

The second chapter, with the title *Vergangenheit neu* (New Past) addresses the reinterpretation of the “communist heritage.” Whether the official partisan myth in Yugoslavia, the official culture of remembrance in Czechoslovakia, the canonical theater texts in Poland, or symbolic architectural works like the slab blocks or the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, the approach is always by strategies of rewriting, revaluation and often also vindication through art, which are, however, subject to criticism and even rejection in the new political reality. Therefore, the socialist past becomes in the post-socialist era a common ground for social reflection, and also not infrequently for adaptation to the new political and social circumstances.

The topic of absurdity is discussed in the chapter *Blödsinn* (“Nonsense”). As the title suggests, emphasis is given to the provocative subversion. Exemplified in cinema, literature and other artistic expression, the authors examine here the forms and functions of absurdity prior to and after the political changeover. The figure of the fool represents in all compiled texts a parody and a subversion of the sociopolitical reality, both with reference to the official art system during the socialist era and to the post-socialist consumer society.

The relationship between art and protest is addressed in the last chapter. The terms “active, critical, purchasable” are used to describe the tensions between the artistic and the political spheres, in particular if the latter could contain in itself a protest where the boundaries between culture and politics could be set. Irrespective of prose, cinema or pop culture, or of issues of social criticism as a path for social mobilization or political issues embodied in artistic or literary forms, it is always about the articulation of art forms that oscillates between art and politics.

The volume thus offers a broad perspective of counter-publics. What is remarkable about this book is, however, not only the transnational approach, but also the extension of the historical period covered, which allows portrayal of the continuity and/or fractures as well as the changes of strategies and formulas of refusal, of protest or withdrawal. Hence, the “resistance,” contrary to common belief, is not an impassioned opposition and dissidence with national range, but a multiform, multicolor phenomenon. Nonetheless, the diversity of the examples listed proves that the attempts at “resistance” were strictly of an urban nature, with the city serving as their setting.

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Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I. By Jesse Kauffman. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015. 287pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$35.00, hard bound.

Germany has a bad reputation as an occupying power. Its cruel and genocidal policy during the Second World War casts a long shadow over German history. The atrocities against Belgian civilians and the destruction of the library of Leuven at the beginning of the First World War were seen as a prelude to German war crimes 25 years later. It does not seem to matter that most atrocities in Belgium and Northern France happened in the first few months of the war and that there was no sustained, systematic terror against the civilian population. While the Western Front is well researched, relatively little is known about German policies in the occupied provinces of the Russian Empire. How brutal was the German occupation policy there? How strong are the continuities between German policies in the First and Second World Wars? Jesse Kauffman, assistant professor at the University of Eastern Michigan, addresses these

questions in his book on the German occupation of Poland in World War I. The dissertation is based on a wide range of sources from German and Polish archives.

Kauffmann offers a corrective to Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius' pioneering study *War Land on the Eastern Front* (2000), which focuses on the Baltic provinces and Belarus. Liulevicius paints a dark picture of German occupation and sees a strong continuity between both world wars. Exercising military and political control and reckless economic exploitation were, according to Liulevicius, the driving forces behind German policy in both world wars. Kauffman shows that Germany did not have a master plan on how to transform eastern Europe. There was much improvisation and uncertainty, and German policy changed depending on the course of the war and the policy of the Entente. Erich Ludendorff had different views on how to solve the "Polish question" from those of Chancellor Bethman-Hollweg or his successor; the ideas of the German military governor in Warsaw were not in line with the wishes of the League of Eastern Marches. Equally unclear was the picture on the Polish side where some groups, most notably Józef Piłsudski and his supporters, were—at least temporarily—willing to co-operate with the Central Powers while others such as the National-Democrats objected to allying themselves with Germany. An additional complication was that Germany shared control of Russian Poland with Austria-Hungary, whose government and military had different ideas about Poland's future.

Despite all these disagreements, German politicians and military leaders agreed that Poland—irrespective of its borders and form of government—had to be closely linked to Germany, but this did not preclude autonomy or even formal independence. Kauffman's focus is on the policy of Hans Hartwig von Beseler, a veteran Prussian general who headed the Imperial Government-General of Warsaw. Beseler tried to win Polish support for the German war effort but neither he nor his superiors intended to unite the provinces of Posen and West Prussia with the Government-General, which significantly reduced the attraction of a German option for Polish politicians. Beseler even supported the annexation of some Polish border regions by Germany, but he also realized that the strength of Polish nationalism would make it impossible to go back to the status quo ante bellum. Beseler's concept of bringing Poland under German influence competed with the idea of an Austrian-Polish solution.

