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Dissident Stories from the GDR and pOstdeutschland.

Resonances and Reflections.

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Elske Rosenfeld and Suza Husse
in conversation with
Katalin Cseh-Varga,
Rebecca Hernandez García and
Redi Koobak

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This conversation offers a reflection on the processes and contexts of artistic research in relation to post-socialist histories and politics of memory that "wild recuperations. material from below" brings together. We, the initiators of this first project in the series "Dissident Stories from the GDR and pOst-deutschland" and editors of this book, invited researchers Katalin Cseh-Varga and Redi Koobak, as well as archivist Rebecca Hernandez García to join us in a written exchange. Rebecca has been our main partner at the Archive of the GDR Opposition. She accompanied each of the participating artists and writers in their work at the Archive, and thus co-shaped this project and its resonances substantially. Katalin studies histories and public spheres of artistic and dissenting cultural practices within East- and Central-European statesocialist cultures. Redi engages in the cultural intersections of post-socialism and post-colonialism from a feminist perspective. Based on their research, they engaged with "wild recuperations. material from below" through a series of questions and observations, which have accompanied us throughout the editing process. While the book took shape, this exchange allowed us to continue learning from and thinking through this project, its different forms of working and researching together, its contributions and their interconnections.

Why is it important to engage with this archive now, at this point in time and space?

Redi Since I did not participate in any of the project's events, I learned about its concept and process only through online texts and visual materials. Therefore I would like to begin by asking: how would you define the present moment in which we ask about dissident practices and social realities of the late GDR? Why is it important to focus on and work with this archive now, at this point in time and space?

Elske Our project acts within and upon a context that is very much in flux, especially where we write, in the Germany of 2019. For over two decades, the historization of the GDR in Germany followed two opposing

tropes: its condemnation as a repressive surveillance regime or its affirmation via the trivializing commodification known as “Ostalgie” (a pun that combines the words for “nostalgia” and “East”). Dissident lives and politics were invisible in the latter and could be told only through the story of their repression in the former. On the occasion of various anniversaries, the story of the opposition was stylized into a heroic tale in which its concrete and resonant political content was erased. There was some interest in certain subcultures such as punk and alternative fashion, but by and large most narratives did not feature dissident or oppositional histories, whether in films, books, or exhibitions. The mainstream consensus, dominated by the west German perspective, was that East German cultures, including dissident cultures and subcultures, had no relevant connections to the present, let alone continuities. It was no different in leftist contexts: East German experiences and political cultures were largely absent, and in some more extreme cases leftists subscribed to an idealized concept of state socialism, untroubled by the fact of political oppression and the experience of dissidence.

These cultures of (non-)remembrance were the context in which we began conceptualizing the project and applying for funding – unsuccessfully at first. We had the impression that projects with a focus on GDR histories were not very well received by public funders. Then, in September 2017, right wing electoral gains in the national elections suddenly created an awareness in the west German mainstream that something had gone wrong in the East and that this something needed to be understood. Public interest grew, and east German histories and cultures became a viable and popular subject of journalistic engagement and political interest. The right wing appropriation of East German histories of resistance created a sense of urgency on the left to reclaim and tell these histories. The beginning of our actual process coincided with this shift in public consciousness. We set out to navigate these changing grounds in an emerging field of new conversations, projects, and alliances.

Suza Many of the works that have emerged through this process and that are translated into this book deal with post-GDR environments as social, ecological, and embodied archives. Several of the contributions engage with memory in its intersectionality and psycho-materiality through artistic responses to sites, objects, and gestures that carry residues of the proximity of violence and resilience.

In *Along the Silver Road* (pp. 234–255), Alex Gerbaulet and Mareike Bernien tackle the afterscapes of uranium mining in the GDR as historical topologies that are in movement and continue to radiate. They look at how, in the 1990s, the slag of socialist nuclear modernity extracted in the mines of the Erzgebirge was sunk hundreds of meters deep into the ground, covered over, and “re-naturalized.” Alex and Mareike reactivated self-organized underground research about the conditions and effects of uranium extraction operated by the state-owned mining company Wismut, which environmental activists had gathered in the 1980s. In their contribution they relate these findings to the environmental knowledge that exists in the experiences and bodies of those who continue to live in these “new landscapes.” Toxically alive across layers of earth, ideology, and tissue, the

temporality of this memory extends from the end of World War II, when uranium mining began in the GDR, into the far future.

Our approach with *wild recuperations. material from below* is similarly informed by a non-linear and organic notion of memory, which challenges to the linear way that German "Gedenkkultur" [culture of remembrance] seals histories off in the past, or at least at a controllable enough distance from the present. For example, nationalized memory culture has tended to conflate the "Peaceful Revolution," the "Fall of the Wall," and "German Unification" in a seemingly natural progression of events referred to as the "Wende."[1] In this narrative, the struggles for democratic empowerment, and for the social, and ecological transformation of East German dissidents and, later, the civil and mass movements of 1989, disappear. So do the multiple political, social and environmental failures and losses of the Wende and post-Wende period.

In late June 2019 I drove through the countryside in East Saxony, between the Spree and Neisse rivers, to visit my grandmothers who live in Görlitz and Spremberg. The villages and towns were full of election posters of the populist right wing party AfD, Alternative für Deutschland [Alternative for Germany]. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1989 upheavals, the AfD tried to reset people's memory of 1989 with slogans such as "Vollende die Wende" [Complete the turnover], or "Schreib Geschichte" [Write history], or "Hol dir dein Land zurück" [Reclaim your country]. Considering how mainstream culture has absorbed the histories of 1989 and the Wende into a celebratory narrative of German unification for decades, this nationalist simplification and appropriation should come as no surprise. In fact, we cannot fully call it an appropriation of the struggle for political transformation, but rather the amplification and continuation of a particular aspect of it: the racist undercurrent of the events and lawmaking as well as the upsurge of neo-fascist violence, which marked the unification period and was actively supported by the media and by first West German, then federal politics. The activist and scholar Peggy Piesche reminds us that the widely used term "re-unification" creates a seamless link between the Wende and the "unified land" of the past – Nazi Germany before its defeat and division in 1945.[2] When the AfD calls for the "completion of the Wende" in east Germany today, these are the connections and continuities it tries to activate and with them the fascist imaginary of a white "German homeland."

