

of society as a result of the Cultural Revolution is reflected in the more explicitly revolutionary representation of the story's protagonists (peasants, soldiers).

The third comparison drawn by the author involves two editions of *Bai mao nü* [*The White-Haired Girl*, 1965/1979 and 1997 editions]. Seifert's analysis (pp. 218–232) shows how this revolutionary classic, originally conceived in 1944 and one of the model works propagated during the Cultural Revolution by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, was depoliticized and abbreviated to a considerable extent in the 1997 edition in an effort to ensure it might appeal to the reader and connoisseur of the late 1990s. However, as part of that process, it became an almost completely different story. The elements of personal liberation from class and gender suppression, revenge, revolution, and anti-Japanese war were traded in for what seems to be a tragic love story. As such, it has become precisely the entertaining fairy tale that consumers are craving for.

One of the main drawbacks of this study is that the comic genre is approached in utter isolation, divorced from the broader policy developments in the field of culture and art and the political and ideological demands made on cultural producers in general. If Seifert had approached his subject from this meta-level, the result would have been less cluttered, less repetitive, and more convincingly and more tightly argued. Moreover, this essentializing of pictorial-story production misses the fact that many of the designers discussed, for example Ding Binzheng and Gu Binxing, were also active in other fields, such as propaganda design, block printing, or political cartoons. We are thus left to guess the extent to which the vicissitudes of other artistic domains influenced their experiences and their work. Lastly, stricter editorial controls would have benefited the reader of this otherwise commendable study.

Stefan R. Landsberger

JOSEPHSON, PAUL R. *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 2010. ix, 342 pp. Ill. £34.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000113

Writing about the construction of the future State Automobile Factory (GAZ) in 1930, Boris Agapov, a correspondent for the Commissariat of Heavy Industry's newspaper *For Industrialization*, lamented bureaucratic bungling and the resultant shortages, shoddy work, and other deficiencies, but dreamed of a time when "one hundred and forty thousand machines [...] four in a row [would] come from the assembly shop, the biggest shop in Europe, one and a half kilometers long". A one-time Constructivist poet, Agapov, also envisioned the new city that would spring up next to the factory, the City of Socialism, as a city with "rectangles everywhere [...] each rectangle consisting of a clubhouse, nurseries, kindergartens, cafeterias, libraries, baths and showers working round the clock".

Boris Agapov's dreams perfectly capture the technological utopianism that Paul Josephson has taken as the subject of this broad-ranging but quite personal and obviously heartfelt book. Josephson evinces a fine appreciation of the emancipatory thrust of the Marxist socialist project but also the fatal error of its leading proponents of regarding technology as value-neutral. Asking at the outset "What was *socialist* about socialist technology?" he concludes that the rhetoric of its advantages over technology employed by capitalists – rationally planned rather than market- and profit-driven; solicitous of

workers' safety rather than exploitative of their labor power; environmentally friendly rather than rapacious – masked a reality so awful that it made the record of technology under capitalism look good.

The primary reasons for the yawning gap between rhetoric and reality, he repeatedly notes, were the “hubristic desire” of political power-holders, scientists, and engineers to improve the physical world, and the absence of real democracy whereby producers and others directly affected by decisions about technology could have any legally sanctioned inputs into or controls over those decisions. Wearing a Bluetooth in and of itself is not necessarily condemnable, but when the wearer uses it to pursue Promethean projects that degrade “nature”, the ends cannot justify the means. Trotsky “wore the equivalent of a Bluetooth device [...] to overcome the problems of geography, climate, illiteracy, and backwardness that had plagued Russia”. He, no less than Stalin, thus “fell under the spell of the machine”.

Josephson is by no means the first to make this sort of argument. More than thirty years ago, Kendall E. Bailes, Robert Linhart, Steve Smith, and other historians of labor and technology interpreted the Soviet state's adaptation of Taylorism and coddling of “bourgeois specialists” as a Faustian bargain that augured ill for genuine workers' control, shopfloor democracy, and other shibboleths of the October Revolution. And, at a time when many historians have adopted Michel Foucault's rather more subtle and subjectivist understanding of technology – as in how the “technologies of the self” are integrated into structures of coercion – the mechanistic framework of this book seems a bit dated. What rescues it, among other things, is its radically expanded chronological and geo-political scope, for the book takes in not only technological utopianism displayed during the entirety of the Soviet era and more recent post-communist developments in Russia, but also by Communist Party dictatorships in east central Europe and North Korea. The record of these countries, comprising most of the erstwhile socialist second world, is compared, moreover, to that of the United States and other first-world countries.