Beseler had a colonial attitude toward the Poles. He regarded them as unruly children who did not understand what was in their best interest. He did not consider the Poles to be capable of building a state on their own, believing that they would need German support. Beseler's administration helped Polish state building by allowing Polish local self-administration, expanding school education in Polish, and re-opening the Polish-language university in Warsaw. Beseler had hoped that his policies would win over the Polish population, but attempts to recruit Polish soldiers were not very successful and Beseler became more and more disillusioned. After the Russian February Revolution and the entry of the United States of America into the war, the promises of the Central Powers were more than matched by what the Entente had to offer: full independence for Poland, including Posen and Galicia.

From a German perspective the Polish policy was a failure. It did not convince the majority of Poles to back the Central Powers. Kauffmann shows that institutions were created which continued to function even after Poland had become an independent state. At least in this respect Polish state building was not hindered but furthered. Kauffman also mentions the oppressive dimension of German occupation policy—executions, the taking of hostages, and economic exploitation—but does not fully discuss them. Without a discussion of this dark side of German occupation policy a full picture is not possible. It is clear, however, that German policy in World War I was a world apart from the attempts of the Nazis to destroy the Polish nation. There are some continuities but the differences are more important. It is unclear what would

have happened had the First World War ended with a German victory: whether the colonialist *Ostraum* fantasies of Ludendorff would have been realized or whether a moderate policy would have prevailed that accepted the existence, at least formally, of an independent Polish state within a German-dominated eastern Europe.

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Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943–1957. By Patryk Babiracki. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xvi, 344 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$37.50, hard bound.

Patryk Babiracki's brilliant, big-hearted book burrows inside the aspirations and failures of the Soviet imperial project in eastern Europe. Focusing on Soviet cultural diplomacy in Poland, Babiracki uses political scientist Joseph Nye's term "soft power" to suggest what this project both was and was not. While key actors on both the Polish and Soviet sides—among them writers, scientists, and journalists—attempted to extend Soviet influence "by forging sensitive and reciprocal cultural relations" between the two countries, "their efforts were stifled by the system that Stalin had brutally hammered into place" (236). The result, by the mid-1950s, was to alienate even those Polish intellectuals who had once actively supported the Soviets, and to leave "large, resentful, captive audiences" susceptible to the lure of better-quality cultural goods from the west" (239).

While this conclusion might not be surprising, Babiracki's contribution is to highlight the reservoirs of genuine effort and goodwill that were squandered in the process. In fact, the exercise of Soviet "hard power" in the Polish cultural sphere—heavy-handed propaganda and censorship, officially delimited styles, and limitations on artistic freedom—was opposed by a range of mid-level actors, both Polish and Soviet. It was perceived as counter-productive even by Party hardliners like Jakub Berman. Babiracki also disputes the assumption that Poles' inherited mistrust of Russian/Soviet imperialism must have doomed the soft-power project to failure. On the contrary, the opportunity to be "close affiliates of a culturally able military superpower" (83) was far from unattractive to many, he argues, in the wake of World War II.

Babiracki illuminates this through meticulously researched, thickly layered vignettes describing encounters between Soviets and Poles of various stripes. These start with a chapter on the creation of the Kościuszko Division of the Red Army in 1943, and end with a portrait of the Soviet editor Nikolai Bubnov, who quixotically tried to turn the Soviet mouthpiece *Wolność* into a good read, inspired by the "thaw" in Polish culture a decade later.

The fact that people like Bubnov were repeatedly recalled, ignored, and/or silenced by fear only underscores their commitment to a vision of Soviet "soft" influence very different from that of the political center. Babiracki reminds us that Soviet writers, artists, or scientists went out on a limb to build bridges with their east European counterparts; Sovietization was a risky business, most of all for the Soviets themselves. For instance, while Soviets might welcome the chance to travel abroad on a cultural or scientific delegation, this would redouble pressures upon them to critique, say, the "bourgeois" tendencies of their Polish hosts. Often, this led to abortive encounters that confirmed both sides in their mistrust of the other. On the other hand, Babiracki sees evidence of an unrequited "craving for more interaction" (169) between representatives of the two groups, embodied in Polish writer Zofia Nałkowska's fleet-