

than on the broader issue of the political exploitation of the sex industry by the GDR authorities.

The educational aim in the programme is often used, therefore, as a vehicle to indulge in what is at times salacious, but always generally populist, entertainment television. This tendency towards populism is also suggested in this same edition of the show in the inclusion of an interview with Princess Maja von Hohenzollern. Born in Dresden, Von Hohenzollern suffered at the hands of the GDR authorities when at the age of eight her parents were put in prison for a failed attempt to escape to the West. Von Hohenzollern gives an eloquent account of the hypocrisy of a state that officially allowed the emigration of its population, while in reality persecuting those who tried. Then, towards the end of the interview, we again see the prioritization of entertainment over education as the focus shifts from an examination of life in the GDR to her recently acquired status as a princess in the Hohenzollern family.<sup>67</sup> Still more curious is the appearance at the side of the stage of a range of wedding dresses. The reason for their presence is never mentioned. One can only presume that they belonged to an item that was finally cut from the programme. However, from the trace of the item that remains, the viewer is perhaps given a glimpse of the actual reason why von Hohenzollern agreed to come on the programme. As was well known at the time, she had recently launched a line of designer wedding attire, a line that she was, presumably, keen to advertise. Once again, we find consumer culture as a driving force behind the programme's content, leaving the viewer with the curious juxtaposition of an historical account of the GDR's painful past with life as a princess who sells wedding dresses.

While the MDR programme does not focus as heavily as SAT 1 or ZDF on *Tribans* and other *ostalgic* consumer items, as we have seen it does, nonetheless, still construct life in the GDR largely in terms of consumer values. Although it attempts to distance itself from other *Ostalgie* programmes, claiming it will not 'confuse' the good and bad aspects of life in the way some of the others do, as Emmerlich puts it in the fourth instalment, it is at times very similar to them, also attempting to commodify and exoticize the GDR past, while concurrently claiming to normalize it. In this case we see the GDR used as a means of indulging in salacious sexual stories and royal gossip, areas that have a huge popular appeal. The content of the MDR programme is in fact very close to that of the *Superilla* magazine, which is a highly popular example of the *Ostalgie* industry, selling approximately 600,000 copies weekly, and having a market share of 18.2 per cent in the new Länder.<sup>68</sup> As Manuela Glaab notes, by using the subtitle, 'One for us' (*Eine für uns*), the magazine plays to the perception amongst east Germans that their everyday life

and concerns are under-represented in the media.<sup>69</sup> If one looks at the type of stories covered by the magazine, there are clear points of correspondence between its content and the MDR show. For example, a major focus of interest for its readership remains Stasi scandals – recent stories at the time of writing the present study included the unearthing of new evidence about a suspected Stasi hit man and the 'outing' of a number of members of the Leipzig Olympic bid for 2012 as IMs.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, again as reflected in the MDR programme, one finds a fascination for royal gossip, shown in the number of articles on topics ranging from the life of Princess Diana to the activities of the Spanish royal family.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, royal gossip is a staple of much of the popular media in Germany, as it is across Europe, being regularly featured in the tabloid press. Consequently, despite attempting to maintain a brand identity of eastern specificity, *Superilla*, like the *Ostalgie* shows, is happy to resort to the tried and tested selling points of the popular mass media. In fact, a good deal of its content is no different from other mainstream, non-eastern-specific women's magazines, such as *Gala* and *Bunte* in Germany or *Woman's Weekly* and *Now* in Britain. Thus, we find that an eastern readership is, perhaps unsurprisingly, attracted to features and issues universally appealing within this genre, and which, in turn, suggests that it need not require special representation. However, for *Superilla* to maintain its market share it must also, to a degree, undermine the 'normality' of its readership. In order to sustain its 'unique selling point', the key to the survival of any successful brand, it must insist that it is representing a marginal, 'exotic' social position not catered for elsewhere in the mainstream media. At the same time, it claims, somewhat paradoxically, to speak for 'normal' east Germans.

