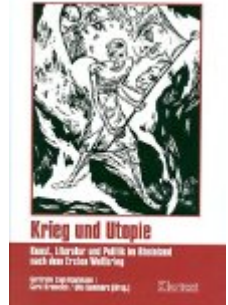


Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann, Gerd Krumeich, Ulla Sommers, eds.. *Krieg und Utopie: Kunst, Literatur und Politik im Rheinland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2006. 406 pp. EUR 24.90, paper, ISBN 978-3-89861-619-5.



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At the end of his masterful history of Freiburg during the First World War, Roger Chickering notes laconically that November 11, 1918, in hindsight one the most epochal days of the twentieth century, "brought no interruptions of the usual business." [1] The end of the war brought precious little peace to many inhabitants of the former combatants. Wartime shortages and regulations persisted for years after the formal end of hostilities, even in ostensibly victorious states. In a Germany beset by local uprisings, a military in the process of collapse and self-demobilization, and insecure western and eastern borders, peace seemed all too illusory. The present volume seeks to evaluate the long-term influence of the war on the Rhineland, an ideal region for the discussion of such themes.

This collection stems from a 2006 exhibition that began in the evocative *Bunkerkirche* in Düsseldorf before travelling to Königswinter and then Péronne, where it was housed in the Historial de la Grande Guerre. Essays consider cultural life in an area caught between tradition and modernity,

war and peace, and France and Germany. The self-conscious cosmopolitanism of a border region and the vertiginous whirl of European artistic experimentation sat uneasily next to the nationalizing tendencies of wartime mobilization. As the volume's contributions reveal, these tensions became manifest in a variety of contexts, including politics, literature, art, and architecture. Its origins as a colloquium are evident in the form and structure of the volume: 46 essays are presented in a volume of just over 400 pages. The editors and publisher did a remarkable job of including artwork, but that decision also significantly reduces the quantity of text, and in some cases the essays are as short as three pages. The volume also benefits and suffers from its interdisciplinarity. As is common with such projects, art historians, historians, and literary scholars will find much to like, even as they complain that there is not enough from their discipline.

The postwar period saw the Rhineland occupied by four Allied powers—its future as part of a German state very much in question. The pres-

ence of foreign troops, in addition to continuing wartime economic conditions and political violence, effectively prolonged the experience of war long beyond the armistice. As Gerd Krumreich reminds readers, postwar occupation of the Rhineland mirrored Germany's "internally ruptured wartime society" (p. 29). In keeping with the trend toward local studies of the postwar period, this volume aims to create a portrait of cultural life in places linked by proximity or explicit association, with particular emphasis on the lively art scenes of Düsseldorf and Cologne. Contributions appear on a host of other regions across defeated Germany, too, ranging from the chaos of postwar Munich to the *Wasserkuppe* in Hessen and the bucolic East Frisian village of Remels.

At the heart of this volume lie evolving and contested visions of utopia that emerged from the years of war. In the realm of art, for example, Rhenish artists turned to eschatological themes, bold forms of representation, and a fascination with human fragility and mortality. In this context artistic revolution and political revolution merged, at least briefly, in the possibility-filled postwar years. Fascination with novelty, marked by the near constant use of the adjective "new," spurred the messianic visions of artists determined to move beyond the disaster of the war. One tangible result was a renewed interest in rebuilding the region's historic ties to France, a shift that consciously shed its (relatively) recent association with Prussia.

The array of cultural producers considered in this work is breathtaking. Some, like Otto Dix and Otto Freundlich, are familiar, while others are not. Contributors map out a dense network of associations. In Stephan von Wiese's essay on Gert Wollheim, we see how Wollheim connected groups like the Aktivistenbund 1919, Das Ey, and Junge Rheinland in "a new form of superregional organization" (p. 84). Beyond the dizzying collection of expressionists and Dadaists, others sought utopia in planned communities, like Düsseldorf's

enduring Freie Erde. Walfried Pohl tells the fascinating story of the misbegotten efforts by the Oelbermann brothers and the architect Karl Buschüter to create a grand Jugendburg Waldeck as part of a plan to rebuild the spirit of German youth.

Admittedly, a number of themes are either absent or maddeningly under-discussed. The volume is far more interested in art and literature than in politics. Essays that deal with policy and political ideas, like Clemens von Looz-Corswaren's contribution on the chaotic and violent situation in postwar Düsseldorf, or Norbert Oeller's piece on Maurice Barrés's visions of a French Rhineland, are sprinkled throughout with little sense of the overall context. Given the amount of research on the church and rural life completed in recent years, it is somewhat surprising to see these areas marginalized. More material on the Right would also have been welcome, particularly on the emerging "new" Right and the fantasies that eventually produced the "barbarous utopia" of the Third Reich. While many authors refer to the occupation, only a few, like Anna-Monika Lauter in her study of the French art exhibition in Wiesbaden, really explore the relationship between the victorious powers and civilians in defeated Germany.

Finally, for a book about the end of the war, very few contributors treat the confusing, contradictory, and perilous process of demobilization. Nicolas Beaupré, in his chapter on the French veteran and author Pierre Mac Orlan, presents the only sustained discussion of the idea of cultural demobilization. This is a shame, because the Rhineland's cultural, political, and geographic position makes it an ideal site to discuss that ways that cultural production and producers engaged in what John Horne memorably termed "demobilization of the mind."

Despite what is left out, a great deal remains to like here. This volume should be read both by readers interested in the Rhineland and by those

more broadly concerned with the postwar history of German art and literature.

Note

[1]. Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 568.

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