In light of these developments, the unification discourse should unearth the colonial grounds that both German post-fascist states (and states of mind) were built upon, rather than obscuring them. I see the artistic and political work in *wild recuperations. material from below* as a form of de-unification and diversification, of opening up rather than "completing" the 1989 narrative. I situate our work in a wider struggle against the erasures and missing vocabulary that we encounter in dominant discourse – and in ourselves, too – in relation to the complexity of life in the GDR and its historical continuities.

For me, personally, something important happened in this collective process that led me to reconnect with the environments I grew up in. My research in the Archive about lesbian* and queer life and activism in Dresden and in

1 – Engl. turn, turnover, or change, "Wende" is used to describe the period of political transformation that followed the 1989 revolution until the early 1990s.
2 – Peggy Piesche at the public conversation "Friedrichshain migrantisch-diasporisch – Neuverortungen" (Friedrichshain district – migrant-diasporic repositionings) at Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, 11 June 2019.

the East German countryside led me to the activist Ina Röder Sissoko. She was incredibly active in the lesbian* and Black feminist movements of the time, involved in anti-racist alliances and anti-fascist self-organization. But, in the Archive, her traces, and the traces of the resistance histories of Black women* and women* of Color that she speaks of in our conversation are almost not there (*Longing is my favourite material for engaging holes* pp.304–331). To encounter the traces of diverse women* and queers, their resistant collectivities, histories, struggles, and propositions makes me feel a tentative, dissonant be/longing that is reshaping my memory and my imagination. I had no access to these realities when growing up and realize that reconstructing alternative pasts nurtures possibilities to relocate ourselves differently and find agency in the troubled places we grew up in.

How "underground" was the GDR underground?

Katalin As I was researching and writing about the art scene of the Hungarian Kádár era, I realized that, in most cases, "opposition" is not an adequate term to describe the relationship between critical or subversive artistic positions and the directives of cultural politics. Aesthetic strategies of the so-called neo-avant-garde did not meet the criteria of art labeled as "ideologically correct" by the state socialist regime. Instead of confronting the regime directly, they developed a sort of co-existence with it. A paradoxical parallel culture emerged that de- or re-functionalized socialist infrastructure and often found a "separate peace" with policymakers. What are your thoughts on the connection between the state and opposition in the case of the GDR? How "underground" was the GDR underground?

Elske What I find so compelling about this Archive and other archives that deal with dissidence in the GDR is that they often destabilize binary categories of official culture versus counterculture, or, to use more contested terms, communist versus anti-communist politics and cultures, just through their existence and through the documents that they contain. Robert Havemann, after whom the association that runs the Archive is named, was very much a dissident in the sense in which Russian philosopher Boris Groys[3] uses the term: a communist whose initial goal was to change state socialism from within. The dichotomies of state and opposition, communist and anti-communist were very much imposed by the regime. This binary notion first had to be constructed, then maintained through an unremitting effort of denunciation, surveillance, repression, and expulsion. In our interview (pp.114–123), Irena Kukutz (co-founder of the Archive and long-standing staff member) talks about how she grapples with the term "opposition," and, consequently, with the name of the Archive itself. "Opposition" was a derogatory term used by the Stasi, not a self-designation. In the context of state repression and the violence it exerted on all kinds of "oppositional" or non-conforming bodies, this distinction between the regime and opposition makes sense; but when approached from the perspective of dissident ideas and practices, it does not really fit. The archive lends itself to the latter perspective and approach. This places

3 – Boris Groys, Art Power (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013), 170.

the Archive at an interesting point of tension between what the materials themselves tell – and how they resonate with emancipatory projects of the present – and the discourses in which the Archive is entangled as an institution, a context that considers the practices and visions of the dissidents as rendered obsolete by the "end of communism."

Suza Given that the term is so central to the Archive and its politics of collecting, the questions "What does GDR opposition actually mean? Whose political practices and histories are being told under this umbrella, by whom and for whom?" were important points of discussion. Throughout our group's research, we encountered materials and traces that pointed to histories of resistance and organizing of People of Color, Black and Jewish GDR citizens, and people with personal and family histories of migration as part of or in proximity to the archived histories of GDR dissidence. In relation to the whole of the collection, these fragments remain rare and even more rarely do they directly convey the perspectives in question. In this regard, the Archive of the GDR Opposition is also a manifestation of a GDR society and state that imagined itself in white and patriarchal terms.

While Ernest Ah, Lee Stevens, and Sabrina Saase from the Raumerweiterungshalle collective update the histories of the lesbian*-feminist and transgender* movements already recorded in the Archive with the voices of Black and trans* activists who are otherwise absent (pp.44–71), Peggy Piesche approaches the Archive as *Archive (of) Gaps* (pp.138–153). She discusses the archive as a starting point for moments, such as the current "30 years after" 1989 and German unification, when a certain collective memory is being reshaped and retold and we ask: what happened back then, who were the people involved, and what did they document? What did they want to preserve? And, what happens with this story when protagonists are not represented, not documented in the archive, not conserved for a future collective narrative? In dealing with these questions Peggy's work records the agency of the gap, which becomes a placeholder for those who are missing. Employing futurist memory, she sets out to make the omitted protagonists visible underneath multiple layers of archive documents. She returns them to the archive by uncovering and marking their absence.

The active archive, a living organism,
an unfinished undertaking,

Katalin It seems to me that your relationship to the archive is one that is "alive." Artist György Galántai developed his own documentary collection by the mid-70s, coining the term of the "active archive." The active archive functions like a living organism; it is an ongoing, unfinished undertaking. Galántai's understanding of the archive is not limited to a pile of documents, but represents an interaction with the latter, an absorption of the researcher and archivist. What is your understanding of the archive and your relationship to it?

