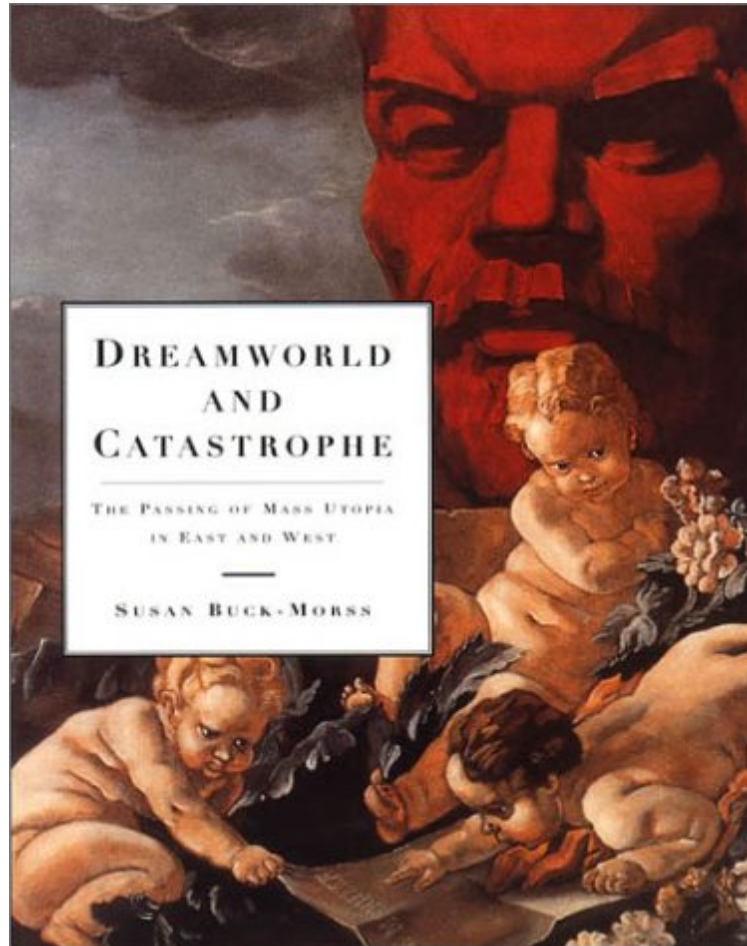


(Free pdf) Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West

Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West

Susan Buck-Morss

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Susan Buck-Morss : Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West:

20 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Daddy Stalin and Warbucks: Friends 'Til the EndBy PanopticonmanBuck-Morss's tale of the sputtering, guttering end of the modern Fordist disciplinary project both in the U.S.A and in the Soviet Union is a stunner. Most compelling are the historical insights -- told with particular elegance through the comparison of patriotic and advertising images -- that show how similar both projects really were! Some of the historical tidbits stick in the mind never to be dislodged: Daddy Stalin asking Henry Ford to come build him a factory to make tractors in the middle of the Depression. Lenin's admiration for Frederick Taylor. Amazing how the salvation for both communists and capitalists was the same industrial regime, the same worker's paradise of factory

labor! The second half of the book, a kind of diary of cross-cultural US/Soviet cultural exchanges prior to and after the Berlin Wall, is interesting but less intellectually energizing. Still, there is a great deal of wit in Ms. Buck-Morss's observation that Western Marxist critics such as Frederick Jameson (who attended some of the same seminars with Soviet intellectuals that Buck-Morss did) seem less willing to give up on the socialist dreamscape than their Soviet counterparts. A great companion read is Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's "Empire" which really has an interesting take on the near simultaneous end of Fordism and the disciplinary state in both the U.S. and Soviet Union. They suggest it was the "multitude" or proletariat in both nations who rebelled against the industrial factory/modern project and destabilized both, an argument which runs counter to the usual top-down explanations for the rise of postmodern economics. Interesting how we're told these days that the Soviets, now suffering in the hot bath of capitalism, are nostalgic for the certainty of the Daddy Stalin years. Perhaps their nostalgia is not so different than Baby Boomer Americans' nostalgia for the lost innocence of the early 50s/60s, the Golden Age of American economic hegemony, before the New Deal project finally collapsed. Now that the veil has dropped it seems we had a lot more in common with "them"(us) than we ever thought we did. And still do!

