Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany
Geoff Eley, Series Editor

Series Editorial Board
Kathleen Canning, University of Michigan
David F. Crew, University of Texas, Austin
Atina Grossmann, The Cooper Union
Alf Lüdtke, Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, Göttingen, Germany
Andrei S. Markovits, University of Michigan

Recent Titles

Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics, edited by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts
Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past, edited by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot
The Politics of Sociability: Freemasonry and German Civil Society, 1840–1918, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann
Work and Play: The Production and Consumption of Toys in Germany, 1870–1914, David D. Hamlin
The Cosmopolitan Screen: German Cinema and the Global Imaginary, 1945 to the Present, edited by Stephan K. Schindler and Lutz Koepnick
Germans on Drugs: The Complications of Modernization in Hamburg, Robert P. Stephens
Gender in Transition: Discourse and Practice in German-Speaking Europe, 1750–1830, edited by Ulrike Gleixner and Marion W. Gray
Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany, Dagmar Reese
Justice Imperiled: The Anti-Nazi Lawyer Max Hirschberg in Weimar Germany, Douglas G. Morris
The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness, edited by Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin
Modern German Art for Thirties Paris, Prague, and London: Resistance and Acquiescence in a Democratic Public Sphere, Keith Holz
The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany, Michael B. Gross
German Pop Culture: How "American" Is It? edited by Agnes C. Mueller
Character Is Destiny: The Autobiography of Alice Salomon, edited by Andrew Lees
Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich, Tina M. Campt
State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State, Ulrike Strasser
Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire, edited by H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl
Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany, Katrin Sieg
Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967–2000, Nora M. Alter
Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany, Andrew Lees
The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890–1960, Adelheid von Saldern
Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History, edited by Christhard Hoffman, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith
Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850–1914, Kathleen Canning

For a complete list of titles, please see www.press.umich.edu

Socialist Modern

East German Everyday Culture and Politics

Katherine Pence
and Paul Betts
EDITORS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
Ann Arbor

Copyright © by the University of Michigan 2008
All rights reserved
Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
⊗ Printed on acid-free paper

2011 2010 2009 2008 4 3 2 1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Socialist modern : East German everyday culture and politics / Edited by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts.
p cm. — (Social history, popular culture, and politics in Germany)
Includes index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-472-09974-0 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-472-09974-4 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-472-06974-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-472-06974-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Germany (East)—Social life and customs. 2. Politics and culture—Germany (East) 3. Socialism and society. 4. Popular culture—Germany (East) I. Pence, Katherine, 1968– II. Betts, Paul, 1963–

DD287.3.S63 2007
943'.1087—dc22 2007035405

Dedicated to the memory and spirit of Daphne Berdahl (1964–2007)

Contents

Introduction
Katherine Pence and Paul Betts 1

SELVES

Homo Munitus: The East German Observed
Greg Eghigian 37

East Germany's Sexual Evolution
Dagmar Herzog 71

Building Socialism at Home: The Case of East German Interiors
Paul Betts 96

The Travels of Bettina Humpel: One Stasi File and Narratives of State and Self in East Germany
Alon Confino 133

BELONGING

Youth as Internal Enemy: Conflicts in the Education Dictatorship of the 1960s
Dorothee Wierling 157

"The Benefits of Health Must Spread Among All": International Solidarity, Health, and Race in the East German Encounter with the Third World
Young-Sun Hong 183

"Asociality" and Modernity: The GDR as a Welfare Dictatorship
Thomas Lindenberger 211

The World of Men's Work, East and West
Alf Lüdtke 234

DESIRES

Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining: Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR
Judd Stitziel 253

Women on the Verge: Consumers between Private Desires and Public Crisis
Katherine Pence 287

Alternative Rationalities, Strange Dreams, Absurd Utopias: On Socialist Advertising and Market Research
Ina Merkel 323

Re-Presenting the Socialist Modern: Museums and Memory in the Former GDR
Daphne Berdahl 345

Contributors 367
Index 371

101. Walter Ulbricht, "Aus dem Rechenschaftsbericht des Zentralkomitees," in *Über den weiteren Aufschwung der Industrie, des Verkehrswesens und des Handels in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Aus dem Rechenschaftsbericht des ZK, den Diskussionsreden und dem Schlußwort des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem IV. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Berlin, 30. März bis 6. April 1954* (Berlin [East]: Dietz Verlag, 1954), 9.

102. "The Aktiv contained representatives of trade, the DFD, the specialist divisions of the central committee (ZK), the working group for women in the ZK, the FDGB, working women, representatives of the Women's Committees, housewives and a row of representatives of factories, as well as constructors, engineers, who are active in the area of household technology." SAPMO BArch SED ZK Abt. Frauen IV 2/17/33, Information der Arbeitsgruppe Frauen über die Probleme der allseitigen Erleichterung der Hausarbeit, 1957.

103. Ibid. See also the discussion in Karin Zachmann, "A Socialist Consumption Junction—Debating the Mechanization of Housework in East Germany, 1956–1957," *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002): 75–101.

104. SAPMO BArch SED ZK Abt. Frauen IV 2/17/33, Information der Arbeitsgruppe Frauen über die Probleme der allseitigen Erleichterung der Hausarbeit, 1957.

Alternative Rationalities, Strange Dreams, Absurd Utopias

On Socialist Advertising and Market Research

Ina Merkel

The most beautiful things in the world were never in the German Democratic Republic (GDR); they were always elsewhere—the country next door, for example, the other Germany, much reviled because of its capitalism; or the great Soviet empire, much praised for its revolution. In the GDR, by contrast, it was never so great; it was a small, provincial, scrawny land. And it also never had a "golden age" that all other surrounding countries had—perhaps it had just some "best years," as one exhibit called it. After the desperate experience of the postwar era, the time of awakening and renewal, of visibly improving life, was remembered as years of prosperity. But even these years—if we assume that the 1960s were really such a period—were not free of contradictions and opposing developments.

