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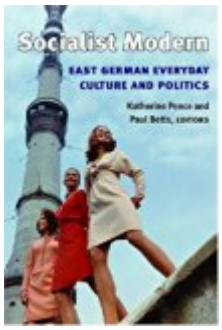

Paul Betts, Katherine Pence. *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 378 S. $26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-472-06974-3.

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This collection of interdisciplinary writings represents one of the most important works of what might be called the second wave of scholarship on the GDR. This next generation of research follows more than a decade of now well-known publications that sought to analyze the GDR: the extent to which it was or was not a dictatorship; whether East German citizens lived normal lives; judgments on that regime's confrontation of the Holocaust and its aftermath; the persistence of inequality in a country dedicated to equality. With a respectful nod to this first wave of research, the authors in *Socialist Modern* take on this scholarship, building on it as well as openly challenging it. Nor are the authors hesitant to argue amongst themselves, or to admit a new line of reasoning brought on by someone else's contribution.

The result is a dizzying panoply of diverse approaches to both familiar and fresh avenues of research, the kind of book that one would like to read in one sitting if one could only process so many propositions at once. I would like to extend the review of individual chapters to suggest how some of the authors can be read together for an even more provocative discussion of the creation of a "socialist modern" in the GDR. This is a book that the field has been waiting for, not only because it is the first successful edited volume of the second generation of scholarship on East Germany. Rather, its provocative, intertwined contributions allow for a linear reading or more selective approach: *Socialist Modern* is so engaging as to qualify for summer reading--and, one is tempted to say, not only for scholars.

The underlying theme of "modernity" pursued throughout the book permits many forms of inquiry. For Greg Eghigian, the work of psychologists and politicians created a "historically new way of imagining the modern being," in this case resulting in an East Germany surrounded by walls, real and psychological: *homo munitus* (p. 41). Eghigian's meticulous investigation into the evolution of the connection between the self and the East German state follows important developments in international and GDR scientific thought about the psyche. His employment of the nineteenth-century biologist Ernst Haeckel's infamous evolutionary paradigm, according to which "on-

togeny recapitulates phylogeny," allows insight into the heretofore poorly understood GDR socialist instrumentalization of rational scientific knowledge in the quest for an understanding of how humans and socialist society developed (cited on p. 53). His conclusion is one that resonates throughout the book: twentieth-century social and biological scientists throughout post-industrialized societies believed that humans, through judiciously applied social measures, could be reformed and even improved.

After a look at the psyche, then, it is appropriate to turn to the body, as Dagmar Herzog does in her chapter, "East Germany's Sexual Evolution." Herzog argues that the "virtually overnight" character of the sexual revolution of West Germany in the 1960s had no parallel in the East, where sexual attitudes took a slower path to emancipated ideas (p. 71). Rather, she concludes, the generally encouraging attitude in East Germany towards women's participation in society, from women's work to an outright rejection of the public image of the doting housewife (despite the reality of women's continued household duties in the East), allowed for a slow but steady erosion of traditional, conservative social mores and a gradual but clear transition to a new acceptance of premarital (mostly heterosexual) sex. Herzog's evidence, however, suggests that of some of the premises of her East-West comparison may be untenable: for example, did West Germany actually experience a sexual revolution in the 1960s if West German women of the 1970s and 1980s were driven to express public "fury" at "men's boorish and selfish behavior in bed" (p. 87)?

Her political contextualization of sex and romance, one that did not include a romance with the state, adds a new dimension to Alon Confino's narrative of an East German travel agent who looked for love at home and abroad. Confino writes the lures of travel on the body of Bettina Humpel, who crossed borders to the East and West regularly, including a "flight from the Republic" in order to join an Austrian lover. Confino's use of a (female) body to illustrate the possibilities that travel prohibitions created for someone who desired to travel frustratingly, if helpfully, complicates the question of impermeable borders. When read in the light of Herzog's discussion of love and romance, the rogue travel agent Humpel turns into a woman driven by the exoticism of love with a westerner, only to find that dream trumped by the reality of love of the Other, which paled in comparison with her love of the familiar--not only her East German husband, but the East German state. In this application of Herzog's contention that East German sexual culture was different from that of West Germany, one cannot help but ask what it was about Humpel's eastern husband that was more attractive than life with a western man. In answering this question, Alf Lüdtke's excellent essay on images of working men in East and West is useful. Far from viewing themselves as victims of a walled-in state, Lüdtke's working men made the apparent economic disadvantages suffered by East German men a virtue, one that even established them as having developed a specific socialist virility. This ideal drew on a distinctly GDR approach to male labor that valued the mixture of traditional ideals of "German quality work" with new, flexible solutions (born of necessity) to problems at work. The socialist day, in this implicit dialogue between Herzog and Lüdtke, manifested a degree of "Germanness" while also showing--even showing off--a pride in a new way of approaching work and social relationships, one to which Confino's runaway wife begged to return.