Rebecca The Archive of the GDR Opposition is a living archive. Materials are constantly being added, in addition to the fact that many of those who have given materials to the Archive are still alive and thus available as living witnesses. Unlike a classical archive, our material doesn't come from a single source, but rather through targeted acquisitions of specific materials. So, the archivists themselves actively contribute to the growth of the Archive. And the role of the users can also be quite active, as they often come face-to-face with their own story when accessing the materials in the Archive. The reappraisal of the SED regime[4] is often strongly linked to the reappraisal of one's own history. Making this connection frequently results in the users bringing their materials into the Archive and becoming both sources of material and witnesses of this particular time period.

Suza This switching of roles in relation to the archive, and interacting with it and its social, ecological and historical environments from different perspectives was very present in the artistic research processes during our project. But this way of working was also met with a particular openness and experimental curiosity from the people who run the Archive. I feel that this attitude is quite rare and our experiences with artistic forms of intersectional memory-work and alternative historiography at District have shown that many archives are only seemingly public institutions. In trying to access them, many people are confronted with barriers and with the same structural exclusions that dominate our society as well as our understanding of history.[5] Therefore, it was all the more exciting to work with the people at the Archive of the GDR Opposition, who seem to be interested in keeping the archive-organism porous and alive in the way you describe. In the context of the open-endedness of the politics and practices that speak from the Archive itself, this makes total sense. And I think that it might be worth considering strategically how an archival politics of open-endedness could be embodied in the process of institutionalization that the Archive is currently undergoing.

Elske The Archive of the GDR Opposition exists within and responds to its historically shifting contexts. When Suza and I began working at the Archive, it was still located in the same residential building in Prenzlauer Berg, where it had been founded. The spirit of the East German dissident and artistic scenes was still very much alive there. In the 1980s, the Prenzlauer Berg district of Berlin was a rather run-down area that housed a unique mix of working-class and "Bohemian" cultures. It was a place where the particular sociabilities of the various East German dissident scenes flourished. The walls of the Archive's building still breathed this atmosphere, even after the neighboring streets were gentrified. To me the Archive always felt like a time capsule. I had the feeling that, generally, people were not really aware of the fantastic treasures it held.

4 - The Sozialistische Einheitspartei, or Socialist Union Party, was the ruling party in the GDR from 1949 to 1990.
5 - An example: In her installation "We Call It Love: An Oppositional Screening" and the discussion event "Uncracking the Archive" with the artists, writers and researchers Anguezomo Mba Bikoro and Natasha Kelly, the filmmaker and curator Karina Griffith reflected her experience of being denied access to public film archives during her research about decolonizing the histories of the political movements of the 1960s in Germany, which she carried out at District in 2018. Karina Griffith, "Revolt She Felt: Productive Irritation for Intersectional Protest on Film," in Revolt She Said. Decolonial and Feminist Perspectives on 1968, ed. Keppler, Koch, and Nold (Berlin: District, 2019), 14–18.

In 2017, the Archive moved to the premises of the former Stasi headquarters in Berlin-Lichtenberg. The imposing and oppressive architecture of the latter could not but affect any visitors to the Archive. The proximity of the Archive to the other institutions located there, such as the Stasi Museum and the Stasi archives, increased the visibility of the Archive, but also placed it in closer proximity to the actors and narrative of the official "Gedenkkultur" [culture of remembrance] with its emphasis on historiography from above, and stories of state repression. It was important for us to consider how to deal with this new context, as it would undoubtedly affect both the way in which the artists read the Archive and how visitors would read the artworks and the project. How to avoid telling the stories of dissidence once more through the story of their repression? How to engage critically with the institutional practices that came with this new setting and keep alive the spirit of "working from below" that the documents speak to?

Suza The stories of the beginning of the archives, which come together under the roof of the Archive of the GDR Opposition, connect in multiple ways to Galántai's image of the archive as an organism with a metabolic relationship to its makers, caretakers, and users. The archives grew from below as activists became archivists. For a long time, the conditions under which the archives were built and maintained were precarious. Many of the archive's collections originated in underground publications, unofficial libraries, and self-archival practices that were part of dissident political organizing in the 1980s, especially in the feminist and environmental movements. After 1990 many of them looped back below a now different surface to continue spaces of dissident knowledge. I consider this a conscious gesture of resilience – facilitating counter-narratives not only for those of the GDR regime, but also for mainstream memorialization of 1989/90 and for the encroaching post-socialist capitalist realities.

Suza and Elske Rebecca, how would you describe the social shifts impacting the Archive and the ways it is being approached?

Rebecca The extent to which the Archive itself is subject to these shifts is quite limited. And the focus of the Archive's collection is clearly defined and doesn't change as a result of social shifts. On the other hand, perception and the use of the Archive's materials do change, and this is where research and public outreach come in. These can and should respond to social changes. The Archive, on the other hand, forms the basis; it documents and archives the records of a historical period. This is, and remains, the task of archives, independent of their changing contexts.

Suza Anna Zett's artistic contribution *Deponie* [Landfill], which is present in the book in the form the essay *Waste Disposal and Landfills* (pp. 72 – 89), interrogates the relationship between image and text material in the Archive and the ecological and political environments of this material. Taking documents of the environmental movement and the autonomous poetry scene in the GDR as her points of departure, she is interested in gestures and processes of disposal in the environment, in politics, and in the psyche. Investigating "poetic ecosystems of damage," she draws connections between the ways the post-fascist totalitarian system of the GDR was sedimented in language and the so-called politics of waste transfer from West

to East Germany. *Deponie* [Landfill] offers "a new perspective on the state of post-growth and degrowth in deindustrialized urban and rural environments, which are rendered as potential spaces for self-organized, 'wild' life forms of human and non-human co-species," writes cultural scholar Ulrike Gerhardt in relation to Anna's series of works nurtured by her research in the Archive of the GDR Opposition.[6] In her essay, as well as in the work of Alex Gerbaulet and Mareike Bernien, (toxic) waste depositories emerge as "under-sites" of utopia. Maybe we can look at the Archive in a similar way, like a depository for political possibilities, cultural and environmental knowledge that was backlogged before and after 1989/90 – a place where they were kept safe in the double sense that they were not lost but also posed no threat to the dominant political realities. As much as disposal sites are toxically alive and ever-leaking, the Archive as a disposal site for political imagination cannot be sealed off from potential contamination. Our collective work with and in the Archive was and is therefore also an exercise of seepage in multiple directions.

