
**Review by Johannes von Moltke, German, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

In a slightly surprising reversal, the unification of Germany on terms largely dictated by the west has left historians of the Federal Republic scrambling to reassert the continuing relevance of their field. Far from becoming obsolete with the demise of the GDR, historical study of the former east has burgeoned with the opening of the archives, whereas the history of West Germany threatens to congeal into an everlasting present that merely supplied the model for the dynamics after 1989. Hence the vaguely defensive opening gesture of this anthology, with which the editor connects the project of “exploring West Germany as history” at a time “when the primary focus of research is East German history.”

As the majority of the contributions demonstrate, there is certainly no need for defensiveness. Well organized into coherent thematic sections, each of which is supplied with an editorial introduction, *The Miracle Years* amply demonstrates the continuing relevance of historical study of the 1950s as a foundational decade. The book’s emphasis on cultural history, in particular, opens up a whole range of subjects that can significantly complement and complicate received notions of the “Adenauer era”—from the study of race and gender to issues of film, music, and popular culture, from broad discourses of guilt and victimization to oral “microhistories” of everyday culture.

It is thus only fitting that in the opening contribution to the volume, Elizabeth Heinemann should speak of the 1950s as “something...
of an open playing field, a discursive space in which diverse narratives of German experience could compete for a role in shaping a new national identity” (23). By covering a variety of different topics and approaches, the articles collected in *The Miracle Years* map out this discursive space. They analyze the cultural, social, and political “games” that took place on this playing field, and, most importantly perhaps, they help us to reconstruct some of the underlying rules by which these games were played.

Among these rules, it would appear, a discursive construction of victimhood took pride of place. This tendency emerges persuasively from a number of contributions that focus on victimization as a key trope through which Germans imagined themselves and their relation to various “others” during the 1950s. Two figures were particularly prone to being functionalized as representatives for this discourse of victimization: Elizabeth Heinemann’s article retraces the universalization of women’s experiences, and of rape in particular, which were “generalized into stories of German victimhood;” and Robert Moeller’s article, “Remembering the War in a Nation of Victims” (a revised version of an earlier publication and now also part of Moeller’s recently published *War Stories*), lays out the paradigm of victimization by exploring the role of returning expellees and prisoners of war as German victims and, by extension, representatives of German victimization. Frank Biess’s article similarly investigates the role of returning POWs in fashioning national and particularly sexual and gender identity, including conflicting stories of both “de-“ and “re-masculinization.”

Taken together, these articles prove two things. On the one hand, the authors demonstrate convincingly that, contrary to widely held notions of the 1950s as a decade in which the Nazi past was resolutely repressed, cultural and political discourse during these years was indeed obsessed with that past—albeit in deeply problematic ways. Secondly, they all demonstrate the elision of non-German victims in dominant discourses about national identity. For this reason, one is grateful to the editor and further contributors for highlighting the “other” side of victimhood in the ensuing section entitled “Stigma: ‘Others’ in the Shaping of West Germany.” Here one finds Juliane Wetzel’s informative accounts of Jewish life in Germany after 1945, which is complemented by Frank Stern’s analysis, in a later
article, of the cinematic representation (or lack thereof) of Jews as metaphors for bad conscience. Also in the section on “others,” Eric Weitz analyzes the role of communism in the making of West Germany during the cold war, and both Heide Fehrenbach and Maria Höhn present innovative research on questions of “race” as articulated through perceptions of, and interactions with, African-American GIs. Finally, Ulrich Herbert and Karin Hunn’s contribution serves as a useful and timely reminder that the recruitment of guest workers had its origins as early as in the mid-1950s; the neoliberal rhetorics extolling the “import” of guest workers as a measure to increase the flexibility of the labor market speak volumes about the business orientation of Konrad Adenauer’s government. The same rhetorics emerge in Volker Berghahn’s analysis of the ways in which the bourgeoisie aimed to recast itself as the dominant social, economic, and cultural class during the 1950s. The continued force of these corporate, neoliberal rhetorics in the Kohl/Thatcher era as well as in Schröder’s/Blair’s “Third Way” is reason enough to study their origins in the first postwar decade.

Written from the perspective of the 1990s, most of the essays aim to establish a critical distance from the 1950s and to provide us with a historically nuanced critique of the terms in which the decade saw itself. The anthology’s slightly ironic borrowing of the decade’s dominant paradigm of “miraculous” change for its title is a case in point. Other labels that are submitted to close scrutiny include the discourse of “normalization” (which Lutz Niethammer complicates with some rather more troubling fragments of individual memory and experience, and which Hanna Schissler deconstructs as a profoundly ideological and gendered category); “reconstruction,” or Wiederaufbau (which Berghahn proposes to replace by “recasting,” or Umbau); and “modernization” (for which Arnold Sywottek proposes a number of periodizing differentiations that are usually obscured by the ritualized application of that term to the entire decade).