Thomas Lindenberger's contribution on asociality is based on the premise that a community needs to exclude some members in order to define the parameters of those who are admitted. His observation that historians have generally ignored the "pact" made between East German citizens and the state, which allowed for obedient citizens willing to trade autonomy for protection, can no longer be supported; indeed, much of the

first generation literature of how the GDR survived for half a century accused those citizens of accepting their lot for precisely this reason. Lindenberger's problematic generalization, that societies generally create a caste of excluded underclass citizens from immigrants (presumably legal or illegal) who anticipate inclusion by hard work and conformity, whereas the GDR "recruited its bottom layer from its own people" is corrected by Young-Sun Hong's analysis of the racist and xenophobic treatment of medical students from developing countries brought to the GDR under the auspices of sharing scientific knowledge with the objective of aiding decolonized countries. Indeed, Lindenberger's framework for understanding the institutionalization of social and societal rejection lends another dimension to Hong's discussion, suggesting that the GDR actually imported its underclass--a troubling hypothetical dimension of the medical exchange program that seems all too credible, albeit one that potentially includes conscious as well as unconscious motivations and outcomes.

In a consideration of the state's interest in controlling its citizens all the way into their homes, two chapters approach the motivations and degree of success of this less-obvious type of surveillance. In her essay, Dorothee Wierling reintroduces the concept of a dictatorship, in this case one established through the educational system, understood here as the larger state educational apparatus, which extended beyond the school system. Examining the GDR's youth policy throughout the 1960s and young people's trangression of officially prescribed "boundaries," Wierling highlights the GDR's conflicted aproach to addressing a general conflict that, officially, did not exist. Her description of youth as the "internal enemy" of the state--in the GDR, a massive group of young people waiting constantly in the wings to play western Beat music, ignore state regulations placed on acceptable public behavior, and show off their threateningly androgynous hair and clothing styles--is overstated as seeming unique in the context of the comparable generational differences that appeared in the post-industrialized countries of the period. One must concede that institutional structures in 1960s Paris or Madison were different than those in the walled-in GDR, but one must also concede that the state in all cases saw youth as a very real threat to the stability of the nation (and was sometimes correct in that estimation). The sentiment, moreover, was often mutual. The 1960s were not only a time of sexual revolution; they were also a time of extreme, violent anger at the state among young people in most post-industrial countries, and a time when many states saw fit to send in the militia to put down student riots--if necessary, with violence.

As Wierling suggests throughout this chapter, youth culture is a key site of tension between adults and young people. But this tension in the GDR was not the result of tightly controlled education and youth policy gone wrong, or else there would not have been similar fears of long-haired boys and short-haired girls listening to the Beatles in other, western countries. Lest we forget the conviction widespread within contemporary western democracies that students who did not conform to state and cultural expectations were an enemy to be eliminated with force, we should remember that it was not in a socialist bloc country that twenty-nine National Guard soldiers fired sixty-seven shots into a group of students in thirteen seconds, killing four and wounding nine, in 1970. I do not equate the tragedy at Kent State with the GDR's attempt to censor (even Beat) music as dangerous to the state. But throughout the 1960s and 1970s, governments took drastic measures to control their youth, and youth resisted and retaliated--sometimes with secret music concerns, sometimes with Molotov cocktails. In all cases, the "youth as internal enemy" leitmotif could be most easily identified in states that tried hardest to train young people as responsible, patriotic citizens. And, in all cases, one would be hard pressed not to find examples of states that

did not use scare tactics and violence as a primary means of disciplinary action.