The idea of a golden age is a vision of the future that takes place in the past. But even the more distant past couldn't be appropriated into heroic memories in the GDR. For example, the 1920s were a time of inflation and mass unemployment for East Germany's working class, petty bourgeois, and rural citizens. They didn't gain anything from this. And they basically lost the war twice—both as Germans and as members of the lower class or, more precisely, as part of the sub-bourgeois classes. So the new German Republic offered much in the way of upward mobility and encouraged all children to study. Many among the so-called reconstruction generation enjoyed remarkable careers that enabled them to move from new GDR teacher to government minister, from working girl to professor, and so on. What is more, the GDR offered social security, peace, and growing prosperity. Nevertheless, this GDR is not the subject of wistful recollection,

even in the face of Germany's ongoing deindustrialization and mass unemployment. Neither its secure workplace, state child care, nor subsidized cultural undertakings are the stuff of nostalgia, since they mainly served the state's economic interests and added too little sparkle to everyday existence. The *Ostalgie* wave that has recently suffused the media cannot obscure this fact. In this way, Ostalgie is not to be confused with nostalgia proper, because it is not about a misty-eyed longing for a harmonious past but is rather a form of identity politics that is better understood as a protest against the way in which dominant interpretations of GDR history have robbed the GDR past of its subversive potential.

To be sure, the GDR was a country of common people (*kleine Leute*). It was mostly concerned with work and sometimes a bit of enjoyment. But just because the people were common does not mean that they didn't harbor dreams. Littler dreams, perhaps, but dreams nonetheless—of little cars, vacations on a cold little sea, snowless little mountains, little rivers, and perhaps a little love on the side as well. None of this has much to do with sparkle or even gold. Gold was the stuff of fairy tales or cinema or the glittering dresses beautiful women wore on their skin. Most would probably not have known where to begin with such a thing.

As little as the GDR wanted to be a truly consumer society, and no matter how absurd it is in the end to accuse it of *not* being one, it was certainly no golden age. Communism was never intended to be the fulfillment of individual desires but instead was based on the ideal of rational needs and the centrality of labor as the greatest need of all. And as for consumption, one imagined that once everyone could have everything that he or she really needed, the desire for symbolic distinction would disappear of its own accord. "Each according to his needs" was not a slogan based on the "all you can eat" principle but in fact presupposed rational consumers. However, rationality has little of the same luster as gold.

Perhaps it is precisely the different logic at work in this society and the reason why it didn't come undone for so long that needs explaining. In a peculiar way, consumer culture serves as a good explanatory field of investigation in this regard. On the one hand, it is connected to popular fantasies of living in excess or, put differently, prosperity for all; on the other, it is here where the contradictions between ideal and reality emerged in a dramatic experiential context. The following discussion will attempt to explore socialism's alternative rationality by focusing on two paradigmatic aspects of consumer culture—advertising and market research.

Closely connected to this is the question of why socialist utopian ideals were never fully abandoned in policy or in everyday consumer behavior.

Anthropological Approaches

At first the topic of consumer culture, advertising, and market research in the GDR seems almost absurd, since socialist societies are considered societies of shortage based on an elementary level of provisioning that departed dramatically from consumption in a modern sense. Historians still disagree as to whether one is dealing with consumer cultures as such when analyzing socialist societies. In these debates about the very definition of consumer culture, the abundance of goods produced by industrial society, and in particular the surplus "decencies" on offer from which "sovereign" consumers can choose "freely," serves as the main yardstick of evaluation. Socialism's conspicuous lack of competitive advertising ends up only perpetuating this long-standing preconception.

The standard investigation of GDR consumer culture as a history of dictatorial control based on systemically produced shortages—planned economy, command structures, and "dictatorship of needs" still parade as favorite catchphrases—has all but answered the questions about this society way before any new archival file has been opened. That is a great pity, for hasn't the unrestricted opening of virtually all archives—something still unimaginable in West European societies, by the way—made it possible to cast new light on the inner logic of socialist society and in turn to call into question received explanations by discovering new horizons of understanding?

An anthropological perspective that strives to understand the inner logic of the cultures and societies promises finer analyses and broader explanations. Its merit lies in reconsidering differing paths of modernization and alternate modes of development rather than disqualifying the GDR tout court as a dead end of research. From this perspective the study of consumer culture in the GDR is inseparable from the more general problems affecting all industrial societies: growing social differences, the squandering of scarce resources, the mismatch between supply and demand, and so forth. Even if many of the devised solutions ultimately failed to win over the citizenry, they still deserve to be taken seriously as alternative enterprises in themselves.

The field of cultural practice is all the more important in this regard, not least because of its breadth and interdisciplinary nature and because it doesn't examine the GDR as simply a closed chapter, as some of the more specialized political or institutional areas of contemporary history might approach it. The complete rupture after 1989 in institutions, the political system, economic life, and the work world stands in marked contrast to the continuities in lived experiences, mental patterns, and cultural practices. In the sphere of consumer culture, the dialectic of transformation and tradition is especially visible and is laden with symbolism and rich cultural meaning. The question of consumption in the GDR is thus no mere by-product of the *Wende* but attracted a great deal of public and political attention from the very beginning.

Official public discourse always put a premium on the theme of "de-differentiation" of GDR society by its equitable distributive principles and the uniformity of supply. Consumer choice in the GDR appears thus to be largely shaped by societal pressures and state directives that allowed only limited room for individuality ("niches") and decision making. Usually such developments are described in terms of collectivism versus individualization or homogenization versus plurality of lifestyles and thereby are commonly interpreted as part and parcel of the GDR's insoluble contradiction between norm and need. Typically the point of departure for these appraisals is the collapse of the GDR, whose causes are often attributed to deficits in the consumer sphere together with constraints on mobility, such as the freedom to travel. Invariably the blame is assigned to either the central administration of the planned economy or the "primacy of politics," wherein all economic questions were systematically subordinated to socialism's overarching political imperatives. Underlying this thesis is the assumption that consumer shortages could have been avoided under different political or economic conditions, in this case one of private property and market competition.