The discussion of *Superilla* leads us neatly to an examination of the final, and most watched GDR nostalgia show, RTL's *DDR Show*, which was supported by a special tie-in edition of the magazine, again suggesting points of contact between what is perceived as the eastern and western mass media.<sup>72</sup> RTL, like the magazine and the other shows, sought to walk the tightrope between the need to normalize the former GDR population on the one hand, and to exoticize its consumer culture on the other. As with the ZDF and SAT 1 programmes, we are presented with simulated GDR bathrooms and living rooms. We are introduced to curious GDR drinks as well as the world of GDR music. In the RTL show, music plays a particularly important role, an emphasis that is probably largely due to the fact that the channel produced a tie-in CD of GDR pop music, which it advertised repeatedly during commercial breaks.

The main presenter of the RTL show is the west German Oliver Geissen, a choice that further shows a commitment by a national channel

to bring the GDR into the mainstream. Geißen is well known in Germany as the presenter of, amongst other things, *Die 80er Show* on RTL, the format of which is identical with the *DDR Show*. This suggests that the channel sees no difference in nostalgia for the 1980s, or for the GDR. However, we also see many of the weaknesses to be found elsewhere, particularly with regard to the MDR show, which undermine the channel's attempts to normalize this aspect of German history. This is revealed once again in the obvious failure of certain guests to act according to the wishes of the presenters, but which disturbs the tone of the show far more than we saw with MDR. In the first instalment, for example, Geißen interviews Katrin Sabß, who plays Christiane in *Good Bye Lenin!*, asking her to compare her role in the film and her experience of the *Wende*: 'How was your *Wende*?'. Sabß pauses for a moment, then thoughtfully suggests, 'My *Wende* ... mmm, that was 1989', sarcastically suggesting that she experienced the events just like everyone else in the east, and that Geißen, as a *Messi* would have to be reminded of when it took place.

As the interview progresses another of the show's guests, the boxer Henry Maske joins the discussion, saying that the events of that year felt completely 'unbelievable' to him, a view that is met with approval by the other east Germans present. At this point, Geißen attempts to empathize with them, claiming that in the west the events felt equally 'unreal', to which Sabß quickly retorts, 'but you lot didn't want it to happen!', a statement which Geißen then attempts to laugh off, but which clearly makes him feel uncomfortable. Like SAT 1, RTL claim that the DDR Show is their contribution to the process of inner unity. 'This is all Germany. This is all us', runs the refrain of the show's title music, a refrain that is used throughout the programme to introduce its guests. However, in successive interviews, the programme cannot hide the obvious feelings of disunity exhibited by guests who seem openly irritated at being interviewed on the subject of the GDR by a westerner. This irritation would, it must be said, seem somewhat disingenuous. First, of course, the guests presumably knew who would be interviewing them and were keen to have the exposure such a show would give them. Second, Geißen does try his best to be sensitive to his guests. His style is deliberately naïve, and although, like Meyer in the SAT 1 show, this western presenter is the central focal point, he is very adept at giving his guests room to speak. He consciously tries not to dominate, playing far more successfully than Meyer the role of the interested layperson eager to learn about life in the east.

Clearly, RTL learnt from some of the criticism of the earlier shows. From its very first programme it includes one item a week which presents the dictatorial nature of the GDR. In the first edition, for example, we watch a film about Erika Reinmann, who was imprisoned for 14 years as a

