

EAST-WEST RELATIONS AT A CROSSROADS: GERMAN REUNIFICATION AND THE GDR *Ampelmännchen*

Rachel Boate

“Two lights (red and green) are the prototype of the signal,” writes Henri Lefebvre in the *Critique of Everyday Life*, “They do not allow for intermediaries, transitions or evolution. They open a way forward, or they close it.”¹ In Lefebvre’s semantic system, the traffic light embodies the concept of a pure signal, something that issues an explicit command—like “stop” or “go”—without room for interpretation. “A signal does what it says, says what it does, and nothing more,” he continues, “it is imperative and precise,” and never operates beyond the framework of its own signification.²



Figure 1. Cover of *Bild* magazine’s special issue on German unity, October 2008. Courtesy of *Bild*.

Yet, in at least one instance the red and green traffic light—the Lefebvrian signal—has come to stand for something much larger. To celebrate the nineteenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, in October 2008 *Bild* magazine issued a special edition devoted to commemorating German reunification. Its cover (Fig. 1) featured a magnified view of a pedestrian traffic light with the green and red crosswalk figures—the emblematic indicators of “walk” and “don’t walk,” respectively—appearing together on the same register. While interwoven arms and elevated champagne flutes suggest a celebration of German unity, critical differences—both physical and semiological—highlight the continued rift between former East and West. The green crosswalk figure reproduced on the cover refers

to the imagery used in traffic lights of the former West (Federal Republic of Germany or FRG), whereas the shorter, stockier figure is the *Ampelmann* (traffic-light man, pl. *Ampelmännchen*) of the former East (German Democratic Republic or GDR). What the *Bild* cover also suggests, however, is that Lefebvre's unequivocal signal had come to signify something beyond the functionality of a pedestrian traffic light. Here, the green light associated with "go" or "advance" symbolically appears to represent the progress of the former West, while the red light marking "stop" describes the now defunct GDR. This paper probes this very transition—from signal to symbol—by tracing the cultural history of the *Ampelmann* as a technological apparatus in former East Germany and its afterlife as a nostalgic souvenir following German reunification.

The history of the East German traffic light chronicles the transformation of a localized cultural signifier into an iconic national commodity. Its journey from the ranks of the everyday (Fig. 2) to the abandoned dustbin of a failed nation, from reclaimed, nostalgic national hero to globalized brand (Fig. 3) is generally known by a German populace who also lived through this shift. Despite the appearance of a reunified Germany, I argue that the recent commercialization of the *Ampelmännchen* has displaced and remapped postwar cultural differences onto a marketable GDR object. Mass production and consumption of the *Ampelmann* (and other products from the former East, known as *Ostprodukte*) have become critical strategies to convince citizens of the former GDR of their successful assimilation within a reunified Germany—one whose dominant values and practices were actually holdovers from the former West.³ Although the *Ampelmann* returned to Berlin's public sphere only in the late 1990s, Germany's remobilization of the signal actually perpetuates Eastern stereotypes, thereby maintaining East–West distinctions and exoticizing the GDR as a cultural other.



Left: Figure 2. Berlin traffic light. Photograph by author.



Right: Figure 3. AMPELMANN Storefront in Berlin. Photograph by author.

On October 13, 1961, Karl Peglau debuted the *Ampelmann* to the East German people (Fig. 4). Peglau, a traffic psychologist, had been commissioned by the GDR Transportation Ministry to devise a system of crosswalk symbols to protect pedestrians from the recently heightened threat of road-related injuries and deaths. Convinced that motorists and pedestrians would only obey playful imagery that

they could connect with and clearly understand, Peglau chose to introduce a figural design that conformed to the general geometric sign systems operating elsewhere in East Berlin.⁴ Looking towards preexisting traffic symbols used for automobiles and electric streetcars, he formulated recognizable iterations of “stop” and “go” with an unconventional human form. The distinctly frontal position of the red Ampelmann, with his wide, outstretched arms, formed a horizontal visual barricade that echoed the stop light and “no entry” signs used to direct vehicular traffic. The verticality of the green figure mirrored the arrows and bars that permitted traffic to proceed, while the exaggerated swinging arms and lively figural stride expressed a dynamic diagonal that signified forward movement. Furthermore, the stout form of the GDR Ampelmännchen almost doubled the surface area covered by its Western counterpart, providing greater illumination and clarity.⁵

