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Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany

In 1951, sociologist David Reisman published a fictitious account of a bombing campaign involving consumer goods rather than explosives. What US officials called 'Operation Abundance' was soon dubbed 'The Nylon War' by Reisman's imaginary reporters following its initial barrage of the USSR with women's stockings. The offensive strategy was inspired and devious:

> Behind the initial raid of June 1 were years of secret and complex preparations, and an idea of disarming simplicity: that if allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors. The Russian rulers would thereupon be forced to turn out consumers' goods, or face mass discontent on an increasing scale.[1]

Operation Abundance 'was both violently anti-Soviet and pro-peace', according to Reisman's parody, and entailed 'recruitment of top-flight production and merchandising talent from civilian life'. Successive waves of air-dropped free samples were said to throw socialist society into disarray 'as Soviet housewives saw for their own eyes American stoves, refrigerators, clothing and toys'. Reisman described the war's outcome as a new Soviet policy that attempted to enfranchise consumers, but strained state resources. '[T]he Russian people, without saying so in as many words, are now putting a price on their collaboration with the regime. The price — "goods instead of guns".'[2]

Less than a decade after its publication, Reisman's fiction came to seem prophetic. In the summer of 1959, Russians got their first taste of the US consumer lifestyle at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. Advising on exhibition strategies, Llewelyn Thompson, the US ambassador to the USSR, proposed that displays should 'endeavor to make the Soviet people dissatisfied with the share of the Russian pie which they now receive'.[3] Consequently, the show's perfunctory sampling of American 'high culture' was dwarfed by a consumer spectacle which showcased cosmetics, clothing, televisions, kitchens, soft drinks, mail order catalogues, fibreglass canoes and sailing-boats, automobiles and a prefabricated suburban house. Soviet premier Nikita

1 David Reisman, 'The Nylon War' in *Abundance for What? And Other Essays* (Garden City, NY 1964), 67. I wish to thank György Péteri for bringing this essay to my attention.
2 Ibid., 68, 69, 73.
3 Llewelyn Thompson quoted in Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York 1998), 167.

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Khrushchev seemed testy on the first of his two visits. He lost his composure when confronted by the 1100 sq. ft tract home, dubbed 'Splitnik' by American journalists for the ramp splitting the structure in half to allow crowds of visitors to move unimpeded past the furnished interiors. Arriving at Splitnik's lemon-yellow, all-electric, GE kitchen, Khrushchev and his tour guide, Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, confronted each other. Khrushchev declared that the US had no exclusive franchise on advanced domestic technology and claimed preposterously that 'all of our houses have this kind of equipment'.[4] Humiliated by inadequacies on the Russian home front, the Soviet premier made a rash wager: 'In another seven years we will be on the same level as America. When we catch up with you, while passing by we will wave to you.'[5] Officials in Washington were ecstatic, proclaiming the exhibition 'probably the most productive single psychological [warfare] effort ever launched by the US in any communist country'.[6]

Although historians sometimes credit the Kitchen Debate with inducting model homes and household goods into the Cold War, the American National Exhibition was the parting volley of a successful propaganda campaign rather than its opening shot. The US State Department had begun developing domestic consumption as a propaganda weapon ten years earlier in divided Berlin, a city reconstructed as a set of competing ideological showcases. Just as singular as the construction of a habitable metonym for Europe's partition was the opportunity to construct a daily life that transgressed Cold War boundaries. Until the infamous Wall went up in 1961, Berlin's socialist capital and capitalist metropolis met at relatively open border crossings. Especially at the peak of West German unemployment in 1950, West Berliners shopped in the 'Second World' for cheap goods at favourable exchange rates.[7] East Berliners crossed over to the 'First World' for nylons and jeans, or to take in a Hollywood film at a matinee.[8] Propagandists from both sides, inspired by the ways consumers exploited Berlin's oddness for their own ends, devised new strategies to reach audiences across the city's sector boundaries.[9]

Just as in Reisman's 'Operation Abundance', household goods exhibitions sponsored by the Marshall Plan in West Berlin recruited 'top-flight' civilian talents, including Edgar Kaufmann Jr, design curator at New York's Museum

4 Khrushchev quoted in Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, op. cit., 179.

5 Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty. Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington, DC and London 1997), 215.

6 1960 USIA Annual Report, quoted in Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, op. cit., 210.

7 Katherine Pence, 'The Myth of a Suspended Present. Prosperity's Painful Shadow in 1950s East Germany' in Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian, *Pain and Prosperity. Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford, CA 2003), 153.

8 Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA 2000), 2.

9 Paul Steege uses the term 'messy location' in the context of the Cold War imperative to segregate ideological realms, to describe Berlin's geopolitical site. Paul Steege, 'Making the Cold War. Everyday Symbolic Practice in Postwar Berlin' at the 'Revising Alltagsgeschichte', paper presented at the German Studies Association Conference, New Orleans 2003.

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of Modern Art (MoMA). They were assisted in their efforts by a federal employee, Peter G. Harnden. A California-born architect, Harnden's wartime work as a US Army Intelligence officer was followed by a postwar career in exhibition design and production — first for the Marshall Plan and later working under Federal sponsorship as an independent consultant based in Paris. His use of model homes to promote the US political economy was honed in occupied Germany and culminated a decade later in Moscow. The path toward Khrushchev's humiliating encounter with a lemon-yellow kitchen can be traced directly back to US propaganda spectacles staged in West Berlin.

John Connelly has noted that 'the precise function of the open border is one of the most pressing questions in the historical sociology of the GDR'.[10] In an era before television could beam images of Western lifestyles directly into East German homes, the US State Department exploited the geopolitical anomaly of divided Berlin to expose citizens of the West *and* East to household exhibitions trumpeting the Marshall Plan's social contract, which conflated democratic freedom with rising private consumption. US-sponsored exhibitions were scheduled deliberately to coincide with major socialist holidays, a strategy which exploited the ease with which East Berliners could visit the city's western half before the construction of the infamous Wall in 1961. Marshall Plan shows poached attendance from East Berlin's political rallies, which were stocked with crowds shipped in from across the socialist nation. Bargain-rate admissions for those holding East German identity cards provided an added incentive for a day trip to the capitalist west, and allowed US officials to keep a precise tally of socialist visitors. To compete with the 1951 World Festival of Socialist Youth (Weltfestspiele), for example, Marshall Plan propagandists introduced colour television and projection-screen broadcasting to Europe. US technicians broadcast a programme of live entertainment via closed circuit to television sets displayed in shop windows and to two large outdoor projection screens, one at Potsdamer Platz, just a block from the East Berlin border. Crowds began to gather at 2 p.m. to claim perches atop piles of wartime rubble to secure an unobstructed view of the evening telecast. This mediated, real-time communion with television viewers in outdoor locations across West Berlin was the Marshall Plan's capitalist analogue of Stalinism's embodied socialist collectivity, the latter expressed in choreographed masses flowing down East Berlin's boulevards. A Marshall Plan press release crowed:

> While 100,000 young men and women crowded the Soviet sector of Berlin for the communist-inspired world festival of youth, the free sector of the German capital got its first look at both color and black-and-white television. A steady flow of wide-eyed visitors . . . who had come to Berlin from many parts of the world 'played hooky' . . . and saw for themselves the exhibits put on by CBS in color, and RCA in black-and-white.[11]

10 John Connelly, 'Ulbricht and the Intellectuals' in György Péteri (ed.), *Intellectual Life and the First Crisis of State Socialism in East Central Europe, 1953–1956*, Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, no. 6, 103.

11 'Free Berlin Exhibits Draw Communist Youths', 24 August 1951 press release, RG 286 MP Ger. 1088–1106, Visual records, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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Marshall Plan publicists grabbed photo-ops of uniformed members of the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend, the East German communist youth organization) at American exhibitions, and documented 'Americanized' teenagers — '*Ami-Jünglinge*' as they were known in party rhetoric — being beaten by *Volkspolizisten*, or 'people's police', while trying to cross the border back into East Berlin.[12] Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the East German party, laid down the law for such youths in June 1952: 'Every young person at a university or any other kind of school will be immediately expelled if he has any connections with West Berlin. Whoever is a member of the state youth organization will be kicked out of the FDJ. . . . There is no other way.'[13] Among East German teenagers, that critical cadre of socialist citizens-in-the-making, the party programme of Sovietization 'from above' was under mortal threat from a countervailing process of Americanization initiated 'from below' — the consumer-driven vector of influence emphasized by scholars of the East/West interface of popular culture — but choreographed 'from above' through Marshall Plan spectacles, which confronted socialist citizens with domestic environments that were the antithesis of Stalin-era material deprivation.[14]

In the wake of Stalin's death in 1953, economic and social reforms supported by Khrushchev forged a tenuous truce between socialist collectivity and capitalist consumption. A cornucopia of new household items suddenly graced the pages of Soviet bloc magazines. *Kultur im Heim* (Culture at Home), an East German home-decorating journal founded in 1956, showed kitchen gadgets and domestic technology formerly associated with American excess, but now celebrated as the practical accessories of a contemporary socialist lifestyle. Modernist home furnishings, decried by party leaders a few years earlier as symptomatic of Western decadence, became heralds of communism's 'New Course' — even if they were nowhere to be found in state retail outlets. Over the course of a generation, a Stalinist construct of domesticity emphasizing the presence of culture was abandoned for one that highlighted the absence of objects.[15] Of even greater portent than the Soviet bloc's embrace of the kind

12 'Caught Red Handed', 15 October 1951 press release, RG 286 MP Ger. 1180, Visual records, US National Archives, College Park, MD. On the East German party reaction to 'Americanized' socialist youth, see Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels*, op. cit., 58–70.