schoolgirl for drawing a moustache on a picture of Stalin (her appearance on the show tying in with the recent publication of her account of the incident).<sup>73</sup> Yet, while the show's creators insist that this type of item was always to be included, the journalist Marcus Theurer points out that this particular film sequence was made very late in the programme's production, and as such can perhaps be seen as a response to the attacks on the ZDF programme.<sup>74</sup> Yet, while RTL was in a position to avoid some of the pitfalls of the other programmes, ironically the *DDR Show* probably received more criticism than any of the others. This was mainly due to RTL's presentation of some official GDR institutions. As already mentioned along with Geißen, the show's co-host was Katarina Witt, one of the biggest Olympic stars the state produced, and as we see in *Helden wie wir*, a woman who for many was a major sex symbol. Indeed, recently she has received more publicity for appearing as a *Playboy* centrefold than for her sporting achievements, an event that certainly impressed Geißen, who makes much mileage out of it in the show.<sup>75</sup> In her opening interview she appears on stage with her hair in pigtails and dressed in a tight-fitting Young Pioneer's uniform, although she is at pains to tell the audience that it is not an original uniform as her adult figure would not have been able to fit into it. She explains how one joined the organization and what one did. It is presented as an idyllic moment in her life. We see her sing its songs and her response to its call 'Be Prepared!' ('Sei Bereit!'), 'Always Prepared!' ('Immer Bereit!'). The presentation of the Young Pioneers is overwhelmingly nostalgic, with Witt reveling in the chance of wearing the uniform again, as well as recalling other aspects of the state's ideological paraphernalia, concluding simply that the whole experience 'was lovely'. The apolitical nature of this item is then further reinforced, as Martenstein also points out, by the lightly-charged eroticism of Witt's appearance in her uniform, which seems to foreground not the experience of being in the Young Pioneers, but Witt's status as sex symbol.<sup>76</sup>

The show's focus on institutional aspects of life in the GDR, and specifically the state's use of uniforms and flags would seem to betray particularly clearly the western perspective of the programme. As Betts notes, with regard to the presence of GDR material culture in the west, 'West Germans tend to collect not old consumer goods but, rather, more political memorabilia (SED pins and flags) as the preferred emblems of their imagined GDR.'<sup>77</sup> This is also reflected in the difference between the types of *Ostalgie* exhibited in *Sonnenallee*, and *Good Bye Lenin!* respectively, the latter focusing much more closely on the question of the state's ideology than the former. Although, once again, it is clear that the television manifestation of this ideological *Ostalgie* is far less reflective

than that of the Becker's film. Instead, in the RTL show, we find the commodification of an old, exotic political culture, far removed from the world of present-day German consumerism, but which can continue to be indulged through that very consumerism. As such, this *Ostalgie* would seem to be reminiscent of the type of consumerist *Westalgie* we see, for example in the 'Prada Meinhof' phenomenon. That said, any of the potential ambiguity discussed previously in connection with this type of *Westalgie* is wholly avoided in the *DDR Show*. Rather, the consumerist optic becomes a means of neutering this aspect of the GDR past, turning the potentially problematic question of participation in GDR institutions into an action that can now be understood in terms of material culture.

The normalization/exoticization of GDR political culture in the *DDR Show* was specifically picked out for vilification in the press debate the *Ostalgie* craze sparked, and got RTL into a good deal of hot water. As well as wearing a Pioneer uniform, in the show's publicity material Witt wore a FDJ shirt.<sup>78</sup> This caused an outrage amongst some east Germans who felt that no 'normal' person would willingly wear such a shirt unless they absolutely had to, a position illustrated, for example, in the FDJ meeting we see in the film *Sonnenallee*, where the film's romantic heroine, Miriam, cannot get out of her blue shirt quick enough once she has made her 'self-critical' speech. Clearly, one must not forget the point made by Wolfgang Hilbig, that it is ridiculous to condemn a person for simply being a member of a mass youth organization. However, in the publicity pictures, as well as her interview about the young pioneers, Witt seemed to revel in her membership of such institutions and thus, for some, showed herself not to be an 'everyday' member of GDR society, but rather part of the establishment. In commodifying this particular aspect of society, the show consequently seemed to be over-playing the 'normalization' card. Indeed, it actually inverts what I described above as the 'exoticization' of the mundane. Instead, it constructs as everyday behaviour what was for many 'normal' people in actual fact extraordinary. The appearance of Witt in the publicity photographs in an FDJ uniform even saw Günter Nooke try to bring a court action against her for wearing the symbols of an organization damaging to the German constitution. Since the 1950s the FDJ has been banned in the West. In 1991, when it was re-founded in the eastern regions, the law was rescinded, but just in the east. Since the *DDR Show* was filmed in Cologne, Witt was breaking the law by wearing the shirt.

