

"EVEN UNDER SOCIALISM, WE DON'T WANT TO DO WITHOUT LOVE": EAST GERMAN EROTICA*

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As the old joke had it, socialism would have worked if it weren't for cars. Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, it has become almost commonplace to say that consumption is key to understanding the history of East Germany and its eventual downfall.¹ The problem of luxury, as Ina Merkel has shown, was central to debates about consumption under East German socialism.² In comparison to their Eastern neighbors, let alone the Third World, citizens of the German Democratic Republic enjoyed a very high standard of living.³ The basic needs of the population, such as housing, food, and public transport, were heavily subsidized and readily available. Famously, a bread roll cost five pfennigs throughout the life span of the GDR. By providing the necessities of life at affordable prices, the regime hoped to win hearts and minds for socialism. But as memories of postwar shortages faded, full stomachs and low rents quickly came to be taken for granted. Right from the start, comparison with the West was what counted. Spurred by access to Western media, contact with relatives, and, prior to the building of the Berlin Wall, visits to the West, East Germans demanded goods that were not common currency—citrus fruit, TVs, and cars—as well as higher standards for everyday items—tastier sausages, softer toilet paper, clothing of greater quality and style.⁴ And as time went on, the population started to see formerly “luxury” goods such as refrigerators, wash- ing machines, televisions, and cars as necessities.⁵

The flip side of East German pricing policy was that such “luxuries” were sold at extremely high prices. In 1989, a color television cost

1 Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999); Ina Merkel, “Working People and Consumption under Really-Existing Socialism: Perspectives from the German Democratic Republic,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 55 (1999): 92-111; idem,

“Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity Was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture,” and André Steiner, “Dissolution of the ‘Dictatorship over Needs’? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s,” both in *Getting and Spending: European*

and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century, ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt (Cambridge, 1998); Ina Merkel and Felix Mühlberg, eds., *Wunderwirtschaft. DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne, 1996); Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East*

>> *Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, “Tulips in December: Space, Time and Consumption Before and After the End of German Socialism,” *German History* 19 (2001): 253-76; David Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003); Paul Betts, “The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000): 731-65.

2 Ina Merkel, “Luxus im Sozialismus. Eine widersinnige Fragestellung?” in *“Luxus und Konsum” – eine historische Annäherung*, ed. Reinhold Reith and Torsten Meyer (Münster, 2003), 221-36.

3 See Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 198.

4 See Felix Mühlberg, “Wenn die Faust auf den Tisch schlägt. Eingaben als Strategie zur Bewältigung der Alltag,” in *Wunderwirtschaft*, ed. Merkel and Mühlberg, 175-84. For a selection of petitions on the subject of material goods, see Ina Merkel, ed., *“Wir sind doch nicht die Mecker-ecke der Nation!” Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin, 2000).

5 Merkel, “Luxus im Sozialismus,” 231, 223.

5297 marks—six months' wages for the average worker.⁶ Elevated prices offered a means of subsidizing the five-pfennig bread roll and other basic goods, as well as a way of gaining access to the millions of marks in savings squirreled away by the population; but they were also a reflection of the regime's priorities. As János Kornai has described state socialist economies: "The leaders of the economy believe they know what is really good for the consumers better than the consumers themselves; they are ready to defend them from their own faulty consumer decisions."⁷ The goods that were cheap and plentiful were those that were considered necessary for work—a roof over one's head, bread, potatoes, margarine, cigarettes, a tram ticket. Certain other goods, such as books, newspapers, and theater tickets, were considered to be culturally or politically worthy of subsidy. But prices remained high for products that were not essential to a worker's existence—butter, coffee, and cars.

The paternalist efforts of the state to encourage consumers to buy useful and functional goods that would make them better workers and socialist citizens did not always find favor with East German shoppers. Long waits for cars, televisions, and telephones added insult to injury.⁸ High prices, combined with scarcity, led to similarly high levels of frustration and grievance, yet the party leadership had little patience for demands for luxury. Schooled in the Stalinist ranks of the Weimar-era communist movement, and with the sacrifices of the Nazi period ever-fresh in their minds, the old communists of the Politburo clearly felt more at home with work and necessity than leisure and luxury. Nevertheless, the question of consumption was not one the regime was able to escape.⁹ The worst crisis of communist rule, the workers' uprising of June 1953, was triggered by a simultaneous hike of work norms and prices and brought the regime to the point of collapse. Eight years later, the Berlin Wall was built as a direct response to the migration of millions of workers to the higher wages and living standards of the West. Ignoring consumers' demands was simply not an option. Concerted efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to make life under communism more attractive included opening specialist shops that sold luxury goods, often imported from the West, at vastly inflated prices. "Exquisit" shops stocked fashionable clothes, and the Delikat chain specialized in luxury foods such as Western coffee and jam. Most contradictory of all were the Intershops, which only accepted Western currency. At first, they were open solely to foreign visitors, but, in the 1970s, they were opened to all East Germans in response to their demand

6 Helmut Weiß, *Verbraucherpreise in der DDR. Wie stabil waren sie?* (Schkeuditz, 1998); Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 159.

7 János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford, 1992), 153.

8 Stefan Pahlke, "Warten auf ein Telefon, mit Permanenz und Penetranz," in *Wunderwirtschaft*, ed. Merkel and Mühlberg, 166.

9 On attempts to build prosperity in the 1950s, see Katherine Pence, "The Myth of a Suspended Present: Prosperity's Painful Shadow in 1950s East Germany," in *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*, ed. Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian (Stanford, 2003), 135-59. On pressure from within the state bureaucracy to increase the supply of consumer goods, see Mark Landsman, "The Consumer Supply Lobby – Did It Exist? State and Consumption in East Germany in the 1950s," *Central European History* 35 (2002): 477-512.

to be allowed to spend hard currency sent to them from the West.¹⁰ The hypocrisy of this was unmistakable: the regime asked its loyal adherents to break off contact with relatives in the West, but rewarded those who did not with access to Nescafé and Nutella.