13 Ulbricht's comments at a conference of regional secretaries of the SED, 4 June 1952, cited and translated in Michael Lemke, 'Foreign Influences on the Dictatorial Development of the GDR, 1949–1955' in Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience. Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York and Oxford 1999), 102.

14 The concept of 'Americanization from below' in contest with 'Sovietization from above' is developed in Michael Lemke, 'Deutschlandpolitik zwischen Sowjetisierung und Verwestlichung 1949–1963' in Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist (eds), *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1997), 94–9.

15 On the use of socialist consumption as a culture of resistance, see C. Humphrey, 'Creating a Culture of Disillusionment. Consumption in Moscow, A Chronicle of Changing Times' in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart. Modernity through the Prism of the Local* (London and New York 1995). On the role played by consumer dissatisfaction at the collapse of the East German state, see Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Collapse in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill,

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of commodities displayed in US State Department household goods shows was the party's implicit adoption of the Marshall Plan's notion of citizen enfranchisement through rising purchasing power: a consumer rewards programme impossible to maintain in an economy founded on the primacy of state-owned heavy industry. As fantasized in Reisman's fictional 'Nylon War', a runaway inflation of consumer desire ultimately bankrupted the political economy of Soviet-style socialism.

US occupation governance in postwar Germany faced a two-front cultural battle. Communist propaganda depicted the USA as a military empire ruled by philistine parvenus. German intellectuals and opinion leaders, who constituted the second front in America's cultural cold war, typically regarded America as the purveyor of 'a primitive, vulgar, trashy *Massenkultur*, which was in effect an *Unkultur*, whose importation into postwar Europe had to be resisted', in the words of historian Volker Berghahn.[16] More than merely humiliating, perceptions of a degraded American 'non-culture' also subverted US plans for Europe's postwar future. The Marshall Plan set out to link capitalist democracy and economic growth to low-cost mass consumption: the Fordist mechanism by which workers would be enfranchised, and agitation by communist labour unions neutralized.[17] 'Today's contest between freedom and despotism is a contest between the American assembly line and the Communist Party line', declared Paul G. Hoffmann, the former CEO of Studebaker who headed the Marshall Plan's European Recovery Programme (ERP).[18] The ERP blueprint for unleashing postwar consumer desire effectively redefined Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms', transforming 'freedom from want' into the freedom *to* want.

A classified US intelligence report of 1947 examined Soviet propaganda ridiculing 'the American Way of Life' and recommended that the USA initiate a counter-propaganda offensive based on themes like 'American living standards' and 'try it our way'.[19] In the spring of 1948, the Office of the Military Government in US-occupied Germany (OMGUS) contracted Frederick Gutheim, a German expatriate architectural historian, as a consultant for an exhibition about postwar housing trends in the USA. Patricia van Delden, chief officer of the OMGUS Information Centers and Exhibitions Branch, doubted the wisdom of such an exhibit:

NC and London 1997), 192, 195–7, and Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ 1997), 89–97.

16 Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars* (Princeton, NJ 2001), xvii.

17 The origins and ideological underpinnings of a Fordist consumer culture are traced in Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed. The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York 1989).

18 Paul G. Hoffman, *Peace Can Be Won* (Garden City, NY 1951).

19 US Army Intelligence, 'Russian Propaganda Regarding the American Way of Life' (Project 3869), 10 October 1947. RG319, 270/9/23/7, Box 2900, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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> In the years since the war, the Congress has failed to pass an adequate housing bill, and our own publications, easily available to the Germans in [US] Information Centers, draw constant attention to that fact. Unless we are in the position to explain to the German people how they can acquire these houses, . . . we could be criticized for raising false hopes.

Van Delden's alternative, to 'confine ourselves to material showing American concepts of architecture', was disregarded by her superiors. Photographs showing new homes and neighbourhood planning trends were solicited from architecture school libraries at Harvard, Columbia and MIT. The images were enlarged for display panels at the OMGUS Exhibitions and Information Center, where Joost Schmidt, the former master instructor of graphics at the Dessau Bauhaus, was in charge of design. So wohnt Amerika (How America Lives) opened in Frankfurt in August 1949 (Fig. 1). Despite stellar production talent, the exhibition attracted only a modest audience and was largely ignored by local journalists. Photographs and scale models of suburban homes had failed to capture the imagination of postwar Germans. The head of the US Information Center in Frankfurt, Donald W. Muntz, recognized the error: 'If real honest-to-god electric stoves, refrigerators and deep-freeze units had been on hand, the general attendance figures would have been astronomic. I can well imagine that the problems in bringing these gadgets together would be manifold, but an effort here would have paid off.'[20] The show's 'particular failure', as Muntz termed it, would not be repeated in State Department exhibits of domestic material culture.

Whatever the popular response to the American 'good life' pitched at the Frankfurt exhibition, its underlying values were alien — even alienating — to Germans across all four occupation zones at the end of the war. For postwar citizens struggling for sustenance and basic shelter, images of overseas affluence were foreign in every sense of the word. The consensus among many intellectuals was that Germany was at the threshold of a new historical era that would muzzle capitalism and material excess. Spartan lifestyle choices complemented both the economic realities of life in the wake of Armageddon as well as the search for an indigenous German socialism. The nation's modernists rediscovered the minimalist design traditions of the Weimar era, which they embraced for their potential to aestheticize collective poverty. The Deutsche Werkbund's 1949 Neues Wohnen (New Living) exhibition in Cologne prescribed ascetic domestic appointments as a catalyst for Germany's spiritual redemption — a theme repeatedly mentioned in opening-day addresses. The Minister of Economics of Nordrhein-Westfalen Erik Nölting observed of the *existenz minimum* designs devised by Weimar era modernists: 'Hard times in the past also forced downsizing and thrift upon us, but it was a

20 Donald W. Muntz to Patricia van Delden, 'Special Report re America House Publicity Efforts on Behalf of the "*So Wohnt Amerika*" Exhibition, 24 August 1949', RG260, 390/42/21/3, Box 323, OMGUS Information Control, Records of Information Centers and Exhibits Branch, 1945–49, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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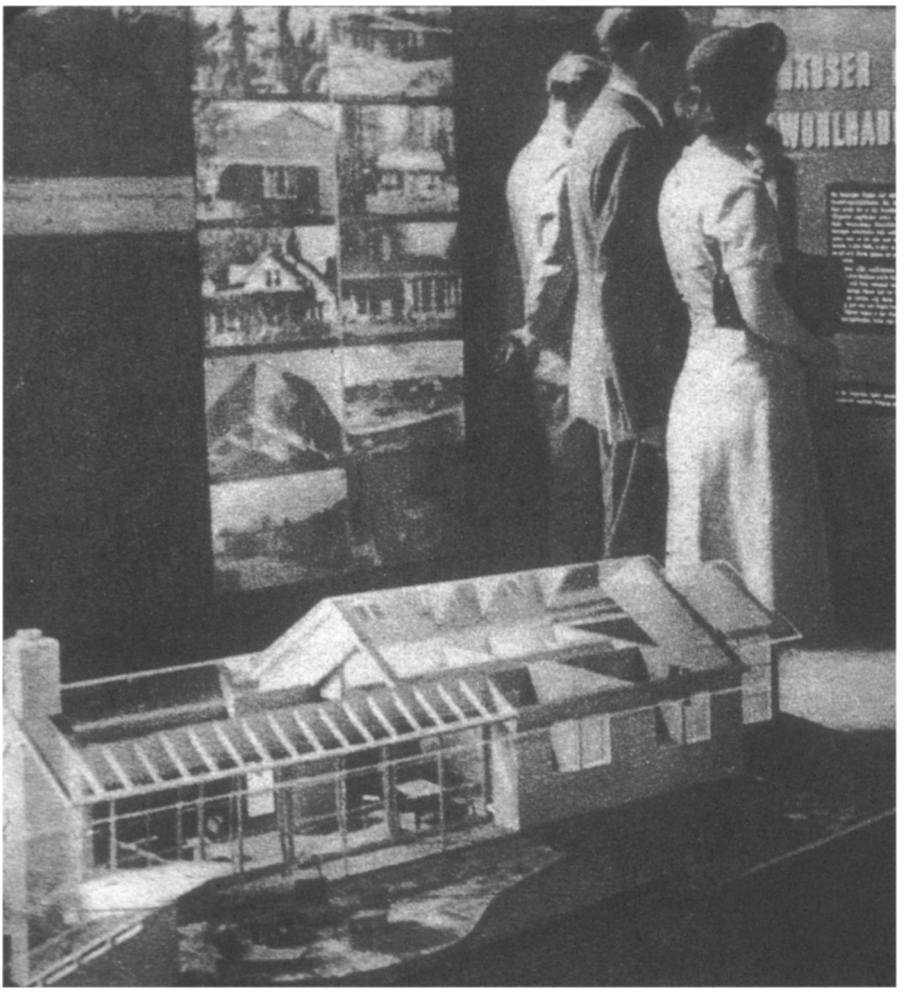
FIGURE 1
German visitors examine a model and photographs of 'housing for the prosperous' at the OMGUS exhibition 'How America Lives', Stuttgart 1949. US National Archives at College Park, MD.



healing force that led to new form and a modest yet refined domestic culture.'[21] 'Privation purifies and tests every object, narrowing it down to just what it should be: a bed, a table, a kettle', pledged architect Rudolf Schwarz. 'All of these simple things . . . arrive at pure design in the home of the poor, and are no more embellished than their use.'[22] Salutary penury had to be defended

21 Erik Nölting, *Neues Wohnen. Werkbundausstellung deutscher Architektur seit 1945* (Cologne 1949), unpaginated.
22 Rudolf Schwarz, *Neues Wohnen* (Cologne 1949), unpaginated.