But the historical distance separating us from the 1950s can also serve to bring back into closer focus some aspects of the decade’s culture that have long been held at arm’s length. In this respect, the essays on various aspects of popular culture in particular provide a welcome revision of long-held theories of mass culture as mass deception, focusing instead on the specific symbolic transformations
that popular practices such as rock and roll, youth culture, or the cinema both enabled and blocked. This shift of focus is surely one of the principle merits of Uta Poiger’s work on the ways in which the American cinematic genre of westerns contributed to a refashioning of German masculinity, or of Kaspar Maase’s analyses of the youth cultural “styles” provoked by Americanization and the “irresistible rise of popular culture” during the 1950s. For all of their critical attention to the power and gender dynamics of popular culture, both of these analyses also maintain a sense of its potentially empowering effects for selected social groups. Rick McCormick’s careful reconstruction of the embattled production history of Wolfgang Staudte’s *Rosen für den Staatsanwalt*, as well as his analysis of that film’s gender politics, however, again sounds a cautionary note. Likewise, Frank Trommler’s description of the author-reader relationship in postwar German literature reminds us of the limits within which revisionist accounts such as Maase’s and Poiger’s must move.

Although there is some overlap in terms of authors and topics with another recent volume on politics, society, and culture in the Adenauer era that appears to have originated at about the same time,¹ the essays collected in *The Miracle Years* provide a welcome and consistently thought-provoking addition to the sparse material available on the 1950s in English. Moreover, even as it deliberately concentrates on one side of the “inner-German” divide (with the signal exception of Dorothee Wierling’s wonderful piece on the “mission to happiness” that guided the “making” of East and West Germans out of the cohort of 1949), the volume successfully bridges another gap by integrating work on the 1950s from both sides of the Atlantic. In this respect, one would hope that the project might serve as a model for other such exchanges between Anglo-American “German studies” on the one hand and German “Germanistik” with its related disciplines on the other.

**Notes**


**Review by Andrea Orzoff, History, New Mexico State University**

Uta Poiger’s valuable new book sets out to analyze postwar German society through the writings of cultural and political leaders in both West and East Germany from 1945 to roughly 1961; her epilogue continues to trace these issues up through 1968. She explores both states’ responses to American popular culture, particularly popular music and film, highlighting early fears about Americanized cultural consumption among German youth, and the effect of US popular culture in reshaping postwar gender roles. Poiger argues that the postwar influx of American westerns and films aimed at the young such as *The Wild One* or *Rebel Without a Cause*, and of jazz and rock music, challenged traditional German conceptions of authority, race, gender, and class (although Poiger does not specify this category, her analysis consistently addresses it), as well as ideas about respectability, the family, and the place of young people in society.

West and East Germany responded differently to these challenges, as Poiger adeptly demonstrates; their responses helped shape postwar West and East German identities in the context of the increasingly heated cold war. The new states’ relationship to each other, including the attempts of their leadership to differentiate their states from one another, plays a significant role in Poiger’s work, which skillfully charts this complex process of reaction to and interpretation of German culture(s) as well as American culture. Berlin, as a main site of interaction and conflict between West and East German culture, constitutes a major focal point of the study. Poiger’s main questions relate to the involvement of each state, and American popular culture, in establishing new norms of youthful behavior, gender, and Germanness in east and west. Only as regards the last issue, that of German identity, does her book fall short: however, that does not affect the overall high quality of this monograph.

Much of the book focuses on perceived threats to traditional masculinity and the possible ramifications of gender upheaval for the
German family and society at large. Germany’s wartime defeat and the rapaciousness of the Red Army’s advance through the country’s eastern territories translated into a postwar gender crisis in which German men were viewed as having failed to protect their women. German cultural commentators, as Poiger shows, worried about the development of overly powerful or sexually aggressive women along the lines of the Americanized “girl” (Poiger provides an illuminating exegesis of the history of German ideas about the “girl,” borrowed both as a term and as a type from the United States), and overly aggressive, “untamed” younger men, influenced by such American cultural figures as Marlon Brando and James Dean. Poiger explains that up through the mid-1950s, both west and east viewed American culture, in this charged context, as a clear threat, linking the influence of American films and music to uncontrolled sexuality, to the lower or working classes, and to renewed susceptibility to fascism. But the riots of the mid-1950s by so-called Halbstarke urban youth sporting ducktails and jeans evoked precisely these images: American culture was seen as the root of discontent, as a threat not just to postwar German society but to Germanness. Poiger’s thoughtful account makes clear West Germany’s initial concern not just about Americanization but also about the possible influence of Soviet culture from East Germany and the need to bolster the “mental and spiritual defense of the Christian West.” (61) West German commentators initially dismissed American jazz as “degenerate,” the same pejorative terminology adopted by the Third Reich to discredit young “Swing-Heinis.” (67) Meanwhile, the Halbstarke themselves claimed political justification for their rebellions, linking their appropriation of US cultural images to their resistance to renewed military conscription in the west or to political oppression in the east.

Their claims, as well as any implied challenge to the state or to official policy, were minimized by officials and cultural interpreters. By the late 1950s West German politicians had begun to view American culture as a potentially useful tool in reshaping their own society and waging the cold war. At the same time, West German social scientists, influenced by American intellectuals, redefined all youth culture, including that of the Halbstarke, as apolitical. West German leaders and commentators successfully defanged the social threat posed by rebellious youth by psychologizing the discourse of adolescent develop-
ment, describing rebellion as simply a personal phase, and the rebels as “good boys” passing through hard times (210). Meanwhile, jazz music, previously viewed as dangerously African-American (and thus associated with Weimar- or Nazi-era ideas about “racial degeneracy”), now became the representative of the energetic, improvisational pluralism of a democratic industrialized society and a fundamental part of West German high culture. In short, West German leaders selectively depoliticized certain aspects of American cultural consumption, claiming that youth culture now occupied a “private sphere”—although leaders continued to worry about the ability of families to educate their sons and daughters as sensible consumers of popular culture and actively involved citizens of a democratic state. While the family, along with cultural consumption of all kinds, had been tacitly defined as a private sphere by West German politicians, nevertheless the West German state continued to concern and involve itself with both of these. (212) In addition, some of the earlier ambivalence towards American youth culture remained, particularly in West German attitudes towards rock music, which with its visible, sexualized young female fans, contradicted the resolutely traditional heterosexual post-war gender norms of the “housewife marriage” and authoritative male. Moreover, West Germany attempted to use ostensibly “depoliticized” American culture to destabilize East Germany by sending parcels of consumer goods to East German teens and, through heavy advertising, luring them to movie theaters in West Berlin. (208)