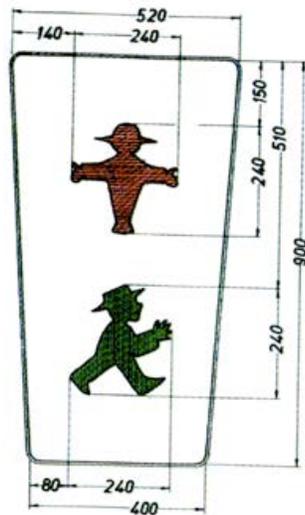


Figure 4. Karl Peglau's original Ampelmann design, 1961. Courtesy of © AMPELMANN GmbH.

Pegla had to ensure that his design was legible to three critical subgroups: the elderly, the mentally disabled, and above all, children. The animated stout body, ludic hat, and jaunty, upturned nose added to the signal's legibility, but Peglau also intended his design to appeal to children and encourage them to learn elements of roadside safety.⁶ The Ampelmännchen appeared in GDR classrooms by the mid-1960s as part of a campaign to instill traffic safety rules in schools and in the home. Coloring books, poems, and jingles were produced by the Ministry of Transportation, as was a card game called “Take Care in Traffic” that taught players to match commonly seen traffic signs to their meanings.⁷ Students who exhibited exemplary road safety knowledge were even given the Golden One Badge, which featured the green Ampelmann. And, beginning in 1968, Friedrich Rochow cast the Ampelmann in his roadside safety video series, *Verkehrskompass*.⁸ This series of short episodes follows a brother and sister team as they learn to navigate the busy streets of Berlin on foot and riding a bicycle, with animated versions of the red and green Ampelmännchen appearing onscreen to offer helpful tips. In moments of potential danger, the red Ampelmann materializes, thrusting out his recognizable arms to prevent impending collisions, while his green counterpart emerges to notify the children when conditions make it safe to cross the street.

By the time that political tides had begun to turn in the late 1980s, Peglau's Ampelmännchen were deeply engrained in both the everyday life of the GDR and in its citizens' cultural consciousness. However, with the fall of the Wall in 1989, East Germans (who had colloquially become known as *Ossis* by West Germans) were quick to abandon their quotidian products, which now seemed cheap and archaic compared with the surfeit of modern luxuries made newly accessible on the other side of Berlin. Consumer shortages (namely foodstuffs and manufactured goods) had reigned under the early years of the GDR, a crisis justified to its citizens by the Marxist maxim that "it was not wealth in material things that would count in a post-bourgeois society, but riches counted in freely disposable time which could be used for individuals' personal development."⁹ The socialist egalitarianism and collective distribution espoused by the East distinguished between genuine needs and superfluous ones, while individual desires and a system of mass marketing informed capitalist consumption in the West.¹⁰ The design aesthetic of the GDR favored functionalism, producing objects made to last rather than markers of social distinction. Therefore, the "remarkable iconic simplicity of the [Ampelmann] sign matched its mundane, unadulterated social embedment."¹¹ Peglau's design eschewed the technological bells and whistles of the capitalist West, instead favoring the familiar and cartoonish form of the Ampelmann, which sprang from the pride of place given to the collective family unit and community-based social security in the GDR.

Easterners quickly forgot technical designs that valued utility, sociability, and efficiency when met with the comparably wide variety of consumer goods available on the other side of the Wall. Economic deprivation had primed East Germans to desire, and "capitalism now stepped in to let them buy."¹² Their initial emphatic embrace of the West facilitated the legal aspects of reunification. The FRG enacted rapid policy changes without encouraging a more thorough consideration of reunification's cultural repercussions in a broader public forum. Change began gradually in May 1989 when the Hungarian government began to allow East German citizens to leave Hungary, and permitted them to travel to West Germany by way of Czechoslovakia and Poland. The anti-government demonstrations that followed spread through the GDR by the end of that summer, culminating in the breaching of the Berlin Wall on the night of November 9, 1989. The month of March 1990 witnessed the first free elections in the former East, followed by economic and social union on July 1, and finally political union on October 3 of the same year. Reunification called for the immediate standardization of the East based on existing FRG procedures, norms, and institutions.¹³ Despite its material perks, capitalism had also come to signify a rise in unemployment, less leisure time, and social and economic competition in the former East. While the West experienced a five percent growth in GDP during the first two years following reunification, the former East's GDP fell by one third over the same time period.¹⁴ The former East also experienced the systematic removal and erasure of monuments, symbols, and insignia that had come to comprise GDR identity, including a new, featureless Ampelmann beginning in 1992.