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against the disease of materialism. 'Our men and women . . . should learn to distinguish for themselves which perceived needs are real and which are false', architect Hans Schmidt warned. 'False needs can be awakened by appearances, by envy, by advertising. It is essential to induce wariness and introspection in people.'[23] *Konsumterror*, as the West German sociologists Theodor Adorno and Helmut Schlesky later called it, ran rampant at the Werkbund's first exhibition of postwar domestic design.

The US Marshall Plan set its sights on the notion of *Konsumterror*. Private consumption was integral to 'the American way of life', and the antithesis of Stalinism's instrumental asceticism, which redirected national economies toward the statist project of building smokestack socialism. Marshall Plan strategies for reconstruction instrumentalized private spending instead. Consumption would fuel economic expansion and, as a worker's reward for co-operation with industrial management, stabilize capitalist democracy. A continuous surge of productivity, profits, wages and private spending would avert the class warfare that plagued European interwar capitalism, with its focus on a zero-sum distribution of wealth. America's promulgation of the public benefit of private consumption was nowhere more evident than in Germany's former capital. In 1950, West Berlin received a new trade pavilion, courtesy of the US State Department. The George Marshall-Haus, designed by municipal architect Bruno Grimmek, was the former German capital's first example of the postwar International Style modernism celebrated by the curators of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Built in Berlin's exposition park, the pavilion hosted exhibits and conferences which promoted industrial productivity, tariff-free trade and mass consumption.

The Marshall-Haus made its debut in October 1950, with construction finished just in time for the annual West German Industrial Exhibition and the socialist holiday coinciding with East German national elections. West German Minister of Economics Ludwig Erhard opened the trade fair with a speech that referred to the Bundesrepublik as 'a free nation of consumers', one in which citizens would determine whether production would 'be employed . . . for the ends of human and social welfare'.[24] However, the US State Department seemed to have a different consumer economy in mind. It shipped in a six-room prefabricated tract home by Page and Hill of Minneapolis, replete with furnishings. This exhibit's curator was an architect on loan from the US Home and Housing Finance Agency, Bernard Wagner, whose father, Harvard professor Martin Wagner, had been Berlin's Weimar-era municipal planning chief. German carpenters working in round-the-clock shifts took only five days to assemble the home on a site beside the new Marshall-Haus.[25] Attractive female American Studies majors from West Berlin's newly-opened

23 Hans Schmidt, *Neues Wohnen* (Cologne 1949), unpaginated.

24 Ludwig Erhard, trans. J.A. Arengo-Jones and D.J.S. Thomas, *The Economics of Success* (London 1963), 80.

25 *Amerika zu Hause. Deutsche Industrie Ausstellung, Berlin, 1.-15. Oktober 1950* (n.p.), unpaginated.

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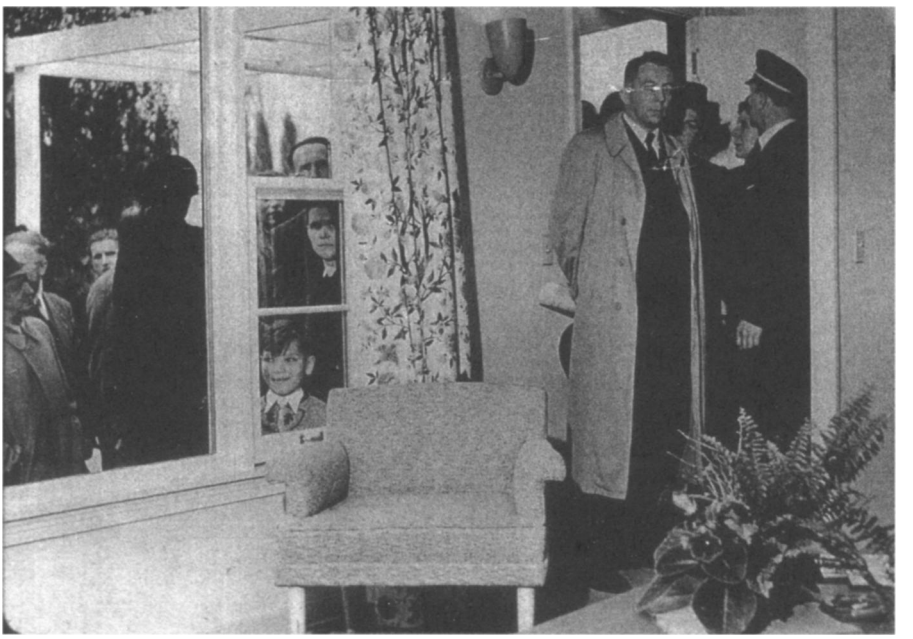
FIGURE 2
Crowds at the policed front door of the 'America at Home' exhibition, West Berlin 1950. US National Archives at College Park, MD.



Free University were selected as tour guides and trained to answer questions about 'such household miracles as the . . . electric washing machine, illuminated electric range, vacuum cleaner, mix master, toast master, etc.'.[26]

Predictions of astronomical attendance at an exhibition featuring 'real honest-to-god electric stoves, refrigerators and deep-freeze units' proved accurate. When Amerika zu Hause (America at Home) swung open its front door, the exhibit was promptly mobbed. Visitors thronged in such numbers that police had to be posted at the front and back doors, and foot traffic limited to groups of ten to avoid structural damage to the wood-frame building (Fig. 2). According to a US press release, Germans were impressed by the thermostat-controlled central heating and 'a model American kitchen with gleaming electrical appliances which are already the talk of Berlin'.[27] These domestic comforts were bound to create a sensation, given the fact that, in 1950, 15 per cent of the West German population was crowded into housing with three or more inhabitants per room, and the average working-class family of four spent

26 Memorandum, Paul A. Shinkman to Henry J. Kellermann, 3 November 1950, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

27 'News release', 15 October 1950; 'Model US Home at West Berlin Fair No. One Attraction for Awed Germans', undated; RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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nearly half its disposable income on food. At a time when the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* was still in its infancy (and felt last of all in West Berlin), this display of extravagant private consumption was made credible by precisely those prejudices that US cultural diplomacy was attempting to neutralize, namely the view that America was a superpower parvenu awash in wealth, but devoid of *Bildung*.

In the two weeks that it was open, America at Home was seen by 15,000 East Germans. That number fell far short of spectator demand, frustrated by the structural limitations of the small house and its inability to process visitors en masse. Nevertheless, the tract home proved an effective propaganda tool, according to a report filed by US State Department representative Paul A. Shinkman, and was capable of disarming even the most recalcitrant of East German agitators:

> At least one of the latter, a 20-year-old youth who had whipped up a forum of 200 protesting West Germans to expound his well-worn Communist line of 'American economic slavery', changed his views at the end of a specially conducted tour of the house under my personal and friendly guidance. He admitted ruefully that the American way of life looked good to him — but that a visit to the Model American Home was about as far as he could expect to travel in that direction.[28]

A closing-day assessment sent to the US Secretary of State crowed that 'while residents of the Soviet-sponsored East German Republic were being instructed to "march in festive spirit" to the polls to vote for a single slate of candidates, their countrymen in West Berlin . . . were voluntarily spending the sunny holiday by the thousands at the industrial exhibition'.[29] US officials judged America at Home 'a gratifying demonstration of what can be accomplished in selling the American democratic way of life from the Berlin "showcase" behind the iron curtain in an incredibly short space of time'.[30] As underscored by a State Department decision not to raffle off the display for use on another site, as originally planned, in order to avoid the 'possibility [of the] house falling into undesirable hands', the suburban tract home had become a new weapon in America's Cold War arsenal and, correspondingly, had to be secured against unauthorized use.[31]

The next US foray into the Cold War's domestic front attempted to undermine the predominant European belief in an inherent contradiction between high

28 Memorandum, Paul A. Shinkman to Henry J. Kellermann, 3 November 1950, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

29 Paul Shinkman to Secretary of State, 15 October 1950, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

30 Memorandum, Paul A. Shinkman to Henry J. Kellermann, 3 November 1950.

31 Webb, Frankfurt Office of the US High Commander for Germany (HICOG) to HICOG Berlin, 12 September 1950, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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culture and American mass consumption. For this undertaking, the State Department hired Edgar Kaufmann Jr, MoMA's industrial design curator, as an independent consultant. Kaufmann staged the museum's annual 'Good Design' exhibit of modern household products, which was produced by the museum in partnership with the Chicago Merchandise Mart. Just as the 'Good Design' shows blurred the distinctions between the museum and a department store, Kaufmann's collaboration with the Marshall Plan's Economic Co-operation Administration (ECA) also eroded the institutional boundaries — in this case, those separating US foreign policy from MoMA's mission to promote modernism as America's new establishment culture.