Like the hard currency gold mine of the Intershops, the production of erotic goods played a role in holding together the East German economy and also provides a telling example of the confused nature of socialist policy towards consumption. Not only did erotica raise difficult questions about the influence of the West and equality of access to consumer goods; it combined them with the equally knotty subject of sex. The production of socialist erotica demonstrates how far the regime was prepared to go to provide its people with the goods they desired.¹¹ While claiming that pornography was anathema to socialism, the authorities permitted the printing of nude photographs both for export and for the domestic market. As we shall see, this gulf between moral rhetoric and economic policy quickly became an open secret.

Following the repressive line taken by the Soviets since the 1930s, early East German policy towards sex and the body was deeply conservative.¹² Abortions were nearly impossible to obtain, prostitution and adultery were frowned upon, the ban on homosexuality was zealously enforced, and attempts were made to ban nudism.¹³ This brand of reproductive heterosexuality was handed down from the highest levels. Walter Ulbricht's Ten Commandments of Socialist Ethics and Morals in 1958 left little doubt as to how citizens should lead their lives. "You should live cleanly and decently and respect your family," thundered commandment number nine.¹⁴ The regime condemned Western pornography and erotica as bourgeois, decadent, and reactionary. During the early Cold War, it portrayed pinups, stripteases, and prostitution as typical of an Americanized, profit-oriented West German sexuality, contrasting them with the healthy sexuality of the East based in marriage and childbearing.¹⁵

10 See Merkel, "Luxus im Sozialismus," 231-35; Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 243-77. On the Intershops, see Jonathan Zatlin, "Consuming Ideology: Socialist Consumption and the Intershops, 1970-1989," in *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR*, ed. Peter

Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde (Essen, 1999), 555-72; Katrin Böske, "Abwesend anwesend. Eine kleine Geschichte des Intershops," in *Wunderwirtschaft*, 214-22.

11 I use the term "erotica" as it encompasses best

the mixture of nude photographs and erotic literature discussed here. Much of this material, particularly the photographs, could be classified as soft pornography.

12 On the repressive turn in Soviet sexual policy, >>

>> see Daniel Healy, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (Chicago, 2001); Janet Evans, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defense of Mother and Child'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981): 757-75.

13 Jennifer Evans, "Reconstruction Sites: Sexuality, Citizenship and the Limits of National Belonging in Divided Berlin, 1944-1958" (PhD diss., SUNY Binghamton, 2001); idem, "The Moral State: Men, Mining and Masculinity in the Early GDR," *German History* 23 (2005): 355-70; Uta Falck, *VEB Bordell. Geschichte der Prostitution in der DDR* (Berlin, 1998); Günter Grau, "Return to the Past: The Policy of the SED and the Laws against Homosexuality in Eastern Germany between 1946 and 1968," *Journal of Homosexuality* 37 (1999): 1-21; Josie McLellan, "State Socialist Bodies: East German Nudism from Ban to Boom," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (2007): 48-79.

14 *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des V. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands. 10. bis 16. Juli 1958 in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1959), 159. All translations from German are the author's own.

15 *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 13/1952, 38.

The capitalist exploitation of vulnerable women fit neatly into a Cold War narrative of capitalist brutality and socialist humanity. An article published in 1952 claimed that nude photographs were used by American magazines to distract the population from the horrors of the Korean War.¹⁶ This was “the Strength through Joy tradition in American portions,” concluded the author, underlining not only East Germany’s moral superiority to its Cold War rival, but its antifascist credentials, too. The Western sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s—which West German media apprised East Germans of quite well—posed a new challenge to East German propagandists. Their solution was to describe developments in the West as a “sex wave” (sometimes “sex flood” or even “sex hurricane”), which commodified sex and nudity in order to sell magazines, newspapers, films, and books. “Flooded” with sexual stimuli, the capitalist consumer became a “slave to his urges,” they argued. The results: “moral sellout, brutality, loss of control, and deformed emotions.”¹⁷ Such moral panic could be mobilized against dissenting voices within socialism, too. At the infamous Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee in 1965, delegates attacked novelists and filmmakers for their “sex propaganda,” “disgusting bed scenes,” “pornography,” as well as the influence of “American amorality and decadence.”¹⁸ As Erich Honecker famously proclaimed from the podium: “Our GDR is a clean state. Here there are immovable ethical and moral standards for decency and morality.”¹⁹

For all its public moralizing, however, the regime consistently used publications with sexual content as part of its strategy to win popular acceptance. Despite their criticisms of West German and American sexualities, the East German authorities had long been aware of the seductive power of sex. Advertisements featuring semi-clad women appeared as early as 1952 and were to remain a constant feature of East German life.²⁰ But the first specifically erotic consumer good appeared on the market in the wake of the workers’ uprising of June 1953. Incensed by a 10 percent increase in work norms, which, combined with price hikes, amounted to a total wage cut of 33 percent, workers in Berlin had taken to the streets. The protests soon spread through most of the country, and by the afternoon of June 17, 400,000 people had become involved.²¹ Forced

16 *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 2/1952, 7. For a much later example, see *Das Magazin* 11/1975, inside back cover.

17 A. Jaritz, “Die ‘Sex-Welle’ oder Ausverkauf der Moral,” *humanitas* 19 (1970): 6. See also Walter Hollitscher, *Der überanstrengte Sexus. Die sogenannte sexuelle Emanzipation im heutigen Kapitalismus* (Berlin, 1975), 16.

