

COMPLETED DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

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Memory, Oblivion and Imaginary Realms, Study of two Centres of the Communist Memory in East-Berlin: the Palace of the Republic and the Stasi Museum

Berlin spawns an impressive imagery related to the history of the 20th century. Few other cities contain so many landmarks of the great events that shaped Europe and the world. From the ruins of the past century, Berlin is trying to set itself up as the German capital, a centre of political and economic power which embodies German democracy and sees itself as modest and exemplary. The collapse of the Wall has led to a break of intelligibility for those who lived within it. The stigma that made Germany an exception amongst the nations of the world has been swept away with the wall. However much it opens *de facto* new prospects for the future, this break of intelligibility also foreshadows a radically new relationship with history. In the reunified Germany, and especially in Berlin, a large scale re-evaluation of the past has begun, aiming at bringing sense to the new historical, political, economic and social order born from the events of 1989. The treatment of the high places of Communism, in conjunction with an extensive work on the past of the GDR, addresses multiple requirements formulated in political and economic terms, as well as in terms of identity. The discussion focuses on how the construction of official narratives of the communist past is part of an overall dynamic of incorporation of narratives of the new Germany in the urban space of the capital, paying special attention to the ways in which these reconstructions of the past are received in Berlin's 'public arena'. The thesis analyses how a common history of the GDR is taking shape and how, in turn, alternative narratives of the city and its past contradict the, sometimes homogenizing, interpretations proposed by the 'New Berlin.'

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Making video games and microcomputer a cultural heritage - Online and offline ethnography of a hobbyist community

This dissertation focuses on a community of 300-to-400 hobbyist-collectors of micro-computers and video-games from the 1970s to the 1990s, which they call ‘*vieilles machines*’. The collectors are mainly from France, but also from Belgium and Switzerland. Fieldwork was carried out both ‘on line’ and ‘off line’, mainly in Paris.

The community members communicate through online forums which belong to local offline associations. These forums are mainly used to exchange objects and information among collectors. The discussion looks at the rich and complex system of values and representations that regulates social relationships among the collectors. The main points are: a love for the *vieilles machines*; the will to use them; the idea of sharing knowledge and the rejection of monetary speculation. Sharing is the very basis of the daily behaviour and social imaginary of the community. Sharing is not, however, the rule in neighbouring economic systems (eBay, garage sales, other online auction websites). During the initial stages of the formation of this community – around 1998 – when these machines were seen as just obsolescent technical rubbishes, as opposed to collectible items, the community members could collect them for free or at very little cost. Thus, when an outside market developed and prices increased, they felt as if the *vieilles machines* had been stolen from them. As a reaction to the increase of prices caused by the outside market, the collectors changed the social norms and rules of exchange inside the community, so that at least they could mitigate the internal price increase. In particular, they promoted the idea of mutually satisfactory exchange as opposed to the idea of profit, and developed a ‘taboo system’ on the object’s real price, using the stance of major online opinion leaders whose expertise had contributed to give the community the status of main promoters of video games and microcomputer heritage. These collectors have, thus, managed to create a niche economy; a low price market in which one cannot integrate easily but in which, when fully integrated, anybody can benefit from an extended system of generosity and mutual aid.

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Modernization and change in China: Anthropological and social stakes: The renovation of the residential districts lived by a community of dwellers in Harbin

In China, the phenomenon of new building work has increased since the end of 1990s, raising issues of the implications and consequences of urban modernization in people's life. Questioning locally the process of urban modernization, this thesis is mainly the result of an investigation conducted in the city of Harbin, in the northeast of China (Heilongjiang Province). The thesis offers a comprehensive ethnography of a community in the 'Gu xiang' district, in the western part of the city.

The renovation of the district activated anxiety and fear in the community. The thesis offers a description of the context in which conflicts and negotiations between residents and authorities took place. The 'dwellers movement' was formed following the eviction of residents and the destructions of their houses. The discussion addresses the emerging nostalgia and the mourning, and its symbolic expressions, which followed the transformation of residents' lifestyles. When residents returned, they attempted to re-appropriate the new houses and to redraw the urban space as a synthesis between their past and their future.