For the 1951 ECA exhibit *Industrie und Handwerk schaffen neues Hausgerät in USA* (Industry and Craft Create New Home Furnishings in the USA) Kaufmann assembled nearly 500 examples of 'progressive American design' characterized by 'simple lines and functional forms', and oversaw their display for the show's Stuttgart debut. The exhibition was also booked for subsequent venues in Berlin, Munich, Milan, Paris, London, Amsterdam and Trieste.[32] Kaufmann's selection of furniture, ceramics, glassware, kitchen appliances and other household goods for display in Europe recycled the contents of previous Good Design exhibitions, which juxtaposed upscale collectibles by design luminaries like Ray and Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, Isamu Noguchi and George Nelson with prosaic functional items, including a Chemex coffee carafe, Pyrex measuring cups and Tupperware containers. This demonstrated that 'a contemporary lifestyle' mixed 'many low-cost items and a few luxury items', according to a US press release.[33] Kaufmann's writings ascribed a far greater significance to domestic modernism. His pamphlet, *What is Modern Design?*, published a year earlier by MoMA, asserted: '*Modern design is intended to implement the lives of free individuals*' (emphasis in original), and pronounced household modernism indispensable to democracy. German critic Heinrich König was correct on many levels when he noted that the products displayed at the New Home Furnishings exhibition were not 'representational' in style. Rather than merely representing an 'American way of life', these domestic goods were its physical embodiment, according to Kaufmann's manifesto.

The New Home Furnishings show also staked a claim to Weimar-era modernism as America's inherited cultural capital. Kaufmann's essay for the show catalogue proposed a family tree for American industrial design that placed it at the culmination of pioneering German efforts, such as Peter Behrens's commissions for AEG, the work of the Deutscher Werkbund and the

32 'American Home Furnishings Exhibit' press release, RG 286 MP Gen 863–1012, Visual Collections, US National Archives, College Park, MD; Edgar Breitenbach and Arthur Vogel, 'Department of State Memorandum of Conversation', 2 January 1951, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Expositions, Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5224, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

33 'American Home Furnishings Exhibit' press release, RG 286 MP Gen 863–1012, Visual Collections, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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legacy of Bauhaus design. This assertion was proudly reiterated by West German reviewers, including Bauhaus alumnus Wilhelm Wagenfeld, who asserted that 'carefree, ingenious lightness and an obvious joy taken in empirical experiment' were the distinctive new world contributions that made American modernism 'more perfectly resolved and less problematic than [its German manifestation] the first time around, as can be observed from . . . the old Werkbund and Bauhaus'.[34] Kaufmann's constructed pedigree for US household modernism conformed to a cultural narrative taking root on both sides of the Atlantic over the course of the 1950s. 'In this period', historian Paul Betts observes, 'the Bauhaus assumed a privileged position within West German culture in part because it played a crucial role in the larger Cold War project to draw the Weimar Republic and the [postwar] Federal Republic into the same elective lineage, while at the same time conjoining West German and American cultural modernism.'[35] Kaufmann's New Home Furnishings exhibition used modernist consumer goods bearing a transatlantic design pedigree to bridge the chasm between victor and vanquished.

For an exhibition purportedly demonstrating 'American design and craftsmanship as adapted to American home living', however, Kaufmann's collection of products 'was in no way typical of the contemporary American household', as more than one German reviewer quickly recognized.[36] The nostalgic and regional styles that dominated the US furniture market were nowhere to be found in the show. America's provision of freedom of choice for consumers, no matter what their taste (or lack thereof), was an aspect of market democracy that seemed to embarrass Marshall Plan officials. William C. Foster, a former steel industry executive who served as deputy administrator of the ECA in Europe, claimed that the 'especially progressive' consumer design showcased by the exhibition was in the process of displacing more 'conservative and conventional' products in the USA. This dissimulation of American popular taste was the stock-in-trade of US cultural diplomacy, which projected a national self-portrait created expressly for European consumption. By the end of the 1950s, the US State Department was exporting International Style architecture, abstract expressionist painting and sculpture, and atonal music as cultural reflections of American freedom of expression. In this dubious marriage of art and politics, modernist abstraction — by common definition 'non-representational' — was used overseas to represent core American values: a propaganda achievement so unlikely that it was nothing short of sublime.

* * *

34 Wilhelm Wagenfeld, 'Neues Hausgerät in USA', *Baukunst und Werkform*, vol. 4, May 1951, 43, 44.

35 Paul Betts, 'The Bauhaus as Cold War Legend. West German Modernism Revisited', *German Politics and Society*, 14, 2 (1966), 76.

36 Walter Bogner, quoted in 'Neues Hausgerät in den USA', *Neue Bauwelt*, no. 39 (1951), 160; Heinrich König, 'Neues Hausgerät aus USA', 244.

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In 1952, officials of the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), an ECA successor organization, proposed a basic shift in exhibition strategy for the US contribution to the annual German Industrial Exhibition. Rather than producing separate exhibits of heavy industry and consumer goods (as had been done in 1950, with America at Home representing the latter), the US display would focus exclusively on private consumption. The decision was motivated largely by its potential impact upon East Germans, as a State Department memorandum clarifies:

> The Berlin Industrial Fair in 1950 was most impressive because it showed large machines being produced by the West at a time when Eastern factories were suffering from dismantling by the Soviets and when raw materials in the East were in extreme shortage. Since that time, however, the Eastern emphasis on heavy machinery and production goods has brought about a changed situation. It is particularly appropriate at this time, therefore, to show West Berliners, and more especially East Zone and [Soviet] Sector visitors, the progress made in the West in developing consumer goods designed to raise the standard of living of the average family.[37]

Plans for the exhibition were finalized in May. The show would feature a house within a house — an 'ideal dwelling' built within West Berlin's Marshall-Haus pavilion. Just as at a nineteenth-century ethnographic spectacle, the model home would serve as backdrop for a 'man-wife-child family team actually going through [the] physical actions of living in [the] dwelling, making proper use of [the] objects in it', according to a State Department telegraph. Thematic content was 'to be developed in terms of arguments for a high-production, high-wage, low-unit-cost, low-profit-margin, high consumption system . . . . Emphasis [is] to be placed upon [the] fortunate outcome of American economic philosophy when combined with European skills and resources.'[38] Wherever possible, household equipment and furnishings were to be Western European in manufacture. A modern domestic environment based on New World ideals, but assembled from continental products, would convey the benefits of the Marshall Plan and its transatlantic promotion of the American economic system.

In producing its most ambitious German exhibition to date, the State Department faced the logistical challenge of quickly gathering an international assortment of household goods. As with the New Home Furnishings show, all domestic objects were to be selected by a curator at MoMA, presumably Edgar Kaufmann Jr.[39] A German architect, Fritz Bornemann, was contracted

37 'Berlin Industrial Fair 1952', HICOG Berlin to US Department of State, 5 November 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

38 HICOG Bonn to US Department of State Bureau of German Affairs, 31 May 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

39 Memoranda of two MSA meetings of 21 and 23 July 1952 note a contract with the Museum of Modern Art without noting a specific curator. RG59/150/71/35/04, Entry 5323 (Records of the International Information Administration, Subject Files, European Field Program 1949–1952),

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to draft plans for the model home. In Bonn, US public affairs officer Herwin Schaeffer helped locate the required West German furnishings; freelance consultants were hired to track down products from France and Italy. Department of Commerce officials asked the Air Force to sponsor another Berlin airlift: this one dedicated to the transport of stylish furniture rather than food and coal. The most harrowing moment in the show's production occurred just days before the grand opening. At a press conference, Peter Harnden, chief of the presentations branch of the MSA, described the upcoming exhibition and stated that 'in the course of enacting [a] normal daily living routine [the] wife–mother would demonstrate household appliances and equipment' — including a bathroom shower. The next day, United Press correspondent Joseph Fleming announced that the US State Department would be sponsoring a 'strip tease' at West Berlin's industrial fair. A flurry of 'confidential security information' telegrams between Germany and Washington followed. MSA administrators vowed that Harnden 'did not (rpt not) say or allude to: (A) any sort of "strip tease" (B) [a] "luscious young Germ[an] girl" hired for [the] "leading role" (C) "modeling nylons, panties and brassieres". . . . In view of [the] widespread play given this misleading, erroneous account, plans for [a] shower routine [have been] cancelled.'[40] A few days later, following a successful VIP preview, an exultant MSA official wired the US Secretary of State to report that local journalists, industrialists and officials, including West German Minister of Economics Ludwig Erhard, were 'delighted' by the exhibit. 'Contrary to UP story implications, there is nothing vulgar or cheap about [the] role of actors demonstrating household equipment.'[41]