East Germany, meanwhile, continued to politicize both American-influenced personal behavior and music, and to repress both as much as possible until the building of the Berlin Wall, which effectively cut off the possibility of East German youth frequenting movie theaters or dance halls in West Berlin. Poiger also notes the “flip-flops” of the East German government and its youth organizations with regard to American culture in the early 1950s, moving from condemnation to cooptation when seen as necessary. Overall, despite some notable differences, both Germanies tended to reject certain aspects of American youth culture, particularly those associated with African-American culture or sexual expressiveness. That is, both countries reacted with an essential conservatism: even West Germany embraced only those American influences it could somehow defang, deracialize, and desexualize.
Poiger neatly knits together varied source material in crafting this compelling narrative. Her source material includes newspaper reportage and commentary as well as internal government documents, internal plans, and documents from the occupying powers. In addition, Poiger’s account ranges widely and skillfully across postwar pop-cultural terrain, discussing with equal deftness the Badewanne jazz club in 1950s West Berlin, the effect of films like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* in both east and west, and the gradual transfer of jazz from middlebrow to high culture. Very occasionally, Poiger does quote participants in the riots or everyday German citizens (she notes on page 206 that “it is difficult to reconstruct exactly how **Halbstarke** or rock n’roll girls in the 1950s thought about their actions”). For the most part, however, this is a study of discourses among the political and cultural elites in both west and east.

Despite the general excellence of Poiger’s text, some questions remain unanswered. First and foremost is her definition of Germanness, which is never clearly laid out and seems more related to the international alignment or development of the postwar German states and their cold war patrons than to issues within German society. Moreover, her discussion of German identity tends to focus on the west. The reader is left to infer that the West German state and its leaders made peace with Americanized culture as part of a post-war German state identity, which involved membership in NATO and a commitment to an increasingly unified western Europe. At the same time, Poiger repeatedly alludes to the effect of American popular culture on Germanness—seemingly a reference to a more socially constructed identity and particularly on the ramifications of American-inspired shifts in gender roles on Germanness. Yet Poiger never addresses how it was that these struggles with new gender models, new artistic influences, and questions of youth culture were made specifically German, an important question given that France and the United States struggled similarly with postwar gender roles and that reactions to the youth culture portrayed in *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* were equally strong in the United States. One aspect of postwar identity construction that was specifically German, and that gets somewhat lost in Poiger’s analysis, is the issue of dealing with the Nazi past. I found it fascinating, for example, that initially both Germanies seemed to displace fears about lingering
fascist tendencies onto American popular culture and its influence over German teens (103ff.). Such an issue seems much more pertinent to postwar German identities than the question of the relative acceptance or rejection of American culture, or adoption of widespread postwar gender norms.

A second problem is one of balance. Although the book sets out to address equally both boys and girls in both the FRG and the GDR, in fact most of the book deals with young men in the west. Poiger provides an interesting historical assessment of German fears about the “American girl” they saw entering western culture after World War I and effectively notes the way in which particular models of femininity and masculinity were used by commentators throughout the postwar period. Nevertheless, girls remain in the backdrop of the book until chapter five, which focuses on rock music and in particular Elvis Presley. Poiger is aware of their absence as protagonists (at times she is reduced to hypothesizing about why women are not discussed, as in chapter four on jazz). She also seems aware of the problems involved in her discussion of East Germany, which tends to focus on patterns of repression. In her conclusion, Poiger notes the importance of challenging totalitarian models of East Germany and claims that in part she does so here by a systematic contrast with the west demonstrating that the democratic west was as interested in controlling and politicizing culture as its eastern counterpart, albeit in a less repressive manner. This claim, however, is itself somewhat problematic. Most of her discussion of East Germany in fact revolves around charting repression. I would assess this book as challenging a straw-man or idealized democratic vision of postwar West Germany rather than a totalitarian vision of East Germany—still a significant contribution to the literature, but not one that challenges our previous understanding of the East German regime’s response to cultural life.

Finally, given that her study describes a reinscription of the position of youth and the family in German society, it would have been useful to include a brief assessment of the place of youths or youth cultures, the family, gender, and respectability in earlier eras, the better to appreciate the rupture involved in the creation of a postwar Americanized youth culture. Poiger’s introduction discusses earlier German commentators’ acceptance and criticism of American music
and film, focusing in particular on Weimar; but it seems just as relevant for her readers to understand whether (and how much) it constituted a radical departure for German leaders and social scientists to view youth culture and its manifestations as private and apolitical. Connected to this question, Poiger could have defined her terms more concretely: for example, the difference between “adolescent” and “teenager” in her analysis is not entirely clear. She does not use the latter term until the last chapter on rock music, where she notes American discussions about the term “teenager” and its use in the German context (190ff.), whereas *Halbstarke* rebels are for the most part described as “adolescents” (79ff.). What kind of difference, if any, existed between these two groups? Addressing these issues more forthrightly would have clarified the significance of the shifts and ruptures Poiger traces in this study.