However, shortage does not exist in and of itself but is always a relational concept linked to a specific historical context. Similarly, the concept of a "society of shortage" is misleading in that it is based on the logical misconception that shortage necessarily limits possibilities of behavior and inevitably leads to frustration, envy, stinginess, and covetousness. Yet it is precisely in shortage economies or in times of shortage that individual consumer behavior is often marked by a remarkable ability to improvise and seek outlets for hedonistic pleasures. Both these forms of behavior can bring deep satisfaction, underlining the point that the cultural practices

associated with shortages can be—and are—unexpectedly diverse. As such they go well beyond the experience of restriction, moderation, and the rational use of resources to include experiences of pleasure and creativity as well.

The term *shortage society* still serves as a controversial concept in East-West discourse, one in which Western cultural criticism often ignores the problem of "surplus society" altogether. The West becomes a colorful normative foil against which the GDR appears in bland black and white. Admittedly, this was often reflected in the attitudes of many GDR citizens, who measured their own lives against perceived notions of West Germany. From this perspective the East-West conflict was seen as primarily a clash of economic systems viewed as polar opposites, as consumer culture under socialist conditions was subjected to derision and dismissal. Yet the concept *shortage society*—despite its admitted value in describing particular developments—fully misses the self-understanding of the GDR, which never sought to become a Western-style consumer society but rather saw itself as embarking on the path toward a more civilized, humane "culture society" (*Kulturgesellschaft*). There is no reason why this shouldn't be another yardstick with which to measure real-existing socialism.

The departure point of socialist consumer policy was the communist ideal of satisfying needs (leisure time, rich relationships, and cultivated individuality instead of material wealth) that were only able to flourish in partial and fragmentary ways under the conditions of real-existing socialism. Indeed, it is precisely the contradiction between communist utopia, socialist policy, and popular hedonistic desires that accounts for the peculiarities of GDR consumer culture. If one investigates the GDR's consumer culture with this contradictory character in mind, then one cannot help but arrive upon a surprising phenomenon: the Party and state leadership were put under enormous pressure by the consumer demands of its citizenry. In fact, consumer culture was the Achilles' heel of the system, a field of public debate on which the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and state leadership knew that they could win or lose popular approval. Granted, there was broad agreement between the leadership and the people about specific utopian ideals such as notions of just distribution and social leveling. Over the decades these ideals served as the cement that—despite deep problems—nonetheless held the society together. For this reason, mine is a plea for approaching GDR everyday life and cultural patterns in the GDR without presuming the overwhelming influence of the economic system and political events. Rather, what we need to do is to delve into the

world of individual subjects, their longings, values, and possibilities for agency in concrete conditions, and to show that GDR society existed for so long because there was—alongside the conflicts and opposition—general consensus about key goals and ideals. And it was precisely the fact that these ideals were only partially and unconvincingly translated into reality—the long farewell to utopia that the Party leadership completed in the 1970s—that prompted GDR citizens in 1989 to demand substantial reforms. One cannot understand today's problems—what Jürgen Kocka summarizes with the term *unification crisis*[1]—if one does not grasp this interface of politics and culture, utopia and reality, or, for that matter, state tutelage and individual subjectivity.

In this sense, the study of consumer history of the GDR is best developed and pursued from three perspectives: communist utopia, real-socialist politics, and cultural practice. The first theme of utopian ideals touches on the reconstruction of cultural values that were closely connected to ideas of socialist consumerism. They constituted an important starting point for understanding not only the state's consumer policies but also the people's expectations, demands, and perceptions of normality. As such the formative moments of utopia in terms of consensus and legitimacy are of special interest. What must be investigated secondly is how consumer policy dovetailed with original communist ideals and to what extent it was either partially realized, suppressed, forgotten, revalued, or eventually abandoned. On the one hand, consumer policy in the GDR can be seen as a paternalistic politics of provisioning; on the other, democratic forms of consumption developed over the course of GDR modernization, making a heterogeneous consumer culture possible. Third, the history of GDR consumerism must address the practices of consuming, individual acquisitive strategies, differentiated lifeworlds, as well as the transmission of particular mentalities. This raises an important question of what relationships individuals developed with the surrounding "world of goods" under these circumstances and what changes they experienced in their consumer mentality and consumer behavior over the decades.

The following essay will address these three levels by focusing on two key instances of consumer culture: consumer research and advertising. Despite the absence of competition in the GDR, they were both widely practiced and formalized in institutions, albeit with unique characteristics and functions. Both were informed by an ideal conception of consumption within socialism that clashed with the real existing needs of individuals. Both were meant to mediate between production and consumption in the

place of an absent market mechanism. Within consumer research, a utopian socialist concept of need was developed and discussed. Advertising was supposed to spread this consumer ideal and to influence the development of needs through education. However, the very logic of the medium complicated such a policy, since advertising is designed to entertain and incite pleasure. Therefore it inevitably opened up a Pandora's box of symbolic meanings that far exceeded the object and its use value. Policies could not resolve this ambivalence, and consequently the state all but ended advertising in the 1970s. Consumers acted as the starting and end point of both consumer research and advertising, but their cultural practices were not addressed. In the third section, the following question then arises: which diverse forms of individual adaptation developed under these conditions?

Consumption and Reason: The Planning of Needs

One of the basic paradigms of the socialist economic system was the conception that needs, and by extension production, could be planned. Through changed property relations the central state's grip on all economic life was guaranteed. Production output and development costs were supposed to be harmonized with each other. This promised to lead to the salutary effects of rationalization, where resources and capacities would no longer overlap in a way that led to senseless waste. Long-term planning is an elementary component of every complex economy. But in the GDR the claim proved problematic that productivity could be centrally determined and implemented down to the smallest firms.

