6. Beyond Horseplay

Leipzig's Ethnographic Museum, Indian Hobbyists in the German Democratic Republic and Experimental Ethnology as Popular Education

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the relationship between the Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig and local Indian hobbyist groups in East Germany before (and after) 1990. Analysing hobbyism and political solidarity for Native American social struggles in the context of the 200-year long history of German "Indianthusiasm", the chapter foregoes a detailed phenomenology of the many hobby clubs, and questions on the cultural appropriation and ethnic drag that tend to dominate academic works on the topic. Instead, it illuminates how the museum and clubs advanced an understanding of "experimental ethnology" by portraying hobbyists as politically engaged amateur scholars. In doing so, both sides catered to their own interests, as they adhered to cultural-policy guidelines, legitimised their activities, and curried favour with bureaucrats in the hierarchy of the socialist state who could have impeded their work. The chapter will highlight how the museum and the clubs used aspects of curating, for example, organising exhibitions and public education on Native Americans, to present hobbyism as a form of popular education and to utilise the museum as an interface to disseminate academic knowledge among the public. In addition, by imagining, (re)constructing and representing indigenous village life on their club premises, hobbyists curated everyday life-worlds for themselves, creating a niche culture beyond the reach of the socialist state that blended private and public spheres. The angle of curatorial work, thus, provides insights into the private, public, and institutional aspects of GDR cultural history.

Introduction

The Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig[1] published a magazine commonly called the *Mitteilungen* (notifications) in most years during the time of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to promote its exhibitions and inform readers about its research projects, events and everyday tasks. The magazine's style and informal language present museum work by merging major museological purposes, such as research and education, with entertainment. The title page in the *Mitteilungen*'s second issue in 1964 confronts readers with the photograph of a man posing in the full regalia of a Native American Plains warrior in front of a tipi (Fig. 6.1). The main article introduces the work of an Indian[2] hobbyist club located in Taucha, a small town near Leipzig. Readers learn about the club's tipi encampment, major activities and crafts, such as archery and quillwork, and members' motivation to study the history and culture of Native Americans from the Great Plains. This article is crucial to understanding the interrelations of museum ethnography, popular culture and Indian hobbyism in the GDR, as it helps to explain how the museum sought to benefit from and further influence the German fascination for Native Americans. The man depicted on the magazine's cover personifies this curious mélange of research, education and popular culture as he is not only a member of the hobbyist group but also an employee of the museum and the author of the article (Freyer 1964: 1–4).

This chapter explores how the long-lasting hype about Native Americans in Germany, dubbed "German Indianthusiasm" (Lutz 2002: 167–184), affected cultural and education policies, museum work and popular culture in the GDR. While the phenomenon of Indianthusiasm becomes comprehensible only through the lens of the *longue durée*, the chapter focuses on the particular circumstances and strategies used by actors in the context of socialist GDR culture, education and politics. It argues that the Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig and regional hobbyist groups built their collaboration for mutual benefit: both sides used typical practices of museum work, such as collecting, researching, teaching and exhibiting, to set their activities within the prescribed frame of socialist cultural and education policy. The multilayered "socialist environments" thus curated frequently blended private and public spheres, academic and popular education, top-down ideological party directives and grassroots civic engagement, as well as official "state culture" and subcultural niches.

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1 | Today, the institution is called the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig. *"Völkerkunde"* is the original German term for Cultural Anthropology, literally describing the "study of peoples". Some institutions preferred the term "Ethnologisches Museum" (ethnological museum) during the 20th century. Today, political debates (e. g. on the colonial past of the German state, the discipline and individual scholars) lead many institutions to look for titles that are less fraught with problematic connotations, such as the *Museum der Weltkulturen* (Museum of World Cultures) in Frankfurt am Main.

2 | I follow Robert Berkhofer's suggestion and speak of Native Americans when discussing the actual people and use the term "Indian" to denote the idea and resulting stereotypical depictions of Native Americans (Berkhofer 1979: xvii).

Fig. 6.1: Cover title of Mitteilungen für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig *2 (1964).*

On the one hand, hobbyists approached the museum to gain reliable resources about Native Americans. They learned about exhibition concepts and practices, and could sometimes use the museum as a platform to present their own activities and skills to the public. On the other hand, the museum fulfilled its mandate to serve as a link between the state's ideological directives on education and culture, scholarship and the populace. Supporting the hobbyists' amateur ethnology was a welcome opportunity for the museum to implement the state's doctrine of popular education and to gain further insight into the museum's own collection through the hobbyists' growing practical experience with reconstructing material culture.

The chapter highlights these mutually reinforcing motivations, effects and ironies in portraying the collaboration between the museum and the hobbyists. It discusses how both parties benefitted not only from sharing the knowledge and skills about historical indigenous cultural practices and crafts but also from collecting and disseminating information about contemporary social struggles of the Red Power movement in the United States. In linking popular interest with research and political engagement, both the museum and hobbyists utilised Indianthusiasm to curate particular socialist environments that served their individual interests but were also acceptable to the prevailing political doctrine.