Suza and Elske Rebecca, you've often talked about how unusual the confrontation with artistic research methods through our project was for you. Can you say something about how you perceived this process, or whether and how our actions have somehow impacted the Archive? And what role do you think art can play in dealing with archival material and history in terms of linking them to the present?

Rebecca Archives are organized according to clear structures and follow a defined classification. Art needs, or, rather, it demands other forms of access to the material and goes against classifications. In art, one does not usually find clear structures. One has to engage differently with these approaches from an artistic perspective. This was the biggest challenge for me. By getting involved in such an experiment, new and creative perspectives toward one's material and toward the archive emerge, paving the way for new groups of users.

Suza The archive as an organism needs metabolic relationships with its environments. This is how it stays alive. But what happens inside the bellies and underbellies of collective memory when the archive tries to swallow the researcher like Galántai suggests? With the work of the Raumerweiterungshalle collective, for example, we could think about a kind of mutual infection. For their radio play titled *insufferable together. a documentary mosaic* (pp. 44–71) they consulted protagonists and archive materials of lesbian* and transgender* histories in the GDR about their experiences of everyday life and of resistance, patriarchy and racism, about the pathologization of non-normative sexualities, lesbian* antifascism, the beginnings of the transgender movemenent, about exclusions and conflicts, meeting places and alliances. For the book they combined the script of the radio play with a series of images. *insufferable together* is a document and a practice of locating queer histories – as much as the archive that documents them – in a net of relationships and reciprocities. What they find in the archive (and what they cannot find there) leads Lee, Ernest, and Sabrina away from the archive and into living contact with the people who were active in these movements of the 1980s. Many of them are still around and can speak from their perspective on the present, and on the past.

6 – Ulrike Gerhardt, "Language, Body, Indices. Cultural Memory of the Transformation in Post-Socialist Video Art" (unpublished dissertation, 2019).

insufferable together also manifests the recognition, which runs through *wild recuperation. material from below,* that these histories are still very much alive together with those who brought them about and who are not only living archives, but often people who continue to engage with change in the present.

Many of the involved artistic practices activate oral modes of transmission and embodiment as forms of archiving, aggregation, sedimentation, or inscription. Conversation in the expanded sense of the word and oral-history-based memory work are employed toward performative and dissident methods of historiography. This allows space for both the continuous incompleteness of historical narratives and reciprocal encounters with histories that leave traces on both the archive and the researcher. In connecting with the archival materials and with the absences they testify to, each artist-researcher added something new to the archive that was not there before. I like to think of this process through the image of stirring something in the belly of the archive, a dynamic that holds the potential for re-composition. The Archive of the GDR Opposition grew from archival politics that were an integral part of sub- and counter-cultural practices with change as their aim and constant intrinsic process. That is why it is an ideal context for exploring how archiving from below could look today and how archives re-/compose themselves based on living contact.

Minor historiographies: gesture as archive and method

Redi I am drawn to Elsa Westreicher's project *Intimacy, Transparency, Urgency. A few tomorrows ago, there were miles between yesterday and today,* particularly in the ways in which she addresses questions of temporality, relations between the public and the private, transparency and opacity, various materialities, and an understanding of a gesture as a form of political protest. It reminds me of Erin Manning's writings on the potentialities of the "minor gesture"[7] which could be connected to how minor activisms challenge superficial and normative ideas of activism as something associated only with loud in-your-face messages and grand gestures, charismatic leaders, and forms of protest such as mass demonstrations, rallies, and strikes. As Erin Manning notes, the potential of minor gestures lies in the fact that the "minor isn't known in advance. Each minor gesture is singularly connected to the event at hand, immanent to the in-act."[8] Thinking of the Archive of the GDR Opposition and the conversations and artworks it inspired, do you find the concept of the minor gesture useful for bringing aesthetics and politics into an intimate, mutually enabling encounter?

7 – Erin Manning, The Minor Gesture (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016).
8 – Ibid., 2.

Elske The concept and methodology of minor-ness is absolutely central to this project. It also strikes me as an important quality of the dissident political forms we look at and work through. In the GDR of the 1980s, these practices and sociabilities unfolded pretty much on the smoldering ruins of grand-narrative politics. Their immanence and their anti-political stance make them hard to read through existing concepts of the political – and at the same time so relevant to many political projects of today. I think this is also why these histories call so strongly for artistic forms of historical processing that operate in the registers of the minor. A shared theme of many of the contributions and conversations in this project has been the absence of a vocabulary in which dissident experiences can be addressed. Histories that were shut down, rendered unintelligible in dominant narratives, survive in physical gestures that have yet to be processed into a language in which they can be known.

Brazilian psychoanalyst and cultural critic Suely Rolnik talks about art as a way of processing the tension between what is sayable within the current cognitive mappings of the world, and that which bodies sense in its resonant apprehension. To her, the political function of art is to reconfigure these very mappings, or languages, in which experiences can or cannot be addressed. As experiences become addressable, they enable different ways of being and doing in the world.[9] To me this very much sums up what Rolnik would call the aesthetico-political intention of our work.

