

were far more likely to come from Catholic backgrounds than were left-wing activists; and whether the paucity of women in the groups examined was entirely equivalent to their counterparts elsewhere on the political spectrum. But these are tiny questions in a big book.

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## Designing One Nation: The Politics of Economic Culture and Trade in Divided Germany

**By Katrin Schreiter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 289. Cloth \$55.00. ISBN: 978-0190877279.**

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Katrin Schreiter uses the concept “economic culture” to rethink the relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Cold War, particularly in the period of normalized relations between the two states, from 1972 to 1989. Her introduction contains several analytic propositions about the post-1945 division of Germany that support this approach and object of investigation. First, that “it is impossible to understand the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) during the decades of division without the GDR, and vice-versa” (1). Second, that in both German states “economic progress” and “material culture” effectively “substituted for traditional nationalism” that had been de-legitimized by the grotesque excesses of the Third Reich (2). Third, that both states “instilled material culture, specifically interior design and furniture production, with strong political messages,” including the competitive search for “an untainted postfascist modernity” (2) that led both states to “national branding” strategies as part of the Cold War (8).

Many readers can easily agree with these starting points, which have been noted before, by other historians. After 1945, Germans recreated a safe national identity in non-political economic and technical areas. West Germans were savers, guardians against inflation, as well as makers and exporters of high-quality machine, transport, and pharmaceutical equipment. “German Engineering” served as Volkswagen’s advertising slogan for many years in the North American market, a perfect example of the positive, non-political, technological projection of German national culture. On the other side of the border, East Germans were proud of their relatively higher standards of living within the Soviet Bloc.

From these general starting points, Schreiter presses on into more creative territory by noting ironically that “the striving for difference created similarity in how East and West negotiated their country’s division” (3). Schreiter wants to find and explain these similarities across the two Germanies in various aspects of domestic material culture: product design, trade preferences, and consumer tastes, for example. In this examination, Schreiter relies on the concept of “economic culture,” derived from political scientist Paul Egon Rohrllich, in which cultural value systems, perceptual predispositions of national populations, and state economic policies are all connected.

Of course, in the decades before 1945 the two Germanies had a shared “economic culture” in architecture, interior design, and home furnishings. Schreiter explains how parts of this shared inheritance in design, like the *Bauhaus* and the *Werkbund*, were consciously cultivated or rejected by both states during the competitive decades of the Cold War. Schreiter carefully recapitulates the design debates and policies that unfolded in both Germanies after

1945, including their reckonings with the Weimar and Nazi pasts. The arguments and deliberations of politicians and designers in both states are set in the immediate international context of German-German relations and in the larger international contexts of East-West relations and transnational design trends. Schreiter does an excellent job of keeping that discussion under control, and these portions of the book could serve as a handy mini-history of politicized design in twentieth-century Germany.

Schreiter is also adept at showing how larger economic trends and forces affected the German furniture industry, for example, the Berlin Agreement of 1951 that regulated inner-German trade for the next forty years, or the GDR's "Unity of Social and Economic Policy," the new economic program begun in 1971 that greatly expanded the volume of consumer goods imported from the FRG in the 1970s and 1980s. The book could be usefully read as a case study in the economic history of the GDR.

In the production and sale of home furnishings, Schreiter identifies parallel processes that unfolded on both sides of the inner-German border: consciously manipulating economic culture, investing in "consumer taste education" (3), allowing designers and cultural brokers to influence economic policy, and encouraging design institutes towards a "national brand" that could "create a narrative of political significance around their products" (8).

Schreiter uses a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental sources to illuminate these developments, beginning with the most important government ministries, offices, and institutes in both German states. These have been supplemented by an array of innovative sources like the archives of the German Design Council (*Rat für Formgebung*) in Frankfurt am Main and the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design at the University of Brighton. Schreiter is particularly effective in recalling the popular impact of important international design exhibitions like the *We Build a Better Life* traveling exhibition that drew half a million visitors from West and East Berlin during its three-week run there in 1952. That exhibit was sponsored by the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) to display the "productivity of the Atlantic community in the area of home necessities" as the catalog title proudly proclaimed (*Wir bauen ein besseres Leben. Eine Ausstellung über die Produktivität der Atlantischen Gemeinschaft auf dem Gebiet des Wohnbedarfs*). Schreiter makes great use of these exhibits, their catalogs, posters, and magazine coverage to reconstruct the international dialogue taking place among designers and the attempt to shape public tastes. The Leipzig Fall Fair and the International Furniture Fair in Cologne (where I worked under-the-table while a student in Germany) were also important sites for East and West to display the material embodiments of their respective ideas of domesticity (*Wohnkultur*).

