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Nada Boškovska, Angelika Strobel, Daniel Ursprung. *"Entwickelter Sozialismus" in Osteuropa: Arbeit, Konsum und Öffentlichkeit.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016. 268 S. broschiert, ISBN 978-3-428-14618-5.

Esther Meier. *Breschnews Boomtown: Alltag und Mobilisierung in der Stadt der LKWs.* Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016. 303 S. , gebunden, ISBN 978-3-506-78193-2.

Timo Vihavainen, Elena Bogdanova. *Communism and Consumerism: The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society.* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2016. XXIV, 172 S. , , ISBN 978-90-04-30397-3.

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Recently, historians have begun to interpret the late Soviet Union as an empire of consumption. Histories of the Soviet car, television, shopping, clothing, travelling, housing in general and household appliances in particular demonstrate the extent to which the late Soviet Union changed its program from the moralistic and ascetic enterprise of the 1920s into the aspiring competitor to western living standards of the late 1950s and beyond. Most notably Natalya Chernyshova, Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnec Era, London 2013; Lewis Siegelbaum, Cars for Comrades. The Life of the Soviet automobile, Ithaca 2008; Susan Reid, Cold war in the Kitchen: Gender and De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev, in: Slavic Review 61 (2002), pp. 211–252. The majority of those recent histories explicitly argues that, by nourishing consumerist expectations among the Soviet citizens, the Soviet Union dug its own grave. This paradigm also informs the histories of the socialist experiment in Eastern Europe. The three books under review here — two edited volumes and one monograph — subscribe to this notion of consumerism as a "Pandora's box", as Ulf Brunnbauer puts it in his contribution to the edited volume "Entwickelter Sozialismus" in Osteuropa (Boškovska et al., p. 44): The socialist bloc ultimately had to fail, as it was incapable of fulfilling the consumerist promise.

The two edited volumes explicitly address the history of consumption in the Eastern Bloc, while Esther Meier's monograph about everyday life in Naberezhnye Chelny, a city in the autonomous Soviet republic of Tatarstan, only cursorily touches on consumption as one crucial aspect of life under Brezhnev in the 1970s. Interestingly, all three books set aside the most influential paradigm since the mid-1980s: that of the Brezhnev Era as an 'age of stagnation'. While five years ago, international conferences still saw heated debates as to whether the 1970s were stagnating or normalizing, Meier nonchalantly states that the notion of stagnation is simply not "productive" (Meier, p. 13) for the questions that concern her. Dina Fainberg's and Artemy Kalinovsky's edited volume is the most up-to-date obituary of the stagnation paradigm. See their Reconsidering Stagnation

in the Brezhnev Era. Ideology and Exchange, Lanham 2016.

Instead, Meier's urban history of Naberezhnye Chelny deals with migration, ethnic politics, labour and everyday life in a remote city far from Moscow. Since 1969, Naberezhnye Chelny developed around one enterprise that produced an iconic Soviet item: the KamAZ lorry. The KamAZ was (and still is) sold all over the world and was often used by military for transportation. Although the lorry itself was not sold to individuals and thus was not for consumption, the city that developed around the enterprise became close to a consumerist heaven in the 1970s. Meier follows the decision to set up the enterprise in Tatarstan, the resulting chaos in planning the enterprise and the nationality politics connected with the decision to locate the enterprise in an autonomous republic which at that time was already a highly industrialized region. The core chapters deal with migration into the city, the hierarchies that developed between Russian and Tatar migrants, working life at KamAZ, and the building of the city. They present the ***mikrorayon*** as emblematic for Soviet living and lived experience. In terms of consumption, Meier depicts Naberezhnye Chelny as a city that promised a better life for those who decided to work at KamAZ. Not denying the usual Soviet hiccups in providing apartments, for instance, Meier nevertheless illustrates the many options that the city opened up for its inhabitants – Russians and Tatars being the majority. Meier vividly describes everyday life in Naberezhnye Chelny and thus the normalcy of living in the 1970s.