Wir bauen ein besseres Leben (We're Building a Better Life) opened in Berlin, and was scheduled for subsequent engagements in Stuttgart, Hanover and Milan. Its single-family home — containing two bedrooms, a living-dining room, bath, kitchen, laundry/home workshop, nursery and garden — was realized down to the kitchen gadgets and garden tools, but built without a roof. All the approximately 6000 products in and around the house were modern in design and manufactured in a Marshall Plan member nation. A bill-

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Box 8, US National Archives, College Park, MD. For US State Department consumer design exhibitions, however, Edgar Kaufmann Jr had become the consultant of first choice. A memo from Elmer Lower of the HICOG Office of Public Affairs in August 1952, concerning an international 'Design for Use' show planned by Stuttgart's Landesgewerbeamt, states: 'It is my suggestion that . . . the [US State] Department consult people in the design field, such as Mr Edgar Kaufmann from the Museum of Modern Art, so that a representative group of high quality materials is sent.' Elmer Lower to Richard Brecker, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5227, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

40 HICOG Berlin to US Secretary of State, 17 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

41 HICOG Berlin to US Secretary of State, 19 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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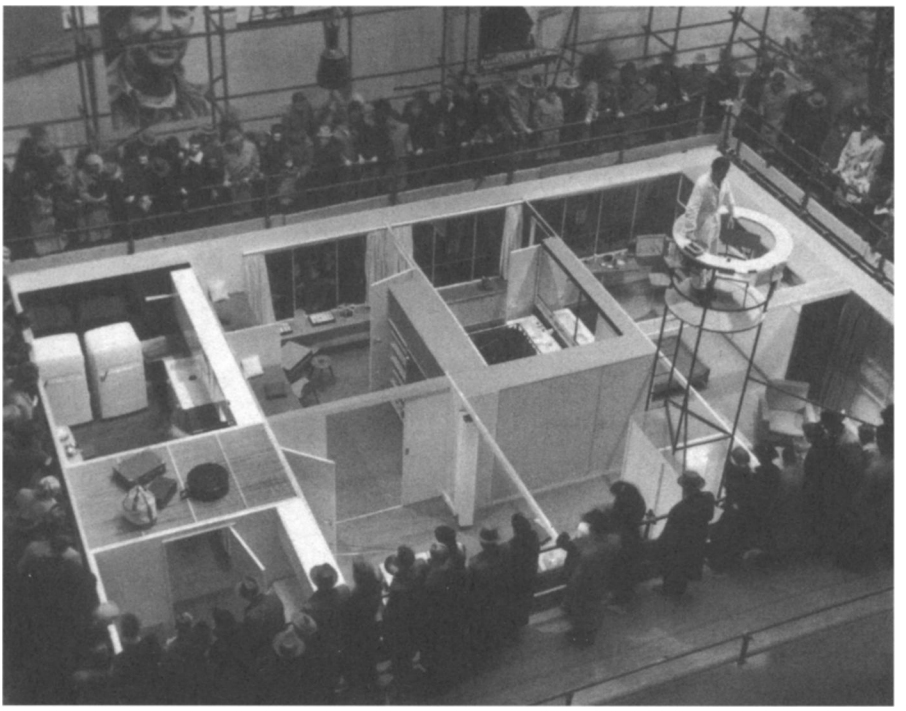
FIGURE 3
A bird's eye view of the topless home and second-storey catwalks of 'We're Building a Better Life', West Berlin, 1952. A narrator, dressed in white overalls, can be seen atop the crow's-nest, upper right. US National Archives at College Park, MD.



board mounted beside the home's front door announced: 'The objects in this house are industrial products from many countries in the Atlantic community. Thanks to technology, rising productivity, economic cooperation and free enterprise, these objects are available to our western civilization' (Fig. 3). This stage set for the domestic life of 'an average skilled worker and his family' was manned by a model family, in the literal sense. Two couples and eight pairs of children, all professional actors, worked in alternating shifts, going about their household tasks and leisure rituals in a consumer wonderland. A narrator, dressed in white and perched in an overhead crow's-nest, explained the model family's interaction with its domestic environment. Visitors became voyeurs, staring through windows or crowding catwalks for a bird's-eye view, observing how the use of modernist household objects created their subjects.

The tour of the show ended at an installation introduced by a display panel showing a male labourer with the headline: 'This man is a worker and at the same time a consumer.' For East German visitors it was an obvious reference to the lack of material rewards for labourers under Stalinist socialism. Given the era's standard gendering of household consumption as female, the panel

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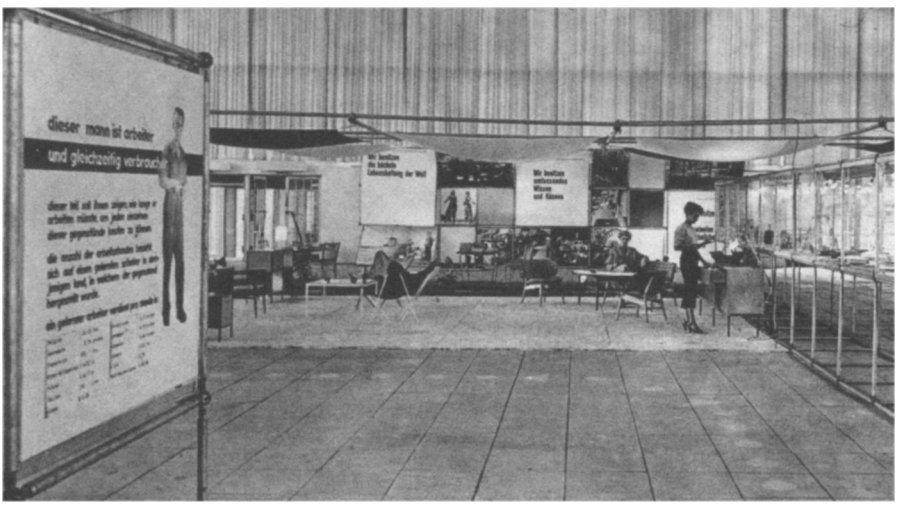
FIGURE 4
The culminating display area of 'We're Building a Better Life', this photograph from the show's second opening in Stuttgart. Below panels announcing 'We possess the world's highest living standard' and 'We possess unlimited knowledge and ability', the home furnishings seen within the model home were available for closer inspection. US National Archives at College Park, MD.



also provided a cue to the presence of an exhibition discourse of importance to men (Fig. 4). In this final display area, the furnishings seen earlier in the model house could be examined at close range. Attached to every item was a tag indicating country of origin, retail price and the number of hours of labour — as measured by a skilled worker's wage — needed to purchase the object. This seemingly guileless calculation of purchasing power entailed a fundamental repudiation of Marxist ideology, which used the concept of labour value to define capitalist production and distribution as exploitation. Profit, according to Marx, was the unpaid labour value that industrialists appropriated from workers when manufactured goods were sold at retail price. MSA planners arrogated Marx's concept of labour value to express the amount of work needed to *purchase* an item, rather than produce it. This shift in emphasis radically redefined labour value as a means to quantify capitalism's reward system, rather than indict capitalist exploitation.

At A Better Life, MoMA's International Style modernism did much more than just provide aesthetic redemption for bourgeois domesticity — a predominant message of the Kaufmann's New Home Furnishings exhibition of 1951, and its Good Design progenitors. As a primer in 'the modern approach to interior decoration', according to an MSA press release, A Better Life showed how 'rationally designed products from different countries in the Atlantic community can be combined harmoniously'.[42] Or, as expressed in

42 'Productivity and Integration Make for Higher Standard of Living', March 1953, RG 286/Ger 2219–2226, Visual Collection, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

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another press release, 'the show says that just as these items from the various countries combine to form a homogenous whole, so the nations themselves can combine to form a homogenous community'.[43] The exhibition's underlying message was reprised in the West German daily, *Der Tag*:

> The new style, realism plus simplicity, finds its strongest expression in the US Marshall-Haus . . . . There are different versions of one style and one way of life typical for a 'western bourgeois' household. Nothing is foreign to us, whether it comes from Berlin or Los Angeles, from Stockholm, Sicily or New York.[44]

At A Better Life, International Style modernism was not simply an aesthetic, but also the model of production and consumption that supported the identity politics of Cold War cosmopolitanism. An antithetical notion of 'realism' was concurrently under construction just a few miles east, where East Berlin's socialist realist housing blocks were rising with advice from Soviet architects. East German art and architecture were being transformed by a party-orchestrated cultural revolution intended to install socialist realism, characterized as 'socialist in content and national in form', as a national aesthetic. By contrast, the modernist style promoted by the US State Department at A Better Life was capitalist in content and international in form. To counter the likely charge that A Better Life was an exercise in Americanization, comparable to the apparent cultural Sovietization of East Berlin, MSA officers went to great lengths to clarify the exhibition's internationalism. 'To some visitors, this home of a future "average consumer" would appear perhaps to be "American", but that is incorrect', a West German design journal reported, reiterating an opening-day address by Michael Harris, chief of the German branch of the MSA. 'John Smith or Hans Schmidt would be perfectly capable of affording such a house when certain conditions were met: we must make the Atlantic community of nations a reality; eliminate tariff barriers, and raise productivity, thereby allowing us to lower prices and raise wages.'[45] Stalinist ideologues equated the Marshall Plan's advocacy of a common market stripped of trade barriers with an assault upon national sovereignty, and vilified modernist design as a capitalist plot to 'disassociate the people from their native land, from their language and their culture, so that they adopt the "American lifestyle" and join in the slavery of the American imperialists'.[46] While alarmist, the assessment was not baseless. The Better Life exhibition

43 'We Build a Better Life', undated typescript, RG59/150/71/35/04, Entry 5323 (Records of the International Information Administration, Subject Files, European Field Program 1949–1952), Box 8, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

44 Article in *Der Tag*, 22 September 1952, translated and quoted in Lyon to Secretary of State, 22 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

45 Heinrich König, 'Ausstellung: "Wir bauen ein besseres Leben" ', *Architektur und Wohnform*, 61, 2 (November 1952), 87.