If Josephson had to rely on official (overwhelmingly English-language) publications and secondary literature to inform himself about the predilections of Boleslaw Bierut and Kim Il Sung, his chapters on the dangers of nuclear power, environmental degradation (especially in the Urals), lack of worker safety, and the marginalization of women's needs in Soviet Russia bristle with references to all kinds of Russian publications, regional archival sources, and personal anecdotes. One wonders in this connection which was most arduous – poring through the last forty years of *Concrete and Reinforced Concrete*, the leading journal of the Soviet State Committee for the Construction Industry, to document “hyperbolic discussions of thousands upon thousands of cubic meters of concrete”; perusing the archives of the fisheries, forestry, communications, and transport industries of the far northern province of Arkhangelsk from 1930 to 1964; or traipsing through the grounds of lumber mills in the same part of the country.

The broadness of the scope suggests a broad audience. Certainly, the case for reigning in post-Soviet Russian floating nuclear power stations and reactor parks as well as “nuclear fuel parking lots” and other biohazards in the United States deserves to be heard loud and clear, and in this sense, the book is addressed as much to policy-makers as to students or more casual readers. Its appeal is enhanced by the employment of metonyms such as the “concrete ceiling” encountered by female professionals in the Soviet Union, “from kimchi to concrete” to denote the North Korean experiment in autarchy, and “industrial deserts” to signify what has become of much of the southern Ural Mountain region. It benefits from the extensive and largely effective use of the metaphor of grayness to characterize the standardized, modular, repeatable, stripped-down, prefabricated, environmentally

hazardous, and above all, aesthetically dull “proletarian aesthetics” of Stalinstadt (German Democratic Republic), Sztalinvaros (Hungary), Nowa Huta (Poland), and other “socialist” cities. Finally, the definition of socialist realism as a genre “in which heroes were heroes, villains were villains, and nature was a villain too”, and the statement that “[i]n the Urals, money for ecological study or environmental law enforcement did not grow on trees” because “in many places there were no trees” demonstrate that wry humor has a place too.

It is quite clear that much of the socialist world’s technological utopianism originated in the capitalist West. Moreover, with the onset of the Cold War it became incumbent on the USSR to devote enormous expenditures on ever more fancy and costly projects, both to avoid the impression of weakness and to impress the rest of the world. With precious few exceptions – the diversion of rivers flowing north to the Arctic to irrigate central Asia, being the best-known – state authorities did not have to contend with domestic opposition to their plans. Hence, the relatively smooth arc from the Volkhov electrical power station project of the 1920s to Chernobyl in 1986.

Alas, this *tour d’horizon* of the physical and moral devastation caused by technological utopianism has its own excesses. One is the rhetorical use of “socialist workers’ paradise”, the repetition of which does nothing to explain the Bolsheviks’ actual political rhetoric. Another is the repetitiousness of the argument that the technology adopted by socialist leaders, planners, architects, and engineers did not reflect truly socialist goals. But, over and above these matters of style and taste, is the truly extraordinary number of simple errors of fact, wrong dates, and misspelled names that distract attention from the argument the author builds against “large-scale, resource-intensive, symbolically important, yet highly irrational projects”. Better than most, Josephson knows that one needn’t wear a Bluetooth to get things right, and it is too bad that neither he nor the Johns Hopkins University Press managed to catch these mistakes before committing them to print.

Lewis H. Siegelbaum

MESKILL, DAVID. *Optimizing the German Workforce. Labor Administration from Bismarck to the Economic Miracle.* [Monographs in German History, Vol. 31.] Berghahn Books, New York [etc.] 2010. xi, 276 pp. £55.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000125

David Meskill’s initial thesis is that the German economy was able to recover quickly after the Great Depression as well as after World War II. As an important factor in this, he identifies the German workforce’s high level of training, which had been made possible by the registration of school-leavers through public vocational counselling and the increased readiness of companies to train them. The decisive factor here, however, was that the production potential of the German economy had for the most part not been destroyed.

Since placement in apprenticeship positions by vocational counselling was closely tied to general job placement, the author describes in chapter 1 the beginnings of public job placement prior to World War I. Here he argues that a decisive turning point in the subsequent *Totalerfassung* (complete inclusion or registration) of the German workforce was the Job Placement Law of 1910. It should be pointed out, however, that the law of 1910 was intended primarily to better protect job-seekers from exploitation by commercial placement agencies. While the law was also supposed to strengthen public job placement