Previous scholarly and non-fiction works on the hobbyist movement were interested in motivations, gender roles and historical contexts or in the functionality of the groups; some studies even followed an ethnographic approach to studying hobby groups (e. g. Carlson 2002: 213–216; Schultze 2004; Borries/Fischer 2008; Kalshoven 2012). Other works have emerged from within the movement, serving as a documentation of hobbyists' activities and subjective academic and non-fiction explanations of the phenomenon (e. g. Rosche 1990; Turski 1994; Pfeiffer 2006). Rather than outlining the phenomenology or discussing problems of cultural appropriation regarding hobbyism,[3] this chapter is interested in how hobbyists interacted with the museum within a socialist frame and how museum work determined this interaction. It draws on the corpus of academic and non-fiction literature to help to explain the complex interrelationships between hobbyists, museum staff and the socialist state. Beginning with a historical contextualization of Indianthusiasm, the chapter proceeds to introduce two regional hobbyist clubs and their activities. It employs the term 'experimental ethnology' to argue that both the museum and the groups themselves portrayed hobbyism as a politically expedient example of applied amateur scholarship. The discussion will illustrate that this notion entails not only trial-and-error handcrafting of material objects based on original models studied in the museum's collections and library but also exhibitions, public education events about indigenous issues and practical solidarity campaigns for the Red Power movement in the United States.

German Indianthusiasm and the "True Story about Indians"

The interest in Native Americans in central Europe reaches back to the late 18th century. Regarding the German context, scholars have argued that it is related to the formation and historical renegotiations of German national identity, as it "stems directly from German polycentrism, notions of tribalism, a devotion to resistance, a longing for freedom, and a melancholy sense of shared fate" (Penny 2013: xi; cf. Lutz 1985; Usbeck 2015). The phenomenon attained longevity because "the Indian" became a malleable symbol for lofty, broadly interpretable ideas, so that it "persisted through all the political regimes and the most radical ruptures in modern German history" (Penny 2013: xii). It is, thus, no coincidence that Indianthusiasm also represents Germans' perspectives on 'America' as a place of longing and that, at the same time, serves as a valve for anti-Americanism in Germany. Since the 19th century, "Indians" have symbolized freedom, resistance, communality and the wide-open spaces of the West. The history of subjugation, massacres, broken treaties and forced assimilation in the frontier wars and US-Indian policy, however, seem to mark white Americans as greedy

3 | Scholars and activists in North America and Germany have discussed how far hobbyism comprises cultural appropriation and, thus, whether it continues colonial practices. See Haircrow (2018) and Taylor/Kemp (2018) for examples of the public debate. See, for example, Deloria (1998) and Lutz et al. (2019) for academic discussions.

hypocrites in the eyes of many German observers. This becomes particularly obvious when Germans contextualize "the fate of the Indian" in relation to the universal claims to liberty, self-fulfilment and democracy that are central to the mainstream American founding myth and self-image. This love-hate relationship with an 'America' that simultaneously seems to represent both freedom and the repression thereof also served German politicians of all political leanings in the 20th century to negotiate their own national identity and their stance toward the United States (Penny 2013: 157–251; Usbeck 2018: 67–82). Talking about Native American history and about the social struggles resulting from US-American racial policies helped both the Nazis and the East German communists to advertise a particular perspective on the United States in the light of prevailing ideologies (Usbeck 2018: 67–82).

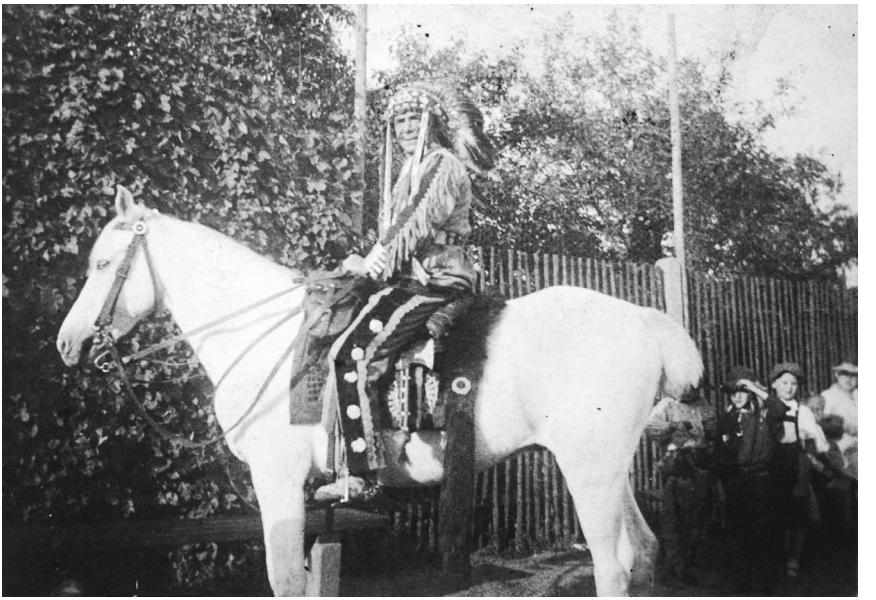
As these projections, imaginations and political interpretations have often contradicted each other and been frequently questioned, "scholars, museum curators, pedagogues, and dilettantes of all fashions" undergo "seemingly endless effort[s] […] to control the discourse on 'Indianness' in Germany by denouncing popular clichés and attempting to replace them with new versions of 'the authentic Indian'" (Penny 2006: 798). Hence, these "endless efforts" in "cliché busting" (ibid.: 799) have become a staple activity among educators since the 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, ethnological museums in Germany were among the leading institutions worldwide; their North American collections were usually the smallest regional departments but attracted the most visitors, and this popularity resulted in a heightened desire to educate the public about Native Americans and to counter stereotypes promoted in popular literature, shows and movies (Penny 2013: 11–12). Since the core activity of a museum, i. e. curating, entails that exhibits and scholars address and deconstruct clichés, it is obvious that ethnological museums engaged in "cliché busting" about Native Americans because, in doing so, they could benefit from the popularity of the topic and fulfil their educational mandate at the same time.