18 Günther Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin, 2000), 241, 22, 245, 242. It should be noted that the filmmakers and writers who were the target of such virulent criticism were first and foremost political, not sexual, rebels. “Pornography” was a useful smear, but the Eleventh Plenum was directed primarily against political criticism and artistic autonomy. The SED’s quarrel with the films banned at the Plenum was not their occasional nude scenes—which were rarely sexual—but their unsparing view of life in East Germany.

19 Erich Honecker, “Bericht des Politbüros an die 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED, 15.-18.12.1965,” in *Kahlschlag*, ed. Agde, 241.

20 See, for example, the advertisement for Mildana soap in *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 12/1952, 6, in which the model’s nipple is clearly visible.

21 Gareth Pritchard, “Workers and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany in the summer of 1953,” in

The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht

1945-71, ed. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester, 2002), 112.

to go into hiding, the SED leadership was only able to put down the uprising with the help of Soviet tanks. It was clear that a rapid improvement in living conditions was necessary.²² Reminded that austerity and ideology alone were not enough, the Central Committee increased the money supply and authorized the production of more consumer goods, including a new entertainment monthly called, simply, *Das Magazin* [The Magazine].²³

Das Magazin contained little overt news or politics: its specialties were erotic short stories, racy articles about marriage and infidelity, and irreverent opinion polls with titles like “When is a Flirt More than a Flirt?”²⁴ Most shockingly of all, its editors were authorized to publish a nude photograph in every issue—among the only such pictures available in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵ But despite its unusual content, *Das Magazin* was far from peripheral or marginalized in the East German publishing landscape. Its initial print run of 150,000 copies was highly significant in the context of paper shortages. Nor were its staff in any sense personae non gratae: for example, Hilde Eisler, editor from 1956 to 1979, had been a major figure in communist émigré circles during the Nazi period and was married to the head of East German radio.

Although it was cheap and mass-produced, *Das Magazin* quickly became a collector’s item. In April 1954, just four months after its launch, its publisher wrote to the Ministry of Culture requesting that the circulation be doubled to 300,000 copies. The magazine had sold out in Berlin within 24 hours, and in the Zeiss works in Jena, a key center of socialist production, there were only 50 copies among 18,000 workers.²⁶ By painting a picture of disgruntled customers and dissatisfied workers, the publisher hoped to persuade the ministry’s planners to release more paper—a scarce and jealously guarded commodity in the socialist state. There was, after all, little point in launching a popular magazine if difficulties acquiring it were going to increase consumer frustration. Nevertheless, circulation was increased only grudgingly and incrementally. As early as 1956, the publisher reported that *Das Magazin* was available only “under the counter” in many places.²⁷ By 1965, circulation had reached 425,000, reaching its high point of 565,000 in 1981.²⁸

22 On 1953 as a turning point for East German consumer culture, see Katherine Pence, “‘You as a Woman Will Understand’: Consumption,

Gender and the Relationship between State and Citizenry in the GDR’s Crisis of 17 June 1953,” *German History* 19 (2001): 218–52.

23 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (henceforth SAPMO BArch), DY 30/J IV 2/3A /382. >>

>>The Wende Museum has a complete run of the magazine in its holdings.

24 *Das Magazin* 2/1961, 23.

25 There is no space here for a full account of *Das Magazin*. See the memoirs of its former editor Manfred Gebhardt, *Die Nackte unterm Ladentisch. Das Magazin in der DDR* (Berlin, 2002); Evamarie Badstübner, “‘Zeig’, wie das Leben lacht und liebt...’ Die Unterhaltungszeitschrift *Das Magazin* und ihre Leser zwischen 1954 und 1970,” in *Befremdlich anders. Leben in der DDR*, ed. Evamarie Badstübner (Berlin, 2000), 432–70; idem, “Auf 80 Seiten um die Welt. *Das Magazin* zwischen 1954 und 1970,” in *Zwischen ‘Mosaik’ und ‘Einheit’. Zeitschriften in der DDR*, ed. Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis (Berlin, 1999), 189–201; Martina Freyer, “The Indecent Legend of the Prudish East: *Das Magazin* as Source for Cultural and Historical Research” (master’s thesis, Royal College of Art, 2002). My thanks to David Crowley for alerting me to the existence of this thesis and for kindly sending me a copy.

26 Bundesarchiv (henceforth BArch) DC9/9028. Verlagsleitung (Letsch), Verlag Das Neue Berlin, an Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, Abt. Planung und Plankontrolle, 12.4.1954.

27 BArch DC9/9028. Verlagsleiter Das Neue Berlin (Müller) an Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, 2.7.56.

28 BArch DC9/9028.

What was so appealing about this publication, and how was it able to inspire a level of devotion in its readers that the editors of *New Germany*, the party press organ, must have envied? Despite its low cover price, there was something undeniably luxurious about *Das Magazin*. Few of its articles referred directly to the building of socialism, nor was it oppressively ideological. The monthly nude sent readers an erotic signal, suggesting that socialist bodies could be used for pleasure as well as work. At a time when the sinewy frame of activist Adolf Hennecke was near ubiquitous, softly rounded female curves basking in the warmth of the sun were sumptuous indeed.²⁹ For readers whose freedom of movement was profoundly limited, *Das Magazin's* features on foreign travel and lifestyles were an exotic glimpse of the unattainable,³⁰ as one fan described it, “a glass of champagne at the end of a working week.”³¹