The Federal Office of Streetworks particularly struggled to normalize the newly reunified country's traffic signs, since the FRG Ampelmann had met broad disapproval from Western citizens.¹⁵ The state subsequently commissioned designers to develop a new Ampelmann model and launched a series of psychological analyses to determine the most well-received iconography.

Ironically, the Federal Highway Reserve Institute (Bundesanstalt für Straßenwesen, or BASt) did not even consider Peglau's design. Selecting the GDR design would have reduced production costs, since Eastern companies had already financed manufacturing of the figural template. "If it's truly a Reunification," noted Anna Mulrine, "they need to recognize that the east has something to contribute too."¹⁶ Not doing so construed an uneven dynamic between former East and West, prioritizing Western products and designers, and emphasizing an *us* versus *them* relationship that recalled life separated by the Wall.

Yet, former GDR citizens were not the only ones traversing the former East–West divide. Markus Heckhausen, a graphic artist from West Germany, began to collect outmoded Eastern products that had been left to gather dust on store shelves, or abandoned in dumpsters and alleyways. By 1996, he was recycling the original glass from the GDR traffic lights and refashioning them into newly wired decorative lamps based on the original design, which he sold from his Berlin studio.¹⁷ Resurfacing in a reappropriated form, the earlier signal had now become both a screen for nostalgic projections and the signifier of sublimated resistance against Western predominance. The Ampelmann's innocuous configuration distanced the technological apparatus from a Western understanding of GDR oppression, and instead served as a mnemonic bridge to the past and a locus for recovering a prior collective identity.¹⁸ Though proponents of a new, standardized Germany interpreted such *Ostalgie* as selectively ignoring totalitarian realities, this wistful turn reinscribed bygone everyday practices with new cultural significance.¹⁹ *Ostalgie* is a portmanteau of the German words *Ost* (East) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia) and refers to a perceived nostalgia for life in the GDR. While the immediate years following reunification saw a rejection of GDR products by former Easterners in favor of new Western goods, the equation was reversed by the late 1990s.

The nostalgia that progressively mobilized behind a large-scale appeal for the return of the GDR Ampelmann did not reflect a simple desire to return to the past. Rather, nostalgia was felt for "all the beautiful-sounding but never-realized (socialist) promises about the Golden Future," the unfulfilled dreams and future prospects possessed by a prior time.²⁰ Namely, nostalgia was felt for the way the past could have been. Svetlana Boym has written extensively on the varying modes of nostalgic engagement in relation to the former Eastern Bloc. She states that while *restorative* nostalgia seeks to completely reconstruct the past and return to its origins, *reflective* nostalgia dwells on longing in and of itself. Former East Germans were strongly "enamored of distance, not of the referent."²¹ Mourning the loss of the Ampelmann did not merely equate to mourning the loss of a long-gone communist history, but reflecting on memory became a means of forging a connection with a disappearing past.

Heckhausen is typically credited with successfully channeling this nostalgia to contest reunified Germany's campaign for "One Berlin, One *Ampel*" and founding Berlin's Committee to Save the Ampelmännchen in 1996. However, the committee was actually established by communist Jörg Davids. Davids knew Heckhausen via Joachim Roßberg, the original 1960s manufacturer of the GDR Ampelmann and a close colleague of Peglau.²² After struggling to locate the disappearing traffic light materials, Heckhausen formed a partnership with Roßberg to ensure continued access to the light's plastic plates.²³ All of these influential figures belonged to

Dauids's peaceful protest group, which organized public events, hung posters, installed the recycled GDR traffic lights in public squares, and even organized an Ampelmann Rock Concert to advocate the Eastern prototype's return.²⁴ Awareness gradually crept beyond Berlin, with the green figure appearing on Magdeburg's football club jersey, and references to the Committee to Save the Ampelmännchen protests appearing on the websites of BBC News and the *New York Times*.²⁵ In response to the growing movement, Kajo Schommer, Saxony's economics minister, ordered traffic authorities in the region to install the GDR standard in all new or repaired streetlights, with the traffic minister of Sachsen-Anhalt quickly following suit.²⁶ By late 1997, it was decided that Peglau's design would return to light up crosswalks located in the former East.