Indian hobbyism emerged when the popular interest in Native Americans turned into a craze in the wake of the *Völkerschauen* (ethnological expositions), American and German Wild West shows and circuses, and the success of popular literature, most of all Karl May's Western novels. The first club was founded in Munich in 1913 (Taylor 1988: 567; Kreis 2002: 200). People in Taucha had already begun to dress up as cowboys and Indians during the procession at the local country fair, the *Tauchischer Jahrmarkt*, in the 1890s.[4] The Leipzig museum influenced local cultural practices early on. To cite one brief example, a small exhibition on Plains culture in the show windows of a Taucha department store in 1937 inspired locals to adopt ornaments and patterns in their own crafts (Dräger 2009: 454–457). Figure 6.2 shows Alfred Giel posing on horseback in Indian regalia at the *Tauch'scher*, as the locals call the festival, in 1930. His son Joachim became one of the early members of the Taucha hobbyist group in the 1960s, later served as its chief and worked closely with the museum.[5] Thus, the

4 | Interview with Joachim Giel, 17 December 2009.

5 | Interview with Joachim Giel, 17 December 2009.

Fig. 6.2: Alfred Giel, posing on horseback at Tauchischer Jahrmarkt*, 1930.*



Leipzig museum and the regional hobbyists had been imbued with the cultural tradition and had already established relationships and mutual interests when they began to curate knowledge about Native Americans for the GDR public in the 1960s.

Registered as *FDJ-Kulturgruppe für Indianistik Hiawatha* in 1958, the Taucha group frequently approached the museum for information (IG Mandanindianer Taucha 2008: 2).[6] Members studied objects to learn about crafts, techniques and embroidery patterns for their own regalia, tipis and equipment. The author of the article in the *Mitteilungen* mentioned above, Johannes Freyer, served as the museum's technician; his work with objects allowed club members to study material culture closely and experiment in reproducing these items based on original designs. The group also built close personal ties with the American curators, Lothar Dräger and Rolf Krusche.[7] These connections provided access to the museum library and objects in the American collection that were not on display (cf. Freyer 1964).[8] The library became a major source of information for hobbyists as it held many reports and illustrations from early exploratory and ethnographic expeditions to North America, and was also well

6 | The group was renamed *Interessengemeinschaft Mandanindianer Taucha* in 1965. The *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth) was the umbrella youth organisation in the GDR and served as a host institution for a number of cultural associations, such as this hobbyist group.

7 | A delegation of the Taucha group even attended the defence of Dräger's PhD dissertation, posing in regalia for a photo with him afterwards; see Dräger (2009: 460).

8 | Interview with Lothar Dräger, 2 February 2019.

stacked with contemporary international research literature (through international licences and through an informal system of swapping print doublets with Western institutions and traveling scholars). It connected hobbyists with highly desired but – for many people in the GDR – almost inaccessible resources and special interest news from the outside world.[9] Their work with ethnographic and historiographic sources also inspired hobbyists to study the socio-economic contexts of Native American cultures and the various colonial contacts and conflicts. Research became a central activity among hobbyists; the hobby group *Uhwentsya Karenhata* in Leipzig-Paunsdorf, split off from the Taucha group in 1983 to focus on the Iroquois culture, expected diligent studies from its initiates in the museum library as a prerequisite for membership (Freyer 1964; Rosche 1990: 6). In addition, a number of independent scholars and authors of non-fiction emerged from these research efforts among regional hobby groups (Dräger 2009: 465).

These practices have been rooted in the "cliché busting" campaigns since the 1800s, which, time and again, have denounced stereotypical depictions of Native Americans in mass-produced Western novels and films. However, "cliché busting" at the museum and in the GDR hobbyist clubs also tied in with contemporary ideological issues. The GDR leadership had begun to support organised leisure activities in the cultural sector in the late 1950s on the condition that they were "peaceful, progressive, and [that they] promoted accord among nations *[völkerverbindend]*" (Pfeiffer 2006: 18).[10] Hobbyists could refer to these ideals when applying to register their clubs. Since all cultural groups in the GDR were required to register with the state and, thus, depended on certified approval, having popular education and intercultural solidarity prominently displayed in one's portfolio helped to convince the decision-makers of a group's worthiness (Turski 1994: 55). Hence, "cliché busting" in the context of GDR cultural policy inadvertently served to mould yet another ideological cast into which East Germans could press their ideas of "authentic Indians".

Since Marxist ideology was derived from Marx' theoretical scholarship on historical events and developments, socialist ideologists advertised their policies as the political implementation of scientific "truths". Ethnology in the GDR promoted itself as a progressive, scientific response to the racial theories of the Nazi era and the resulting racism and war crimes. Socialist ethnology promised to engender knowledge about and acceptance of the "other" as an "equal" by representing and explaining the customs, histories and cultures of other peoples. Socialist ethnology was supposed to nurture and display solidarity with the liberation struggles and nation-building of anticolonial movements, especially during the decolonization of African and Asian states since the late 1950s, and to interpret them within the frame of socialist internationalism and anti-imperialism (Dellit 2012: 10–15). The GDR leadership focused their foreign policies (as well as discussions on international affairs in higher education) on countries in the decolonizing world to present socialism as the natural ally of

9 | Interview with Rolf Krusche, 23 November 2018.