In the *Ostalgie Shows* we see the commodification of the GDR past. This is in itself nothing new, since consumer culture has always been a part of east German identity construction. However, in these programmes we see a number of developments. Most importantly we find this consumer culture enter mainstream television discourse. Furthermore, it

goes beyond its use as a reference point for east German self-expression. Instead, it becomes a means whereby 'inner unity' can be evoked through the construction of all Germans as consumers. In these shows the GDR is no longer presented as a 'Stasi state'. Instead, through *Ostalgie*, it is constructed as a world with a curious material culture. Nevertheless, even if the gasps of horror and disapproval of earlier representations of the GDR are replaced now by curiosity and amusement, the *Ostalgie* shows still furnish us with a representation of the east from which the Federal Republic can distance itself. Thus, they reinvent an exotic eastern 'Orient'. This, in turn, allows the programme-makers to reconfirm the FRG as the better German state, but which, for many indignant east Germans at least, still fails to engage honestly and in a differentiated manner with their pre-unification experience.

## Notes

1. ZDF *Ostalgie Show*, presented by Andrea Kiewel and Marco Schreyl, first broadcast Sunday 17 August 2003 at 9.45 pm; MDR *Ein Kessel DDR*, presented by Gunther Emmerlich und Franziska Schenk, in six parts, broadcast weekly from Friday 22 August at 9pm; SAT 1 *Meyer und Schulz: Die ultimative Ost-Show*, presented by Ulrich Meyer and Axel Schulz in two parts, broadcast weekly from Saturday 23 August at 8.15 pm; RTL *Die DDR Show*, presented by Oliver Geißen and Katarina Witt in four parts, broadcast weekly from 3 September at 9.15 pm.
2. Figures from the *Tagespiegel*, 19 August 2003.
3. Figures from *Quotenmeter.de*, [www.quotenmeter.de/index.php?newsid=3040](http://www.quotenmeter.de/index.php?newsid=3040), accessed 21 February 2004.
4. Antonia Kränzlin, 'Wie baut man sich seine DDR?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 21 August 2003.
5. Quoted in Marcus Jauer, 'Seid bereit? Immer bereit!', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 August 2003.
6. Quoted in Harald Martenstein, 'Schön war die Zeit', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 August 2003.
7. Leander Haufmann 'Es kann dicke genug', *Der Spiegel*, 8 September 2003.
8. Thomas Brussig, 'Mrux, die deutsche Einheit', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 31 August 2003.
9. See 'Interview mit Hans-Hermann Tiedje', <http://www.rrd.de/multikultur/figaro/8903308-hintergrund-894348.html>, accessed 23 February 2004.