Das Magazin's popularity can also be attributed to the fact that it reflected how the majority of people chose to spend their leisure time—not working extra shifts or attending party meetings but spending time with the family, reading, cooking, traveling, talking about relationships, and dressing up. Even its cookery column was called “Love, Fantasy and the Art of Cooking” and featured recipes for dishes as adventurous as “Lord Byron Rice” (key ingredients: rice, white wine, sugar, cream, and tinned pineapple). The magazine’s distinctive cover art exemplified this mixture of the exotic, erotic, and the everyday. The prolific graphic artist Werner Klemke produced 423 cover illustrations between 1954 and 1991.³² His trademarks were a black tomcat, which appeared on every cover, and an irreverent, mischievous attitude towards sex and relationships. As early as June 1960, the magazine’s cover featured a pretty blonde witch flying through the night sky clad only in fishnet stockings and red high heels.³³ In March 1968, a male insomniac counted Rubenesque women instead of sheep.³⁴ Klemke’s covers often featured blissful couples, whose happiness was clearly based on a strong physical bond.³⁵ He could be extraordinarily suggestive—the Christmas issue of 1973 featured a kissing couple, naked but for a gold star tied over the man’s genitals and a mask tied over the woman’s, giving the impression of an artificial penis and pubic hair.³⁶ Clearly pleased with this motif, Klemke followed it in February 1974 with a cover in which a man, confronted with a naked woman, appears to wear a large pink dildo on his nose.³⁷ Only Klemke’s humor and charm saved such covers from overt smuttiness or official censure.

29 The figurehead of the East German Stakhanovite movement, Hennecke rose to fame by overfulfilling the norm by 387 percent.

30 See Badstübner, “Auf 80 Seiten um die Welt,” 199.

31 *Das Magazin*, 2/1962, 3.

32 *Das Magazin*, 3/2004, 85.

33 *Das Magazin*, 6/1960. See <http://www.dasmagazin.de/1960/titelbilder.htmls/#>. All covers can be viewed by searching the Heftarchiv at *Das Magazin's* web site and selecting the appropriate year.

34 *Das Magazin*, 3/1968.

35 E.g., *Das Magazin*, 11/1975, which showed a newlywed couple approach their wedding bed, on which the figure of a prone woman was outlined in flowers.

36 *Das Magazin*, 12/1973.

37 *Das Magazin*, 2/1974.

The openness and irreverence about relationships present on *Das Magazin*'s covers was in evidence in its features, too. East German mating habits were put under the microscope in a 1959 survey on flirting and seduction techniques, with respondents recommending the tried and tested formula of wining, dining, and flattery.³⁸ One outraged reader objected to these rather unsubtle suggestions. "What were you thinking of when you devoted three-and-a-half pages to the primitive, kitschy opinions of these self-satisfied amateur Casanovas?" he fumed.³⁹ Other readers leapt to the publication's defense: One man insisted, "Even under socialism, we don't want to do without love," a phrase that could have been coined to describe *Das Magazin*'s philosophy.⁴⁰

The cultural authorities appear to have agreed. *Das Magazin*, along with most other East German magazines and newspapers, was not officially censored before publication. While all books were vetted by the Ministry of Culture before publication, magazines were submitted to the press department of the SED's Central Committee only after they were printed. If the department's officials were really displeased by what they read, they could recall and pulp the entire edition. This drastic measure was never taken in the case of *Das Magazin*, although the editor was called to the press department for a dressing-down on a number of occasions.⁴¹ On the whole, though, *Das Magazin* was spared the difficulties faced by other publications, such as the satirical *Eulenspiegel*.⁴² This, of course, did not mean that censorship did not take place.⁴³ Authors and editors had a strong sense of what could and could not be said in the socialist public sphere and self-censored accordingly. If a contributor's "inner scissors" did not trim sufficiently, a more cautious member of the editorial staff was sure to step in. This "censorship without censors" was perhaps even more effective than direct party censorship would have been.⁴⁴ The lack of a safety net before publication, and the dire consequences if a publication had to be pulped, meant that editors tended to err on the side of caution. *Das Magazin*, for example, did not engage with politics in anything but the gentlest manner. Its articles on sex and relationships were certainly risqué by East German standards, but they did nothing to challenge the state's emphasis on heterosexual monogamy. Articles that did mention adultery, or extramarital pregnancy, were usually morally disapproving, or emphasized the unhappy consequences of such actions. For all its irreverence, *Das Magazin* published little that contradicted Ulbricht's exhortation to live cleanly and decently.

38 *Das Magazin*, 7/1959, 28-30.

39 *Das Magazin*, 9/1959, 3.

40 *Das Magazin*, 11/1959, 4.

41 Gebhardt, *Die Nackte unterm Ladentisch*, 120-25.

42 Sylvia Klötzer, "Über den Umgang mit heißen Eissen. *Eulenspiegel*(eien)," in *Zwischen 'Mosaik' und 'Einheit'*, ed. Barck et al., 105-15.

43 On censorship in East Germany, see esp. Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer: Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeiten in der DDR* (Cologne, 1998).

44 Gunter Holzweissig, *Zensur ohne Zensur: Die SED-Informationsdiktatur* (Bonn, 1997).

The nude photographs, too, chimed surprisingly well with the regime's emphasis on "clean," reproductive, heterosexual sexuality.⁴⁵



Figure 1. Nude on a beach, *Das Magazin*, June 1968, 64. Photographer unknown. This photograph has been cropped but gives an indication of the East German style.