10 | All translations from the German original in this chapter are my own.

anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements to gain political advantage in the Cold War. Consequently, policy directives for the discipline of ethnology strongly favoured African, Asian and Latin American topics. However, although North American ethnography was pushed to the periphery, the continuing focus in exhibits on historical and contemporary Native American struggles appealed to an unwavering popular interest and matched official expectations of a critical representation of the United States as an imperialist oppressor (Dräger 1992: 36). Unsurprisingly then, traditional Indianthusiasm and "cliché busting" melded with socialist notions of *Völkerverständigung* (intercultural understanding) when museums and hobbyists addressed broken treaties, sovereignty, poverty and the civil rights struggles of the Red Power movement.

Popular Education, Exhibitions and Experimental Ethnology

The popular urge for "cliché busting" becomes evident in numerous entries in the museum's visitors' books, exhibitions and publications. It informed the relationships between hobbyists and museum staff and became a signature political device by which hobbyists and museum staff could justify their work vis-à-vis the state. One teacher's entry in the visitors' book explains that the special exhibition *Prärie-Indianer* in 1960 supported her school's efforts to "nurture intercultural understanding", another states that it helped to "do away with distorted images known from old books".[11] This reference to "old books" (i. e. Western novels) has been a recurring feature in "cliché busting" that is also evident in exhibits. The Leipzig museum, for example, sponsored a small vestibule exhibition in 1964 in which the Taucha hobbyists presented their work. One of the display cases opens a clear dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' Indian literature, showing ethnographic works (with illustrations by Karl Bodmer)[12] on the top shelf set against an array of typical Western dime novels on the bottom shelf. Although the texts and object labels in the showcase have not been documented and archived, the arrangement alone explains the educational thrust in this display. By selecting specific works and orchestrating them in the showcase in a way that 'good' Indian literature (ethnographic works and reports by traveling scholars) was pitted against the 'bad' (fiction, especially dime novels), the hobbyists curated an environment that allowed them to tell a particular story and engage in a discourse

11 | See "Gästebuch, Juni 1960 bis Dezember 1962" (visitors' book June 1960 to December 1962). This special exhibition was the first North American exhibition after World War II; it was part of a museum campaign to boost visitor numbers by appealing to popular interest (Damm 1961: 3; Dräger 2009: 462).

12 | Karl Bodmer, a Swiss artist, accompanied Prince Maximilian zu Wied-Neuwied on his ethnographic expedition to the Plains and the Upper Missouri region from 1832 to 1834. Bodmer's sketches and drawings of Native people count among the first visual representations of those from the region and are highly valued today for their attention to detail. Reprints of Bodmer's drawings have been published in academic works, fiction and non-fiction ever since.

about Native Americans that had a clear educational direction. Regardless whether the hobbyist curators intended to adhere to socialist doctrine on how non-Europeans were supposed to be discussed in public, it is obvious that the arrangement they chose aligned with both the educational motivation of museum staff and the ideological directives of the state. Visitors, museum staff and as critical state officials could easily read (and praise) it as an exemplary socialist environment if they chose to see it through such an ideological lens.

The hobbyists' small vestibule exhibit further conveyed their co-operation with the museum. It represented both parties' interest in education, research and public visual representation. For the hobbyists, exhibitions and public relations by way of popular education have always been a measure to show that their activities went beyond childish horseplay and that they were not simply "playing Indian". Their self-representation as amateur scholars also helped hobbyist groups in the GDR to become certified as registered clubs (often with the *Kulturbund*,[13] or the FDJ) and, thus, gain access to funding and venues for their activities (Turski 1994: 55–59). Publicly displaying the research aspect of their activities explained and justified what many casual observers would interpret as a curious or even silly pastime for adults. Therefore, while Freyer's article in the *Mitteilungen* revels in the joy of clumsily learning new dance steps or of nights by the campfire, the author still portrays the overall purpose of the club as a form of research: "This way of practicing *Völkerkunde* [ethnology] is a lot of fun!" (Freyer 1964: 4). Similarly, a thesis paper about the Paunsdorf group argues that they "conduct their hobby, which seems romanticizing to an outsider, with ethnographic seriousness" (Rosche 1990: 11).[14] However, because many people have automatically associated hobbyists with the romantic stereotype of "Indians", the relationship between museums and hobbyists elsewhere was not always as amicable. As some GDR hobbyists remember, the director of the Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden complained that hobbyism was not a serious venture, hobbyists lacked the training and they, therefore, were not qualified to discuss Native American issues in public (Turski 1994: 59–60). Their strong focus on education, then, was a means for hobbyists to be taken seriously by state authorities and professional educators, albeit with mixed results.

The second display case of the Taucha group's small exhibit at the Leipzig museum in 1964 shows how hobbyists put their research on Native American cultures into practice through "experimental ethnology" (Fig. 6.3). I use this term to build an

13 | The *Kulturbund* was the state's umbrella organisation for all cultural activities.

14 | This thesis was a final paper to earn the certificate of a registered youth club educator. The author conducted her research and part of her training embedded with the Paunsdorf group and, throughout the text, emphasises that the group's activities are worth supporting because of their educational value. It is intriguing to note that she emphasises the validity of her assessment especially at the time of writing in 1990, when social problems associated with early post-socialism, such as unemployment, social despair, and emerging racism and xenophobia had already become relevant factors in cultural politics and social work among young people (Rosche 1990: 27–29).