Like other Ostprodukte, the reinstated Ampelmann gradually devolved from a symbol of resistance to a profitable merchandise brand. In its absence, the design for a highly visible technological apparatus in the former East's public sphere became a trendy sign for GDR culture stamped on gimmicky souvenirs in reunified Berlin. After buying the rights to Peglau's design in 1999, Heckhausen launched his first Ampelmann collection with Barbara Ponn in Berlin. Peglau and others initially interpreted the move skeptically, construing Heckhausen's actions as a ploy to capitalize on the beloved Ampelmann's commercial value.²⁷ Yet, Heckhausen's continuing partnership with a former Ossi, Roßberg, suggested that Heckhausen was motivated by a desire to safeguard and perpetuate GDR identity in a newly reunified Germany. Paul Cooke posits that, indeed, Western firms frequently began selling and distributing GDR Ostprodukte "to atone for [their] earlier treatment of eastern history, and of [their] poor management of eastern restructuring."²⁸ Such optimistic readings envisioned that former West Germans would use these vestiges of the GDR as spaces in which to engage with developments in the newly unified social landscape.

Yet, by 2006 Heckhausen and Roßberg appeared in a Leipzig courtroom, contending their rightful ownership of the Ampelmann patent. While Roßberg argued that "whether people like it or not, the Ampelmännchen remains a symbol of the east," such claims to inherited entitlement held little sway over a Western company that had grossed 2.4 million euros in 2005.²⁹ Although citizens of the former East mobilized behind Roßberg, staging a metaphorical battle of East–West relations, Heckhausen ultimately won the trademark rights. Despite the semblance of Eastern agency and recognition of a GDR product, Heckhausen's victory seemed to recast the cultural inequities that had surfaced following the fall of the Wall. Indeed, the success story of a Western businessman at the expense of an Ossi outsider was relatively familiar to citizens of the former GDR.³⁰

Such a resurgence of East–West debates coincided with national preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the destruction of the Wall and a series of intellectual reassessments of Germany's path to reunification. In the fields of cultural anthropology and cultural studies, a plethora of books and anthologies reached the press, examining the former GDR in relation to memory studies, Ostalgia, and even postcolonialism. Newspaper polls revealed that "fifty-seven percent, or an absolute majority, of east Germans defend the former East Germany... eight percent of eastern Germans flatly oppose all criticism of their former home and agree with the statement: ... 'life there was happier and better than in reunified Germany today.'"³¹ The rapid pace of reunification had made GDR citizens feel as

though their former country—including its monuments, memorials, and traffic signals—had been deemed illegitimate.

As scholars and citizens alike questioned the success of German reunification, a newly trademarked Ampelmann stepped in to convince the world otherwise, as images of the little red and green men began to appear everywhere as co-opted national icons.³² Indeed, what did it mean for a Western company to own the rights to a GDR symbol? And how did ownership of that symbol relate to ownership of the past in which that sign was created? The restoration of the Ampelmann in former East German traffic lights seemed like a small victory, a sign that reunified Germany had finally embraced (or at least admitted) an element of GDR culture back into the public sphere; this fact was bolstered by Germany's decision to mobilize that same cultural entity as *the* representation of German identity during global events of the early 2000s.

When the G8 summit took place in Germany in 2007, for instance, each of the four hundred participating members was given an Ampelmann pin to wear as a symbol of modern Germany, and a 2010 issue of *GEO* magazine employed Ampelmännchen imagery to foreshadow the discussions of reunification found in its interior pages (Fig. 5). Similarly, following the nuclear crisis in Japan in 2010, German pins with antinuclear-energy messages materialized, showcasing the red Ampelmann as a German figure in solidarity with Japan and its national losses. Such visual production and consumption of the East German Ampelmann had come to occupy a political sphere that had little in common with the sign's original intent, marking what Michel de Certeau deems manipulation “by users who are not its makers.”³³



Figure 5. Geo magazine cover, “The Story of a Berlin Street. Germany, How are You United?” October 2010. Image courtesy Geo.