The consequence was bottlenecks and so-called planning surpluses (*Überplanbestände*), both of which showed how production was neglecting basic consumer needs. Since prices as a regulating instrument were eliminated for ideological reasons—price stability was ultimately the criterion for the superiority of the socialist system—the appropriate solution was seen to lie in the scientific study of needs. One expected from consumer research exact predictions about which consumer goods the population needed in which quantities. In the Ministry for Trade and Supply, the crossing point between production and consumption, two tasks were assigned to the newly created Institute of Needs Research formed in 1961 (later renamed the Institute of Market Research) as key areas of study: influence on production and the education of needs. One of the key goals

of socialist production was ostensibly "the greatest possible satisfaction of the growing needs of society." One could only achieve this if "the needs were known in their quantity and quality, when [trade] is informed about need, its development and changes, and thus can influence production accordingly."[2] This was first formulated by the political economist Wolfgang Heinrichs in his 1955 book about the foundations of consumer research. The results of the questionnaires should however "not simply serve as a registry of the expression of consumers' needs with the goal of an appropriate corrective for production and trade, but will simultaneously be made of use for guiding consumer needs in the interest of constructing socialist living and consumer habits."[3] Under capitalist relations of production, market research has a fundamentally different function. It is an instrument of industry, the producer, so as to create a complete market overview "of conditions in general and prices in particular" in order on this basis "to exploit for itself the most favorable exchange possibilities (prices)."[4] Since various producers compete with the same goods, or different goods compete among themselves (motorcycles compete with refrigerators, for example), the payoff was to be the knowledge from market research about which preferences the shoppers gave for one or the other product and for what reasons. This economic interest was lacking in GDR firms, however. What is more, retailers exerted no sort of economic pressure. Rather than free pricing, political pressure was exerted on retailing to lift this pressure completely off of production and to provide no economic stimuli to producers. Therefore, the findings collected by market research in the GDR and the policy suggestions emerging from them all but fell into a void.

Yet these research findings were extremely valuable in another sense in that they served as a unique form of empirical sociology. Today we can thank this agency for amassing unusually rich findings about GDR living standards, income conditions, and consumer preferences across various social groups, in effect making possible a more nuanced picture of historical changes in lifestyles and mentalities. These market research reports are valuable as well insofar as they were not ideologically driven but often chronicled real problems and issues. People and their desires stood at the center of these empirical investigations. The Institute of Market Research was the first—and for a long time the only—establishment in the GDR that could conduct such wide-reaching representative surveys. Surveys often asked about possession of consumer goods at home as well as other consumer wishes. Invariably they were conducted anonymously. Time and again the consumer researchers praised the great openness of the population. "In one survey of 6000 randomly selected consumers, there were only 2.6 percent refusals to answer."[5] Yet this number rose to 4 percent in 1965 and 8 percent in 1966; and these numbers kept rising. Still, in this short period of time, thirty-five thousand households or individuals from more than 440 cities and communities were surveyed, a remarkable sum even if it is only noted offhand in the literature.

What is particularly interesting is that GDR consumer research systematically extended its objectives and methods far beyond the field of consumption. Instead, many of the surveys touched on social relations in the GDR such as youth and leisure, old-age poverty, and discrimination against women. Alongside income and possessions, budgeting of time was also investigated. This shift in research interest from consumption to lifestyles was no coincidence, however, but was a logical result of the utopian concept of socialist lifestyle that developed shortly after the foundation of the institute. The utopian core of the "Theses on Consumption in Socialism"[6] presented in 1963 laid down the idea of equality in relation to the distribution of socially produced wealth for incomes as much as for produced goods. There were no ideas of consumer policy in this sense, because they were always expressed as social policy through just distribution rather than in reference to the dubious achievements of the Western world, such as consumer freedom of choice. Thus the determination "that the level of consumption of various classes and statuses . . . presently shows a very strong differentiation"[7] created the demand for an above average development of monetary income of lower income groups. In this regard, forms of "prestige consumption" (*Geltungskonsum*) were strongly criticized, often in the form of unjustifiably rich household possessions, an overemphasis on personal property, and so forth. All of this was to be eliminated.[8] According to the utopian communist ideal, the desire to rise above others would disappear on its own if everyone had the same opportunity to gain access to the same goods. Distinction would then no longer derive from discrepancies of material wealth but rather from varieties of individual self-creativity.

A second utopian moment aimed at changing consumer habits. This didn't have to do just with "prestige consumption" per se but with the speed of changing fashions, love of shopping, and discarding of things. "Rational consumer norms" or "reasonable consumption" were opposed to these attitudes in the name of longevity, functionality, and standardization. To this end designers were asked to deliver classic—and therefore

long-lasting—design solutions for functionally mature products. Third, the concept of socialist consumption was connected with the idea that "the individual framework for consuming goods as personal property . . . , which remains for many consumers the single or dominant form of organizing consumption, would lose its meaning." The social provision of food, laundry centers, and lending services of everything from record players to cars was supposed to offer an attractive alternative to individual consumption.

The ideal of a just distribution of available social wealth was connected to ideas of reducing consumption. This was related to the GDR's difficult economic situation, as well as to the mental makeup of the Party leaders, who had survived the privation and misery of the Weimar and Nazi periods. Conscious reduction to real necessities didn't automatically mean renouncing comfort or fashion, though. The main formula was to provide use value instead of prestige consumption. The desire for mobility was thereby tolerated, but not to the extent that everyone had to own a car. Yet the policymakers did not view consumer opposition as a natural reaction to the planned economy. Rather, they identified the roots of consumer opposition among consumers in which "a large number of habits and remnants from capitalist society are still present. Therefore a constantly active influence on the development of desires of the people is necessary. . . . This will only be successful in the struggle against every form of prestige consumption, manifestations of egoism and the overemphasis of personal interests over the interests of society."[9]

Although a strongly paternalistic streak toward the population is evident, one must not overlook the fact that such values were also held dear among the lower levels of GDR society, especially for that generation that survived the years of privation and misery. Demands to limit consumption in a rational fashion—be it in the development of durable goods, the concentration on use value, and/or the avoidance of symbolic distinction—was very much part of both the long tradition of proletarian self-help (i.e., consumer cooperatives) as well as the educated bourgeois tradition of consumer criticism. It was thus taken for granted that a virtue was being made of necessity; that moderation was compulsory (and temporary) rather than desired and permanent; that an austere lifestyle was the very expression of these specific material conditions; and that consumer desires and longings among the GDR citizenry were often oriented toward the lifestyles of completely different classes and strata.