The typical East German nude was female, young, slim and physically unblemished, lightly tanned, wore little make-up or jewelry, and was photographed out of doors. (See Figure 1 for an example of the genre.) In marked contrast to Western "pinups," body hair was not a taboo, with armpit and pubic hair often on display.⁴⁶ It was generally agreed that it was best to photograph these "natural" models outdoors, preferably "playing sport and happy games."⁴⁷ That way, there were plausible grounds for their nudity, and the viewer would admire the beauty of the human body rather than use the photographs for sexual stimulation. Contexts that might imply sexual activity—the bedroom, group nudes—were to be avoided at all costs.⁴⁸ The attempt to make the nude body stand for health and strength rather than sexuality had, of course, important precedents in Nazi art and photography. And there can be no doubt that the "naturalness" of East German nudes, particularly the vis-

ibility of body hair, owed something to the conventions of Weimar nude photography, too.⁴⁹

In any case, *Das Magazin's* monopoly on nude photographs did not last for long. By the mid-1960s, such images began to appear in other mainstream publications, including photographic, health, trade union, and youth magazines. As they became more commonplace, nudes also became more overtly sexual. Whereas early nudes tended to be prized for their natural, outdoorsy qualities, those published in the 1970s and 1980s were posed in altogether more come-hither attitudes, looked directly into the camera lens,

45 Evans, "The Moral State," 355–56.

46 American magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* only began to depict pubic hair in the early 1970s.

47 Gerhard Vetter, "Zum Thema Aktfotografie," *Fotografie* 6/1954, 165.

48 The idea that outdoor nudes were morally less worrying was nothing new. As Alison Smith shows in her work on the Victorian nude, pastoral settings were often a way of dissociat-

ing nudity from the questionable activities of the "demimonde" and transcending the "urban sexualised body." Alison Smith, "The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain: 'The English

Nude,'" in *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, ed. Alison Smith (London, 2001), 11–22, 14.

49 See, for example, Gerhard Riebicke, *Photographien* (Berlin, 2000).

and wore heavier make-up.⁵⁰ These developments were closely linked to the evolution of Western nude photography. East German photographers, publishers, and consumers did not inhabit a closed visual world: after all, the regular publication of nudes had been a direct response to developments in the West. Before 1961, the open border allowed East Germans to sample the racier side of capitalism. And even after the Berlin Wall was built, East Germans experienced West German erotic consumer culture via TV, radio, and smuggled books and magazines. For all their protestations about Western pornography, the East German media, too, looked over the border for inspiration. The editorial staff of *Das Magazin* had a subscription to *Playboy* so that they could keep up with Western trends.⁵¹

The “Westernization” of the nude was accompanied by a new openness about the commercial value of erotica. From the 1950s onward, state-owned publishing houses produced pinups and glossy books of nude photographs for the lucrative overseas market.⁵² By 1980, this was enough of an open secret for Inge von Wangenheim to publish a novel about it. *The Derailment* took as its starting point the moment when a train came off the tracks in a small Thuringian village. Its cargo, books of erotic photographs, printed in the GDR but destined for the Swedish export market, quickly disappears—with hilarious results. Supposedly based on a real incident, the novel spoofed the hypocrisy of the party and the old-fashioned morality of country folk in equal measure and was a huge success with East German readers.⁵³ Rather like Werner Klemke, Wangenheim was able, with her humor and lightness of touch, to address a potentially delicate topic to a mass audience.

Perhaps one of the reasons the book was passed by the censors was that in reality, East Germans no longer had to wait for a train to go off the tracks—erotic consumer goods had begun to find their way onto the domestic market, too. Books such as Klaus Fischer’s *Nude Photography* offered lavishly produced glossy nude photographs under the guise of an advice manual for amateur photographers.⁵⁴ By 1989, 27 out of 237 photographic posters on sale were of nudes.⁵⁵ The East German film industry, better known in the West for its hard-hitting social criticism, had a lucrative sideline in erotic slides for the home entertainment market. East German television got in on the act, too, with *Night Time Erotica*, soft pornography for the late night viewer.⁵⁶ Even striptease, which had until then been emblematic of the exploitation and gender inequality of the West, began to become an acceptable form of entertainment at factory

50 On the commercialization of nudes, see also Ina Merkel, “Die Nackten und die Roten. Zum Verhältnis von Nacktheit und Öffentlichkeit in der DDR,” *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 18 (1995): 80-108.

51 Brigitte Sellin, the photo editor of *Das Magazin*, interviewed in Uta Kolano, *Nackter Osten* (Frankfurt/Oder, 1995), 37.

52 On the production of pinups in the 1950s, see BArch DR 1/7794, Jüttner an Volkskammer, 21.3.58; BArch DR1/822, Deutscher Buchexport an VVV Leipzig 13.4.55. For an early example of a book produced solely for export, see *Internationale Aktfotografie* (Leipzig, 1966).

53 Inge von Wangenheim, *Die Entgleisung* (Halle, 1980). It had already gone through seven editions by 1985.

54 Klaus Fischer, *Aktfotografie* (Leipzig, 1987).

55 “Das Fotoposter im Programm des Staatlichen Kunsthandels,” *Fotografie* 6/1989, 2.