Mary Beth Stein claims that such national levels of appropriation stem from the desire to manufacture and manipulate a country's cultural tradition. "One salient feature of invented traditions," she writes, "is the claim of continuity with the past which serves to legitimize a particular practice or ritual, thereby concealing its very inventedness."³⁴ Fighting for the return of the Ampelmann neither atoned for the East–West injustices that occurred in the 1990s, nor acknowledged the former GDR as a cultural equal. Supporting the dissemination of Ampelmann imagery did not lead to revisionist approaches to reunification history; rather, it set the stage for mass commodification.

As AMPELMANN GmbH developed, red and green paraphernalia saturated the market, manipulating the exotic and intriguing qualities of both the Ampelmann and Ostalgia phenomenon as a method to sell gimmicky souvenirs to foreign tourists.³⁵ Key chains, smartphone covers, coffee mugs, cork screws, cigarette lighters, handbags, t-shirts, and bookends appeared, each imprinted with the form of the Ampelmann. Heckhausen's company marketed these items as distinctively German—more than mere souvenirs, they were a material part of Germany's complex national history. Sold as GDR products, they were simultaneously branded as arbiters of a nation's lost cultural heritage. Ampelmann-shaped cookie cutters, jewelry, plush children's toys, salt and pepper shakers, ice cube trays, and gummy candies, all of which were types of products that would have remained unavailable to citizens of actual East Berlin, now emerged on the market. Such direct reification not only belies GDR history, but it also contradicts the very idea of cultural normalization, distilling "the *strangeness* of a world that no longer exists, to elicit surrealized East German life."³⁶ Commercial production displaced the Ampelmann from the realm of the quotidian and regrafted him onto the commodity, the antithesis of a socialist ideology devoted to discrediting Western capitalism.³⁷

Emphasizing the novelty of these commodities essentially re-exoticizes them, and hence subordinates GDR cultural practices back into the peripheral space surrounding a mainstream Germany. These "relics of a lost socialist world" evoke a nation frozen in time, one that lagged behind the West with products that seemed foreign and kitschy compared with those of a standardized market economy.³⁸ Steven Heller explains that, like the West, the former East "claimed to be modern, and this was represented through a range of signifiers, including furniture, color palettes, and materials, especially plastics."³⁹ The GDR produced plastics cheaply and on a mass scale: they were malleable and looked cutting edge, clean, and nontraditional. A campaign in the 1970s even encouraged East German citizens to use plastic items in place of wooden objects, which wreaked of convention and bourgeois values.⁴⁰ AMPELMANN GmbH played into this history with their marketing and branding strategies. Ampelmann goods, made in eye-popping colors with the manufactured sheen of freshly produced plastic, filled Berlin's tourist shops, standing out as flagrantly from the former East German era when compared with the other contemporary wares for sale. Too unconventional, sentimental, and charming to be taken seriously, "their very 'non-belongingness' in the commodity world of the global marketplace" makes them magical objects of desire.⁴¹ The fact that advertising, marketing, and branding were virtually nonexistent in the GDR distances these recycled Ampelmännchen even further from their original context.⁴²

This co-opting process has continued unabated to the present day. Younger generation and foreign tourists—demographics with no relation to experiences endured during the time of the GDR and without a nostalgic longing to retrieve them—comprise the principal consumers of Ampelmann goods. Only a minority of young Germans (and fewer tourists) even know that the Ampelmännchen served as an integral educational tool for students and families, since marketing strategies merely emphasize its significance for reunification history. As such, Ampelmännchen souvenir production continues to ignore everyday life as it existed in the GDR, yielding endless copies that only distance the red and green figures further from their intended function. These “imitations, fakes, and new works inspired by earlier prototypes extend and further alter the aura of antiquity,” domesticating the past to a different, unintended audience.⁴³ Today’s Ampelmännchen no longer serve as memory repositories or historical markers of the GDR as they did in the 1990s. History has become a marketable and consumable souvenir—one completely untethered from its past symbolism and recycled into an icon of an exotic and lost communist Germany.