Elsa's work (pp. 154–175) focuses on and processes gestures of touch and of political action at the meeting point between the intimate and the political/public: her photos are of protest banners made out of bedsheets kept in the Archive. To this encounter between private and public – in which these intimate textiles become public and political in a macro sense – she adds another historical layer, based on her own autobiographical, or rather, family knowledge. Through her mother she knows that sheets like these were produced by political prisoners in an East German women*s prison. Intimate textiles produced by state violence. Elsa's artistic gesture as she weaves together these macro and micro levels, public and private histories and objects, engages a politics of the minor.

My own contribution to the exhibition also looked at a major political moment through its absolutely minor, somatic shifts and movements. It works with footage from the very first meeting of the East German Round Table (a platform for dialogue between regime and opposition) in December 1989. In the scene, the bodies of the opposition members are set in motion by the sound of a demonstration that gathers outside the building. I intensify this agitation in my edit, because I am interested in the collective that these transgressing sounds and movements create between people on the inside and the outside. To me, the radicality of the 1989 revolution is much more apparent in this commingling of the somatic and the sonic than on the verbal level of this intensely macropolitical moment. My text contribution *Versuche/Framed* (pp. 90–113) revisits this moment through a video clip produced one year later in which, once again, bodily gestures, repetitions, and moments of intensified silence push beyond a language that feels insufficient.

9 – Suely Rolnik, "The Geopolitics of Pimping," Eipcp.net, translate.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/rolnik/en.html.

Erotohistoriography: The affective pull of the archive.

Redi In my research on the self-portraits of Estonian queer feminist artist Anna-Stina Treumund, I was inspired by Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "erotohistoriography,"[10] a historical method that builds on the suggestion that our relations to history can sometimes be surprisingly erotic. Erotohistoriography uses the body as a tool to access and make sense of encounters with the past in ways that would problematize the logic of chrononormative development and teleological narratives of progress, which was important for me in relation to analyzing postsocialist feminist imaginaries without always already casting them as "belated copies" of the West, as "lagging behind." Working towards "a politics of unpredictable, deeply embodied pleasures that counters the logic of development,"[11] Freeman notes that:

> Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of under-standing.[12]

In other words, since erotohistoriography is an affective historiography that is responsive to how history "arouses, kindles, whets, or itches,"[13] I am curious to know how it might resonate with your project *wild recuperations. material from below*? What are the affective pulls of the Archive of the GDR Opposition and how do you relate them to the contemporary political moment? What in the archive "arouses, kindles, whets, or itches"?

Suza The idea of erotohistoriography is a fabulous tool to think with in relation to the practices of queering time and memory that *wild recuperations. material from below* engages in. In her artistic and book contribution *Big Bang Backwards* (pp.16–43), Nadia Tsulukidze inserts herself into history, and into the biography of another – destabilizing and countering history's normative narratives and chronopolitics in the way you describe. The thoughts, dreams, memories, and imagination in her archive diaries trace and entangle the encounter between Nadia's hybrid present as a post-Soviet migrant artist who works in a retirement home, and Freya Klier, the GDR theater-maker, writer, and activist. With intersectional sensibility towards sickness as an embodied form of resistance, Nadia's work intertwines documents and tales of both experiences into a shared, troubled time-space, which is both reality

10 – Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography," Social Text 23, no. 3–4 (2005); Elizabeth Freeman, Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010).
11 – Redi Koobak, Whirling Stories: Postsocialist Feminist Imaginaries and the Visual Arts (Linköping: Linköping University Press, 2013).
12 – Freeman, Time Binds, 95–96.
13 – Ibid., 117.

and fiction. As she mixes up biographies and political feelings across the boundaries of “me” and “you,” now and then, her work creates a dissident, diasporic, and sick chronopolitics of post-socialism.

Elske The concept of an embodied erotohistoriography is also highly pertinent to my practice. It departs from where history and the present collapse into one in my body and manifest as an irritation. To me, 1989 is an experience that has been inscribed in the body and reaches towards, but fails to meet, the vocabularies of the present. It finds no language within the common historizations of the events. The speechlessness that this creates is saturated with affect, with happiness, with rage, with urgency. It continues to push me towards giving it form. I began working in the Archive in 2009, because I wanted to find, in a very simple, straightforward way, objective testimony for what I remembered in my body of my experience of 1989/90 and for which the narrative of the “Fall of the Wall” provided no words. I discovered that this experience continued to resonate in the documents I found here. By using, reworking, and showing these, I tried to create spaces in which my experience could become recognizable to others. The idea for a collective process of artistic research at the Archive emerged out of this process. I felt I needed to share this way of working with this history with others. To use art to create spaces in which a past can be embodied and in that way reworked in the present. To bring a past that has become unspeakable back into language via art, writing, and conversation must, by definition, be a collective process.

Suza Your work shows how we need to hold space for tenderness, for being affected in ways we might not be able to express, for mistakes, for the unknown, and for a stubborn kind of vulnerability. I feel that the collective political and aesthetic process of language-making that you advocate is a kind of queering and part of world-making processes that develop across time and from many different tongues. That is also why such a process, and our collective work, goes against the colonial logic of particular knowledges, sociabilities, and subjectivities “lagging behind.”

Redi, your analysis of Western renderings of cultures with a history of state socialism as “lagging behind” is important. This notion of belatedness and the patronizing dynamics it enables is present in the dominant narratives and developments of 1989 and thereafter. According to these we had to “update” Eastern European infrastructures and mindsets to the speed of capitalism. The Archive of the GDR Opposition contains important counter-narratives. It shows just how aware people and groups that had mobilized for the 1989 revolution were of the costs with which the promises of capitalism would come. Our collaborator Maria Josephina Bengan Making researched the leftist feminist and migrant political initiatives that formed in 1989 and presented documents of their political analysis and demands at the conversation *I want nobody to find no trace of our existence* (pp.276–303). These texts, like the ones that Samirah Kenawi brought to that event, were a clear warning against the deterioration and destabilization of social and economic infrastructures that they predicted would likely be brought about by the rushed German unification. A unification that brought with it a swell of class, race, and gender based violence as well as the structural violence of a system rooted in the exploitation of people

and natural environments of the Global South. These texts map important political alternatives that existed then as they do now.