56 Torsten Wahl, “Zärtliche Zofen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 7, 2003, 16.

work outings in the mid-1980s;⁵⁷ the celebrations for the 750th anniversary of Berlin in 1987 were marked by the presence of topless “mermaids” (Fig. 2).⁵⁸

The population was equally aware that erotica was a commodity. A lively unofficial trade in professional and amateur photos ran parallel

to the regime’s activities, with books changing hands at hugely inflated prices.⁵⁹ Amateur nude photography was encouraged by the regime as a legitimate socialist leisure activity, and the results ranged from snapshots from the nudist beach to sexually provocative poses clearly imitating Western pornography.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that it was forbidden to bring or send pornography into the country, East Germans and their West German relatives went to great lengths to smuggle *Playboy* and

other erotic goods across the border.⁶¹ By the time the Wall came down, 30 percent of the population admitted to having been shown illegally smuggled West German pornography at their place of work alone.⁶² Erotica was not only popular for leisure but also a means of gaining access to scarce services such as car repair and plumbing.⁶³

As well as for pacifying socialist consumers, erotica was used to persuade them to part with their savings. In 1980, the Kiepenheuer publishing house proposed the introduction of a new series, the Erotic Library. This was part of a mini-boom in erotic publishing, centered around classics like the *Kama Sutra* and Casanova’s memoirs. Like the goods in the Exquisit and Delikat shops, erotica was in such short supply that publishers could set prices high and still



Figure 2. Participant in the parade of ships to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the founding of Berlin, July 25, 1987. Landesarchiv Berlin, 289463. Photographer: Günter Schneider. This image has been cropped.

57 Günter Rössler, interviewed in *Nackter Osten*, 57-58.

58 Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1987-0704-042; Landesbildstelle Berlin, 289455, 289463, C14373, 289480, 289437. For more on this, see McLellan, “State Socialist Bodies.”

59 Klaus Honnef, “Als die Bilderwelten zusammenstürzten,” in *Die nackte Republik. Aktfotografien von Amateuren aus 40 Jahren Alltag im Osten* (Berlin, 1993), no pagination.

60 See Josie McLellan, “Visual Dangers and Delights: Nude Photography in East Germany,” *Past and Present* 205, no. 1 (2009): 143-74. For a collection of amateur photographs, see *Die nackte Republik*.

61 See, for example, Christian Härtel and Petra Kabus, eds., *Das Westpaket. Geschenk-sendung, keine Handelsware* (Berlin, 2000).

62 Werner Habermehl and Kurt Starke, *Sexualität in*

der DDR (n.p., 1990), no pagination.

63 Günter Rössler, interviewed in Kolano, *Nackter Osten*, 52; Backmann, “Als die Bilderwelten zusammenstürzten,” n.p.

expect an edition to sell out within weeks. The Erotic Library took the concept of erotica as a luxury good to new extremes. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classics such as *The Adventures of Fanny Hill* were to be published in tiny volumes, opulently bound, and aimed at bibliophiles. The motivation for this was more economic than cultural; in fact, the idea had come from the printing works rather than the publisher's editorial staff.⁶⁴ The head of the publishing house also admitted that the possibilities of the lucrative export market (and the resulting hard currency) had proved influential in the decision to produce the series.⁶⁵ Crucially, though, these publications would also be available to East German consumers. The Ministry of Culture and the Central Committee quickly acquiesced, and the series went into production.⁶⁶ Not only did the high prices of these books (around 95 marks) promise a hefty profit for the publishing house; they were also designed to keep their controversial content away from the general reader. Thus, it was possible to publish much more explicit material than in a mass-market paperback.

But despite the sound financial arguments for the series, it still had to be justified in cultural terms, both to maintain Kiepenheuer's image as a serious literary publisher and to satisfy the demands of the East German censorship system. Publishers' usual tactic was to stress a manuscript's historical, literary, and cultural value, and to refute any suggestion that a book might be published for its erotic content alone. Nerciat's *The Devil in the Flesh*, a romp through the bedchambers of the *ancien régime*, was praised for its critique of pre-revolutionary society. This book, its publisher was at pains to point out, "should not be seen as the facile sexual fantasies of an aging man," but rather as a valuable eyewitness account of life at the court of Louis XV.⁶⁷ Chorier's *The Dialogues of Aloisia Sigea*, a tale of sixteenth-century Italian courtesans, chastity belts, and male prostitutes, had no such political value. The reader's report admitted that it "verged on the pornographic," and that it would be disingenuous to attribute anti-clerical intent to the sex scenes between priests and noble ladies. What did justify publication, however, was Chorier's rich and subtle use of language.⁶⁸

Yet even publishers themselves were not always convinced by such justifications. Roland Links, the head of Kiepenheuer, admitted in a letter to the Ministry of Culture in 1988 that members of his editorial staff had expressed serious reservations about the series, doubts that he himself shared. He could not honestly say that any

64 BAArch DR1/3704a, 480.

65 BAArch DR1/3884a, 457.

66 BAArch DR1/3884a, 453-56.

67 BAArch DR1/3885a, 460.

68 BAArch DR1/3884a, 459, 460.

of the books in the series were “great literature,” and he conceded that he had “not yet found an oracle” that would tell him “exactly where the boundary between literature and pornography” lay. Links balked at the suggestion that *Josefine Mutzenbacher*, the next book in the series, should be printed in an edition of 15,000, and felt that it was unwise to include it in the Erotic Library at all.⁶⁹ Subtitled “The Life Story of a Viennese Whore,” *Josefine Mutzenbacher* was unusually explicit. Its anonymous author, the publishers surmised, must have aimed to include every variant of sexual activity. However, they concluded queasily, even then there was “a limit to the number of human orifices, as well as the combinations of the sexes.”⁷⁰ Links suggested a much smaller edition of 5,000 and a retail price of 160 marks to restrict potential purchasers.⁷¹ By the time the publisher officially sought permission to print, the price had been set at 200 marks, almost one-third of the average monthly white-collar wage.⁷²