In the introduction to his volume, Timo Vihavainen claims that the ideology of consumerism has so far been understudied, especially so for the Soviet 1960s, a decade "when the Soviet Union really tried to create a new kind of consumer without the consumerist mentality" (Vihavainen/Bogdanova, p. xi). Unfortunately, the making of this edited volume coincided with the publication of Chernyshova's extremely important study about Soviet Consumer Culture and is therefore not considered in this volume. However, in all of his three contributions to the volume Timo Vihavainen concentrates on relatively broad summaries of the history of consumerism in (Soviet) Russia and the West and does not explicitly address the "age of consumption" itself in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, Vihavainen tries to develop a theory of a supposedly distinct Russian tradition of consumerism, which was basically anti-materialist. In a "land of peasants" (Vihavainen/Bogdanova, p. 18) luxury was interpreted as sinful. "[T]he mentality of Russia's toiling masses in 1917 and even much later, was more alien to bourgeois hedonism and utilitarianism, than was the case in most of Europe, which was more urbanized." (Vihavainen/Bogdanova, p. 22) Such broad assessments are not, however, able to explain why shifts in Soviet official policy occurred first in 1930s, in which Stalin promised a merrier life at least for some people and intentionally stratified Soviet society on a massive scale into "haves" and "have nots". Neither can the peasant attitude or orthodox beliefs, which presumably shaped the anti-materialist worldview of the Bolsheviks in the 1910s and 1920s, be held responsible for the decidedly pro-consumerist politics of Khrushchev. Similarly to Vihavainen, Olga Gurova's contribution to this volume distinguishes four periods in the official ideology of consumption in the Soviet Union by looking at discourses about fashion in the Soviet Women's journal ***Rabotnitsa***: The ascetic 1920s, the ideology of 'kulturnost' in the 1930s which promoted consumption at least for a small elite, the ideology of "Soviet taste" in the 1950s and 1960s and the "growing materialization" of the 1970s and 1980s. While the analysis of ***Rabotnitsa*** allows Gurova to confirm those four distinct periods, the question of what exactly initiated those changes, remains open.

By focusing on the concept of fashion in the Soviet 1950s and 1960s, Larissa Zakharova suc-

ceeds in extrapolating the contradictions between the socialist planned economy and the planning of needs. Naturally, the theory of socialist consumption as put forward by Soviet economists had problems with understanding, or even acknowledging, the significance of fashion. Why should one buy a new summer jacket if last year's was still in perfectly good shape? The Soviet economy labeled such an attitude 'bourgeois mentality' and dismissed it as disrespectful of productive human labour. Furthermore, Soviet economists believed in something like a 'rational norm' of clothing (and every other possible item for consumption). Such a general rational norm was supposed to mirror another blurry concept, that of 'reasonable needs'. Yet the Soviet planned economy never achieved a clear understanding of what constituted 'reasonable needs' and even less how to identify them. Instead, presumed 'reasonable needs' were simply put into practice by the specific way of planning the economy. Within the logic of Soviet planned economy, larger sizes of clothes were deemed unreasonable. Producing large sizes were unprofitable for Soviet factories as the "excessive use" (Vihavainen/Bogdanova, p. 90) of fabrics did not result in higher prices for each item. Producing average-sized items or, following the logic of such a rationale, smaller sizes produced a larger amounts of income. While Zakharova's article demonstrates on the one hand that the Soviet consumer of the 1960s had and made choices, she concludes that "fashionable consumer culture was not widespread" (Vihavainen/Bogdanova, p. 107). Such a statement offers a rather bleak picture of the recently proclaimed age of consumerism in the USSR.

Similarly, Elena Bogdanova's history of the Soviet consumer illustrates the boundaries and limits of shopping or rather "obtaining" (***dostat'***) goods. Bogdanova analyzes the so-called books of complaints. Every shop and every Soviet institution had to have such a booklet in which the unsatisfied, grumbling Soviet citizen could write his complaint. As much as the existence of those ***"knigi zhalob"*** demonstrates the systematic practice of complaining, there were strategies employed by the complainants to make sure that consequences followed. However, those consequences were rarely improvement of the material condition of the writing citizen but rather redress for injustices or misuse of authoritarian power. According to the editors Vihavainen and Bogdanova, the "age of consumption" seems to be nothing more than a promise which only opened the gap between consumer and provider (which in the Soviet case was eventually the state or the Party) and consequently had to fail.

In terms of choices and level of consumption Julia Richers' and Radina Vučetić's articles about Hungarian and Yugoslav consumerism in the second edited volume under review deliver a less grim picture. The framing of the Hungarian socialist experiment as "goulash-communism" explicitly refers to the politics of consumption the regime of János Kádár implemented after the 1956 uprising. According to Julia Richers Kádár was so successful in introducing a consumer(ist) culture in Hungary that after the activists of 1956 had returned from the prison to the Hungarian society they were disgusted about the high level of consumption. "Consumption was considered as a means for de-politicization, stabilization and appeasement of the consumption-oriented population." (Boškovska et al., p. 248) Julia Richers succeeds in fleshing out the promises and pitfalls of socialist consumption as she illustrates the extent of stability and satisfaction the Hungarian consumer experienced. At the same time, she acknowledges the growing sense of disappointment felt by socialist consumers as they confronted a small range of choices, queues and other difficulties. In Richers' article, consumption is a means of stability for the regime and a pacifier for the society leading her to conclude that consumption was "political" (Boškovska et al., p. 248); it was a political tool and less an end in itself.