With the rise of the postwar generation—a new, large, and above all independent consumer group with specific desires and money to spend—it became clear how utopian these ideals were. A 1971 study conducted by the Institute of Market Research cautiously concluded "that the consumer habits of the population in terms of their lifestyles in principle changes very slowly over a long historical period."[10] The ideals were therefore delayed but not set aside completely. This antagonism between socialist goals and the real needs of the masses shaped GDR consumer and social policy. The story of GDR advertising dramatized the homegrown contradictions in which this policy was embroiled.

The Charm of Everyday Life: Leitmotifs in Advertising

West German interaction with East German consumer culture was typically confined to shop windows. Amid the flood of cult books that have appeared since 1989, the curious and weird-looking shop windows were rarely left out. Favorite motifs always cropped up: the forced politicization of the world of goods, featuring busts of Lenin, slogan-laden ribbons wrapped around brassieres, and masses of identical items on display in what were known as "stacked windows." Even the last refuge of advertising—the display window—was dismissed as symptomatic of an impoverished imagination and deep indifference toward the economy. Many authors condemned socialist advertising as utter nonsense.[11] But contrary to memory, there was a lively and diverse advertising culture at least until the 1970s, as noted in posters or advertisements suffusing newspapers, magazines, cinema, television, and radio.

Over the decades, socialist advertising was hotly debated as a controversial cultural phenomenon. On the one side stood the rejection of Western shopping culture; competitive advertising was to be forbidden, since desires that could not be fulfilled should not be whetted. Others countered that advertising was a fitting medium to make new products known, to publicize growing prosperity and economic power, and to propagate new ideals of socialist lifestyle. Still others claimed that advertising offered a certain cultural entertainment value. It could be funny, stir attention, create enjoyment, and better link the viewer's worlds of experience. Advertising, so went the logic, didn't have to do this in a heavy-handed manner; it could also do so satirically and ironically. In each case, though, it was clear

that advertising created images that were consciously set apart from reality. It was this very gap between image and reality that created the enjoyment of the advertisement in the end.

Consumers are supposedly seduced into buying goods through images of fun. This is both the hope of manufacturers and the source of criticism among intellectuals, since both sides understand that these goods are often things that aren't "really" needed. Advertising is instrumental in helping create these "false" needs through desire for prestige, the pleasure of possession, and status consciousness. While this was always accepted in the West as a necessary part of the market's need to stimulate consumption, those in the East thought they would remain untouched by it on account of the fact that there was no profit interest at stake. In the West one assumed that advertising always lied, distorted reality, peddled myths, and undermined Enlightenment principles.[12] Under socialism, by contrast, advertising was assigned the didactic function of rational education and consciousness-raising about the virtues of a modest social lifestyle: "Socialist advertising is determined by humanistic principles; it informs the people and enlightens them about that which is useful to them."[13] Advertising in the GDR was thus distinguished from its Western counterpart in its reasoned, enlightened approach to product publicity.

This ideal was scarcely practicable, however. While advertising aimed to propagate socialist lifestyles, in the end its content was severely circumscribed by pressing economic imperatives. This determined the ebb and flow of advertising policy. In the 1940s and 1950s, newspaper announcements and cinema advertising were the dominant advertising media. After 1949 the SED-sponsored advertising agency DEWAG also produced cinema films. In 1954 the Party organ *Neues Deutschland* published a study of print ads in various newspapers and studied differences in the advertising behavior practiced by both private and "people's" firms. Private firms were greatly overrepresented in overall production. In order to change this situation and to ensure that more attention would be devoted to socialist economics, the Ministry for Trade and Supply founded a department devoted to advertising and shop window design.[14] With it the progress and success of the people's economy were supposed to be amply shown to the people. By broadcasting that the GDR too was progressing toward prosperity, the wind could be taken out of the sails of the critics of the planned economy. As a consequence, it is wrong to say that socialist advertising was not competitive; yet its aim was not the hocking of brands or products but rather the legitimacy of the "people's economy" itself.

During the 1960s advertising was increasingly called upon to help regulate the effects of the market. One could not advertise goods that were in short supply, whereas those goods that were plentiful were hyped incessantly. With time, advertising campaigns took on great meaning in connection with the problems of supply. In 1959 the SED Central Committee initiated a concerted campaign for margarine, which was meant to mitigate the shortage of butter. Its central motto—"Valuable, because it's rich in vitamins"—was an appeal to individual health and energy. In 1960 full-page color ads appeared in the *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* magazine that perversely displayed a backdrop of oranges, bananas, grapes, peaches, and peppers, together with abundant vegetable baskets stocked with tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and melons. A small, gray cube of wrapped margarine was placed in the foreground. Margarine was supposed to contain all these good vitamins. Such health propaganda became a standard refrain for pitching basic socialist items. In 1960 there was an advertising campaign for fresh fish; in 1966 the "Goldbroiler" chickens and eggs were peddled with similar messages.