14 of 24 people found the following review helpful. The Betrayal of History By Sam Vaknin 'Dreamworld and Catastrophe' is a cry of anguish disguised as the interdisciplinary analyses of a (neo-)Marxist scholar. It is a fragmentary and tortured reaction to the betrayal of history, in the best of Walter Benjamin's tradition, consciously emulated in this tome by this leading authority on the Frankfurt School. It is painful to wade through the convolutions of denial, intellectualization and projection that constitute the first part ('Democracy' - the political framework). The next two sections ('History' and 'Mass Culture') are a joyride of erudition and an intellectual tour de force. The last part - a dry chronicle of the comings and goings of the author's milieu amidst the disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of Russia - is anti-climactic. The opus in its entirety does not fulfill the blurb's somewhat hubristic promise: 'This book offers a reevaluation of the twentieth century'. Sam Vaknin, author of 'After the Rain - How the West Lost the East' 9 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Where's the Beast? By Jack R. Curtis Having been raised in the ideological wasteland of 20th century America, I found this book an interesting read. It could be seen as a vindication of Chomskii's idea that the Cold War was a fake, in which the 2 sides's respective leaders colluded to pick the pockets of their respective peoples in order to finance the buildup of huge military machines which could be used to suck the blood of the 3rd world. My main disappointment, aside from occasional annoying forays into pseudo-intellectual gibberish (especially the Soviet "nomenklatura" variety), was the author's failure to inquire into the cause of the socialistic failure, apparently assuming the fact that the leaders of neither side actually had any interest in the welfare of their people was sufficient explanation. It seems more likely to me that the collapse of social welfare is an inevitable result of the global population-explosion (i.e. as the population increases the competition for Earth's resources intensifies grows increasingly vicious, things are bound to deteriorate). Considering that the Wise Men of yore warned us of this problem long ago (i.e. population-explosion becoming the "Beast of Armagedon" threatening to drag us to our doom with it's 4 Horsemen of Famine, Plague, War, Avarice when we had finished the job of replenishing the Earth), it's hard to understand why the global intelligensia don't get it. Perhaps the "dumbing-down of America" has taken it's toll on the rest of the world, as well.

Developing the notion of dreamworld as both a poetic description of a collective mental state and an analytical concept, Susan Buck-Morss attempts to come to terms with mass dreamworlds at the moment of their passing. The dream of the twentieth century was the construction of mass utopia. As the century closes, this dream is being left behind; the belief that industrial modernization can bring about the good society by overcoming material scarcity for all has been challenged by the disintegration of European socialism, capitalist restructuring, and ecological constraints. The larger social vision has given way to private dreams of material happiness and to political cynicism. Developing the notion of dreamworld as both a poetic description of a collective mental state and an analytical concept, Susan Buck-Morss attempts to come to terms with mass dreamworlds at the moment of their passing. She shows how dreamworlds became dangerous when their energy was used by the structures of power as an instrument of force against the masses. Stressing the similarities between the East and West and using the end of the Cold War as her point of departure, she examines both extremes of mass utopia, dreamworld and catastrophe. The book is in four parts. "Dreamworlds of Democracy" asks whether collective sovereignty can ever be democratic. "Dreamworlds of History" calls for a rethinking of revolution by political and artistic avant-gardes. "Dreamworlds of Mass Culture" explores the affinities between mass culture's socialist and capitalist forms. An "Afterward" places the book in the historical context of the author's collaboration with a group of Moscow philosophers and artists over the past two tumultuous decades. The book is an experiment in visual culture, using images as philosophy, presenting, literally, a way of seeing the past. Its pictorial narratives rescue historical data that with the end of the Cold War are threatened with oblivion and challenge common conceptions of what this century was all about.

From Kirkus sBuck-Morss (The Dialectics of Seeing, 1989) turns her Benjaminian eye on the often surprising convergence of the Western and Soviet utopian imaginaries, to dazzling effect. Reading this book is like receiving a fascinating annotated scrapbook from your really smart friend in Moscow. From 1988 to 1993, Buck-Morss was a

visiting scholar there, at what was first called the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The fact that, by the end of her tenure, it was known as the Russian Academy of Sciences attests to the ideological turbulence of those years and to the dynamism and relevance of her task. Buck-Morss's previous book was a daring attempt to reverse-engineer Walter Benjamin's Paris Arcades Project out of the more than one thousand fragments left behind at his death. If Benjamin's project was, as he put it, "concerned with awakening from the nineteenth century," Buck-Morss's current undertaking is a none-too-gentle attempt to shake us out of the nightmare that has been our 20th. The scope of her research, often breathtaking, more than justifies a certain measure of methodological madness: with an irreverent collage sensibility worthy of the high modernism at issue here, she nimbly leaps from a blackly hilarious and terrifying chronology of the policy decisions surrounding Lenin's embalming, to a mini-history of the figure of the square in avant-garde art on both sides of the Cold War, to a visual pun that compares the architectural sketch for a never-built "Palace of the Supreme Soviets," topped by a monumental Lenin statue, with a film still of King Kong atop the Empire State Building. There's even an early-1990s attempt at "hypertext": scholarly footnotes that threaten to overtake the page. This experiment, however, works less well than those parts of the book that devote themselves to a clear-eyed reading of the visual detritus of mass culture. An ambitious book with the courage to take on the images that complacent post-capitalism might prefer to forget, and the erudition to read them with rigor and wit. -- Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. Reading the dominant narrative of Western triumphalism after 1989 against the grain, Susan Buck-Morss reaches back to the moment when the dreamworlds of mass utopia were not yet revealed as recipes for disaster. Boldly blasting their residues into new constellations of fragile hope, she unsettles our conventional wisdom about the lessons of the 20th century and provides arresting new ways to think about the possibilities of the 21st. (Martin Jay, Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor, Department of History, University of California, Berkeley) About the Author Susan Buck-Morss is Professor of Political Philosophy and Social Theory, Department of Government, and Professor of Visual Culture, Department of Art History, Cornell University.