

en politieke speelballen in de lucht. Hij kon veel van zijn persoonlijke ambities niet waarmaken en moest rekening houden met het machtige Spanje. Door zijn bewegingsvrijheid op te rekken waar het kon en te beperken wanneer het om dynastieke redenen moest, drukte Albrecht zijn stempel op de Habsburgse Nederlanden.

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Milena Veenis, *Material fantasies: Expectations of the western consumer world among East Germans*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press in cooperation with the Foundation for the History of Technology, 2012) 280 p.
ISBN 978 90 8964 400 8 [Technology and European History Series, 6].

In 1990, two weeks after West and East Germany formed a currency union, I spent a night in an isolated East German farmhouse in the Spreewald. Prominently displayed on the bathtub ledge were three household products from West Germany. Each colourful plastic container indicated a different brand, but the contents of each had the same purpose: to clean bathroom surfaces. Tucked nearly out of sight on the floor next to the sink was a blandly packaged box of powder, a functionally identical East German product. Why were the West German wares so appealing to the woman who ran this house? The anthropologist Milena Veenis helps explain the far-reaching expectations that East German citizens brought with them in their encounters with the West's consumer culture. Drawing on her fieldwork in the small Thuringian city of Rudolstadt in 1993 and 1994, she explores the relationship between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the material appetites of its inhabitants.

This is not a simple tale of material want behind the Iron Curtain that could only be satisfied by the West's plenty. Drawing on Daniel Miller's findings, Veenis maintains 'that consumption plays a central role in current processes of cultural and individual self-development'. But 'whereas Miller seems to have a rather optimistic view on the development of identity', Veenis sees 'this process as a continuously doomed ... attempt to construct a true and solid identity'. Informed by the work of Colin Campbell, Jacques Lacan, and Yannis Stavrakakis, among others, Veenis sees 'the dialectic between identity and consumption' as 'propelled by estrangement – not as a temporary phase in a continual process of further self-development, but as an existential condition that drives our consumption behaviour, ensuring that as soon as consumer desires for material possessions ... are satisfied', these feelings are followed by 'disillusionment' (p. 234).

This process typifies many societies, but it gained special significance in the former GDR, where the euphoria of 1989-90 soon turned to disappointment among both winners and losers of the transition from socialism to capitalism. To apprehend the hopeful expectations that ended in collective disenchantment, Veenis adopts fantasy as a cultural heuristic. 'When reality threatens to undermine the discursive fundamentals supporting a certain group as a more or less cohesive entity, people have two escape routes at their disposal to restore and uphold faith in their mutual coherence: creating a scapegoat ... or suggesting that the true "us" is to be reached' in a different manner (p. 29). In both cases, fantasy cloaks any weaknesses in the ideology that led to this point.

How did material fantasies play out in the GDR? Linking the rise of socialism to the demise of fascism and its alleged progenitor, capitalism, the socialist regime promised its citizens a bright future in which the conflicts of the past would supposedly disappear because of the material prosperity that socialism promised. Ironically, by thus elevating the symbolic value of material goods, the regime also helped attach great significance to West German products. Veenis's nuanced account of life under the East German dictatorship suggests that such discourses helped paper over features at odds with socialist solidarity. One had to keep quiet about the Stasi, for instance, but could vent about the regime's failure to deliver sufficient wares. 'Scapegoating the state for not delivering the [goods] it promised, and fantasizing about a life amidst western abundance, allowed East Germans to uphold some sort of faith in their collective self-representation as being more or less harmonious' (p. 221).

The materiality of Western products – their look, feel, smell, and taste, which so many experienced directly through Christmas packages and vicariously via television – promised to deliver what was missing for the good life. Imagine, then, the disillusionment that Veenis encountered a few years after the residents of Rudolstadt had obtained unhindered access to Western currency and goods. Instead of attaining fulfilment, they lost the social harmony that they imagined had existed in the GDR, as ever greater social differentiation developed for all to see. Instead of standing together in lines or bartering with each other in a situation of shared want that enforced much apparent equality, one openly sought one's own advantage and no longer socialized with less successful neighbours. At the same time, people faced the symbolic devaluation of their previous lives.

This experience led many residents of Rudolstadt to view Veenis's project with suspicion. To study their relationship to consumption, Veenis had to learn as much from their silences as she did from their words. She also turned to the goods around them, and to local and regional archives. Finally, she drew on extensive scholarship about this and other dictatorships because her informants' reactions to material goods and her questions about these things were bound up in how these people had experienced life in the GDR. The reality was complex, she shows in deep meditations about everyday life under an oppressive regime. Neither East German whitewashing and nostalgia nor West German demonization and disparagement do justice to it.

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Arjan Nobel, *Besturen op het Hollandse platteland. Cromstrijen 1550-1780* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2012) 250 p. ISBN 9057308479.

Naar sommige boeken wordt al lang voor verschijning uitgekeken. Arjan Nobel was zo gelukkig om in 2012 zo'n boek te publiceren en daar op te promoveren aan de Universiteit Leiden. Zoals de titel al aangeeft gaat het boek over besturen op het Hollandse platteland in de Vroegmoderne Tijd, een onderwerp waar tot dusver bar weinig over is verschenen. Aan de hand van de casus van de ambachtsheerlijkheid Cromstrijen komen we veel te weten over hoe het er daar aan toeging en in hoeverre dat (vermoedelijk) overeenkwam met de praktijk op de rest van het Hollandse platteland. Nobel heeft voor zijn onderzoek gebruik kunnen maken van het unieke archief van