*Jazz, Rock and Rebels* is an admirably ambitious and broad-minded book that provides intriguing insights into the cultural history of both postwar Germanies. That in the end Poiger promises somewhat more than she delivers does not, in the view of this reviewer, detract at all from the book’s value. *Jazz, Rock and Rebels* constitutes a valuable contribution to the literatures on the postwar Germanies, not to mention cold war culture, Americanization, and gender history.

Felix Philipp Lutz, *Das Geschichtsbewußtsein der Deutschen: Grundlagen der politischen Kultur in Ost und West* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2000)

**Review by** Eric Langenbacher, Center for German and European Studies, Government, Georgetown University

Felix Lutz’s *Geschichtsbewußtsein der Deutschen* is a path-breaking contribution to the study of German political culture. Through the presentation and analysis of an original, representative survey of western Germans conducted in 1991, the author identifies various groups, characterized by distinct attitudes towards history and contemporary politics. By deconstructing the often oversimplified and normatively laden concept of historical consciousness, Lutz adds immensely to our knowledge of how the past exerts influence on the
present. Above all, this rigorous quantitative study is particularly needed given the extreme dearth of such analyses in the literature.

Abjuring the concept of memory in favor of the more rigorous framework of historical consciousness, Lutz defines his approach as a reconstruction/interpretation of a past from the perspective and values of the present that contains cognitive and affective elements. This subtype of consciousness performs a number of crucial psychological functions for individuals, providing orientation (a “groundedness” in time that integrates past, present, and future), meaning (identity), and a basis for action. Important collective social and political dimensions exist, especially regarding action and identity. Historical consciousness is “less an inner-psychic, static organizational principle, and more an element of social interaction … which enables autonomy” (58).

Turning to an analysis of the survey data, factor analyses uncover six factors in the realm of historical interpretations (romanticization of Nazism, responsibility for history, repression, seduction theory, history as suffering, and historical pessimism) and seven interpretations of the present (satisfaction with the system, chauvinism of prosperity, rejection of German unity, social criticism, European consciousness, national crisis scenarios and neutralism). Next, cluster analyses identify five distinct demographic groups that differ in regards to involvement in and attitudes toward politics and history, methods of processing the past, identity, assessments of the present, and foreign policy orientations.

Each of the five groups identified in this study is named according to the predominant mode in which its members work through history. The first group, with the name repression, represents 23 percent of the sample. Members of this group have comparatively lower levels of education and interest in politics and history. They no longer want to hear about Nazi crimes, and they relativize the period but do not try to glorify it. Their identity contains elements of constitutional patriotism, an emphasis on traditional “hard” German virtues, an economic-centered pride in postwar German achievements, and a high degree of satisfaction with Germany’s prosperity.

The second group, or the conformists, which represents 21 percent, is marked by comparatively higher church attendance and CDU party affiliation rates, and the lowest levels of education,
income, and political participation. Members of this group, which includes more women and older respondents, demonstrate an uncritical acceptance of both past and present, and a strong desire for harmony. The past is viewed by conformists as a natural catastrophe or bad luck, and Germans are seen as victims of the seductive figure of Adolf Hitler. Conformists have the highest levels of the chauvinism of prosperity (a feeling of superiority based on economic achievements coupled with a resentment towards outsiders who want to share the wealth), take pride in economic achievements, reveal tendencies toward ethnocentrism and intolerance, such as regarding refugees as a threat. Nevertheless, this group shows the second highest support for political neutrality and strongly supports the European project.

Members of the third group, the skeptics, representing 17 percent of respondents, are the youngest, best educated, and least religious. This group’s members vote overwhelmingly for the Green Party and SPD and have the highest interest in history and politics. Permeated by the postmaterialist value complex, they strongly support responsibility for history and historical pessimism. They regard Germans as unreformed from the pathological attitudes of the past, and they believe that the current Federal Republic is so riddled with injustices and weaknesses that history could repeat itself. A national state and any kind of pride are seen as highly problematic by this group, and neutralism is considered the only proper policy.

The fourth group is summed up by the German term Verantwortungsbewusstsein, as having the consciousness of responsibility. Its members, which represent 22 percent of the sample, are characterized by high levels of education and of interest in politics and history, and are mainly CDU and FDP supporters. This group combines a strong belief in responsibility for the past with support of the current system, a general optimism that Germans have learned from the past, a marked embrace of Europe, tolerance, and a rational national identity that could be characterized as constitutional patriotism, but coupled with pride.

The final type, the romantics (Verklärung), which includes 14 percent of respondents, is older, politically conservative and has low levels of education, interest in history and political participation. It has a partially positive view of Nazism and tends at times toward right-extremist and pro-Nazi sentiments. This group strongly rejects
responsibility for the past, as well as the seduction theory. They share the chauvinism of prosperity but believe that contemporary Germany is too small, too liberal, too European, and has too many foreigners.

