newspaper reviews, *Leserbriefen*, and internet discussion forums.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I am a *Zonenkind* since I was born in 1977 and grew up in Altentreptow a small East German town located in what used to be *Bezirk* Neubrandenburg and is now called Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. We enjoyed good reception of West German radio stations and TV channels but officially did not consume these capitalist mass media. My socialization was also informed by being a *Pionier*, including weekly Monday morning school assemblies and collecting recyclables and donating the money at school for a fund in support of developing countries.

In 1996, the former West Germany still seemed intimidating to me, so I decided to stay East and attend Potsdam University where I earned an MA in English and American Studies with minors in Russian Studies and Economics in 2003. During this time, I also spent two semesters on a study abroad program at Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, MI. Apparently, my GDR socialization had only been partly successful as I enjoyed my time in the country that had constituted the prime embodiment of imperialism and our enemy in the Cold War to the extent I returned after completing my degree in Potsdam.

From 2003 to 2005, I attended the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ where I received an M.A. in German Studies with a minor in Second Language Acquisition and started working as a Teaching Assistant for German language classes. Subsequently, I joined the Ph.D. program in Modern Languages with a concentration in German Studies at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI, where I continued working as Teaching Assistant and was awarded the Thomas C. Rumble Doctoral Fellowship for 2006-2007. My professional socialization also includes presenting papers and organizing sessions at conferences and was complemented by the adventures in my private life, two happy sons and a loving, hard-working recycler and restaurateur husband, all of whom are American but enjoy my tales of childhood on the other side of the Iron Curtain.