Links’s agonizing about *Josefine Mutzenbacher* neatly illustrates the economic pressures within the state socialist economy in the 1980s. It also demonstrates how keenly publishers like Links felt the gap between official rhetoric and economic necessity. However much they attempted to claim that they were producing a specifically socialist erotica—literary and aimed at the connoisseur—there was no getting around the fact that their motivation was primarily financial. Pricing potential purchasers out of the market was unusually elitist: East Germany prided itself on its reputation as a “land of reading” (*Leseland*), where literature was available to all. But even heavily subsidized publishing houses were expected to run one or two profitable sidelines. Links himself admitted that Kiepenheuer’s erotic ventures had been “an excellent breadwinner.”⁷³ Nevertheless, the profit motive would not have justified mass editions of pornography. State-owned enterprises were more dependent on the approval of their superior organizations—“the charity of the bureaucracy”—than the market.⁷⁴ *Josefine Mutzenbacher*, as Links recognized, bordered on the unacceptably explicit. The only possible way to justify the work was to package it as a luxury good, stress its literary credentials, and keep circulation low. Setting the price high was supposed to limit its potential audience to bibliophiles and collectors. At the same time, the luxurious nature of the good, and the fact that such publications were in short supply, meant that a market was guaranteed, whatever the price. In fact, the extent to which such pricing policies put the Erotic Library out of the

69 BArch DR1/3704a, 480-81.

70 BArch DR1/3704a, 475.

71 BArch DR1/3704a, 480-81.

72 BArch DR1/3704a, 374. In 1988, the average monthly net wage of a worker was 899 marks, and that of a white-collar worker without a degree 688 marks. Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, 159.

73 BArch DR1/3704a, 480.

74 Kornai, *The Socialist System*, 265.

ordinary citizen's reach is questionable. Due to the lack of desirable consumer goods and the low prices for everyday items, most East Germans saved considerable amounts of money. The small number published was likely to have proved a greater obstacle.

What, then, was luxurious about erotica? In economic terms, it was certainly expensive. In the case of the Erotic Library, the consumer bore the cost, but other products, notably *Das Magazin*, were heavily subsidized. Like all other newspapers and magazines, it was classified as a staple of socialist cultural production, which should be made available to the workers at an affordable price, and its cover price of one mark was never raised. This strategy proved counterproductive, however, as the extra cost for each copy made it difficult for the regime to justify broader circulation, with the result that consumer demand far outstripped supply. *Das Magazin* was continually oversubscribed, celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 1974 under the tongue-in-cheek motto: "In Short Supply for Twenty Years" [*Zwanzig Jahre Mangelware*].⁷⁵ Readers complained that the only way to get a subscription was to inherit one—or marry a postal worker.⁷⁶

Aesthetically, erotica had an air of luxury. Both *Das Magazin* and the Erotic Library enjoyed distinctive and unusual looks: *Das Magazin* boasted colorful covers, dreamily photographed nudes, and "handwritten" headlines, and the Erotic Library sported a diminutive size, gilt-embossed titles, and fancy endpapers. While the Erotic Library was deliberately targeted at bibliophiles, *Das Magazin* proved surprisingly collectible, too. Treasured copies were passed from hand to hand and eventually bound into volumes for future reference. Readers reported using the covers to wallpaper their homes,⁷⁷ and one man wrote, "I collect the nudes; my wife collects the recipes."⁷⁸ They experienced both Klemke's cover art for *Das Magazin* and nude photographs as a welcome relief from the dominant trends of socialist visual culture and the ever-present leitmotifs of school, factory, and collective farm.

Ideologically, erotica never really shook off its associations with the West, as *The Derailment* mischievously demonstrated. More than that, it made no reference to the world of work, politics, sport, or education. The lack of adornment, jewelry, or elaborate hairstyles (stressed by photographers and photographic manuals as crucial to the success of a nude photo) meant that nudes in *Das Magazin* appeared classless, a world away from the everyday politics of East German life. Most unusually for an East German cultural product, erotica

75 *Das Magazin*, 1/1974, 4.

76 *Das Magazin* web site, "Leserpost zum Jubiläum," March 2004; <http://www.dasmagazin.de/content/forum/lesermeinungen.php>.

77 *Das Magazin*, 7/1962, 2.

78 *Das Magazin*, 5/1961, 2.

did not make ideological demands on readers or viewers, allowing them a rare opportunity to throw off the political yoke. This space for personal fantasy and escapism may have formed part of its appeal. Unlike the pinups in conventional men's magazines, the nudes in *Das Magazin* and elsewhere were aimed at a mixed mainstream audience, and there is evidence to suggest that readers of both sexes enjoyed looking at the monthly nude.⁷⁹ The outdoor setting created an implicit narrative based on good weather, leisure, and heterosexual sensuality. The idealized girl next door could act as an object of fantasy for both men and women. For the male viewer, the nude was a potential partner—young, and a little bashful. But the female observer could also see herself as the alluring object of desire.⁸⁰

Sexually, erotica made the altogether luxurious assumption that the primary purpose of sex was pleasure, not reproduction. It is interesting that the predominant theme of East German erotica was of surrender rather than domination. Even male sexual surrender was repeatedly thematized on the cover of *Das Magazin*: on the July 1972 issue, a tiny frogman sits in the palm of a monumental, topless blonde, imploring her to kiss him.⁸¹ Later that year, a cover showed a man slumped in bed, clearly sexually spent, as his statuesque partner jubilantly claims victory.⁸² However, although it was possible for Klemke to draw male sexual subordination, it was represented rarely if at all in photography. To the intense frustration of *Das Magazin's* female readership, male nudes were in short supply. The inclusion of a black male nude in the June 1954 edition raised hopes, yet the next male nude did not appear until February 1975, despite dogged lobbying on the letters page.⁸³ Even then, readers reacted with a mix of delight and disappointment as the model's hand coyly concealed his groin. Seven readers spoke for many more when they versified on the letters page:

Dear Magazin,
 Showing a man
 Without his full span
 Is really rather unfair
 If you expect the masses to stare,
 We seven Saxons hope and pray:
 Next time take the hand away!⁸⁴

But even such heartfelt appeals fell on deaf ears. The male nude remained a rarity, even as the female nude, propelled by the consumerism

79 See, for example, the letter from an "avid reader" (*eifrige Leserin*) from Berlin, complaining that the nude photograph in the previous issue did not show enough of the model's figure. *Das Magazin*, 11/1968, 3.