The book does contain several limitations. The conceptual-theoretical discussion is convoluted and dense, impeding the development of a parsimonious theory. The core analysis of the five types does not apply to eastern Germany, and the qualitative analysis of that region is overly sparse. The major divisions between the two regions are acknowledged, and the lack of emphasis on eastern Germans is justified due to the attitudinal instability caused by the *Wende* and the dominance that western German attitudes have in the unified country. Furthermore, the survey is somewhat dated, at over ten years old. Much has changed in the last ten years, including rapid generational replacement, numerous high-profile “memory events” that could have shifted the proportions in each group, as well as the slow but steady stabilization of eastern Germany. Lutz partially compensates by including more recent survey findings and discussions of various public debates. One would hope that this path-breaking analysis will soon be replicated to address these limitations to create an up-to-date portrait of all-German historical consciousness.

Despite these shortcomings, the overall work greatly furthers the understanding of the impact of the past on the German present. Lutz’s main contentions are impressively substantiated: the past continues to matter immensely for contemporary generations of Germans, and historical consciousness is an essential, if hitherto neglected, component of political culture. Nazism and the Holocaust in particular continue to permeate almost every aspect of German politics, albeit in paradoxical ways. There is substantial disagreement as to the continued role the period should play in contemporary Germany, exemplified by the cleavage and debates between the “skeptics” and the group characterized by its *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* (who, representing the elite, determine the official interpretations of the past and greatly influence mass opinion). This is coupled with widespread sentiment to put the past behind. However, most Germans reject Nazism, assess it negatively, accept that debates about the Holocaust will continue, and, most importantly, have internalized numerous lessons. Overall, an encouraging portrait of a stable, historically informed political culture emerges.

*Review by Eric Jarosinski, German, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

Considering the increasing scholarly attention paid to architecture as a key site of modern identity-construction, political fantasy, and cultural innovation, it appears that critics and architects alike have rarely stood in such flagrant violation of modernist Mies van der Rohe’s famous edict “Build—don’t talk.” Kathleen James-Chakraborty joins the discussion of modern architecture’s larger social and political implications with her provocative new study *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, a work that provides a unified framework from which to view modern German architectural design over the last century, while also raising a diverse set of questions about modernity itself. In so doing, her work points not only to the utility of examining architecture for its insights into social systems and cultural life—of talking, not building—but also of its necessity. As the work illustrates, the discourses and personal experiences surrounding construction play as decisive a role in establishing a building’s significance as do its particular design elements.

James-Chakraborty, an associate professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism*, focuses her examination on the years 1910 to 1940. She also provides some historical background into the nineteenth century, as well as a brief analysis of the evolution of modernist design principles in the immediate postwar era and their current manifestation in the architecture of the “New Berlin.” Throughout, she follows what she calls a “social approach,” defined as an alternative route to more mechanistic views of buildings as links in a social order and analyses that confine architecture to intellectual history, neglecting the buildings themselves in favor of the treatises of their designers. She wishes instead to “contextualize architecture’s palpable physicality” through an attention to architectural detail and the philosophical, cultural, and political assumptions and aims in which it is embedded (5).
Her thesis is that early modernist construction is best understood through a social and political lens as various attempts to construct a sense of “community” among the newly emerging masses through aesthetic means. Specifically, she argues that with the emergence of a mass public for architecture at the turn of the century, the emphasis of design shifted from clearly defined historical styles to a more generalized notion of space, giving rise to buildings with abstract forms meant to be emotionally experienced by all classes rather than understood only by those with adequate education. Viewing structures in this way, she depicts buildings by Bruno Taut, Peter Behrens, Albert Speer and others as “sites of performance,” where radically different ideologies—from utopian socialism to National Socialism—used remarkably similar sets to stage vastly different visions of “community.”

Following this line of inquiry, James-Chakraborty does not offer a history of modern architecture per se, as much as an investigation into some of its founding ambitions. She is less interested in architects’ technological or stylistic accomplishments, she tells us, than in examining how they saw their creations fitting into larger social projects. Addressing their aims and intentions in a combined thematic and chronological approach, she asks the following questions: What were the political problems architects sought to address in the first half of the century, and why did they think the built environment could effect change? How did the emergence of mass audiences prefigure a move toward modern architecture’s dismissal of ornament in favor of simplicity? How and why did modern architecture incorporate spirituality and spectacle into design? And finally, how did designers incorporate the same formal aspects into divergent ideological projects, different visions of “community,” and what has this meant for the legacy of modernist design in contemporary Germany?

James-Chakraborty’s starting point for examining these issues is the architectural preoccupation with space she discerns in early modernism, as opposed to historical style or ornament. This interest resulted from a fusion of aesthetic theory, political aims, and experimental architecture in the late nineteenth century, a period marked by industrialization and rapid urbanization and accompanied by nostalgia for the “organic communities” thought to exist in German rural and small town settings. Following theories advanced by thinkers
such as Ferdinand Tönnies, architects and planners sought to restore a romanticized preindustrial social unity. At the same time, however, this restoration was not to come at the expense of industrialization itself, upon which Germany’s growing economic and political power depended. Instead, a cultural solution to societal atomization was sought in architecture, a project spawned by the era’s belief in art, abstract art in particular, as a path to social harmony. As James-Chakraborty argues, art was to transcend rather than express modernization, appealing to mass audiences gathered in concert halls, churches, stadiums, and exhibition areas to look beyond class and political divisions and instead to focus on a cohesive vision of spiritual or national community. This was to be accomplished through the feeling of shared communal space, with the goal of emotional empathy outweighing that of aesthetic appreciation or understanding.