The increasing interest among retailers toward advertising went far beyond the perennial problems of supply and demand. When it was decided in 1959 to broadcast ads on television, the head of the Department of Television Advertising, Hans Lockhoff, justified it thus:

> Should we hide our light under a bushel? . . . Life in our Republic has become more beautiful and easier. Energy and industriousness in production have borne fruit. The economy has taken a large step forward. . . . But does everyone see this heartening result, or are there still contemporaries who sit in their comfortable home, chewing on their rich food, all the while praising the unattainable "West" to the heavens? Don't fantastic notions about our life still haunt many West German minds? . . . But what's sure is that we are neglecting to publicize to everyone [our] better life in everyday practice through one of the biggest and most concrete forms of agitation: advertising our economy. Don't [the workers] have the right to experience through interesting ads, colorful posters, and amusing filmstrips all the things that are available to them, how they can live more culturally and more beautifully thanks to the fruit of their labors? Shouldn't one say in a more cheerful form—as opposed to heavy articles and commentary—how one can live more cheerfully? . . . Good advertising is missing as an ingredient in fulfilling our primary economic task, like

salt in soup. Where else can one express the optimistic feeling of our better life, the justified pride in our collective achievements, and the solid conviction in our superiority more effectively to the masses, more concisely, or more interestingly than in the colorful palate of advertising?[15]

Apart from the risible claim that advertising would somehow document everyday life, this plea arose from the strong desire to recognize product advertising as a crucial means of political propaganda. Indeed, it was meant to counteract the growing influence of Western advertising. Socialist advertising thus acquired a new function in the ideological battle between the two political camps, conceived as it was as oppositional advertising (*Gegenwerbung*). Yet it was not especially convincing in this respect. When Walter Ulbricht drew attention in a 1962 report to the fact that every year enormous amounts were spent on advertising that had no clear payoff, this had immediate and lasting effects. Now advertising was suddenly considered a total waste. The Council of Ministers then passed a resolution to restrict advertising expenditures by 50 percent, since it had supposedly been proven that the influence of many ad campaigns in the previous months had no relation to their expense. Demands now grew louder that advertising should be eliminated completely, mainly because it contradicted the essence of socialism's social order.[16]

In 1963 there was another twist in connection to economic policy reform. That year's "New Economic System of Socialism" was an attempt to encourage profitability in the economy and to strengthen the individual responsibility of factories. In this context, great meaning was again attached to advertising as a means of regulating supply and demand. Television advertising increased, and sales doubled. The producers of television advertising rejoiced: "With the New Economic System we have overcome the long-standing misperception of the minimal effects of television advertising and the low regard toward its economic usefulness. By making good use of the money-commodity relationship in our national economy, profit will become the decisive criterion for evaluating the performance and management of the economy more generally."[17] For the first time the concept of "consumer freedom of choice" now entered the discussion, and with it the influence upon and education of the consumer was identified as advertising's most important function. "Socialist advertising must be geared toward the fulfilment of socialist consumer standards and lifestyles, along with overcoming capitalist remnants still lingering in the mentality

of people. The influence of socialist consciousness must therefore be brought in closer relation with the concrete supply of available goods. . . . From this our populace will see that even within socialism such mental obstacles still exist, and that every effort must be made to free ourselves from their ideological effect."[18]

Yet this hope was never fulfilled, since advertising was prone to constant criticism. Neither could it manage to mediate supply and demand, nor did its proclaimed cultural value of entertainment square very well with broader socialist intellectual principles. Advertising was simply condemned as a senseless waste of precious resources, too closely aligned with dangerous and unwanted Western tendencies.[19] Apart from the difficulty of establishing its political and economic legitimacy, it was really advertising's peculiar media existence as an independent field of symbolic meaning that was its Achilles' heel under socialism. How was a socialist lifestyle supposed to look visually anyway? Smiling families gathered around new refrigerators or televisions? A handsome woman with a vacuum cleaner in hand? How could individual consumption in everyday life be represented as particularly socialist? The advertising leitmotifs of socialist lifestyle tended to cluster around positive images of collective leisure, joyful working women, and health promotion; others focused on idyllic images of youth, family, and couples' happiness. Perhaps the particular charm of viewing GDR advertising today derives from its close relationship to the everyday life and dreams of the time. Little wonder, then, that the main accusation leveled at GDR advertisers was that they tended to reproduce Western consumer images. Consumer asceticism, the self-conscious confinement to use value, and/or functional durability found little resonance in advertising copy.

By the end of the 1960s, SED leaders maintained their conviction that advertising was economically senseless, politically dubious, and culturally damaging. After a long debate in 1975 the Council of Ministers issued a proclamation about the virtues of thrift, which in practice added up to a prohibition on advertising across the land. Permitted were only advertisements for material economy, health care, insurance, cultural policy, production publicity, and the lottery. With it went the end of television advertising, as well as spots in newspapers, radio, and cinema; the advertising industry itself was all but shut down beyond export publicity. In consequence, the campaign to give advertising a new substance and meaning beyond market competition had come to a close. What the very dysfunctionality of socialist advertising paradoxically made clear is that socialist

society was also a consumer society shaped by its industrial mass production and urban lifestyle, increasing leisure time and disposable income. And it is primarily this common image of European consumer society that socialist advertising wanted to communicate as well.

The Art of the Consumer: Practices of Appropriation

Consumer conditions under socialism have been a topic among scholars of late. But what does that mean for everyday life, consumer strategies and practices of appropriation? To be sure, the notion of the worker state was the official concept under which all social groups and activities were subsumed. Lifelong salaried labor shaped the daily and weekly rhythm of all workers, and it also structured more personal relationships between the sexes and within families. Nonetheless, the dependence on paid work as the only source of financial gain (since capital and property were absent) provided some room for economic profit, mobility, and social distinction. By means of the mass production of consumer goods, whose standardization severely reduced any variety, all the while making what had been luxury items more and more widely available, the social leveling tendencies of socialist economics were further strengthened. This was intended to lead to a certain similarity of lifestyles, not least because the equalization of salaries and prices was supposed to reflect a shared and equitable world of material conditions.[20]

