

## In this issue

The cover photo of Erich Honecker and Angela Davis shaking hands in September 1972 depicts two individuals who play a prominent role in this issue. At first glance, the marked difference in their appearance underlines the widespread impression that Honecker was a bland, uncharismatic and strangely outmoded figure – long before the fall of the GDR regime. The popular American civil rights activist, in turn, is quite a counterpoint to the communist leader, clearly dominating the image with her striking appearance. Although Honecker does not have eye contact with his foreign visitor in this picture, he appears to feel a joy and self-satisfaction that points beyond the propagandistic character of the depicted encounter.

*Martin Sabrow* analyzes the tension between the functionary Honecker, who often appeared ossified, and the youthful, enthusiastic ‘communist carer’ Honecker embodied at other times. Sabrow traces Honecker’s biography, his self-understanding and the fiction of undisrupted biographical continuity that Honecker upheld to the last. Angela Davis is the protagonist of another contribution: *Sophie Lorenz* describes the solidarity campaign organized for Davis, who was imprisoned in the USA from 1970 to 1972 and visited the GDR repeatedly after her acquittal. The staging of ‘solidarity’ certainly fulfilled a political function for the GDR – both internationally and domestically – but it is also a manifestation of an everyday Cold War culture that was expressed, for example, in factories and schools.

*Hannah Ahlheim* scrutinizes the history of a German-American relationship of a very different nature: she drafts the social history of sleep between 1930 and 1960, focusing on the history of its scientific exploration. This research was initiated in Germany, and after the Second World War further developed in the USA. The author shows that the rhythms of sleep and debates surrounding its function were always closely connected to the life and work habits of the pertaining society. Moreover, such a historicization of sleep addresses the relationship between individuals and society, between autonomy and subjection. The conflicts this entails can be traced to the present – beyond the 1960s and beyond the example of sleep.

In the debate section, *Klaus Nathaus* and *C. Clayton Childress* build on the earlier work of the American sociologist Richard A. Peterson in their presentation of the ‘production of culture’ approach. They emphasize its usefulness for contemporary history research, which has increasingly come to pay attention to phenomena and processes of popular culture. Research on the meanings and significance of cultural (or medial) forms of expression has a long tradition, and questions of reception today also get greater attention. However, this does not seem to apply to the same degree to the production and distribution of, e.g., music or genres – at least not in contemporary historiography. The authors

suggest that this gap might be bridged with the help of sociological models. *Stefanie Middendorf* and *Annette Vowinkel* contribute comments to this paper.

The sources section of this issue, which *Dominik Rigoll* conceptualized, also has a strong debate character. It addresses the accessibility of sensitive information and the power this entails. For historical research, this implies two things: on the one hand, free access to sources that are relevant for recent contemporary history, and on the other the historicization of the circumstances and conflicts of information politics as such. The international comparisons and trans-national perspectives the authors present in this issue are particularly instructive in this regard. So far, the objects of this research have primarily been 'files', but the discussion is by no means limited to this medium and will in the future most likely shift towards 'data' in the broader sense.

Contributions by *Axel Schildt* and *Alexa Geisthövel* ('rediscovered classics') round off this issue. Geisthövel reconsiders the film *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and Schildt critically re-examines Hermann Lübbe's speech from 1983 on the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's coup d'état – a text that was and remains consequential. In the FRG, the events marking the anniversary in January 1983 were a prelude to a series of anniversaries. In a way they even established historical anniversaries as an endless media loop whose ambivalence we can today clearly discern.

We would like to end with a notice on our own behalf: the graphics and contents of the portal *Zeitgeschichte-online* have undergone a comprehensive renewal since December 2012 (<<http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de>>). *H-Soz-u-Kult* (<<http://hsozkult.de>>) is also introducing a new content management system and a new website design. We are planning similar measures for *Studies in Contemporary History*. Of course we will retain the clear visual appearance and established basic structure, but we also noticed a few possibilities for improvement. Further suggestions by our readers are highly welcome.

The Editors

(translation: Eva Schissler)