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Nick Hodgin, Caroline Pearce. *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State Since 1989.* Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. 300 S. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57113-434-9.

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In spite of the sustained public and academic interest in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) over the past two decades, official celebrations marking the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 focused overwhelmingly on the East German state's demise, largely ignoring the preceding forty years of its existence. Television broadcasts and newspaper reportage were saturated with iconic images of crowds crossing the newly opened border, and a series of dignitaries including the German chancellor herself, Angela Merkel, used the occasion to commemorate the victory of freedom over dictatorship and the beginning of a new European and world political order that had begun with the wall's collapse. The editors of *The GDR Remembered*, Nick Hodgin and Caroline Pearce, seek to look beyond this official position and account for the "multiple narratives and concerns" (p. 4) that have underpinned efforts at representing East Germany since 1989, surveying a wide range of memory media that includes film and literature, museums and memorials, and historiographical as well as generational discourses.

The volume is one of a number of publications occasioned by the 2009 anniversary that address the legacy of the GDR in postunification Germany, and so to a certain extent covers familiar ground.[1] Nevertheless, it has plenty to say in particular on issues surrounding nostalgia for the former East (so-called *Ostalgie*) and the renaissance of totalitarian narratives in interpreting Germany's National Socialist and Communist East German pasts. Though the volume as a whole is not as overtly concerned with interrogating the theoretical models of communicative and cultural memory as are other contemporaneous edited collections, it certainly makes a strong case for nuancing more polarized official memory discourses on the GDR that have been characterized by either rose-tinted nostalgia or outright demonization.

A strong opening thematic section looks at how authors and filmmakers from (East and West) Germany and beyond have sought to represent the GDR. Laura Bradley's chapter explores literary and filmic representations of theatre in the work of Barbara Honigmann, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and Andreas Dresen, reflecting a variety of subject positions–Honigmann as a Jewish author and Özdamar as herself a one-time stage actress of Turkish descent, for instance. Anna O'Driscoll surveys texts by Monika Maron, Christoph Hein, and Christa Wolf in which the device of a middle-aged female protagonist opens up the possibility of narrating unification and life in the GDR in the melancholic mode. Stuart Parkes makes the incisive observation in his analysis of texts by non-GDR citizens dealing with the legacy of the East German state that unification has inspired authors of all generations and nationalities to tackle a "Great German Novel" (p. 67). Elaboration upon why the GDR's history should hold such universal literary appeal would have been welcome here, particularly as the three texts Parkes discusses–by Jan Böttcher, the West German literary doyen Martin Walser, and the French author Jacques-Pierre Amette–converge, broadly speaking, around a condemnatory narrative of the GDR. Nonetheless, it is a stimulating chapter that points tellingly to transnational trends at work in the construction of cultural memory. Hodgin's own contribution, which rounds off the section, offers a nuanced reading of the politics of representing the East German secret police (the Stasi) in postunification film.

Of the section's numerous valuable insights, perhaps the most interesting are those that probe the formal possibilities these particular technologies of memory offer when it comes to representing the GDR. Hodgin, for instance, argues that the "carefully recreated Stasi milieu" (p. 86) of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-winning *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) parallels the fetishization of GDR consumer goods in earlier postunification German film. In this case, however, the film's aesthetic indulges a public fascination with state surveillance. Bradley, too, convincingly shows how Emine

Sevgi Özdamar's innovative insertion of fragmentary and unfinished sketches into her novel may be understood as an invitation for the reader to engage with an ambiguous and incomplete picture of East German theatre.

Following on from this are five chapters dedicated to the musealization and memorialization of the GDR. Silke Arnold-de Simine analyzes two museums dedicated to everyday culture in the GDR: the Documentation Center of Everyday Culture of the GDR in Eisenhüttenstadt and the GDR Museum in Berlin. Günter Schlusche's and Pertti Ahonen's chapters both deal with the Berlin Wall, underlining its continuing resonance long after the end of German division. Whilst Schlusche charts the postunification development of the memorial complex at Bernauer Straße and comments on strategies of memorialization developed here, Ahonen concentrates on broader cultures of wall remembrance in East and West Germany and the extent to which elements of these have survived in reunified Germany. The focus is broadened somewhat in Andreas Wagner's chapter, which offers an overview of the memorial landscape in the federal state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and the developments that have taken place since 1990, helpfully giving some contextual information on the parallel processes of memorializing the National Socialist past. The working through of the East German past has of course occurred at the same time as moves to anchor negative memory of the Holocaust at the center of German identity, and Caroline Pearce dedicates her chapter to the memorialization of this so-called double past. She summarizes the major flashpoints in the debate over the past two decades and concludes that the uniqueness of the National Socialist period has on the whole been upheld in individual memorials as well as in the Federal Strategy for Memorial Sites (the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption*), despite attempts from some quarters to resurrect a form of "anti-Communist or collective anti-totalitarian commemoration" (p. 173).