But how were these broader tendencies toward socioeconomic homogenization received and represented? Is it true, for instance, that what Günter Gaus called the "land of the common people," Dietrich Mühlberg "an underclass society," and Martin Kohli "a society almost without propertied classes" necessarily brought about some sort of cultural homogenization? Did the state's egalitarian crusade really lead to standardized lifestyles? Is, then, the hallowed socialist lifestyle a result of the cultivation and general application of proletariat virtues, or was it rather—thanks to rising general education and material prosperity—more of a "deproletariatization" and "bourgeoisification" of the citizenry despite the state's propaganda to the contrary? Without a doubt all social groups were greatly affected by the dramatic transformations of GDR consumerism and leisure culture, which included the massive introduction of consumer technology into the household and the widespread enjoyment of what were once luxury goods. As the Institute of Market Research stud-

ies showed, workers were disinclined toward pursuing social distinctions through consumerism since their incomes were quite modest. In fact, the trendsetters in the world of social distinction were the remains of the entrepreneurial class, artisans, high-ranking functionaries, and the technical intelligentsia. While no precise statistical information is available, it is quite clear that these income groups were the first ones who were able to purchase a television, washing machine, refrigerator, and car; had larger homes; and went often on holiday. Still, it should be noted that they—along with collectivized farmers—had the longest workday in comparison to other groups.

Consumer research on the socioeconomic differentiation of GDR society according to income yields some interesting results. Alongside the occupation categories of workers or employees (*Arbeiter/Angestellte*), intelligentsia, artisans, self-employed workers, and farmers were included retirees and students as distinct social groups. Yet this not only revealed the predominance of "sub-bourgeois" (*unterbürgerlichen*) groups but also indicated further distinguishing elements as noted in table 1.[21] Leaving aside the negligible demographic groups of private entrepreneurs and self-employed workers, what is striking is the income discrepancy according to age, which in this case underlines that certain groups (students and retirees) remained outside the work process. Yet these exceptional groups cannot deflect attention away from the fact that the GDR was clearly a very leveled middle-class society (*Mittelstandsgesellschaft*), with the workers occupying the bottom end of the income scale.

What is more, highly diverse consumer lifestyles also developed among these groups. There are many reasons for this. To the differences in lifestyle among those living in villages, small towns, and big cities can be added the differentiating factors of educational level, gender, age, and

TABLE 1. Average Net Income According to Specific Social Group

Class/Group	1965	1970	1975	1980
Workers/Employees	105	105	104	106
Intelligentsia	133	143	134	137
Artisans	161	146	165	161
Self-Employed	177	170	186	189
Farmers	120	126	129	129
Retirees	40	47	47	41
Students	30	28	31	29
Total	100	100	100	100

generation. Among people living in rural settings, thriftiness, for example, was generally more pronounced, since they were relatively more self-sufficient and less interested in fashionable clothes, haircuts, restaurants, and holidays than their urban counterparts. Different educational levels could be noted in leisure pursuits and consumer practices: intellectuals read more; constantly sought professional qualifications; watched television moderately; took relatively numerous holidays; developed hobbies such as film, photography, and album collecting; frequented theater; and moved in circles who wrote texts for a living. Intellectuals in the GDR were by and large enthusiastic home improvers: they liked to renovate, build furniture, and tend gardens. Since the 1960s youth became a distinctive consumer group. They were interested in fashion and pursued leisure activities that ensured their cherished generational independence, such as motorcycling, camping, and attending musical events. As soon as young people moved into households of their own, their consumer preferences naturally changed. The financial handicap of the elderly was also extremely noticeable. Retirees lived on the edge of poverty and had little latitude in terms of consumer desires. Gender-specific differences were manifest above all in leisure time. Women had on average over 40 percent less free time than men.[22]

Due to the distribution of privilege, certain groups had access to more resources than others. Older members of the intelligentsia, for example, were given key concessions to entice them to stay in the GDR.[23] Younger members of the intelligentsia, by contrast, had to work harder to attain the same social standards. They also received the short end of the stick when it came to the allocation of decent offices. Young workers were comparatively better off, since they had earlier secured high incomes and could make use of wider social networks for support and provisioning. Those who worked in large export industries were privy to special favors. High-ranking state officials and diplomats, for their part, were able to buy luxury goods in select specialty shops. Single women, and especially those with children, were most neglected among all social groups, while retirees too had to eke out a meager existence at the social margins.

In the 1970s and 1980s the ownership of Western currency acquired increasing importance in East German everyday life, as it seriously transformed income relations. Society became stratified according to "everyone's [Western] aunt's generosity." Access to precious goods and services now was less determined by saved income than by special personal contacts. However one interprets the causes of this development, it did give

rise to two contradictory social effects: it accelerated the trends toward both the de-differentiation and re-differentiation (that is, the individualization) of social life. This was especially notable in consumer practices.

For one thing, the broader trend toward income leveling, controlled goods supply, and standardized design inadvertently exerted a strong compensatory pressure toward individualization. Collecting, bartering, bribing, queuing, complaint writing, do-it-yourself projects, moonlighting, home renovation, and general improvisation of all kinds were common expressions of an enormous East German will toward the self-design of life (*Selbstgestaltung des Lebens*). Under the conditions of limited choice, consumerism was a call to creativity, resourcefulness, and individual problem solving. Yet the energy expended on cultural distinction was by no means the quest for social prestige but instead the expression of personality. Despite the severe limitations of real existing socialism, there was always the possibility to make something from what was available, to stylize one's domestic and personal world.[24]

What is more, it was not only GDR goods that were available to individuals. From the very beginning, West German consumer objects and values found their way across the cold war divide. This was especially the case with older citizens, whose own biographical experiences of the "other social system" served as ruptures and dislocation in their everyday lives. As a result, GDR consumer practices were not exclusively determined by the peculiarities of socialism's logic, values, and ideals. They were equally shaped in mosaic fashion by elements from various historical experiences, periods, and social systems.