10. Quoted in Pascale Hugues, 'Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Heimat', *Tagespiegel*, 6 September 2003.
11. Harald Martenstein, 'Schön war die Zeit'. Theodor W. Adorno. *Minna Moralla*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1951.
12. See 'Emnid Poll', [www.quotenmeter.de/index.php?newsid=2889](http://www.quotenmeter.de/index.php?newsid=2889), accessed 23 February 2004.
13. Quoted in Torsten Hampel, 'Was wirklich bleibt: Wie Frau Scheibe, Trainerin in Kati Witts Eislaufverein, die DDR als Fernsehshow findet', *Der Tagespiegel*, 5 September 2003.
14. Hampel, 'Was wirklich bleibt'.
15. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming, New York: Continuum, 1989, pp. 120–67.
16. Stefan Wölle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR: 1971–1989*, Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998, pp. 106–10. On the influence of Western consumer goods in the GDR see Phillip I. Bryson, *The Consumer under Socialist Planning: The East German Case*, New York: Praeger, 1984.
17. Andreas Staab 'Testing the West: consumerism and national identity in eastern Germany', *German Politics*, 2(6) (1997), 139–49 (p. 145).
18. Quoted in Thomas Abbe, 'Der Dammbreach: Anschlag auf den Einheitsgeschmack', *Freitag*, 29 August 2003.
19. Paul Betts, 'The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture', *The Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000), 731–65 (p. 742–3). For a further more detailed examination of attitudes towards the material culture of the GDR in unified Germany see Martin Blum, 'Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity as Material Culture', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 34 (2000), 229–54.
20. Patricia Hogwood, "'Red is for Love ...': Citizens as Consumers in East Germany', in Grix and Cooke, pp. 41–54 (p. 50).
21. Hogwood, p. 50.
22. See Abbe.
23. I am grateful to Peter Thomson of the University of Sheffield for suggesting this metaphor to me.
24. Katharina Rieger, "'Wir sind Ostmisten'". Die Werbeagentur Fritsch & Maackat macht spezielle Kampagnen für Ostdeutschland. Demn die Menschen dort sollen hören, dass sie auch etwas geschafft haben', *Die Zeit*, 4 November 1999.
25. Patricia Hogwood, 'After the GDR: Reconstructing Identity in Post-Communist Germany' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 4(16) (2000), 45–67.
26. Steff Hugenubel, 'Ostagenturen auf dem Vormarsch', *Werben & Verkaufen*, 22, <http://www.wuv.de/news/archiv/6/a12186/index.html>, 1 June 2001.
27. See for example, Ostprodukte.de, [www.ostprodukte.de:Ossladen.de](http://www.ostprodukte.de:Ossladen.de), [www.ossladen.de](http://www.ossladen.de), [www.osiwaren-versand.de](http://www.osiwaren-versand.de), [www.mondotsarts.de](http://www.mondotsarts.de), eBay, the biggest internet auction house also has a whole section of its site dedicated to GDR products. See [www.ebay.de](http://www.ebay.de).
28. See Michael Bartsch, "'Kost the Ost" zahlt sich nicht aus', *taz*, 6 November 2003.
29. Institut für angewandte Marketing- und Kommunikationsforschung, *Einkaufsverhalten im Lebensmitteleinzelhandel/Fokus Neue Bundesländer 2003*, Erfurt: IMK GmbH, 2003.
30. The one famous exception to this is *Rotkäppchen*, the Freyburg company, which in 2002 acquired, with much public fanfare, the west German sekt company *Mumm*.
31. For further discussion of this phenomenon see Mark Duckenfield and Noel Calhoun, 'Invasion of the Ampelmännchen', *German Politics*, 3(6) (1997), 54–69.
32. See *Event und Touring AG*, [www.trabisafari.de/](http://www.trabisafari.de/).
33. See 'Welcome Back, Lenin!', *Spiegel Online*, [www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/0,1518,238037,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/0,1518,238037,00.html), 27 February 2003.
34. 'Welcome Back, Lenin!'
35. Betts, p. 742.
36. Peter J. Humphreys, *Media and Media Policy in Germany: The Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, second edition, Berg: Oxford, 1994, p. 293.
37. Naughton quotes surveys conducted at the time which claim that between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of the population were keen to maintain the GDR's television and radio stations. Naughton, p. 85.
38. John Sandford, 'The German Media', in *The New Germany: Social, Political and Cultural Challenges of Unification*, ed. by Derek Lewis and John R.P. McKenzie, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995, pp. 199–219 (p. 204).
39. Humphreys, p. 314.
40. Humphreys, p. 294.
41. Humphreys, p. 331.
42. See Fritz Pleitgen, 'Ich bin ostagisch: WDR-Indendant Fritz Pleitgen über Ost-Shows und Stasi-Überprüfungen im RBB', *Der Tagespiegel*, 8 September 2003.
43. See Humphreys, p. 303.
44. Holger Briel, 'The media of mass communication: the press, radio and television', *Modern German Culture*, ed. by Eva Kolinsky and

