PREFACE

This volume has as its conceptual framework the relationship between the turning points 1949 and 1989. Since 1989, debates sparked by the demise of the GDR and the subsequent unification of Germany brought revision of Germany’s recent history. This process is shaped by the dominance of political and sociological inquiry and by late twentieth-century media and paradigm shifts. We also still look to traditional cultural forms to provide insights into historical conditions. The cultural sphere reflects and investigates contemporary social, political and historical circumstances. It also fosters change and cultivates society’s attempts at self-definition. Cultural perspectives on 1949 and 1989, then, elucidate issues of division and unity in East and West. This collection investigates these perspectives, with various aspects of intellectual creativity represented, including literature, drama, film, journalism, essays, and public discourse.

1949 is normally portrayed as a year of formal beginnings marking already evident developments. Then, as in 1989, debate on ‘belonging’ and nationhood was skewed by the pace of political transformation. Notions of selfhood and national identity, often determined by external factors, appeared to have been sealed by the inauguration of two German states in 1949, but have been disputed anew since 1989. 1949 thus invites consideration of how communities come to be entrenched, whilst 1989 may be more readily associated with the contestation of established identities in both parts of Germany.

The eighteen essays in this volume debate the possibilities presented by radical change and the role of culture in confirming — or challenging — constitutional, social and historical developments. They explore power, opportunism, social uncertainty, and self-expression. Whilst the intellectual response to change forms the primary focus, the contributions present a range of approaches. Some of the essays analyse literary, journalistic, or historical sources; others concentrate on the biographies, attitudes, and emotions of individuals or groups. All of the contributions reflect the causal and cultural complexities associated with historical change and point to ongoing discussions in 1990s Germany. The collapse of the post-war order and its direct effects on German society have not only necessitated an ‘inclusive’ historiography embracing both East and West; it has also once more directed attention towards the common National Socialist past. Not least, the revisiting of aesthetic principles in the early
1990s is rooted in issues more typically associated with the late 1940s. Fundamental to all these and connected considerations is the question of perspective. Those who comment on social change are also participants, in 1949 as in 1989. Passivity, conformity and critical distance thus become key considerations, and the uncertain relationship between personal narrative and the history of the collective features throughout this collection.

In the opening essay, Helmut Peitsch traces the terms ‘Scham’, ‘Schuld’ and ‘Stolz’ in the intellectual discourse of both 1949 and 1989. He examines how the earlier debate has been instrumentalised in 1989/90, and asks whether the supposed German Sonderweg has finally come to an end. Peitsch’s paralleling of the two debates challenges our assessment of attitudes at both junctures. Cultural activism in the late forties is explored more specifically by Peter Davies, who focuses on Johannes R. Becher as a representative of the emerging GDR literary elite. Becher’s attempt to ‘revision’ national culture in the late 1940s is portrayed by Davies as an instance of personal identity-building as well as state-building. Clare Flanagan’s analysis of the intellectual response to the loss of national unity also illustrates the construction of physical and psychological communities in 1949. The trends in discourse in 1949 highlight the complicity of writers and journalists in the consolidation of power and in the fostering of any new sense of national belonging.

1949 heralded new literary traditions. These often appear to be less politically burdened in the West than in the East. Rhys Williams points to the salient stylistic shifts in emergent West German literature and its representatives, in particular Arno Schmidt and Hans Werner Richter. For Williams, Alfred Andersch deserves much of the credit for mediating between the extremes represented by these men, and for ensuring their assimilation into a diverse West German canon. Susan Tebbutt explores a another aspect of this diversity, focusing on how the moral challenges of the early post-war period caused one writer, Erich Kästner, to turn to children’s literature to pen timeless messages on tolerance and responsibility. Tebbutt argues that Kästner’s novel Konferenz der Tiere stands as a prominent example of the way in which ‘children’s literature’ (a category she discusses) has also engaged with the legacy of the Third Reich.