Fig. 6.3: Showcase at the vestibule exhibition Wir und die Indianer *(The Indians and Us), curated by the Taucha group in 1964.*

analogy to "experimental archaeologists", who can frequently be seen in historical documentary films, recreating and testing ancient tools and weaponry.[15] The top shelf of the case, similar to the first showcase described above, displays ethnographic literature, most notably showing illustrations of Plains warriors made by Karl Bodmer in the 1830s and information about the social structure of Plains tribes. The bottom shelf of the case presents the hobbyists' efforts to recreate original items of indigenous material culture, such as clothing, headdresses or household items. The case displays a printed overview table of different feathers on the left, probably to explain the cultural significance of ornamentations in a headdress (i. e. colouring, adornments and incisions), along with another classic Bodmer print. The right-hand part of the display presents a number of tools, such as yarn and needles for sewing and quillwork. Freyer's article in the museum's *Mitteilungen* links to this display case in inviting readers to see the "representation of their work" at the museum's vestibule exhibit or visit the club premises in Taucha. In doing so, he advertises both the museum as a venue for public education and the hobbyists' own work (Freyer 1964: 4).

Collaboration with the Taucha club had diverse benefits for the museum. The hobbyists' "experimental ethnology" provided insights for research on the collection's objects; it offered opportunities for public relations and catered to the state's expectations in museum policy. While hobbyists used the museum to learn about material

15 | In a slightly different connotation, the term 'experimental ethnography' has been used before to denote a strand of the discipline experimenting with new methodologies (Neumann 1995: 213–245).

culture, arts and crafts, museum researchers often could not completely track and comprehend the production processes of particular objects without damaging or even destroying them. The hobbyists, however, took the theoretical knowledge gained in the museum library and applied it to their practical attempts at recreating indigenous objects in a diligent trial-and-error approach. Therefore, they acquired skills in quillwork, leather and feather working or basketry over time, and these skills informed one's status and reputation at hobbyist gatherings where members would show off what they had been working on during the year. Museum staff acknowledged this expertise when they approached the hobbyists to reconstruct techniques for making particular objects or to double-check theoretical resources about delicate old objects in the collection, such as moccasins, which could not be opened up or turned inside out without damage.[16]

In terms of cultural policy and politics at the museum, the collaboration with hobbyists was a welcome opportunity for museum leaders to show the socialist government that the museum was not an ivory tower institution but, rather, a critical medium to convey ideology to the populace. The political leadership had instigated reforms in the GDR's cultural and research policy since the late 1950s, which resulted in new directives toward museums. The state sought to extend political influence in the education, academic and cultural sectors with its so-called "ideological offensive" (Dellit 2012: 35–42). Ernst Germer, head of the *Abteilung Wissenschaftliche Museen* (Department for Research Museums) at the *Staatssekretariat für Hoch- und Fachschulwesen* (State Secretariat of Higher Education), emphasised in a speech to museum directors in 1960 that museums should reach out to the populace and "popularise" scholarship. They were to "participate in the education of the labouring masses, to participate in the construction of socialism" (ibid.: 24; BArch DR 3 5537 n. d.), i. e. to make museums and their representation of research and arts more attractive to non-academics.

Reassigned from the ministry to work at the Leipzig museum, Germer and his colleagues conducted a pioneering empirical visitor study in 1962/63. This study revealed the contemporary interest in revamping museums' alleged reputation as "dusty" places of detached bourgeois scholarship and to align them with "popular education", turning the museum into a "cultural and scientific space to educate a wide range of non-professionals" (Germer 1965: 117). In this visitor study, researchers inquired how the museum could improve exhibitions, advertising and events. Some respondents recommended that the museum might inspire and guide amateur researchers and people interested in arts and crafts (ibid.: 140). Germer agreed, and went a step further:

> This alone does not seem to grasp all the opportunities in tying these work groups *[Zirkel]* to our museum. We believe it is essential to nurture relationships with non-professionals who genuinely concern them-

16 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 20 February 2019.

selves with the actual subject matter of the museum – with the history, customs and culture of other peoples – and therein find a meaningful way to spend their leisure time (ibid.).

Germer then referred to first experiences in outreach among amateur-researchers: "We have already undertaken steps toward [popular education] in collaborating with the FDJ-Gruppe 'Indianistik' Taucha."[17] Obviously, the fact that the hobbyists did not consider the museum a "dusty" and "detached" place served the museum to advertise its outreach efforts. Regarding amateur archaeologists and local historians, Germer pointed out that their volunteer work at digs or as attic collectors is a substantive boon to local history museums. Because ethnographic museums focus on non-European cultures and collect objects abroad, he cautioned, such volunteer work would be impossible for the Völkerkundemuseum zu Leipzig. However, "there is a series of collections (slides, photographs, newspaper clippings) which might be worthwhile for a collaboration with amateurs, even though this is not among the museum's central tasks" (Germer 1965: 141). Germer refers here to the enthusiasm and diligence that informs many amateur researchers' collecting. With such diligence in mind, he probably hoped that Indian hobbyists could provide comprehensive documentations of media articles on specific topics, to which museum employees would not be able to commit much time.[18] In his considerations, Germer referred to the so-called *Bitterfelder Weg*, a new paradigm in GDR cultural politics that sought to bring academics and artists together with blue-collar workers, in order to promote creative writing and arts among workers and farmers.[19] In accordance with this philosophy, Germer argued, the museum should intensify its work with amateur clubs such as the Taucha hobbyists. Because ethnographic museums had not had much experience in outreach before, "further work with the said 'Indian studies' group – who seem well-qualified – gains fundamental significance for this kind of bilateral collaboration of museums and interested non-professionals" (ibid.: 141). Indian hobbyism, in this perspective, was an expedient vehicle through which the museum could present itself as the interface between the party's cultural-policy directives and the private interests (and environments) of the populace. Portraying itself as a facilitator in a network of academic and non-academic, state and non-state actors in the field, the museum could

17 | "Indianistik" could be translated as "Indian Studies". The term has been widely used as a self-identifying marker among hobbyists.