It is important to recognize that the devalorizing effect of the notion of "lagging behind" is not only present in dominant discourse, but also within ourselves. The differences and tensions between current feminist languages which inform our practices today – which emerged from the emancipatory,anti-discriminatory (language) politics of queer, BIPoC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color], migrant, intersectional, and decolonial struggles of the last decades – and the feminist languages in the GDR that the Archive documents, are an example of that. Women*s groups in the GDR were often radical feminist spaces, but rather rarely called themselves feminists.Lesbian* groups often did. And they identified mostly within the paradigm of homosexuality, which left little space for the articulation of trans*, inter, and gender non-conforming experiences. Throughout the process of working on *wild recuperations. materials from below,* Elske and I kept an ongoing discussion on how to communicate the different movements and involved practices and subjectivities that we knew were in the Archive, or rather, in the past it describes: should we keep referring to them exclusively by the names they gave themselves at the time and thus reproduce their exclusions and invisibilities? Do we translate them into the words of the present, which are as much in flux, and risk overwriting the specifics of these political and historical contexts, making them even more invisible? Who are we doing this memory work for?

Elske I am very interested in disrupting the narratives of "lagging behind" or "catching up."[14] I like to think of particular historical and contemporary activisms not along a hierarchizing temporal scale of progress, but in terms of the specific subjectivities they always both enable and disable in their own time. I am interested in a nonlinear chronopolitics of mutual denormalization. Looking back in time, it is always possible and necessary to challenge histories of resistance in terms of their shortcomings: where have present-day activisms and their languages increased the complexity of our understandings and helped to highlight and stop particular exclusions? What, in turn, can we say about the activist vocabularies and imaginaries of the present, when we look at them from the perspective of historical activisms? For example, which ways of being were opened by being "lesbian*" or being in a "women*s group" in the late GDR, meaning, under a weaker system of class stratification, or in a situation where money, time, and accruing cultural capital were less of an issue? Which subjectivities, also collective subjectivities were possible that the conditions of our resistances in our neoliberal present do not allow for today?

Western and West German ways of speaking became dominant even in what should have been more sensitive feminist, queer, and leftist contexts. This foreclosed a process of mutual questioning in which both could possibly have changed and updated themselves. Now, East German ways of speaking often appear – when they do – as blockages, as provocations, even. Personally, I feel exposed, vulnerable, each time I try to mark my difference in circles of friends and political peers through the language I use. This discomfort and vulnerability is, to me, a place to work from. If there is any "catching up" to do, I think it is to finally spend time with this

14 – "Catching up" is one of the terms through which the "lagging behind" trope has been formulated. It is the title of Jürgen Habermas' 1990 book in which he states that the East German "catch-up revolution" "cast no new light on our old problems" or contributed any "future oriented" ideas. Jürgen Habermas, Die nachholende Revolution: Kleine Politische Schriften VII, 1. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 7, 31.

unease. To have these conversations now, to try to see if the two languages can still be brought into a process of mutual queering, undoing. I very much see our project as an effort towards such a move.

Suza The spectrum becomes more complex when we shift the focus from the languages and politics of activism towards individual and collective lives, which the Archive also documents. The politics get more entangled, the jargons of self-articulation multiply. For example, "lesbian*" was the identification available for diverse sexual and gender dissidences that existed at the time and which speak from personal traces in the archive. What is more, in this biographical complexity there is space for experiences of endurance, ambivalence, failure, dis-identification, and regression, which are also always part of dissident histories. Movement-centered narratives tend to level such complex experiences, "because they often create a sort of success story focused on the changes that were achieved," writes the cultural scholar Maria Bühner in relation to her research on lesbian* subjectivation in the GDR.[15] In fact, most of the artistic modes of research and practice that are active in *wild recuperations. material from below* do take biographical entanglements and the conflicted relationship between language and body as a departure point for alternative forms of historiography.

Elske The performance by Technosekte and Henrike Naumann, for example, departed from the fact that there are particular (historical) experiences that are unspeakable and call for different approaches, including non-verbal forms of processing (pp.332–355). Shifting the medium towards music, rhythm, and embodiment in interaction with sculpture and scenography, *BRONXX* activates phantasmatic and violent leftovers of GDR socialism. Histories, memory, or documents – in this case the Stasi file of a dissident who was also a Stasi informant – become detextualized and unfixed from language. Technosekte and Henrike Naumann address our bodies as membranes between different layers of reality, or, time, or, as Freeman describes it, "as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter." *BRONXX* took place in the former Officers' Casino of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin, a building neighboring the Archive of the GDR Opposition. It was a ritual for the collective processing of continued violence within German history and social fabric.

An important aspect that we would like to consider in more depth in our future work within *Dissident Stories from the GDR and pOstdeutschland* is the relationship between layers of historical violence (of fascism, of the GDR regime, the biographical devastation of the neoliberal transformation after 1990) and current forms of personalized and collective violence in east Germany. How can one deal with the complexities of this subject in ways that do not repeat violence and forms of dominance? What could a feminist engagement with white male* post-1990 experiences and biographies look like? How could one disrupt the classist projections these attract and deal critically with discourses of victimhood? What kind of practices and spaces are needed to allow for multiple forms of unlearning and also of vulnerability, which such processing of one's own individual and collective implication might bring about?

15 – Maria Bühner, "Beiträge für eine Chronik, die vielleicht einmal geschrieben wird. Perspektiven auf den Forschungsstand zu Lesben in der DDR" (Contributions to a Chronicle Perhaps Written in the Future. Perspectives on the State of Research on Lesbians* in the GDR), in Das Übersehenwerden hat Geschichte. Lesben in der DDR und in der friedlichen Revolution (Lesbians* in the GDR and in the Peaceful Revolution) (Magdeburg and Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation Sachsen-Anhalt and Gunda Werner Institute, 2015), 114.