Focusing on the construction of the Jahrhunderthalle (1910–1913) in Wroclaw, Poland (then Breslau in the German province Silesia), James-Chakraborty outlines simplicity as a key element of such emotive architecture. The domed exhibition and athletic hall was designed by Max Berg and constructed of reinforced concrete, which allowed for enormous spans and a seating capacity of 10,000, making it one of the largest buildings of its day. Its massive scale was offset, however, by its exposed structural framework and lack of ornamentation. As she argues, the starkness of the building reflected the desire of its sponsor, the liberal Breslau city government, to address middle and lower-class constituents through a building that did not rely on potentially alienating and arcane architectural symbolism. Instead, meaning was to come through the events at the hall and their collective experience, most notably of pacifist and socialist theater “pageants” produced by Gerhart Hauptmann and Max Reinhardt.

Spirituality is how James-Chakraborty terms this type of shared experience among mass audiences in unadorned spaces, discerning it as another key element in the architecture she analyzes. Taking the architect Bruno Taut and the writer and theorist Paul Scheerbart as her primary examples, she highlights their utopian faith in glass construction and the play of light within structures to bring about a spiritually transcendent collective experience. Their goal was to provide unity, clarity, and aesthetic harmony to German architecture, and by extension, to all of German society. As she writes, their ideas gained
wide currency: “Religious architecture was transformed, and also the
design of office buildings strongly influenced by the belief that archi-
tecture must be made comprehensible to a mass audience. Indeed,
many patrons believed architecture to be the most powerful tool for
attracting popular support to their own visions of social order” (54).
In place of allegorical statues or historical architectural references,
colored or transparent glass, spectacular lighting, and open spaces
were to serve as the building blocks for a new community.

This element of spectacle is what would most inform the National
Socialists’ adaptation of the modern design principles James-
Chakraborty ascribes to the left-wing and liberal thinkers and archi-
tects she chronicles in the period before 1933. In particular, she
argues, Albert Speer’s use of dramatic lighting effects is highly
indebted to Weimar-era designers such as Erich Mendelsohn, who
had conceived of theatrical city lighting as egalitarian and supportive
of democracy. As she makes clear, however, modern design strate-
gies could have radically different trajectories: “That abstraction as a
means of mass communication was unquestionably progressive from
an artistic point of view did not mean, however, that it could not
serve the right even more effectively than it had the left” (89).
Indeed, in her analysis of Speer’s Lichtdom (Cathedral of Light),
which consisted of hundreds of military spotlights arcing high above
the heads of thousands of spectators in Nuremberg in 1934, she
establishes a clear link to the use of artificial light in Weimar-era
design, dwarfed, however, by its new pervasiveness and imposing
scale within the Nazi regime.

In addressing the memory of such displays and the immediate
postwar legacy of modernist representational strategies for the
masses, James-Chakraborty recognizes a definite taint to Weimar-era
design. “Emotion in postwar avant-garde art and architecture would
be individual rather than collective,” she writes, “indeed, many
architects would entirely reject dramatic gestures as well as the pop-
ulism that had at once provoked them” (103). Citing Hans
Scharoun’s Philharmonie in Berlin (1956-63), she describes much
German postwar era architecture as understated, absent of spectacle,
and once again oriented more toward a bourgeois than a mass audi-
ence. By the early 1960s architecture had changed, she argues, and
so had its aspirations: “The belief that architectural reform could
substitute for political change, like the belief in universal form upon which it was predicated, had finally come to an end” (109). At the same time, however, she still detects in the construction of the “New Berlin” the hallmarks of architecture for a mass audience, which she carefully documents in earlier chapters: experimental engineering, lack of ornamentation, dramatic spectacle, and open, soaring spaces. Yet as James-Chakraborty is careful to point out, these aspects of design are currently understood generally as something new and international, with their ties to specific political and social projects of the last century readily forgotten.

In reading *German Architecture for a Mass Audience* one is happy for the reminder, which is offered in clearly cohesive prose and represents the product of careful research and acute observation. Design concepts, James-Chakraborty makes clear, have a history and within different social and political contexts, they can assume radically different meanings. The most significant contribution of her work is that it gives us a useful way of tracking this evolution by discerning modern architects’ common desire to create “community,” however disparately defined, among mass audiences and to accomplish this goal through a shared set of design principles. By focusing on evolving architectural strategies rather than on clearly defined styles, she thereby provides a means for making comparisons and drawing distinctions that had previously been lacking. What results is her outline of the remarkable similarity between architectural ambitions of vastly different ideological projects. This is by far the work’s most provocative insight, as it raises numerous questions about the oft debated though still emergent understanding of the connection between aesthetics and politics.

Somewhat disappointing, however, is the author’s seeming unwillingness to expand upon some of the most challenging implications of this very affinity. At times James-Chakraborty appears overly intent on separating left from right, when her focus on architectural and ideological intent overlooks thornier questions of potentiality. This precludes her from adequately engaging in an interesting yet extremely difficult debate on the nature of modernism as it relates to fascism; that is, whether National Socialism should be seen as a sly cooptation of modernist surface or whether it can also be viewed as the radicalization of a latent fascist potential in modernism.
itself. Though one would like to see James-Chakraborty more thoroughly address the question that her work itself is so adept at staging, the reader is—perhaps necessarily—left to one’s own devices. Contra van der Rohe’s injunction, one concludes the work with still much more talking yet to do.