18 | To give an example proving Germer's point, Siegfried Jahn, co-founder of the Paunsdorf club and one of the early members of the Taucha club, kindly opened his vast private archive of club chronicles, newspaper articles, exhibit photo documentation and collectibles to support my research.

19 | At the *Bitterfelder Kulturkonferenz* (Conference on Culture) in April 1959 and a few follow-up events, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED, Socialist Unity Party) adopted a programme that was geared towards a new "unity of life and the arts". Historians have interpreted this programme as the GDR's adoption of a Soviet idea for a cultural revolution. Implemented in cultural policy, the programme was supposed to end notions that arts and scholarship were elitist and to bridge gaps between the intelligentsia and non-academics (Gillen 2012).

Fig. 6.4: Replica of the Plains Tipi NAm 3373.

signal compliance in its struggle with party leaders and top bureaucrats, who believed it to be too bourgeois and wanted to reshape it into a "sozialistische Bildungsstätte" (socialist place of education).

The museum eventually institutionalized its outreach efforts in its own *Jugendklub Völkerkunde*, which attracted students at elementary and high school levels and even tied a few future employees to the museum at a young age. Large sections of these students were motivated by their interest in Native Americans.[20] Although the museum's relationships with the Taucha hobby group were not as tightly structured as those with its own *Jugendklub*, they still resulted in frequent mutual aid with research problems, museum pedagogy and exhibits lasting to this day. Most notably, members of the Taucha group made a replica of a Plains tipi that was obtained after an American Wild West show had visited the Leipzig Zoo in 1886. The fabric of the original tent had become brittle that it was no longer fit for display in the exhibition. The hobbyists' replica is currently still a part of the museum's permanent exhibition and sometimes serves as venue for museum pedagogy events (Fig. 6.4). In another instance, the Taucha group produced a replica of a large original tipi that came into the museum's collection in 1907 (Fig. 6.5). Made in 1998 and dedicated by a Native American drum group during a powwow that year, the replica was regularly pitched on the museum grounds during summer throughout the 2000s, and used for events in the museum's education programme. This replica was an exemplary documentation project because the original tent cover was believed to be a war loss at the time (until it was retrieved in 2011). Joachim Giel, the former chief of the Taucha group, recreated the tent cover's

20 | Interview with Birgit Scheps-Bretschneider, 7 February 2019.

Fig. 6.5: Joachim Giel paints the replica of NAm 1384.

intricate ornamentation from a drawing on the museum's old inventory sheet in 2010, as can be seen in Fig. 6.5 (Engel/Usbeck 2014: 109–134).

Regional hobbyists also presented their work outside of the museum. Public events usually entailed a show element, involving, for example, traditional Native dances, knife throwing and archery skills. These show elements drew large crowds of visitors and were also booked for popular television shows. However, both the clubs and cultural administrators responsible for certifying and evaluating them had to navigate between popular appeal and the risk of sliding into "mere spectacle". They had to keep in mind the educational and political justification for these activities (Rosche 1990: 9; Turski 1994: 55–59). Exhibits were another important pillar of the clubs' work and public relations. The brochure published for the 50th anniversary of the Taucha group's founding in 2008 lists five larger exhibits before 1990, and several more after that date, held at youth clubs, cultural centres and small local museums (IG Mandan-indianer 2008: 3). The Paunsdorf group *Uhwentsya Karenhata* organised several other exhibitions both before and after 1990.[21] These exhibits usually presented the clubs' arts, crafts and collections, displaying clothing and quillwork, as well as tools and household items. To contextualize their work in one of their exhibits in a downtown Leipzig shopping window in the mid-1980s, the Paunsdorf group added a quote by the chief ideologist of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), Kurt Hager, who was in charge of educational and cultural policy in the GDR. This quote declared that engaging and

21 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018.

Fig. 6.6: Postcard for the Paunsdorf club, 1990s.

researching non-European cultures prepared the GDR youth to withstand incendiary racist and imperialist propaganda.[22] The group displayed the quote prominently not only because it matched the topic of their display (e. g. addressing ongoing racism in the United States and struggles for sovereignty among the Iroquois), but also as a fig leaf to avoid scrutiny by the authorities that might have resulted in the revocation of their permit to use this shopping window. In short, the quote was included so that the authorities would leave them alone.[23]

The Paunsdorf group used their institutional affiliation with the local youth club *Walter Barth* to turn the club's premises into a small museum complex. Its outline was comparable to the concept of "living museums" or "participatory museums", which not only put crafted historical objects on display but also showed how they were (and are) made and explained the cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. This "living/participatory museum" consisted of two traditional Iroquois longhouses built by club members, along with a palisade to resemble the setup of a historic Iroquois village, as can be seen in Fig. 6.6. The compound also included a museum garden where the group grew corn, squash, beans, tobacco and sunflowers. These

22 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018. Unfortunately, this exhibit was not documented or archived in detailed photographs so that the quotation cannot be properly referenced beyond oral recollections of some of the club's members. The gist of its message, however, matches many of Hager's statements in his political treatises (Hager 1981: 110).