Suza I believe that artistic, and especially performative artistic approaches, are able to open up histories and knowledges in our bodies and feelings that cannot be verbalized otherwise, not yet or maybe never. The embodied pains and pleasures of re-connection scramble the divisions our culture draws between future, past and present. Erotohistoriography in this sense can be practiced as a form of mourning, of moving our phantom limbs in a hybrid present and into touching what is not yet here.

Interacting with an existing, living archive - and with other curatorial-archival approaches

Katalin At first glance I detect a similarity between your project and the touring exhibition *re.act.feminism. A Performing Archive* (2011–2013). Visitors were encouraged to interact with the exhibited material, to act as researchers and archivists. Do you see any con-nection to this curated and wandering archive?

Suza re.act.feminism, which was curated by Beatrice Stammer and Bettina Knaup, is a great inspiration and resource for thinking about queer and feminist performance practices as forms of dissident historiography and the curatorial as archival, performative, and political.[16] The first iteration of re.act.feminism in 2008/09 in Berlin became a place of intense and embodied learning for me. I was studying art history at the time and had begun to experiment curatorially in self-organized frameworks with friends. re.act opened up Eastern European political environments and (counter-)realities of the Cold War period. *A Performing Archive,* the second iteration of re.act.feminism four years later, as well as *GenderArtNet,* directly influenced a collective research and performance series called *dissident desire* that I was in the midst of co-developing at District.[17] The series focused on how bodies relate to one another as archives of desires and knowledge, and of counter-technologies and political imagination. *dissident desire* as a series and proposition was never concluded, and I am realizing that it continues to shape my idea of dissidence until today: a longing, a non-belonging, a feeling running against normalized discipline, exploitation, and violence like an undercurrent, an embodied knowing of alternative realities, a kinship, a queer mode of connecting across space and time, a way of endurance, resistance and world-making that flows in minor gestures as it does in whole cultures and environments, an opaque pleasure and livability in the spaces between affirmation and opposition, a dis-ident practice more than an identity. Many questions that re.act.feminism and *dissident desire* addressed curatorially transpired

16 - Through queer feminist comradeship and connection one of the archival modules of re.act.feminism has found its new home at District where Bettina Knaup has become a collaborator and friend. It is sad as well as telling that the incredible archive and archiving practices of feminist performance that re.act.feminism has assembled has not been integrated into existing art institutions or given the means, beyond project funding, to become a permanent resource. But it does continue to perform: the module at District has become an infrastructure for making artistic and curatorial care work for diverse feminist histories accessible.
17 - "dissident desire" was initiated by Lorenzo Sandoval and myself in conversation with many artists, activists, and initiatives in 2013 at District.

into *wild recuperations:* How do histories act and iterate across time and space, from one body to another? How do they materialize (queerly)? How do the knowledges inscribed into historic "materials," (trans-)form the idea and infrastructure of an archive?

Elske Being able to build on other curatorial and artistic approaches to archives and archiving was of course extremely helpful and important. Our project was particular in that it interacted with and within an existing and operational archive. We displayed the artworks in the different architectures of the Archive: in the reading and meeting rooms, in the staircase and hallways, on archival boxes and trolleys, and on top of the display cases in which the Archive presents some of its documents. The reference documents chosen by the contributors increased this sense of indeterminacy because their status in the exhibition was ambivalent. They helped us showcase some of the contents and themes of the archive and the histories it documents. The artistic interventions that were developed in relation to these existing documents imbued them with new and different possible meanings.

Suza The different artistic and research practices gently wove through the archive along with the exhibition, which invited movement and activity that blurred the distinctions between visitors,users, and researchers in the archive. In some ways art and archive became indistinguishable because we tried to make the archive perform as a social environment. We also organized performances and multiple public conversations to open up the research processes for shared meaning-making and collective readings of archival documents from different perspectives. Our aim was that people would create their own pattern of engagement with the dissident histories in the Archive and would feel that they could come back to this space to continue making connections.

Post-socialism as method

Redi As Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora have argued, "there is still a crisis in both geopolitical and academic imaginaries of protest, particularly those influenced by Marxist critique, which calls for a de-homogenizing of the 'socialism' in postsocialism and for a dialogue between the multiple inheritances of socialism in the present."[18] In their understanding, postsocialism is not a unified phenomenon or experience, and thus, they call for viewing postsocialism, like the related term postcolonialism, as an analytical tool rather than a fixed time period. How does your project understand "postsocialism" and how does it contribute to current geopolitical and academic imaginaries of protest? What kind of imaginaries of protest were revealed by the Archive that could be useful to revive today?

Elske I think the idea of using postsocialism as an analytical term, rather than one denoting a historical time-space is extremely productive and pertinent to our project. Here, the prefix "post" describes a relationship of continuity, rather than a sequential one. "Postsocialist" means a time when

18 - Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, "Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution," Social Identities 24, no. 2 (March 2018): 139–54, doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2017.1321712.

both the idea and the existence of socialism as promise and historical project are irreversibly in the world, and inflect the way one understands and enacts different imaginaries of protest, but also, more broadly speaking, of activism, politics, resistance, and solidarity in the present. Any current socialist project, for example, will have to carry the fact of both the existence, and the multiple contradictions and failings of historical state socialisms. I would consider this as both a challenge to and resource for current emancipatory thinking.

I would also like to add the term "post-dissident" to the mix, because this is particularly relevant to our work at the Archive. Boris Groys describes (post) dissidence as a project or a methodology that acts within the imaginary of socialism, sharing its goals, but working towards a better implementation than the one achieved by the historical state socialisms. Postsocialist and dissident practices, to him, operate in the (communist) modes of expansion, inclusion, and affirmation – whereas capitalist ones operate through differentiation, particularity, and criticism.[19] Protest and other forms of political expression have developed in these two historically specific forms, among others.