In light of these circumstances, one cannot explain the actions of youth in the GDR or elsewhere as either in line with or contrary to the state's school system. Thus, Wierling's notion of an "educational dictatorship" is an oxymoron, for students at any level cannot be taught (or indoctrinated, if we wish to speak pejoratively of another country's schooling) without them learning how to think. And thinking is the real enemy of a dictatorship--and even the bane of many a capitalist politician, schoolteacher, or parent. Such basic educational theories must inform our understanding of youths' lives in the GDR if we are to move beyond such a seemingly harmless use of the term "dictatorship."

Also treating the state's penetration into the home, Paul Betts's chapter on the state's interest in the domestic interior offers a surprising analysis not only of the need for housing, but also of the creation of a viable socialist aesthetic for political legitimacy. His comment that the GDR home itself has surprisingly been largely ignored recasts the home as a stage of interaction between citizen and state, but one where the citizen ultimately has the upper hand. As powerful as this recognition is, it perpetuates the idea of a division of public and private that--while convenient for explanatory schemas--has not held up in other historiographies. His conclusion, that "GDR social life had become increasingly privatized over the decades" (p. 124), does not entirely follow from his exploration into the evolution of market research and the entwining of traditional and modern tastes. It is no surprise that in the field of interior design, East Germans--citizens and politicians alike--turned to styles that rested on historical models (such as Chippendale) infused with East German "proud craftsmanship"; this use of a reinterpreted past as a touchstone of legitimacy for a new state could be seen in every aspect of GDR society, from worker's culture (as demonstrated by Lüdtke) to psycho-scientific research (or by Eghigian). My concern about Betts's analysis rests on its underemphasis of the conscious Germanness of these sorts of endeavors, and an overemphasis on the Sovietization--real and perceived--of GDR political and social behaviors. His examples of citizens' agency in acceptance or rejection of proffered interior design models points to the very historical concept of free will, even in a country of military and political occupation.

Finally, Betts's use of photographs of interior design styles adds a potential dimension of further discussion to the topic, one that could not have been covered fully in the same single chapter: the degree to which interior and architectural designs were the result of aesthetics or material necessity. One example is the GDR re-casting of a Chippendale chair (both are pictured on p. 107). It would be easy to conclude that the pared-down style of the GDR version resulted from the continued influence of Bauhaus sensibility. But even a superficial inspection suggests other possibilities. The "GDR Chippendale" lacks the lateral brace between the two rear legs of the Chippendale model as well as the two ***arc en bouttant*** front braces that connect the chair seat to the left and right legs. The GDR chair's seat would have forced an uneven distribution of weight to the center and back of the seat, ultimately causing the center of the seat to crack. Whether this omission resulted from a lack of materials or, perhaps, training, is a question that only more research can answer.

Judd Stitziel's, Katherine Pence's, and Ina Merkel's contributions expand Betts's focus on markets, taste, and agency by exploring consumer desires. These contributions represent the insight afforded by scholarship on consumerism in the GDR--once considered a questionable avenue of research, this concern has changed the field so dramatically that it has become impossible to ignore the role of the market in its many manifestations. Stitziel positions the GDR as a state forced to negotiate with multiple actors in decidedly un-

communist economic practices via his discussion of the state's attempts to mollify unhappy (female) shoppers with their never-ending demand for more off-the-rack sizes and age-appropriate fashion. In making clear the sense of entitlement that citizens felt regarding their clothing when writing in letters of complaint to the state, or showing East Germans' zeal for the latest fashions that they often had to sew from remnants or other unusual materials, Stitziel also provides an important economic dissection of a complicated situation that historians have been too willing to dismiss as unimportant historically. Similarly, Pence highlights the contradictions in the state's attempt to integrate women into the workforce while these same women, as the traditional primary caretakers in the home, also had to find time (which could have been used in productive work modes) to stand in line for whatever foodstuffs were suddenly available on a given day. Merkel, in turn, reframes this view of the GDR as a "society of shortage" by insisting on this definition as a social construct that needs to be seen as part of a larger historical process--a proposal reinforced by Pence's reminder that the post-World War II occupiers were painfully aware of the need to not recreate the conditions that caused bread riots following World War I.