80 On female identification with nude photographs, see Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London, 1985), 41.

81 *Das Magazin*, 7/1972. See <http://www.dasmagazin.de/1972/titelbilder.html/#>.

82 *Das Magazin*, 11/1972. See the same link as note 81.

83 *Das Magazin*, 2/1975, 20.

84 *Das Magazin*, 4/1975, 3. "Liebes Magazin, zeigst du den Mann/Nicht mit allem Drum und Dran,/kannst Du ihn auch weglassen,/so interessiert er nicht die Massen!/Wir sieben Sachsen hoffen froh und munter:/Im nächsten Heft ist die Hand herunter!"

and increasing prosperity of the mid- to late-1960s, spread beyond the niche of *Das Magazin* to other publications. Photographers and publishers clearly felt the male nude was inappropriate and unnecessary. The female subjects of nude photography were unmistakably passive objects of sexual fantasy. Male nudes rarely existed because they were difficult to fit into the photographic conventions of the nude: passive, sexualized, in thrall to the camera and the spectator. What was possible on Klemke's covers was not possible in the more literal world of the photograph.

For all the regime's rhetoric about gender equality, this world of leisure and pleasure, so self-evidently secondary to the realities of work and politics, was inhabited only by women. One only has to mentally substitute a male for a female model to realize how unthinkable it would have been to portray men in this context. Here the naked body was female, beautiful, heterosexual, and apparently apolitical. With their conservative gender politics, denial of class divisions, and unspoiled rural settings, mainstream nudes were curiously divorced from both the reality and the rhetoric of East German public life. So while these photographs may have been utopian, they were not progressive. It is difficult to agree with Dagmar Herzog that

these photographs were remarkably tame compared with representations in the West and generally lacked the lascivious look and the nonaverage bombshell bodies so prevalent in Western pornography. Meanwhile the heterosexual male anxieties that both funded and were fostered by the pornography typically available in the West were not provoked in the same way in the East.⁸⁵

The presence of body hair and the natural settings should not lead one to assume that these were gender neutral or positive images of women. If anything, East German erotica was fundamentally conservative, a reaction against a society in which women made up an unprecedented percentage of the workforce and had a high degree of economic freedom.

Ultimately, the place of luxury goods in a socialist society was ambiguous: were they a necessary evil to keep the population happy, or a means of raising revenue, or could they contribute to the building of socialism? Thus, erotica fulfilled a number of often contradictory functions: as a crowd-pleasing strategy in heavily subsidized publications

⁸⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005), 205.

like *Das Magazin*, as a source of hard currency on the export market, as a profitable sideline for publishers, and as a means of projecting a pleasurable, even luxurious, image of life under socialism. But as in other areas of consumption, it was unclear whether East German producers were supposed to emulate the West or to provide an alternative.

Thinking about sex was equally muddled. Attitudes towards sexuality became increasingly laissez-faire in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁶

In part, this was an attempt to project an image of East Germany as a modern progressive state and to differentiate it positively from its more prosperous Western neighbor. But while openness about sexuality came to be seen as an integral part of a young, healthy socialist society, it was still overwhelmingly conceived of in terms of heterosexual reproduction. Sex manuals and sex surveys focused on penetrative sex within a monogamous relationship. Attitudes towards homosexuality ranged from grudging tolerance at best to Stasi surveillance at worst. But sex, despite its worthy associations with family, health, and happiness, also became increasingly commodified along Western lines as the regime struggled to keep the population happy. The mixed messages about sex and gender inherent in East German erotica raised uncomfortable questions about the true values of socialist society. Publishers, photographers, and journalists clearly felt a need to compete with the West, but both economic limitations and ideological scruples made it impossible for them to achieve either the production values or the variety of Western erotica and pornography.

After the collapse of communism, the fate of these two publications diverged. As the books of the Erotic Library had, unsurprisingly, done little to shore up the ailing socialist economy or to assuage the grievances of the population, they quickly lost their market. Now they are only available through specialist dealers and Internet auctions, where they are sought for their rarity value rather than their erotic charge. *Das Magazin*, on the other hand, was one of relatively few East German cultural products to survive the transition to capitalism. After German reunification, it experienced a short-lived and unhappy eroticization at the hands of a West German publishing house. Circulation plummeted, but a swift return to its tried and tested mixture of features, short stories, surveys, and the obligatory nude has resulted in a loyal, mostly Eastern, readership.⁸⁷

Das Magazin showed that it was possible to promote the values of the regime and win a devoted readership. Luxury did not have to be

86 Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, ch. 5.

87 A partial explanation for *Das Magazin*'s continued popularity is nostalgia for the vanished sexual culture of East Germany, particularly its ease with nudity. See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 216-19, and McLellan, "State Socialist Bodies."

expensive, and it did not have to imitate the West. In fact, readers experienced *Das Magazin* as luxurious because it promoted the idea that socialist leisure time could be pleasurable and sensual, too. The success of *Das Magazin*'s publishing formula under capitalism demonstrated a potential which the East German regime, in its haste to emulate the West, had consistently failed to grasp: that of a genuine alternative to Western patterns of consumption. It was not the scarcity of material goods that sealed the fate of the East German regime but its failure to provide a unique style of living.

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