In the 1999 interview that is reprinted in this book (p. 124–137), for example, Samirah Kenawi speaks about the oppositional "Frauentreffen" (regular nationwide women*s meetings): "these women's group meetings brought together women from across a wide spectrum – from traditional church groups to radical lesbians, women's peace groups and feminist theologians. There was substantial latitude on how to implement ideas, on which issues were important and on how to approach them. We met and talked to each other, we argued, but within these arguments we searched for common ground and tried to make something happen together, and we accepted our differences. I have never encountered this kind of willingness to find consensus in the West. Today you lash out against your closest allies, because this way you can emphasize the minutest differences, to make clear exactly where their position differs from one's own" (p. 137).

I think our project was absolutely and intentionally post-dissident in this way: aiming at creating a shared verbal and non-verbal vocabulary, and striving towards maximal inclusion. It performed its criticality by affirming multiple and contradictory positions, joining them by "ands," rather than "buts." The events, the exhibition, and our entire work process brought together people, speakers, listeners of vastly different backgrounds and affiliations, who, in present-day Berlin, rarely meet in the same space: feminists, leftist activists, users and followers of the activities of the Archive, former dissident protagonists, different generations of diasporic, Black and PoC scholars, artists and activists, among them east and west Germans of different generations. Each time, the differences and distances between these groups manifested quickly and clearly as irritations and frictions between ways of speaking and performing. The project did not, of course, manage to harmonize these conflicting ways of speaking and unify them into a common language, but it allowed them to coexist for short stretches of time in one and the same space. Minorness and immanence, which we talked about before, are further attributes of a (post-)dissident politics that I think our project and the contributions try to convey and enact at the same time.

19 – Groys, Art power, 168–169.

Suza I agree, and I feel that the dynamics of negotiating difference and consent are probably very much where the political learning from and for the present, past and future takes place. Samirah addresses this complex balance, as does Ina Röder Sissoko who also discusses normative and homogenizing tendencies in the group dynamics of the feminist movement in the GDR and during 1989/90 (p.304). She relates, “claiming difference was perceived as a grave threat. If you attempted to discuss differences within our group of lesbian women*, the response was: ‘But we all belong together. Haven’t we all fought for this together? Why do you need to take on a different role in this?’ That was very painful, because it certainly wasn’t me who wanted this division between us; the division arose from the attitude of white ignorance, from which, unfortunately, also the majority of white lesbian women* were not free at that time.”

What if it had been otherwise? What would have been needed to imagine intersectional-socialist alternatives based on commonalities and differences? What would a queer-communist project from below have looked like in the GDR? What does it look like today, tomorrow? The different experiences from that time as well as the processes and frictions within this project hint toward the need for a multiplicity of concepts, tools, jargons, and translations. The tales of alternative communisms, queer sociabilities, embodied and analytic environmental practices, and intersectional memory-making that emerged from the artist-researchers’ work at the Archive of the GDR Opposition call for a decentralized idea of post-socialist knowledges. Thus, they resonate with the concept of plural historicities, which scholar and activist Maisha-Maureen Auma develops from within Black lesbian* feminist cultures and demands for historicizing cultural politics at large. She criticizes that, “although plurality is our normality, homogenizing constructions of history remain the norm,” and asks for spaces of possibility where “intersectional contributions to society can be mainstreamed without being stripped of their inherent anti-hegemonic critique.”[20] Intersectional postsocialist research, in this sense, could be an instrument for connecting heterogeneous trajectories of marginalized political propositions and futures – a tool to dehomogenize what we know and remember about socialism, and about east Germany.

Elske Absolutely, and I think that this is also an important way to de-provincialize the historization of the GDR and of its dissidences. We already talked about the difficulties and the forms of speechlessness that are produced when the history of the GDR and of the so-called “Wende” are fixed into a national narrative. I often find that I can understand certain phenomena much more easily through their resonances with other historical events in different places. There are childhood memories that are much easier to share with someone who grew up in Cuba than with a west German. Many aspects of the revolution of 1989 have become clearer to me in conversation with friends from Egypt and Turkey who were active during the Arab Spring or in the occupation of Gezi Park. We are often amazed by how similar our experiences have been. The work in this project and the planned series is about enabling precisely these forms of mutual recognition and collective learning. They allow us to diversify histories internally and connect and relate them transnationally and trans-historically.

20 - Translated from: Maisha Eggers, "Lesbisches Denken und Handeln. Was kann unsere Gesellschaft davon lernen? - Einige Überlegungen zur fortlaufenden Geschichtsschreibung pluralisierter Gesellschaften" (Lesbian* Theory and Practice. What can our society learn from it? -Considerations on Continuous Historiography in Pluralized Societies), in Das Übersehenwerden hat Geschichte. Lesben in der DDR und in der friedlichen Revolution (Lesbians* in the GDR and in the Peaceful Revultion) (Magdeburg and Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation Sachsen-Anhalt and Gunda Werner Institute, 2015), 91.

Suza The collaborative artistic research project by Claude Gomis and Saskia Köbschall that was planned for *wild recuperations. material from below* would be a contribution in this direction. The artist-curator duo is interested in the role that pirate radio played in Eastern European dissident organizing and in global anti-colonial struggles. They ask what anti-colonial solidarity would sound like in radio waves traveling from south to north. Their sound sculpture was to span a radio net between historical broadcasts of West African liberation movements, radio pirates of the GDR opposition, and newly produced transmissions on stories of resistance of communities of Black and People of Color activists and survivors in the GDR, which are missing from the Archive. Unfortunately their work was interrupted due to personal circumstances and we hope we can pick it up again in the future.

In fact, the artistic practices, the conversations, and research processes developed within and around *wild recuperations. materials from below* signal several possible lines of flight for future iterations of *Dissident Stories from the GDR and pOstdeutschland:* how to allow for plural dissident histories to resonate further within and beyond the Archive of the GDR Opposition? What could we learn about the relationships between anti-colonial communisms and the coloniality within modern state socialisms? What are the links between the environmental movements in the GDR and ecological, anti-extractionist practices of other times and places? What do we make of the ideological and economic intersections of East and West, South and North in pOstdeutschland?