46 G. Alexandrov, cited in Edmund Collein, 'Die Americanisierung des Stadtbildes von Frankfurt am Main', *Deutsche Architektur*, 1, 4 (1952), 151.

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indeed revealed that the US State Department was grooming modernism as the stylistic *lingua franca* of international consumer capitalism and its idealized American 'good life'.

A Better Life was a hit with German visitors, who seemed to embrace its vision of postwar domesticity, and, in some cases, the Cold War *Realpolitik* behind it. The topless house drew over half a million visitors, over 40 per cent of them from the East. West German newspaper reports were positive, 'with no (rpt no) reference whatsoever' to the striptease scandal, as MSA officers informed their superiors in Washington. *Der Tag* told its readers: 'Take your time to inspect this exhibition. With respect to the arts, handicrafts and technics, it reveals that America is the grown-up daughter of Europe. . . . You will see there what it means to live a decent life.'[47] An actress portraying a housewife in the exhibition effused: 'This house is so perfect that I am afraid we will not want to move out . . . . What will happen if I fall in love with the kitchen too?'[48] German architects were also enthusiastic about the exhibition, sometimes seeing in its celebration of household modernism the promise of superpower design patronage. In a review entitled 'The Domestic Culture of the Western People', *Baukunst und Werkform* editor Alfons Leitl proclaimed: 'Whoever might not have known it learns emphatically through this exhibition: in all the countries of the Western world one deals with the same questions, with the same design themes.'[49] The Cold War realities behind A Better Life's deployment of modernism were apparent to Leitl — and others as well, judging by a comment overheard at the exhibition: 'You have to understand that this whole thing isn't put together just from a professional point of view . . . but with political intent.' 'A political exhibition, then?', Leitl mused. 'Domestic reform with "industrial design" as a responsibility of the Foreign Minister. Not bad. After the Werkbund, we'll give it a try with [West German Chancellor Konrad] Adenauer and [French Foreign Minister Robert] Schumann!'[50] Another advocate of modernism, design critic Heinrich König, interpreted A Better Life as a mandate for government-sponsored cultural reform. In the journal *Architektur und Wohnform*, he exhorted: 'This exhibition is also an appeal to ministries, especially the one administering public education, finally to introduce "The Study of Living" as a course of instruction. . . . It goes without saying that this class is only to be entrusted to teachers who are truly receptive to the New [style of] Living.'[51] König's call for another cultural revolution managed from on high echoed the tactics used to

47 Article in *Der Tag*, 22 September 1952, translated and quoted in Lyon to Secretary of State, 22 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

48 Article in *Tagesspiegel*, 20 September 1952, translated and quoted in Lyon to Secretary of State, 20 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

49 Alfons Leitl, 'Die Wohnkultur der Westlichen Völker', *Baukunst und Werkform*, no. 12 (December 1952), 40.

50 Ibid., 39.

51 Heinrich König, 'Ausstellung: "Wir bauen ein besseres Leben"', op. cit., 91.

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institutionalize socialist realism in East Germany. Coming from West German proponents of the notion that modernism was cultural anti-fascism, enthusiasm for an officially-sponsored postwar style demonstrated how few lessons were sometimes learned by those who had firsthand experience of the nazi venture into aesthetic hegemony.

A Better Life may have wowed Germans, but it sparked a controversy among US advisers in Europe. Donald Monson, a housing consultant with the MSA European Labour Division in Paris, objected to the display of an 'ideal house' with twice the square footage of the West German legal average, as stipulated in the enforced egalitarianism of the nation's first postwar housing law. 'It's all very well to put up shows like this, but in view of the extreme housing shortage in Germany . . . it can be questioned whether propaganda to break down this [German] rule of fair sharing is a wise one.'[52] In response, MSA Chief Michael Harris asserted that the exhibition 'was not about housing at all. Its main point was the attractive and realistic display of the least expensive, aesthetically acceptable mass-produced objects commonly used in everyday living by ordinary people.'[53] The goods on display, however, were anything but common for everyday life in Europe of the early-1950s. A report submitted to the US State Department acknowledged that 'many of the items in the house (refrigerator, automatic dishwasher, television set, etc.) are still beyond the average German budget'. Parked around the home were a bicycle, kayak, motorcycle, motor scooter and a Volkswagen (chosen for its 'direct appeal to local pride'.) 'No average worker could possibly own all these forms of transportation', an MSA memo noted.[54] The commodity culture celebrated by A Better Life was utopian in other ways as well. Its fundamental unit of consumption was the nuclear family, premised on a young married couple with two children. Excluded from this vision of an 'ideal home' and its domestic economy was Germany's historically-unprecedented number of female-headed households. In 1950, at which time most Germans interned in prisoner-of-war camps had been released, there were 1000 men for every 1400 women between the ages of 25 and 39. Of West Germany's 15 million households, nearly one-third were headed by widows or divorced women.[55] The

52 Donald Monson to Joseph Heath, 31 October 1952, RG469/250/79/28/03–04, Box 3 (Consumption, Housing, Propaganda Strategies; Records of the US Foreign Assistance Agencies 1948–61, Special Representative in Europe, Office of Economic Affairs, Labor Division, Country Files Related to Housing), US National Archives, College Park, MD.

53 Michael Harris to Joseph Heath, undated, RG469/250/79/28/03–04, Box 3 (Consumption, Housing, Propaganda Strategies; Records of the US Foreign Assistance Agencies 1948–61, Special Representative in Europe, Office of Economic Affairs, Labor Division, Country Files Related to Housing), US National Archives, College Park, MD.

54 Lyon to Secretary of State, 22 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

55 Robert G. Moeller, 'Reconstructing the Family in Reconstruction Germany. Women and Social Policy in the Federal Republic, 1949–1955' in Robert G. Moeller (ed.), *West Germany Under Construction. Politics, Society and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor, MI 1997), 112.

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so-called *Frauenüberschuß*, or 'oversupply of women', and its accompanying discourses about 'incomplete' families, made the 'typical' household portrayed by actors at the MSA exhibition a sort of speculative social fiction, one that reflected the ongoing 'political reconstruction of the family' taking place in both the USA and West Germany.[56]

In terms of the edification of West and East Germans, A Better Life had more to do with model citizens than model housing. The exhibition confronted a long-standing German discourse that used representations of America to plumb the nation's enthusiasms and anxieties about modernization. In the 1920s, Fordist mass production had inspired German fantasies about the twentieth century's 'new man', from the bourgeois 'captain of industry' to the heroic proletarian of socialist myth.[57] Modernity's potential to redefine gender relationships often lent representations of the new world's 'new woman' an anti-American tone, as cultural historian Mary Nolan has observed. The white, middle-class American housewife confabulated by Weimar-era critics like Adolf Halfeld embodied anxieties about modern consumption through portrayals of hard-edged women who preferred a job to home-making, fed their family from tins, and ruled over scientifically-efficient but comfortless homes — a gendered betrayal of *Kultur*, *Bildung* and *Geist*.[58] The Third Reich elaborated on this anti-American rhetoric, honouring the ideal housewife for her ability to nurture a prolific brood and inculcate the racist nationalism that constituted nazi family values. The long-term success of the Marshall Plan was contingent upon undermining German fears of American consumer modernity, which remained an undercurrent of public opinion, the war's 'unconditional surrender' notwithstanding.

The identity politics of gender was to play a crucial role in establishing a transnational consumer economy and the cultural cosmopolitanism that nurtured it. Beneath the appeal to German tradition apparent in A Better Life — expressed in the actress–*Hausfrau*'s apron and pinned-up braids, her kitchen bustle and *Kaffee–Klatsch* charm — lurked a new postwar persona. Signifiers of a putative return to 'normal' domestic ideals mollified reactionary anxieties, and allowed the idealized housewife to proceed with her new household task of negotiating a Fordist revolution in mass consumption. Although

56 Moeller, 'Reconstructing the Family', op. cit., 126.

57 On the 'new man' as an interwar signifier of radical social reform, see Fritz Neumeyer, 'Die neue Mensch. Korperbau und Baukorper in der Moderne' (15–31) and Wilfried Wang, 'Geometrie und Raster. Der mechanisierte Mensch' (33–49) in Vittorio Magnago and Romana Schneider, *Tradition und Moderne. Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900 bis 1950* (Stuttgart 1992), and Wolfgang Pehnt, 'The "New Man" and the Architecture of the Twenties' in Jeannine Fiedler (ed.), *Social Utopias of the Twenties. Bauhaus, Kibbutz and the Dream of the New Man* (Wuppertal 1996), 14–21. For a discussion of the 'Americanized' German housewife as the 'new man' of postwar modernity see Mary Nolan, 'Consuming America, Producing Gender' in R. Laurence Moore and Maurizio Vaudagna (eds), *The American Century in Europe* (Ithaca, NY and London 2003), 243–61.