23 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018.

products were used to prepare traditional Iroquois meals, served at major club events that were attuned to the Iroquois annual ceremonial cycle. Once more, academic observers such as Marion Rosche emphasised the educational value of this mixture of research, "experimental ethnology", and arts and crafts (1990: 7). Because the premises were the place where members spent most of their spare time and a central gathering site for activities among group members, but also served as a museum that hosted outside visitors, they blended notions of public and private, of museum, home and village square. Hobbyists, such as the Paunsdorf group, thus, curated unique environments that reflected GDR cultural policy and ideological perspectives but, at the same time, allowed members to immerse themselves in their own imaginative world, i. e. to create a comfortable semi-private niche where ideological doctrines and state policies seemingly had no reach.

Practical Solidarity: Hobbyism as Anti-Imperialist Cold War Activism

Hobbyists increasingly addressed Native American civil rights struggles and social conditions in "Indian Country" during the late 1970s and 80s. The US Red Power movement was media-savvy and had staged many spectacular protests since the late 1960s. The GDR state media eagerly reported on these events because they were excellent opportunities to criticise US minority politics within the ideological Cold War frame of anticolonialism and anti-imperialism.[24] Hobby clubs in the GDR sought out news about indigenous struggles in North America and disseminated them further at public events. The hobby movement became more outwardly politicised, and groups formed or split off from existing clubs with the explicit goal of supporting Red Power struggles, so that the number of registered clubs had more than tripled to over 50 clubs by the mid-1980s (Turski 1994: 28). Indian hobbyists had become players in the Cold War, not merely consuming and spreading information about US social struggles in the GDR but actively building international networks and organising practical solidarity for indigenous protests and projects in the United States. Political support groups formed the "Solidaritäts-Arbeitskreis" (Solidarity Working Group), in which delegates from between twenty to some thirty-five groups convened twice a year after 1983. These groups organised fundraisers for donations (selling books, art and crafts or holding public events for an entry fee), curated photo exhibits and political wall newspapers at bookstands and country fairs, collected signatures for protest petitions, and networked with Red Power organisations in the US, as well as with

24 | I conducted a survey of GDR television broadcasts for this study, looking for references to Native Americans and hobbyists. The GDR's foremost news show, *Aktuelle Kamera*, reported on fishing rights struggles in the North West and on Marlon Brando's solidarity campaign for the activists as early as 1964, five years before the first large Red Power protests, such as the occupation of Alcatraz, were launched (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv 1964).

international support groups (ibid.: 28–29; Rosche 1990: 12–14).[25] Here, too, museum techniques such as collecting, curating, teaching and exhibiting served the clubs' popular education and fundraising efforts.

The Paunsdorf group involved itself intensively in these political support structures. They organised infotmation booths at large public events, such as the *Pressemeile* (media mile) at Leipzig's May Day celebrations, or at the annual *FDJ Pfingsttreffen*, a political convention and festival held during Pentecost week. One of the activists remembers that the Leipzig district secretary of the SED, Horst Schumann, visited their info tent at the Pfingsttreffen in 1984, and praised the displays and brochures about the indigenous civil rights movement.[26] Similar to other groups, the Paunsdorf club also made contact with indigenous activists (Leipzig museum curators sometimes referred their Native American visitors to the club). Starting in 1983, they sent care packages to the St. Regis Reservation in New York to support the Akwesasne Freedom School. This school was founded as one of several so-called grassroots "survival schools" organised by the Red Power movement in order to reconnect children with their tribal heritage, instil self-esteem, and develop an education system from the perspective of indigenous epistemology, independent from state school curricula (Davis 2013). These schools had little chance of financial support because they could not obtain accreditation at first and depended completely volunteerism, community fundraising and solidarity campaigns, also from overseas.

The Paunsdorf club was one among many in the GDR who "adopted" such a social project. They regularly sent packages containing school materials, such as chalk, pencils, notebooks and office supplies, until the early 1990s.[27] The school principal comments on the solidarity wave coming from the GDR in a thank-you letter from June 1984: "Our request for help in East-Germany has been staggering. I really can't say much for all you people have done for us."[28] The groups also used the opportunity for public relations, documenting their solidarity work and the Native American contacts' replies in newspaper articles in the GDR (Jahn 1984: n. p.). Among the items sent West across the Atlantic were also packages of glass beads, purchased in Czechoslovakia.[29] Akwesasne school sold them to tribal bead workers and artists in fundraising events. The school principal commented on the quality of the beads and their

25 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018

26 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018.

27 | Postage fees became so expensive in the early 1990s that club members could not afford to raise money for these extra costs (in addition to their own social problems in the post-socialist era) and had to cancel their material support. Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 2018.

28 | Letter to Siegfried Jahn, 6 June 1984. I have anonymized American sources to protect their privacy. I have documented all letters referenced here in my files.

29 | This link to Czechoslovakia also illustrates the international network of hobbyists in Central and Eastern Europe. Groups in the GDR, the CSSR, Poland and Hungary sometimes had different forms of organisation and different relationships with their respective states or followed different interests (e. g. CSSR hobbyists often registered their clubs as Lacrosse sports teams and played each other in a Lacrosse

value for the school's funding efforts. He also remarked on the irony that glass beads should serve as highly valued items in a European solidarity campaign for indigenous sovereignty and self-determination: "It's funny for me to ask for beads because our ancestors let the Europeans stay on Manhattan Island for the amount of $ 24 in beads. Funny how things are."[30] Members of the Paunsdorf group were proud that their school supplies helped the Akwesasne Freedom School to survive and, especially since they were ardent craftspeople themselves, happy to know that beads from the GDR and Czechoslovakia were so valuable to Native American artisans.[31]