To cite Baudrillard, the Ampelmann has reached a simulacrous state, resurrected artificially through a “system of signs, which are a more ductile material than meaning.”⁴⁴ The marketplace has liquidated all original referentials, and new networks of commodification enable consumers to inscribe the Ampelmann with their own fantasies about life in another Germany. Marilyn Ivy refers to this process as the construction of a “free-floating past.”⁴⁵ Detaching cultural commodities from their original significations not only opens up the past to new interpretations, but it also permits the injection of certain ideological biases, as in the case of former East Germany. “Germany,” writes Ivy, “also wants to overcome and retain its own past, to keep it ‘on the verge of vanishing, stable yet endangered (and thus open for commodifiable desire).”⁴⁶ As such, the past itself becomes commodified, reassembled, redeployed, and resold in the form of Ostprodukte like the Ampelmann, consumer objects that actually disavow the cultural history from which they spring.

The tourist industry, in turn, nourishes and invents new conceptions of the past, shaping German historical consciousness along the way. In recent years, the success of Heckhausen’s Ampelmann products has led to the development of Ampelmann sites geared solely toward tourists. For example, the AMPELMANN Restaurant and Coffee Shop opened in Berlin in 2007, featuring traditional German fare, but also serving Ampelmann-branded beer, Ampelmann-shaped pasta, and a latte with a stenciled-foam Ampelmann. AMPELMANN’S Bike-Taxi Tours is their newest venture, which allows tourists to choose between romantic, shopping, or sightseeing tours conducted in the AMPELMANN Shuttle. Alongside the commercial development of the *Ampelfrau* (Ampelwoman), signage in the tourist industry has also co-opted Ampelmann iconography to mark spaces of construction, no smoking, and the location of public bathrooms, just to name a few. Such dependency on tourist desires has constructed notions of an East German everyday culture that never actually existed, revealing how “the past ... is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.”⁴⁷

More recent press following the 2006 court case suggests East Germans’ disillusionment with the ways that AMPELMANN GmbH manipulated an understanding of the GDR past. In a 2006 interview, Barbara Bollwahn asked

Heckhausen to defend himself against accusations that he embodied qualities of the “evil Westerner.”⁴⁸ Former Ossis saw Heckhausen’s interest in the return of the GDR Ampelmann as one motivated by an economic desire, with little consideration for the ways that the symbol had actually been valued in former East Germany. The story of Peglau’s traffic light exemplifies the power of the culture industry, a concept developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer to characterize the production and marketing of modern culture in Western capitalist societies.⁴⁹ The Frankfurt School philosophers held that, despite offering consumers the *illusion* of choice between disparate cultural products, mass culture imposed itself upon the masses, leading to cultural homogenization. While increased mass production of the Ampelmännchen suggested Germany’s steadily growing interest in promoting the awareness of GDR cultural identity, AMPELMANN GmbH’s motivations were largely driven by commercial profit.

Clearly, the red and green Ampelmännchen have come a long way since Peglau’s initial design and Lefebvre’s theoretical conception of the traffic signal. Considering that construction on the Berlin Wall also began in 1961, it seems possible that the initial attachment to the East German Ampelmann may have stemmed from basic human needs. People who experienced concrete separation from friends and family, economic deprivation, and oppressive state surveillance probably welcomed the appearance of an endearing figural form into their everyday lives. Perhaps the visual playfulness associated with crossing a street eased the suffering caused by the inability to cross a geographic border. To its intended users, then, the Ampelmann symbolized notions of social security, state welfare, and communal solidarity. Yet, none of these intimate connections between the GDR people and its crosswalk signal relate to the Ampelmann as it exists today. The importance it held in quotidian East Germany plays little role in the everyday practices of contemporary Germany. Systems of commodification have allowed former Westerners to hold more power than former GDR citizens in the ways in which an Eastern symbol is read and consumed. National and touristic cooption of the Ampelmann has ultimately transformed a marker of the everyday into a marker of otherness, thus re-inscribing East–West cultural hierarchies despite the appearance of reunification.

Rachel Boate is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University where she focuses on facets of art and social engagement in mid twentieth-century France and Germany. Before beginning her graduate work, she earned a BA in Art History and French Language and Literature from the University of Virginia in 2009. Her research has been supported by the École normale supérieure in Paris, the CNRS, the Georges Lurcy Institute, and the Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art, where she is currently a fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

NOTES

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. II* (New York: Verso Books, 2002), 278–279. In contrast to the redundant and inert *signal*, Lefebvre identifies the *symbol* as carrying hidden, codified meanings that can transform and be interpreted by different subjects in varying contexts.