In this way, consumer culture under socialism shared essential elements with the broader modernization processes found in post-1945 Western Europe and the United States. This was particularly the case with the shortened life span of goods as a result of rapidly changing tastes and styles, the consumer's coming of age in terms of the role of goods in identity formation, as well as the more general rationalization and individualization of lifestyles. What distinguished socialism, however, was the delayed effects of these developments thanks to the GDR's social structure and dominant ideals. Indeed, the very absence of any hegemonic bourgeois class meant that so-called proletariat virtues (such as pragmatism and hedonism) not only were more present culturally but were also ideologically supported. Consumer ideals such as practical use and product durability—as opposed to prestige consumption and fashion—eventually ossified over time. Alongside the dominant everyday images of material

prosperity stood other powerful personal ideals: adequate leisure time for the development of individuality and rich social relations became prized values in themselves. In this value system, money carried virtually no symbolic meaning.

Nevertheless, the communist ideals of consumerism in a classless society did not take hold in the GDR. But this was not because of the country's desolate economic situation or because it never succeeded in creating attractive alternatives to individual forms of consumption. It failed because the needs and desires of the people stood in opposition to these ideals. GDR society was faced with a conflict of values that it was ultimately unable to resolve. The socialist utopia promised equality, fair distribution, social security, and communal solidarity. Real-existing capitalism by contrast offered freedom of choice and the possibility of individualization. Banal as it may sound, the GDR couldn't have it both ways.

The GDR, as noted at the beginning of this essay, had no ideal concept of a golden age. Its utopian concept was "geared toward the future," as echoed in the country's national anthem. It believed it had created the preconditions to become the best of all possible worlds. As Gerhard Schulze has recently argued, such an idea is shared by all modern societies.[25] This is a fundamental dimension of the very logic of development and one that stands in a critical relationship to itself. This ambivalence and reflexivity renders absurd the quest for an idealized golden age, historical redemption, and the notion of secular paradise. There can be no imagined happy ending to history and no realized utopian concept in these societies, since this itself would spell the end of the possibility of further development. The GDR then failed in its own utopian aspiration in a double sense: first because it went unfulfilled and second because it remained unreceptive to the dreams and wishes of its own people.

Translated by Paul Betts and Katherine Pence

NOTES

1. Jürgen Kocka, *Vereinigungskrise. Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Göttingen, 1995).
2. Wolfgang Heinrichs, *Die Grundlagen der Bedarfsforschung. Ihre Bedeutung für die Planung des Warenumsatzes und der Warenbereitstellung im staatlichen und genossenschaftlichen Handel der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin [DDR], 1955), 7.

3. Herbert Fischer and Joachim Mayer, "Die Befragung der Verbraucher als Methode der Bedarfsforschung," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Bedarfsforschung* 2, no. 3 (1963): 63.
4. See the West German publication, Michael Vershofen, "Marktforschung in Deutschland heute," *Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft* 4 (1954): 247.
5. Herbert Fischer, "Die Konsumentenbefragung—eine Form der Einbeziehung der Bevölkerung in die Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft," *Marktforschung* 6, no. 1 (1967): 24.
6. "Thesen zu einigen Problemen der Entwicklung der Konsumtion in der Etappe des umfassenden Aufbaus des Sozialismus," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Bedarfsforschung* 2, no. 1 (1963): 4–16.
7. Ibid., 7.
8. Ibid., 8.
9. Ibid., 10.
10. "Zur Entwicklung sozialistischer Verbrauchs- und Lebensgewohnheiten bei der Bevölkerung der DDR," 1971, Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Coswig (hereafter BA Coswig), L-102/543, 4.
11. Georg C. Bertsch and Ernst Hedler, *SED—Schönes Einheits-Design* (Cologne, 1990), 12.
12. See Clemens Wischermann, "Der kulturgeschichtliche Ort der Werbung," in *Bilderwelt des Alltags. Werbung in der Konsumgesellschaft des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts,* ed. Peter Borscheid and Clemens Wischermann (Stuttgart, 1995), 8–19.
13. Margot Kuhle and Paul Schäfer, *Gut beraten—Erfolgreich verkaufen* (Berlin [DDR], 1967), 36.
14. Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter SAPMO BA), DY 30/IV 2/610/26, unpaginated, January 16, 1954.
15. Hans Lockhoff (Leiter der Abteilung Werbefernsehen), "Sollen wir unser Licht unter den Scheffel stellen?" *Neues Deutschland,* December 14, 1959.
16. SAPMO BA, DY 30/IV 2/610/33, file page 2, July 17, 1962.
17. Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Sammlung Glatzer/Vorbereitung Planmaterialien/Propagandistische und Ratgebersendungen, unpaginated, Jahresplan 1967.
18. Annelies Albrecht, "Die Funktion und Aufgaben der Werbung auf dem Konsumgüterbinnenmarkt, die Verantwortung der einzelnen Organe bei der Lösung dieser Aufgaben und die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Werbemassnahmen," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Bedarfsforschung* 3 (1963): 3–8.
19. SAPMO BA, DY30/IV A2/2032/50, unpaginated, August 10, 1970.
20. Wage and tax policy is especially meaningful here, since it led to a broad leveling of wages. Subsidization policies and the achievements of the factories also contributed to a leveling of social differences.
21. The table was put together according to my own calculations from the data of the *Statistischen Jahrbücher.*
22. BA Coswig, L-102/162, file page 73, Horst Scholz, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Umfang und Struktur der Freizeit der Frauen und dem Verbrauch an Waren sowie Dienstleistungen," PhD diss., Hochschule für Ökonomie, Berlin (DDR), 1966.

23. In the 1950s and 1960s, so-called individual contracts were signed with members of the "old" intelligentsia. These contracts secured, among other things, unique financial allotments in the form of special awards, material support in the construction of private homes, and a free choice of schools where their children could study.

24. See the thoughts of Michel de Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns* (Berlin, 1988).

25. Gerhard Schulze, *Die beste aller Welten. Wohin bewegt sich die Gesellschaft im 21. Jahrhundert?* (Munich and Vienna, 2003).