58 Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity. American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York and Oxford 1994), 120–7.

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her male partner may have been 'a worker and at the same time a consumer', as the MSA proclaimed, it was the 'completely automatic, mechanized wonder kitchen . . . somehow reminiscent of the control panel of an airplane', as the *Neue Zeitung* gushed, that crowned the new lifestyle.[59] The kitchen shown in A Better Life — the only room in the dream house in which nearly every object was imported from the USA — was an object of desire for both sexes, according to a *Tagesspiegel* report. 'For women and all men interested in mechanics, it is a white paradise. . . .'[60] Images of masculine aggression had given advanced technology a sinister edge during the war. Feminization would render a postwar machine age *gemütlich*. The MSA's 'new woman' also overcame German national chauvinism in her cultivation of the tasteful cosmopolitanism reflected in home furnishings assembled from across the 'transatlantic community'. The role of the postwar *Hausfrau* was limiting, but also liberating, as Erica Carter has argued, in that its restrictive gender construct was accompanied by the privileged status of 'housewife as consumer–citizen', situating West German women 'in discourses of reconstruction as the bearer of the values of a specific form of postwar modernity, one dominated by scientific and technological rationality'.[61] With her relentless optimism, will to live in the here-and-now, and devotion to a better future, the idealized housewife was the pre-eminent 'new man' of West Germany's first postwar decade.[62]

A Better Life marked the apogee and conclusion of State Department funding for modernist household design exhibitions. In 1953, overseas propaganda was entrusted to a new organization, the US Information Agency (USIA). It was born just as anti-communist isolationists and fiscally-conservative populists were launching a two-pronged assault on federal spending for foreign cultural programmes. Over the course of the 1950s, Congress imposed cuts in the USIA budget so punitive that the organization and its mission were rescued only through executive branch intervention. President Dwight Eisenhower, a vigorous proponent of anti-communist propaganda efforts, formulated what historian Robert Haddow has called a 'McCarthy-proof' strategy for cultural diplomacy. It borrowed from the New Deal model of partnership between government and private enterprise, but shifted financing and — more importantly — public attention from the former to the latter. The 'American way of

59 Article in *Neue Zeitung*, 20 September 1952, translated and quoted in Lyon to Secretary of State, 20 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

60 Article in *Tagesspiegel*, 20 September 1952, translated and quoted in Lyon to Secretary of State, 20 September 1952, RG59 862A.191 (Internal Affairs of State Relating to Exhibitions and Fairs in Germany), Box 5225, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

61 Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI 1997), 225.

62 Nolan, 'Consuming America, Producing Gender', op. cit., 254.

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life' would be promoted henceforth through private businesses at international trade fairs. Corporations donated products and capital in return for an opportunity to penetrate new markets abroad. The US Commerce Department assumed responsibility for shipping exhibits and providing overseas support services. Under the new system, federal funds provided seed money rather than underwriting all expenses. Propaganda expertise developed over the postwar years would not be lost; it would be privatized. Peter Harnden, the MSA officer who inadvertently launched reports of a federally-funded striptease at We're Building a Better Life, became the co-ordinator of exhibition production for the Commerce Department's Office of International Trade Fairs. Harnden's private Paris-based design firm boasted employees from nine different nations, and derived its profits primarily through commissions to create a new generation of US household exhibits.[63]

Under Harnden's supervision, the tract home reappeared as an overseas emissary of American living standards, now displayed in something close to its native form, rather than as a hybridized variety engineered for application on foreign soil. At trade fairs staged in Milan, Bari, Barcelona and Paris in 1955, two completely-furnished suburban homes, complete with garden patio and carport, were exhibited under the co-sponsorship of *House Beautiful* magazine, The Producer's Council, The National Association of Home Builders and The Prefabricated Home Manufacturer's Institute. *House Beautiful* furnished and decorated one of the homes in Lafayette, Indiana, the other in Toledo, Ohio. Both were photographed for publication, then disassembled and shipped to Europe. Although the magazine's editors trumpeted the high quality and affordability of the decor and 'the noticeable improvement in taste, as compared with interiors of only yesterday', the plush upholstered furniture, green and tangerine colour scheme and clutter of decorative accessories perhaps were indeed better suited to the American Midwest than Milan or Paris. While MoMA's curators certainly would have considered these results of a newly-privatized exhibition policy a step backwards, USIA propaganda strategy took a decisive leap forwards. Displays began to emphasize the mechanisms by which suburban homes and their consumer accoutrements were integrated into their broader capitalist economy. For a 1955 Paris exhibition, Harnden mocked up an American supermarket and placed it beside a model home to clarify the relationship of the technology-laden kitchen to its source of packaged provisions. His work at a trade fair in Vienna the following year linked the model home to a fashion show and a colour television display. This additive approach 'brought material culture to life and revealed how technology benefitted the average person'.[64] USIA exhibitions proclaimed that foreign replication of the American consumer's 'good life' meant importing an entire economic system, not just its individual products.

63 Cynthia Kellogg, 'An American Brussels Fair Designer Gives French Home Modern Look', *New York Times*, 4 December 1957, 63.

64 Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, op. cit., 60–1.

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Harnden's advances beyond an earlier generation of Marshall Plan commissions yielded a propaganda triumph at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Federal officials hired George Nelson, whose furniture had been featured in previous Marshall Plan shows, to design the Moscow exhibition. During the preliminary planning phase, Nelson met Harnden, who was a 'major contributor' to the final design.[65] Nelson immediately added to his staff an employee from Harnden's office, Philip George, who became responsible for co-ordinating the entire Moscow exhibition as Nelson's right-hand man.[66] Given the established record of American propaganda strategy, the Communist Party Central Committee was aware that, for the US State Department's Moscow exhibition, 'special attention will be paid to the demonstration of domestic appliances: electric kitchens, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, air conditioners, etc.'.[67] Soviet visitors moved through a vortex of technology, product and service displays related to the model home that awaited them at the end of their procession. They were introduced to 'the American way of life' by a dazzling audio-visual presentation, 'Glimpses of the USA', created for the exposition by the husband and wife team of Ray and Charles Eames, two of the nation's most celebrated modernist designers. Across seven overhead screens, impressions of a typical day in suburbia flickered and pulsed in choreographed multi-media imagery. The main exhibition pavilion, seen next, was conceived by design consultant George Nelson as 'a huge modular steel shelving system' stocked with a cornucopia of toys, stereos, sporting goods, cookware and kitchen appliances, clothing, mass-circulation periodicals and even musical instruments. Framed by this Cold War stockpile of consumer goods, Singer provided a sewing demonstration, Helena Rubenstein oversaw makeovers of Russian women in her cosmetic company's beauty salon, RCA operated a working colour television studio, and a 'Miracle Kitchen' concocted meals from packaged ingredients donated by General Foods and Betty Crocker. Just as at Berlin's Better Life show, a second-storey catwalk provided visitors with a bird's-eye view of Fordist consumer practices. By the time Soviet visitors entered 'Splitnik', the model home supplied by All-State Properties of Long Island and outfitted by General Electric and Macy's, they had been exposed to a working outline of the capitalist infrastructure upon which American consumer domesticity was dependent.[68]

Khrushchev's vow to beat the West at its own game, made memorable by the Kitchen Debate photo-op at the 1959 exhibition in Moscow, in fact predated that event by years. The Soviet Seven-Year Plan for 1958–65 had pledged to match the USA in housing supply and consumer goods, some of the

65 'American National Exhibition in Moscow', *Industrial Design*, 6, 4 (April 1959), 54.

66 Stanley Abercrombie, *George Nelson. The Design of Modern Design* (Cambridge, MA 1995), 164.

67 Report to the Central Committee of the CPSU, 23 May 1959, cited in Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, op. cit., 186.