- Wilfried van der Will, Cambridge: CUP, 1998, pp. 322–37.
45. Jo Groebel et al. *Bericht zur Lage des Fernsehens*, Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 1995, p. 13.
  46. Werner Fröh and Hans-Jörg Stiehler, *Fernsehen in Ostdeutschland: Eine Untersuchung zum Zusammenhang zwischen Programmangebot und Rezeption*, Berlin: Vista Verlag, 2002, p. 12.
  47. Fröh and Stiehler, p. 22.
  48. Manuela Glaab, 'Viewing the "Other": how the east sees the west and how the west sees the east', in Grix and Cooke, pp. 69–88 (p. 76).
  49. Werner Fröh et al., *Ostdeutschland im Fernsehen*, Munich: KoPaD, 1999, p. 52.
  50. John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, second edition, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 65.
  51. Fröh et al., *Ostdeutschland*, p. 13.
  52. See, for example, Jakob Hein, *Mein erstes T-Shirt*, Munich: Piper, 2001, for further discussion of this text, as well as more recent general trends in east German writing see Paul Cooke, 'East German Literature in the Age of Globalization', in *German Literature in the Age of Globalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner, Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004, pp. 25–46.
  53. Fröh and Stiehler, *Fernsehen*, p. 88.
  54. Fröh and Stiehler, p. 21.
  55. Fröh and Stiehler, p. 77.
  56. Jens Schneider, 'Kinder, wisst ihr noch', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 July 2000.
  57. See, for example, Bernhard Homnigfort, 'Modern und sparsam- und sämtlichen Kritikern ein Gäuel', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 15 July 2000.
  58. Axel Beyer, 'Showformate- Trends und Veränderungen', in *Unterhaltung und Unterhaltungsrezeption*, Baden Baden: Nomos, 2000, ed. by Gunner Roters, Wolter Klingler, Maria Gerhards, pp. 173–81 (p. 177).
  59. For further discussion of the importance of the television audience within German light-entertainment programming see H. Burger 'Diskussion ohne Ritual oder: Der domestiziert Rezipient', in *Redeshows: Fernsehdiskussionen in der Diskussion*, ed. by W. Holly, P. Kühn and U. Püschel, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1989, pp. 116–41.
  60. Andreas Garaventa, *Showmaster, Gäste Publikum: Über das Dialogische in Unterhaltungsshow's*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1993, p. 29.
  61. Fiske and Hartley, p. 65.
  62. Christoph Schulteis, 'Das Kuriositätskabinett', *Berliner Zeitung*, 19 August 2003.
  63. Peter Hoff, 'Der ultimative Ost-Zoo', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 August 2003.
  64. *Elis und Escher: Die DDR – nur eine Lachnummer?* First broadcast, MDR 15 September 2003.
  65. Kränzlin.
  66. See Hans-Ulrich Brandt, et al., *Das war unser Kessel Buntes*, Berlin: Kai Homilius Verlag, 2002.
  67. Maja von Hohenzollern is the third wife of Prince Ferfried von Hohenzollern. They married in 1999.
  68. Glaab, p. 75.
  69. Glaab, p. 76.
  70. 'Stasi-Killer: Was weiß das Bundeskriminalamt wirklich', *Superflu*, 2, 9 October 2003, p. 14–15; 'Stasi-Schatten über Olympia', *Superflu*, 43, 16 October 2003, p. 10–11.
  71. 'Diana und ihr Butler: Verrat oder Huldigung?', *Superflu*, 45, 30 October 2003, p. 98; 'Traumhochzeit mit einer Geschiedenen', *Superflu*, 46, 6 November 2003, pp. 10–11.
  72. See *Superflu: Das Offizielle Magazin zur grossen RTL-Show*, Sonderheft 1 (2003).
  73. Erika Reimann, *Die Schleife an Stalins Bart*, Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 2002.
  74. Marcus Theurer, 'Die Einwicklerin Katarina Witt erinnert sich mit RTL an die alte DDR', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 September 2003.
  75. The publicity surrounding her *Playboy* appearance was, however, subsequently eclipsed by the scandal surrounding the publication of her Stasi file, which suggested that Witt had closely cooperated with the East German Security Service, an accusation that Witt still strenuously denies. See Günther Lachmann and Ralf Georg Reuth, 'Die Stasi-Akten der Katarina Witt', *Die Welt am Sonntag*, 12 May 2002.
  76. Martenstein, 'Schön war die Zeit'.
  77. Betts, p. 758.
  78. The FDJ, or 'Free German Youth', was the GDR's mass organization for teenagers.