Schreiter deserves credit for identifying the design and production of home furnishings in postwar Germany as a subject with two advantages. First, explicating the economics of furniture production allows for a very revealing investigation into the economy of the GDR and the economic relationship between the two Germanies. Second, these important economic issues can be explored from a source base that extends far outside the traditional state-centered documentation from a few important ministries in the GDR. The nature of home furnishings as items of mass consumption allows Schreiter to expand the field of her investigation well beyond the small circle of the policy-making elite that dominated of the GDR. It is insightful to find an important economic issue in the GDR that can be explored from a wider-than-normal perspective, so to speak.

Through five chapters, Schreiter reaches the conclusion that "despite their systematic differences, the FRG and the GDR co-created an economic culture in which designer [*sic*], producers, retailers, and consumers increasingly agreed on the same values and norms that governed economic interaction and inspired shared ideas of modern living standards" (187). As a result, she argues, we should "stop thinking about the two Germanys in isolation from each other in order to see how much they still had in common in 1989" (188). These conclusions fulfill the introduction's promise to "underscore similarities" (3) in the two German states and to "offer an intriguing alternative to traditional Cold War histories of Germany that emphasize rivalry" (9).

Criticisms of the book are likely to arise from Schreiter's habit of overestimating the importance of her subject and overstating her possible conclusions. How many readers will agree with the following propositions: that initiatives in product design "normalized East-West relations, which eventually undermined the Cold War status quo and helped to pave the way for unification" (6)? Or that a shared taste for "conservative modernism . . . made the [1989] transition from reform to unity plausible and feasible in German minds" (9, 183)? Or that "the pan-German economic culture developed a vocabulary of transparency, humanity, and morality that shaped German efforts for peace in Europe in the 1980s" (186)? Or that shared notions of "design, taste, and consumption" helped prevent "great social upheavals or political disruptions in the fall of 1990" (189)? Many scholars will find these claims to be over-reaching.

Materially oriented scholars will doubt whether Schreiter's proposed "economic culture" of shared perceptions, norms, values, and tastes could ever bring the two German economies closer together. The real existing gaps between economic structures and performance in the neo-Stalinist East and the social-market West were enormous and obvious; they permeated daily life in the GDR. Those gaps are widely recognized as the root causes for the dead-end trajectory of the East German economy and state. These differences could not be bridged by the cultural constructs Schreiter identifies.

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## **Europa in der Tradition Habsburgs? Die Rezeption Kaiser Karls V. im Umfeld der Abendländischen Bewegung und der Paneuropa Union**

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Writing about the Iraq War in 2003, Jürgen Habermas contrasted Europeans' well-founded wariness with the more "naïve optimism" displayed by American elites. What was distinctive about Europeans was that they had learned from their particularly conflict-ridden past: previous catastrophic wars had shown that the wiser course was usually to live with diversity rather than to seek change by force. It is unlikely that Germany's most prominent public intellectual would have much in common with the scattered assortment of mostly German-speaking intellectuals who dreamed of some kind of neo-Habsburgian Europe after 1945. But in his elucidation of a distinctive European identity, he echoed at least some of the arguments presented by those advocates of an Occidental (*abendländisch*) Europe featured in Markus Pohl's study.

These intellectuals included a few household names such as Joseph Roth and Carl Jacob Burckhardt but were mostly second-order writers who had some connection to the last crown prince of Austria-Hungary, Otto von Habsburg. Pohl is particularly interested in how these thinkers latched onto the figure of Charles V as the European statesman *par excellence*. They usually provided a grand sweep through centuries of European history, charting how a diverse European empire had splintered into national and religious enclaves once Martin Luther provoked a rupture in Western Christendom. According to this narrative,