68 Ibid., 206.

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latter to be distributed free of charge by 1980, or so the promise went. Abundance for all, according to the USSR's Third Party Programme, ratified in 1961, was one of the preconditions for a full transition to communism. Another was the emergence of a citizen of a new type: educated, cultivated, socially integrated and self-disciplined — especially in regard to consumer desire. Khrushchev-era consumption, rather than aping its capitalist counterpart, was envisioned in reformist terms, as Susan Reid has demonstrated. Rather than inventing needs and inflaming demand, socialist advertising would inculcate rational consumption patterns, ensuring that markets could be predicted and managed. The 'normative consumption budget' devised for a typical family, as Reid notes, reflected 'communist morality, which in general entailed self-discipline and voluntary submission of the individual to the collective will'.[69]

Khrushchev's 'thaw' may have produced the East Bloc's new subjectivity, the socialist mass consumer, but its inspiration was largely non-Russian. While dramatic social change required Moscow's imprimatur to become official, East Bloc cultural transformation was more complex than the construct of a Khrushchevian 'revolution from above' might suggest. Soviet socialism's western frontier served as a catalyst for change in the USSR, and logically so. Eastern Europe had endured Stalinism only briefly, and just barely. Consumer austerity measures sparked violent rebellions in East Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1953, which were quelled only through a deus ex machina intervention of Soviet tanks. After Hungary's abortive revolution of 1956, local reforms fostered a partial market economy and increased private consumption, yielding what Khrushchev described as 'goulash socialism'. In the wake of another round of protests, Poland introduced a mixed economy in 1957 with the aim of increasing consumer goods. In 1959, as the USA proudly displayed a supermarket mock-up in Moscow, a real one of glass and concrete was rising in Warsaw.[70] As with the rediscovery of modernism in socialist art and architecture, Eastern Europe's people's republics were proving grounds for experiments in socialist consumer modernity. The rampart of satellite nations assembled by Stalin to insulate the USSR from the West proved to be nothing of the sort. By the mid-1950s the East Bloc functioned instead as a transmission belt on which repackaged western trends were shipped to Moscow for evaluation, ostensibly as cultural innovations from the socialist periphery.

As Eastern Europe devised its own variant of the Marshall Plan social contract — citizen enfranchisement through consumer rewards — strangely familiar images invoked a post-Stalinist 'new man'. In 1957 an article in the East German advertising journal *Neue Werbung* carried news of a 'new form

69 Susan Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen', op. cit., 219.

70 David Crowley, 'Warsaw's Shops, Stalinism and the Thaw' in Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (eds), *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford and New York 2000), 41–2.

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FIGURE 5
A Czech model housewife demonstrates a vacuum cleaner before an audience in 'A Day at Home', staged in the window of a state department store in Pilsen. *Neue Werbung*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1957).

of socialist advertising' using live subjects (Fig. 5). In the Czech city of Pilsen, a domestic 'pantomime' had been staged in a multi-room home interior mocked up along the glass frontage of a department store. The storefront exhibit, entitled A Day at Home, employed adult and child actors to portray a family engaged in household activities. During the course of the day, the housewife demonstrated an array of new domestic products and appliances. As the model family moved about their dream home, an invisible narrator described its 'practical modern appointments', explaining how the new labour-saving devices worked, while spectators on the sidewalk observed them in use. This novel approach to a household goods exhibition was reported to have generated 'great interest among the public' in Pilsen — just as it had five years earlier under US State Department sponsorship at Berlin's We're Building a Better Life exhibition. A Day at Home reprised in close detail the tactics devised by Harnden and his crew to mobilize consumer desire, bolster capitalism and undermine the appeal of communism. More important than the particulars of the household goods displayed in Pilsen was the technique of putting 'consumers themselves in the store showcase, thereby turning

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them into objects of consumption and observation', in the words of historian Katherine Pence. Another consequence of this exhibition strategy — deployed consciously in Marshall Plan shows, but unintended in its Soviet Bloc application — was to sensitize citizens to the material deficiencies of home life under 'real and existing' socialism.[71]

During the 1960s, most East Bloc governments were able to supply the minimum requirements of a fledgling consumer society: one small apartment per nuclear family, a selection of basic foods and a fairly dependable supply of essential household products. But Soviet-style command economies, which privileged the state rather than the citizen as sovereign consumer, were unsuited to the reproduction of a commodity culture based on unrelenting novelty across an ever-changing spectrum of goods. Perhaps most important, the project of creating a cadre of socialist consumers purged of irrational needs was doomed from the start. As early as 1956, foreign journalists in Russia reported sightings of a new subcultural species, the *Stiliagi*: stylish Western-influenced youths who wore non-conformist identities on their sleeve, so to speak, in contempt of Soviet taboos on extravagant consumption and its public display.[72]

The legitimation of a 'consumer socialism' modelled on its capitalist counterpart was a historical watershed.[73] It set the stage for the historically-specific political formation of 'late socialism', characterized by the desire and inability to emulate the kaleidoscopic consumer landscape of late capitalism, with its constant shifts in invented needs, marketing ploys and product lines; the latter providing a kit-of-parts for identity statements that could be continually dismantled and reassembled on an individual basis. Soviet Bloc consumer durables like televisions, washing machines and automobiles came with long waiting-lists.[74] Rationing never ended, but was instead camouflaged by prices set high to discourage the purchase of limited stock. 'Shelf-warmers' — products so undesirable, given the price, that they were made to gather dust in windows — and what shoppers in Poland called '*brakorobstwo*' — a term coined for unused products that were also unusable — epitomized the feeble connection between socialist producer and consumer, attenuated by a Byzantine regulatory system negotiated by the party, state ministries and individual manufacturers. Retail price, rather than being derived from the cost of making and marketing an item, was determined by political expediency and

71 Katherine Pence, 'Schaufenster des sozialistischen Komsums. Texte der ostdeutschen "consumer culture"' in Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker, *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin 1997), 110. Pence is wrong, however, to consider this demonstration a vehicle for a 'GDR-specific version of "consumer culture"' (109), not least since the production was originally mounted in Czechoslovakia.

72 Susan Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen', op. cit., 220, fn. 30.

73 Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London 2002), 81.

74 For example, East Germans had to pay 'for technical consumer durables, eight to fifteen times the price of their West German counterparts'. Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill, NC 1997), 189.

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the complex, constantly-changing politics of subsidy. Campaigns to correct pricing, improve the design and quality of goods, and develop an efficient and courteous retail distribution system were, in effect, cumbersome attempts to reverse-engineer into socialist consumption the qualities required for most retail businesses to survive under capitalism.[75]

The coupling of a Western lifestyle ideal with a permanent lag in 'catching up' was a useful incongruity, however. It became the basis of governance for socialist client states founded upon the reward of consumption in return for complicity. As the Soviet and East German parties abandoned the project to invent a specifically socialist consumer subjectivity, late socialism relied increasingly on privileged access to goods, including Western goods, as part of a rewards programme for its élites, and which established a set of values that permeated throughout society.[76] In East Germany, the socialist vision of a reformist consumer society was abandoned decisively with Erich Honecker's succession as party chairman in 1971 and the so-called 'unity of social economy and policy' forged under his leadership. In the interest of social stability, the East German Politburo uncoupled rising consumption from its logical prerequisite of rising productivity, the equation broadcast across Western Europe by Marshall Plan economists. Jettisoning the Stalin-era prescript 'as you work today, so shall you live tomorrow', the party rewarded citizen compliance with whatever the socialist economy could churn out in the here and now.

Through the early 1970s, East Germany made impressive strides in its standard of living, gaining renown throughout the Soviet Bloc as socialism's consumer oasis. But within a decade, the 'planned miracle' had stalled. As economic growth sputtered, even partial fulfilment of a social contract based on Western-style consumption could be achieved only by taking out loans from the capitalist world or cannibalizing investment earmarked for industry. Erratic shortages of basic goods occurred with increasing frequency. At a crisis meeting of the East German Politburo in 1989, State Planning Commission Chairman Gerhard Schürer remarked: 'There are poorer countries than the GDR with a much richer offering of goods in the stores. . . . When people have

75 This assessment is supported by recent investigations of socialist retailing, including: Julie M. Hessler, 'Culture of Shortages. A Social History of Soviet Trade', unpublished diss., University of Chicago, 1996; Mark Evan Landsman, 'Dictatorship and Demand. East Germany between Productivism and Consumerism, 1948–1961', unpublished diss., Columbia University 2000; 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, 2 (2001), 218–52, and André Steiner, 'Dissolution of the "Dictatorship over Needs"? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s' in Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt (eds), *Getting and Spending. European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1998), 167–85.

76 As Charles S. Maier has noted: 'Privilege became a pervasive way of rationing valued aspects of life, access to which was less political in the West, so that the regime could get credit for doling them out. . . . [E]very favor finally granted was a reminder of how easily another might be withheld.' Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ 1997), 42–3.

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a lot of money and can't buy the goods they want, they curse socialism.'[77] Late-socialist attempts to fuse egalitarian rhetoric to Western lifestyle images yielded an unstable hybrid, momentous not so much for its resulting surface resemblance to capitalist commodity culture, but rather for the underlying absence of an alternative conceptualization of private consumption. As Jeffrey Kopstein has observed, the life-span of East Bloc socialism undoubtedly contracted when Marxist-Leninism defaulted on the creation of 'its own unique understanding of modernity, its own vocabulary for it, its own discourse that would have enabled people to experience scarcity in a qualitatively different way'.[78] On the Cold War's crucial home front, Marshall Plan exhibitions staged early on in divided Berlin modelled patterns of domestic consumption that helped define an emergent 'First World' material culture, and augured the destruction of its 'Second World' alternative.

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77 Gerhard Schürer quoted in Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany*, op. cit., 192. On the use of socialist consumption as a culture of resistance, see C. Humphrey, 'Creating a Culture of Disillusionment. Consumption in Moscow, A Chronicle of Changing Times' in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart. Modernity through the Prism of the Local* (London and New York 1995). On the role played by consumer dissatisfaction at the collapse of the East German state, see Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Collapse in East Germany*, op. cit., 195–7, and Maier, *Dissolution*, op. cit., 89–97.

78 Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany*, op. cit., 195–7.

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