Ironically, the hobbyists' activities created double binds on several levels. Activism and solidarity operated within the official ideological frame; they matched the party line in promoting anti-colonialism and denouncing the United States as an imperialistic power who continued the (neo)colonial exploitation of Native Americans. Similar to official state media, hobbyists and activists declared solidarity with indigenous civil rights organisations. However, their interest in US minority politics implied a general interest in US-American affairs and, with this, in the idea of "America" (the place of longing), which automatically raised suspicions among party leaders and intelligence services. Officials feared that international solidarity networks might also bring GDR activists in contact with politically "suspect" groups, such as West German environmentalists or left-wing "radicals" who did not adhere to the officially approved version of Marxist doctrine. Therefore, GDR authorities grew wary of the hobby groups and had them observed by the *Staatssicherheit* (*Stasi*, state security) operatives, all the while promoting the same ideals (Schultze 2004: 118–134). One *Stasi* document commented on a meeting of solidarity groups in 1987 where members complained that GDR bureaucracy impeded their solidarity work. The officer who wrote the report concluded that, being comprised of mostly young members, these solidarity groups "have a hard time to properly understand the Indian problem in the US and Canada in the context of the larger global situation" and, therefore, tend to "overstep the mark" in their youthful enthusiasm (BStU MfS BVfS Potsdam, KD BRBG 889: 180–181). Another example shows that some hobbyists feared such paranoid reactions by the state: Akwesasne school activists suggested in a letter to Paunsdorf that GDR supporters should "ask […] [the GDR government] to support our aid for sovereignty and recognition of our status as a nation", and to "write letters to the US and Canadian embassy […] entitling us to travel on our own passports without hindrance."[32] Although unaware of the ensuing *Stasi* surveillance of hobby-

league), but they maintained many international personal friendships and often visited each other (Taylor 1988: 567–569; Šavelková et al. 2014).

30 | Letter to Siegfried Jahn, 6 June 1984.

31 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 20 February 2019.

32 | Letter to Corinna Jahn, 9 January 1984.

ists, the Paunsdorf group was, nevertheless, afraid to draw government attention to themselves and decided not to send such petition letters.[33]

At a time when people understood East-West support as the shipping of international "care packages" or German-German *Westpakete* (gift packages containing toys, clothing and snacks) to friends and family in the impoverished Eastern Bloc, thousands of care packages were sent West (that is, the 'wrong way') from socialist countries to support impoverished Native American communities in the United States. While this phenomenon looks like a public-relations bonanza for GDR ideologists, the party and its institutions were afraid of self-organised political activism, especially when it involved people and institutions in the West, for fear of losing control over the populace. Hobbyists commenced their solidarity activities out of a genuine motivation to support the indigenous struggle and might have become poster models of proper socialist behavior. At the same time, this public appearance of their work also served as a false front vis-à-vis the state for many members, behind which the groups could immerse themselves in a self-contained niche subculture. This multilayered system of open expressions of solidarity and veiled measures of isolation and protectiveness among both state and non-state actors illustrates the degree of paranoia prevalent among state institutions, as well as among citizens who had to arrange their private and public lives under the influence of these institutions and their policies.

Conclusion

Museums and Indian hobbyists in the GDR were embedded in the longer tradition of German and European Indianthusiasm. The Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig and local hobbyist groups employed Indianthusiasm for mutual benefit. Hobbyists utilised research opportunities at the museum, gained international contacts and learned about museological practices. They learned skills in cultural practices, arts and crafts and employed them to decorate their homes and clubs and to design exhibits. Their "experimental ethnology" helped to blend public and private spaces and activities, anchored around notions of learning, teaching and curating.

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33 | Interview with Siegfried Jahn, 7 November 1984. My survey of *Stasi* documents did not reveal any *Stasi* observations of the Paunsdorf group at the time of this writing. However, there are several documents about the Taucha group and another group in Leipzig, and one investigation discussed a group in Brandenburg who, like *Paunsdorf*, focused on Iroquois culture and sent care packages to a survival school (St. Regis Reservation, New York). The *Stasi* documents discuss the Brandenburg group's contacts to the reservation and take note of the packages, but they do not reveal if the *Stasi* undertook any active measures against the group in Brandenburg. The fact that the *Stasi* observed hobbyists in Taucha, Brandenburg and elsewhere but apparently was not even aware of the group in Paunsdorf and its activities illustrates how randomly the state's surveillance measures were applied (BStU, MfS, BVfS, Potsdam, KD BRBG 889, p. 0070).

The Leipzig museum, pushed by policymakers to shed its bourgeois reputation, implement recent doctrines and become a place of socialist education, employed the popular interest in Native Americans to garner large visitor numbers for its exhibits. It built and maintained cordial relationships with hobbyist groups. While these relationships might have evolved primarily out of mutual personal research interests and friendships, the collaboration also served to advertise the museum's outreach efforts. North America was a peripheral space as far as the state's interest in higher education and museum representation was concerned. However, Cold War cultural policy made Native American social struggles a worthwhile topic for both museums and hobby clubs: It allowed both to employ and profit from Indianthusiasm, criticise U.S. American imperialism and toe the party line of socialist ideology and policy doctrine, even when such demonstrations of loyalty often served as false fronts to mollify party leaders and top level bureaucrats. Native America had been a source of interest for museums and for the populace even before the GDR. Yet, the mélange of traditional notions, malleable symbols, private interests, pop culture, political activism and state policy created, or rather curated, unique socialist environments around East Germans' fascination for the "Indian" in the space of the museum, club centres and private homes, and the public sphere.

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