As so often, the Yugoslavian case is exceptional: Coca-Cola, Blue Jeans and Playboy were omnipresent. According to Radina Vučetić, the Yugoslav consumerism was Americanized to a degree some western European nations have not reached in the 1960s. Following Vučetićs history, there was no criticism of consumerism or superficiality we know from the Soviet or Hungarian case. The Yugoslav contribution to the age of consumption consists of a welcoming embrace of all shades of consumerism ***à l'occident***. Here the consumerist history is not a history of failure but rather a history of transnational trends.

Another oft-cited reason why consumerism supposedly initiated or accelerated the demise of the socialist experiment is linked to the sphere in which consumption usually takes place: the private sphere. Providing the citizenry with individual apartments instead of ***kommunalki***, cars instead of public transport, and television instead of cinema meant that the actual consumption of things increasingly took place behind closed doors. With the assumption that Socialist states were eager to monitor their citizens, such trends of consumption in private are often understood to have posed political problems. Alongside consumption, the public and the private is a prominent topic in Boškovska's edited volume. Kirsten Bönker's article on leisure and TV-watching skillfully links individualized consumption and the public sphere. She demonstrates how the Soviet regime used television to "emotionally include" (Boškovska et al., p. 203) the viewers into the socialist experiment and its vision of the socialist consumer. Similar to Richers' contribution, consumption here is interpreted as a stabilizing factor. Following Kirsten Bönker in her arguments, Julia Obertreis in her study on Polish television stresses the moments of un-controlled "societal communications" (Boškovska et al., p. 166). The popular "Cabaret" on Polish TV allowed criticism within its program and elicited public responses to the program in form of letters for instance. Politics were omnipresent in entertainment shows, Julia Obertreis argues, and this is not necessarily a politics of indoctrination and propaganda, but might well be a politics of social commentary. Although the title of the volume suggests a prominent role for questions of work and labour in Eastern Europe, only Ulf Brunnbauer explicitly discusses labour, the role of enterprises and the identification with work. By looking at Bulgarian labour relations, he questions the traditional dichotomy of private and public, argues against the so-called retreat into the private and even calls it a "myth" (Boškovska et al., p. 23). Malte Rolf, on the other hand, takes this "myth" for granted. The public spaces in Rolf's article are "empty", void and de-populated. In his view, the dichotomy between public and private contributed to the growing de-legitimization of the regime. Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller in her well-researched and complex article about the closed city of Severodvinsk examines celebrations of state holidays. Contradicting Rolf, she argues that official holidays like 1st of May provided spaces for individual modes of socialization: meeting friends, carrying banners while marching or gossiping. Emeliantseva Koller interprets the many possibilities of celebrating official holidays as a process of restructuring and transforming the late Soviet Union and not necessarily as manifestation of the disintegration of the political system.

As much as the 1920s in the Soviet Union are too frequently researched with the question of the Stalinist 1930s in mind, histories about the late Soviet Union rarely refrain from contemplating the demise of the Soviet Union. In other words, there often is a hint of teleological thinking in these accounts. Why the Soviet Union suddenly was no more is still under dispute. Answers range from national politics to economical reasons to inner-party feuds to performative shifts. For at least the first 15 years after the end of the socialist bloc, historians favoured top-down explanations. However, ever since a new cohort of social and cultural historians declared the post-war Eastern Europe as a main hub of historical research, a new

picture has begun to emerge. With the help of oral history which is gradually gaining widespread acceptance as a method of historical analysis, everyday life and practices of average citizens in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe complement the experience of “developed socialism”. Within this new analytical framework Esther Meier’s book is exemplary. Furthermore, in her history of Naberezhnye Chelny the end of the Soviet Union appears very distant. Some of the contributions in the edited volumes, especially those who subscribe to the notion of consumption as Pandora’s box are prone to peer towards the beginning of the end. However, as Esther Meier asks: Why does consumption or an apartment of your own (family) lead to less identification with Socialist regimes? And I would add, why is consumption Soviet-style (plenty of money, not much to buy) more of a Pandora’s box than consumption capitalist-style (plenty of goods, but not necessarily enough money to buy)? In both cases, people do not necessarily have what they need or want. As much as the paradigm of consumption allows us to take a fresh look at the late Soviet Union and consequently allows us to re-consider traditional notions about the presumably grey, poor, downtrodden and stagnating 1970s, it is a paradigm with a biased premise and has therefore only a limited explanatory power. But as re-considering the late Soviet Union only just begun, we can be open and curious about the emergence of new paradigms and new explanations of a time, which is not remote but remains to a certain extent less understood than the Stalinist 1930s.

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