² Henri Lefebvre, "Fifth Prelude. The Message of the Crucified Sun," in *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959–May 1961* (New York: Verso Books, 1995), 95.

³ This notion stems from Herbert Marcuse, as cited in Georg Stauth and Bryan S. Turner, "Nostalgia, Postmodernism and the Critique of Mass Culture," *Theory Culture Society* 5 (1988): 515. Note also that Ostprodukte not only include everyday symbols and insignia like the Ampelmann, but food items like Spreewald pickles and Vita Cola; personal hygiene products like Florena brand soaps, lotions, and creams; Trabant cars; and even examples of former GDR currency, the *Ostmark*. Examples of these products can be seen in Wolfgang Becker's 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!* and on the online objects catalogue of the DDR Museum's website: <https://www.ddr-museum.de/en/objects>.

⁴ An interview with Peglau's widow reveals: "Mein Mann war sicher. Nur, wenn die Fußgänger das Verkehrssymbol mögen und verstehen, werden sie ihm folgen." Quoted in Juliane Wienß, "Mehr als ein Verkehrszeichen-Ost-Ampelmännchen wird 50," *Nordamerikanische Wochen-Post*, October 17, 2011. Notably, Peglau's final design was based on extensive scientific studies that also inspired the FRG's traffic light designs in 1970.

⁵ For specific details on the reasoning behind Peglau's particular design, see Markus Heckhausen, *Das Buch vom Ampelmännchen* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel-Verlag, 1997).

⁶ See Mark Duckenfeld and Noel Calhoun, "Invasion of the Western Ampelmännchen," *German Politics* 6, 3 (1997): 60. This article also notes that the version used today is the 1963 prototype. The 1961 design included distinct fingers and the suggestion of an open, smiling mouth. These more specific features were eliminated to simplify the manufacturing of the traffic light templates. Juliane Wienß also suggests that the inclusion of the hat might have been an allusion to Erich Honeker's (general secretary of the Socialist Unity Party in the GDR from 1971–1989) tendency to sport a straw hat. See "Mehr als ein Verkehrszeichen."

⁷ Details sourced from *Welt am Sonntag*, January 19, 1997.

⁸ The TV series was produced by *Junge Welt* productions. Some 300 episodes were written from 1968 to 1982. See Heckhausen, *Das Buch vom Ampelmännchen*.

⁹ Alf Lüdtke, ed., *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 148–9.

¹⁰ The FRG experienced nothing short of an economic miracle in the 1950s, characterized by "an eating frenzy, private motorization, construction of private homes, foreign tourism, portable radio sets, then television sets," which sparked riots in the GDR on June 17, 1953, fueled by economic dissatisfaction. In May 1958, the GDR ended the food rationing system that had been in place since 1939 and embarked on a new initiative to increase per-capita consumption and surpass FRG levels of consumerism. When this plan failed, Honeker proposed the "Unity of Economic and Social Policy" plan in 1971. This new initiative aimed to increase wages, improve standards of living, and acknowledge consumer demands. The introduction of Western-style advertising in the 1970s strove to increase private consumption and strengthen the GDR's economy. See Lüdtke, *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship*, 149–153.

¹¹ Dominik Bartmanski, "Successful Icons of Failed Time: Rethinking Post-Communist Nostalgia," *Acta Sociologica* 54, 3 (August 2011): 224.

¹² John Borneman, *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 81. For a more thorough history of GDR consumer practices before and after the Wall, see Daphne Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*, ed. Matti Bunzl (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

¹³ GDR factories were sold to the West immediately following reunification, and the former East was forced to adopt the FRG's systems of justice, industry, banking, education, and social security. See Jennifer Hunt, "Economics of German Reunification," in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, ed. Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Available online at http://www.dictionaryofeconomics.com/article?id=pde2008_E000266> doi:10.1057/9780230226203.0634.

¹⁴ Hunt, "Economics of German Reunification," 4.

¹⁵ For information on the BAST's actions during the immediate reunification years, see Duckenfeld and Calhoun, "Invasion of the Western Ampelmännchen," 61.