Thomas Elsaesser, Michael Wedel, eds., *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1999)

**Review by Christian Rogowski, German, Amherst College**

The past decades have brought with them a plethora of publications that amount to a stock taking of German film history. Surprisingly, the *BFI Companion to German Cinema* is the first compendium on German film to be published in English since Felix Bucher’s somewhat idiosyncratic 1970 publication, *Screen Series: Germany*. Overall, the editors have produced a highly welcome, useful reference work. In just under 260 pages, they present the history of film in German speaking countries, including a wide range of often unfamiliar yet fascinating facets that will be of interest to the general reader and specialist alike.

The overall layout and format of the book may initially strike the reader as strange: after a general short preface, a well-informed introductory essay gives an overview of German cinema in the 1990s. This is followed, without any apparent logic, by a series of pages with thirteen pictures. No effort is made to relate the photos to the entries that follow in the main body of the book: glossy promotion shots of 1940s superstars Hans Albers and Brigitte Horney, stills from films such as F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* and Leontine Sagan’s *Mädchen in Uniform*, a picture of Marlene Dietrich conversing with Fritz Lang at a dinner table—such photos stand alongside an enigmatic, if unflattering, portrait of actress Romy Schneider. The strange placing and combination of these isolated images (perhaps a cost cutting measure) give the book a somewhat austere quality that belies its overall usefulness.
For the most part, the individual entries and the more general thematic essays are well written, informative, and well researched, although every now and then slight factual errors or inconsistencies creep in—the title of Joseph Vilsmaier’s 1995 film *Schlafes Bruder*, for instance, is mistranslated several times as “brother of sound” (rather than “sleep”). Particularly welcome are entries pertaining to lesser known figures or aspects that often escape the attention of film scholars. Indeed, there is much new material to discover. For instance, one finds a useful number of entries on even lesser known figures from Austria and Switzerland, as well as a comprehensive, highly informative article on Austrian film history (but no counterpart that addresses the Swiss German cinematic legacy).

In their preface, the editors admit to the “drastic choices” (viii) that had to be made in producing a single-volume reference work. Even so, sometimes the criteria for these choices are not altogether clear. For instance, while the introductory essay pays homage to the emergence of multicultural voices in recent German film, in particular the work of Turkish-German directors, the book’s main body does not have a single entry on any of the directors mentioned. Likewise, the reader will perhaps be surprised to find no entries on directors such as Percy Adlon, Uli Edel, and Michael Verhoeven, whose international successes, one would assume, make their work of particular interest to an English-speaking readership. Oddly, Austrian actress Maria Schell is included, but not her brother, Academy Award winning actor, director, and producer Maximilian. Other notable omissions include “experimental” filmmakers such as Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, documentarists such as Klaus Wildenhahn or Klaus Wyborny, and, perhaps most surprisingly, composer Friedrich Holländer and director Billy Wilder.

The editors freely acknowledge the difficulties associated with their project. Certain reservations notwithstanding, it should be noted that in many ways they succeed in their efforts to give an inclusive, well informed, and topical picture of the rich history of German cinema. The question of what should and should not be included is, of course, largely a matter of subjective perspective. To be fair, some information about figures or issues that were not granted a separate entry can in fact often be gleaned elsewhere, in the short essays on specific topics and/or institutions. The reader
must, however, navigate through the entries, because here too it is not always clear where a particular topic is addressed. Perhaps it would have been useful to include an index of featured articles to make it easier for the readers to find their way around the volume. If they do make the effort, they will indeed be amply rewarded.


*Review by Frank Biess, History, University of California, San Diego*

That Germans went to war in August 1914 with almost unanimous enthusiasm long constituted one of the most tenaciously held assumptions in German historiography. According to this widely shared belief, the entry into World War I—couched by the government falsely but effectively as a defensive war against autocratic Russia—allowed Germans to overcome deeply engrained divisions and to unite in a moment of unprecedented national crisis. Nothing supposedly illuminated this newly gained “civic truce” (*Burgfrieden*) more fully than the Social Democratic approval of war credits on August 4, 1914. In his well-researched study, Jeffrey Verhey demonstrates that this alleged enthusiasm at the outbreak of the war was largely a myth. Following a number of local studies that have already begun to undermine the thesis of widespread national enthusiasm at the beginning of the war, Verhey offers the first history of “German public opinion in July and August 1914 as a whole.” (7) His innovative study furthermore analyzes the transformation of these “August experiences” into a myth of the “spirit of 1914,” which then played a key role in mobilizing an increasingly weary population during the war as well as in the political right’s onslaught on the democratic Weimar Republic after 1918.

The first part of Verhey’s study skillfully dissects the anatomy of German popular emotions during those summer days between the expiration of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia on July 25 and the first weeks of the war in August 1914. Relying heavily on contemporary
local newspaper accounts, Verhey is able to demonstrate that the often cited “war enthusiasm” remained limited to large cities and to bourgeois sections of the population, especially to male students. The author—pace Michael Bhaktin—also detects a “carnivalesque” element in these expressions of alleged “enthusiasm” that did not so much reflect actual popular attitudes toward the war but rather a more naïve pleasure in the “suspension of certain norms and prohibitions” and the possibility to “express these emotions…without fear of public censure.” (82) Moreover, Verhey also identifies very different kinds of crowds in Germany’s streets in the summer of 1914—“crowds of panic, depression, and fear,” as he calls them—that undermine the notion of widespread enthusiasm. And the largest crowds in July 1914 came together not in jingoistic celebrations of the war but rather in peace demonstrations organized by the SPD. When war actually came, Verhey thus concludes, Germans responded “more or less as one would have expected” (113). There was a “a good deal of fear, panic, sadness, and depression,” especially among working-class sections of the population, which, however, did not translate into outright opposition to the war. Rather than united in their enthusiasm, Verhey concludes, a “grim determination characterized the mood of most of the population” at the outbreak of the war (96).