Inadvertently, these portrayals of consumer culture, by insisting that people bought and desired "things" from the banal to the exotic, try to accomplish two mutually exclusive tasks: they seek to demonstrate that a "socialist modern" included a complex network of consumer desires (and the state's unsatisfactory role in fulfilling these needs), even as they ignore significant similarities of circumstance and outcome in traditional "capitalist" economies. While production and development occurred on a different scale than (for example) in the United States during the same period, the structural issues are the same. It is not true, as Merkel believes, that no profit interests were at stake in the GDR: the case of DEFA film production, which I am researching, is one that shows unequivocally that money was indeed--at least in some instances--the bottom line. Nor can the U.S. economy be described, as Merkel implies, as wholly or mostly based on "free pricing" (p. 330); in fact, the U.S. government intervenes significantly in markets for corn, dairy products, oil, sugar cane, cotton, transportation, and water, in large part to pacify specific groups who could threaten national stability. In terms of the uneven burden of gender tasks (despite Herzog's discussion of the slow but steady change in these inequalities), I question whether Pence's conclusions actually support the idea that a "double burden" (or "triple burden" as Herzog mentions, following Andrew Port)[2] was particularly remarkable, given the double burden carried by the majority of women in post-industrial societies. Again, the scale and specifics differ--but does that phrase throw us off the path towards understanding the GDR because it obscures the persistent role of women in the West as caretakers regardless of their employment status? Such questions remain after reading Stitziel as well. The problem of a scarcity of sizes--especially for larger women--or the need to alter off-the-rack clothing--is a lament known all too well in the United States. The situation that Stitziel charts for the rural GDR under state-sponsored production and distribution is hardly unknown from a retail point of view in a capitalist society: in both cases, rural areas receive fewer consumer goods than urban centers, forcing shoppers to travel to larger cities to find desired items. These conditions resulted not primarily from a failure of the state to provide for its citizens, with citizens angry about the state's unfulfilled promises, but also from basic economic principles that apply in capitalist settings as well. Whether the state or a private fashion industry is making the clothing, only a certain number of sizes can be produced for any society. Trying to fit every person with off-the-rack clothing would entail an inefficient multiplication of sizes that would challenge any state or company.

In sum, the first generation of scholarship on the GDR portrayed that country as one so foreign as to be totally unrecognizable, as the late Daphne Berdahl touches upon in her chapter on the politics of memory. This collection suggests that the second generation of scholarship has slowly left behind descriptions and models of the GDR that no longer serve legitimate scholarly purposes. Even so, this scholarship is not yet ready to see where the GDR looked and acted according to post-industrial models and trends. Following Berdahl's lead, it is time to let go of the "quaint" (p. 360) image of the GDR and the Soviet bloc portrayed by vendors near the Brandenburg Gate, and also time to question the dichotomy, still apparent in much research, between a totalitarian state and a society worth pining after. In this sense I would suggest that the term "Ostalgie" has, with this volume, been laid to rest by even those authors who employ it. In these essays, the GDR and its former citizens, now part of a narrative that connects them in time and place with the rest of the world, even if only in outline form, have won the right to miss certain aspects of its existence--from ***Brötchen*** to diverse rhythms of daily life--without being accused of naïveté or asocial behavior. In the world of linguistics, we could describe the desire to hold part of the past, or even a representation of it, in our hands as metonymy, a part standing for the whole--a desire expressed by the tourist who seeks out a "gladiator" outside the Coliseum in Rome to have his photograph taken with, the young girl in a cowgirl hat and boots imagining herself performing Wild West feats of derring-do, or the American graduate student buying an "official" Soviet military cap that he knows has been fabricated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. All of these "things" represent parts and wholes that as historians we have not even begun to get to the bottom of. ***Socialist Modern***, however, is part of a very good start.

Note

[1]. Andrew I. Port, "The Silence of the Lambs, and Other Myths about the German Democratic Republic," presented at the conference "Between Past and Future: East Germany before and after1989," University of Toronto, March 30-31, 2007, 17.

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