-
- ¹⁶ Anna Mulrine, "Icon Faces a Crossroads," *U.S. News and World Report*, February 2, 1998, 8.
- ¹⁷ See Björn Wirth, "Lampe statt Ampel," *Berliner Zeitung*, July 27, 1996.
- ¹⁸ Bartmanski, "Successful Icons of Failed Time," 213.
- ¹⁹ For a thorough survey of the current literature, see *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. Anna Saunders, Debbie Pinfold (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- ²⁰ Milena Veenis, "Consumption in East Germany: The Seduction and Betrayal of Things," *Journal of Material Culture* 4 (1999): 86. Susan Stewart also notes that nostalgia denotes the desire for desire. See Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).
- ²¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.
- ²² Duckenfeld and Calhoun, "Invasion of the western Ampelmännchen," 65. The original manufacturer was VEB Signaltechnik in Zwickau, a city in the German region of Saxony.
- ²³ For details on the initial partnership, see *Berliner Kurier*, July 30, 1996.
- ²⁴ The German name for the 1996 committee was Komitee Rettet die Ampelmännchen. For more details on their activities, see Heckhausen, *Das Buch vom Ampelmännchen*; Thomas Zander, "Ampelsignale," *Berliner Zeitung*, March 2, 1996.
- ²⁵ See, for instance, Phil Patton, "Public Eye; Little Man with a Past," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1998.
- ²⁶ See *Berliner Zeitung*, February 7, 1995; *Sächsische Zeitung*, January 2, 1997.
- ²⁷ See Barbara Bollwahn, "Dieses warme rot und grün," an interview with Markus Heckhausen, *Tagezeitung*, January 9, 2006.
- ²⁸ Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany Since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), 143.
- ²⁹ "Traffic Light Man in Tug-of-War Between East and West," *Deutsche Welle*, January 2, 2006.
- ³⁰ See Cornelia Gleißer, "Kleine grüne Männchen," *Berliner Zeitung*, February 15, 2006.
- ³¹ See Julia Bonstein, "Majority of Eastern Germans Feel Life Better under Communism," *Der Spiegel*, July 3, 2009; "The Wall in the Mind: Easterners still Feel Like Second Class Citizens," *Der Spiegel*, December 5, 2008.
- ³² German newspapers closely followed the court hearings between Heckhausen and VEB Joachim Roßberg in 2006, with the final ruling resulting in the foundation of AMPELMANN GmbH (and its website, ampelmann.de, the same year).
- ³³ Michel de Certeau cited in J. Bach, "The Taste Remains: Consumption, (N)ostalgia, and the Production of East Germany," *Public Culture* 14, 3 (Fall 2002): 547.
- ³⁴ Mary Beth Stein, "The Present is a Foreign Country: Germany after Unification," *Journal of Folklore Research* 30.1 (1993): 32.
- ³⁵ GmbH refers to "Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung" and translates roughly to "company with limited liability." The term designates a private company in Germany.
- ³⁶ Cooke, *Representing East Germany Since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia*, 151.
- ³⁷ The ideology enforced by party leaders in the socialist GDR state had been characterized by a staunch commitment to Marxist-Leninist thought, which deemed Western liberal values and modern capitalism as a means of exploitation of the working-class masses by the bourgeois classes. The mass-produced commodity, therefore, was seen as a dangerous product of capitalism at odds with socialist values.
- ³⁸ Paul Betts, "The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture," *Journal of Modern History* 72, 3 (2000): 734.
- ³⁹ Steven Heller, "Socialist Regime, Commercial Design," *The Atlantic*, February 19, 2015.
- ⁴⁰ Heller, "Socialist Regime."

⁴¹ Stewart, *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 30–31.

⁴² Martin Blum, “Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity as Material Culture,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 34 (2000): 235. Blum also explains that if any type of marketing was used in the GDR, it generally signaled to consumers that the product was inefficient or undesirable. Without advertising, East German consumers relied on their own experiences with a product to concoct its commodity biography.

⁴³ D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xxiii.

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” in *Literary Theory, an Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).

⁴⁵ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 56.

⁴⁶ Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, 65.

⁴⁷ Maurice Halbwachs in Nick Hodgkin, *Screening the East: Heimat, Memory and Nostalgia in German Film Since 1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 29.

⁴⁸ “Sind Sie der böse Wessi, der den armen Ossi über den Tisch ziehen will?” Quoted in Bollwahn, “Dieses warme Rot und Grün.”

⁴⁹ See: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Verso Books, 1997). First published as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* in 1944.