Yet this was not the way in which Germany’s entry into the prime catastrophe of the twentieth century was remembered. Instead, as Verhey demonstrates convincingly in the second part of his study, conservative newspaper commentators, playwrights, and, above all, German intellectuals almost immediately transformed the isolated expressions of enthusiasm into August experiences, which, as the author argues, were “already removed from real historical experience” (120). These August experiences then formed the centerpiece of the spirit of 1914, a national narrative of political unity and shared cultural identity that was supposed to provide a rationale as well as motivation for the German war effort. The spirit of 1914, however, was not a coherent entity. Instead, the author differentiates between different and, indeed, competing narratives of the spirit of 1914 that various sections of the German polity employed to further their own political goals. Conservatives and the government, for example, conceived of the spirit of 1914 as the popular affirmation of monarchical legitimacy, which was best expressed by the Kaiser’s famous words
on August 4 ("I no longer recognize any parties, I know only Germans"). For radical nationalists in the Pan-German League, or later the Fatherland Party, the spirit of 1914 represented a powerful manifestation of the German Volk’s virility and will to fight. Liberals and Social Democrats, by contrast, construed the “spirit of 1914” as a transformation of Wilhelmine political culture toward greater social and political equality.

Moreover, the myth of the spirit of 1914 was not only heterogeneous but also dynamic. Over the course of the war, it was gradually transformed from a “discourse of legitimacy” into a “discourse of mobilization.” The author emphasizes especially the role of General Ludendorf’s “Patriotic Instruction Program” in shaping a “transcendent myth of the spirit of 1914.” This myth no longer represented simply a description of the German nation but rather a propagandistic construct that was assigned the power to shape reality—that is, to win the war through sheer willpower in spite of Allied material superiority. This notion of the spirit of 1914, moreover, already contained the origins of another myth: the “stab-in-the-back legend.” For if victory could be assured by superior willpower, defeat necessarily had to result from lack of it. Verhey’s analysis thus demonstrates how the cultivation of the myth of the spirit of 1914 during the war provided the discursive space for the attack on the democratic Weimar Republic during the 1920s. The propagandistic myth of the spirit of 1914 was reincarnated in the popular notion of a Volksgemeinschaft, to which all political parties subscribed in the 1920, yet which was ultimately best appropriated by the National Socialists. As Verhey argues, the after-shocks of World War I led many Germans to believe in a “mythical epistemology” that ultimately deprived the left’s more “critical epistemology” of the causes of war and defeat of any popular support (237).

This study clearly ranks among the best recent social histories that have deconstructed long held assumptions about the nature of popular experience during World War I. The author’s conclusions are based on an abundance of published and unpublished sources. He makes an especially good case for local newspapers as indicators of public opinion, and he draws on hitherto neglected sources such as the “August plays” or visual representations of the “August experiences.” Verhey’s study also fruitfully combines social and cultural
history. The second part of the book, in particular, follows more recent cultural history approaches that have emphasized both the war’s impact on culture as well as the power of cultural constructs to shape social and political reality. At times, however, the author may have drawn too rigid a boundary between the analysis of popular reactions to the war in the first section of the book and their transformation into memory and myth in the second half. To be sure, the critical impetus of his study lies precisely in asserting the difference between the historical experience of August 1914 and its subsequent collective remembrance. And while it seems essential to this reviewer not to confuse history and memory altogether, a more explicit discussion of the complicated relationship between these categories might have strengthened the author’s argument. For history and memory may not have been as neatly separated as the author makes it seem. Emotions and experiences in the summer of 1914 were mediated by the same language that was later employed in the construction of the myth of the spirit of 1914; a fact that is confirmed by the author’s use of the same vocabulary (“grim determination”) to characterize both the actual mood of the population as well as central feature of the “myth of the spirit of 1914.”

This minor objection, however, should not distract from the considerable achievements of this book. Verhey’s study represents an indispensable starting point for further analysis of German political language and political myths in the twentieth century. His links between the spirit of 1914 and the National Socialist  Volksgemeinschaft are highly suggestive and invite further analysis. Did, for example, the mob actions against alleged Russian spies and French gold automobiles in August 1914 foreshadow the exclusionary and violent aspects of the Nazi  Volksgemeinschaft? Did the religious language of the spirit of 1914 prepare Germans for more potent pseudo-religious myths in the future, such as the Hitler myth? To what extent was the spirit of 1914 a predominantly male construct, and how did it affect extremely volatile gender relations during the war and postwar period? It is one of the many strengths of this excellent book that it not only offers compelling analysis and original insights but also provokes such larger questions regarding the German experience in the age of total war.
Notes


Johannes von Moltke is a professor of German and of film, media, and television at the University of Michigan and the grandson of Freya and Helmuth von Moltke. New York Review Books will be at this year’s AWP Conference & Bookfair from Thursday, March 5, to Saturday, March 7. If you’re attending the conference, we’d love for you to stop by.