The predominance of chapters focusing on memorials to state persecution and victimhood in this section is quite understandable, though it is Arnold-de Simine's contribution–the only one not to deal with "memorial museums"–that best unpacks the relationship between space and memory.[2] She is ultimately critical of the museums in Eisenhüttenstadt and Berlin, but rightly takes issue with the typological category of the memorial museum too, arguing that it reinforces a focus on perpetrators and victims in memory of the GDR. Displaying objects of East German material culture, by contrast, may promote a critical, "reflective nostalgia" (p. 108) and capture "the gray area between the 'done to' and the 'doing"' (p. 107) that tends to be screened from primarily commemorative spaces.[3]

The final section of the book is its most ambitious and sweeping, though it serves to counterbalance the earlier close analysis of individual case studies with attempts at drawing overarching conclusions. The respective chapters are concerned with societal discourses on the GDR in the wake of its demise, concentrating on generational differences (Mary Fulbrook), the historical practice (Stefan Berger), collective psychological patterns of socialization (Thomas Ahbe), and philosophical readings of *Ostalgie* (Peter Thompson). Here again the volume succeeds in problematizing oversimplified concepts of either *Ostalgie* or condemnation of the GDR. Berger, for instance, concludes that the wholesale dissolution of East German research institutions and dismissal of East German historians from academic posts following unification has caused an anomalous absence in reunified Germany of a Marxist historiographical tradition that is well established elsewhere in Europe. Thompson, drawing on Ernst Bloch and Slavoj Žižek, seeks to explain the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* not so much as nostalgia amongst former East Germans for what they had lost with the end to German division, but rather as a longing for a utopian vision that was not actually attained prior to 1989 yet retroactively associated with the period of "real existing socialism."

In her chapter on a generation of East Germans born around 1929, Fulbrook intriguingly suggests that the circumstances of their socialization in the final years of the Third Reich and preparedness to embrace the project of socialist renewal led to a "cultural availability for mobilization" (p. 206) that in turn foreshadowed their attitudes towards the GDR and its collapse. Ahbe underscores patterns of socialization too but in his chapter stresses that the dividing line is between eastern working-class, and western bourgeois constructions of identity. One might ask whether he gives the economic costs of unification rather short shrift here. He surmises that, in the capitalist post-1990 Federal Republic, "eastern Germany makes the west wealthier–while the west poses obstacles to development in the east" (p. 238), but equally the federal government has invested over €1.3 trillion in the new federal states to date. Likewise, Fulbrook's chapter, for all its conceptual innovation, underplays the "qualifications and recognition of complexities" (p. 208) inherent to any attempt at individual or collective profiling.

Overall, however, the volume makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing scholarly interrogation of memory of the GDR in reunified Germany. Even within what

is now a richly populated field of study, *The GDR Remembered* deserves a wide readership, and will be useful in particular for undergraduate courses on account of the uniformly solid individual contributions, which function equally well as stand-alone pieces. That said, a number of longish quotations are included without English translations, making the volume less appropriate for "general readers" (p. 14) than the editors would have liked (though, where whole chapters have been translated from German, Hodgin and Pearce have done an excellent job). Ultimately, this minor quibble should not detract from the volume's many strengths; it is a worthwhile addition to a field of research whose vitality is as clear two decades after German unification as it has ever been.

Notes

[1]. See for instance Karen Leeder, ed., "From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR Twenty Years After," *Oxford German Studies* 38, no. 3 (2009); David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, eds., *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt, eds., *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011); Renate Rechtien and Dennis Tate, eds., *Twenty Years On: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification German Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011); and Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold, eds., *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[2]. The term is taken from Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007).

[3]. This remains a politically sensitive question, as highlighted by the drastic reduction in funding for the Documentation Center in Eisenhüttenstadt, which at one stage in 2012 even appeared to be facing closure. See Stefan Lötsch, "Museum auf Schmalkost gesetzt," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, December 7, 2012, http://www.moz.de/artikel-ansicht/dg/0/1/1068265/, (accessed February 5, 2013).

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