Post-1989 debate concerning past complicity and responsibility for the future has clear parallels with that of the late 1940s. Bill Niven
challenges the received wisdom of a ‘people’s revolution’ in 1989 and develops a ‘self-exclusion’ theory to explain the behaviour of GDR citizens both during and after the *Wende*. He points to patterns of passivity among citizens in the new *Länder* and emphasises the complexity of power relations. Niven thus anticipates the essays in this volume by Claus, Allan and Linklater, although all reveal the difficulty of reaching any consensus on the extent of the responsibility borne by East Germans for their regime. The question of responsibility for the past also concerns the familiar protagonists in Stephen Parker’s tale of the merging of the Academies of Arts in Berlin. Parker demonstrates how the manner in which intellectuals of the former GDR were categorised according to the extent of their involvement with the state authorities sets up an inevitable parallel, as elsewhere, with the post-Third Reich debate. The accusations and counter-accusations aimed at writers and thinkers focus attention on the current redefining of intellectual elites in the new Germany. Involvement with the state takes on a more sinister aspect in Barbara Miller’s article on *Informelle Mitarbeiter*. As Miller illustrates, individuals’ explanations for their roles in *Stasi* operations reveal complex strands of self-justification and narrative persuasion. Yet, as Beth Linklater demonstrates, any understanding of the relationship between the individual and the regime in the former GDR is also dependent on the evidence to be gleaned from the population at large. Linklater’s oral history paints a picture of ordinary people both proud of their past and their identity, and suspicious of the present. Her analysis shows how the ‘certainties of the past’ produce a mythical element in public and private history, a history passed on to the next generation.

The themes of memory, nostalgia for the GDR, and the individual’s formation of identity and community are echoed in other contributions. Moray McGowan examines how theatre in eastern Germany has reacted to the demise of the GDR. He shows how theatre productions reflect prevailing concerns, recording the fate of their community and making reference to cultural difference. They also combine established traditions with elements of spontaneity, thereby communicating the vibrancy of social change. Martin Kane shows how prose literature can do the same. He focuses on the lighter, more sceptical vein of writing about East Germans and stresses the significance of this as satire, but also as a form of resistance in 1990s’ Germany. Kane questions whether the exotic prose of Fritz Rudolf Fries represents ‘a variety of *Ostalgie* or a satirical
unmasking of it'. The use of humour and imagination to respond to bizarre historical circumstances sets up a contrast with the journalistic reportage considered by Matthias Uecker, but here too, the question of Ostalgie is central. Uecker investigates whether there is any evidence that journalists in East and West, emerging from vastly different traditions, really do reveal 'grundverschiedene Mentalitäten' in their reporting of regional and national events. Gisela Shaw’s analysis of Norma, a novel by former GDR writer Brigitte Burmeister, sheds light on issues of identity and self-expression in 1990s’ narrative literature. Burmeister’s story of one woman’s own personal Wende presents a narrative that can be located within the tradition in women’s literature of reconceptualising perspective and language. Applying the theories of Bakhtin and Kristeva, Shaw explores in particular the theme of memory and the relationship between the individual and power. Her conclusion that the novel presents ‘die dialektische Spannung zwischen Aufklärung, Diktatur und Revolution’ underlines the centrality of cultural production in 1989/90 and since.

In contrast to these eastern writers and in particular the younger generation, who are arguably locating their artistic expression of contemporary issues in stylistic approaches of the future, Günter Grass uses Ein weites Feld to express ‘outsider’ nostalgia for the GDR. In his assessment, Julian Preece argues that the GDR is lamented as the place where ‘imagination was the key to survival’. Whilst Grass defends GDR citizens as the unfortunate bearers of modern German history, Preece’s essay provokes questions about the significance of his presentation of the GDR population as essentially passive.

The question of passivity is one of the central considerations in Sean Allan’s analysis of three post-1989 German films. These films explore the problem of facing reality, and the role of art in contemporary society. Allan’s study shows how the critical approaches to the Wende in these films include criticism of the GDR population’s hasty response to the fall of the wall and unification. Yet Allan demonstrates that filmmakers, while accusing others of passivity, have implicated their own cultural sphere in the acceptance of the new order. Horst Claus, also writing on post-1989 film, notes that experiences of the late 1940s were often not expressed in film until the time of the Wende — further evidence of the widespread uncovering of suppression and nostalgia prompted by the liberation of the past. Helmut Schmitz’s discussion of Bernhard Schlink’s Der Vorleser and Ulla Berkewicz’s Engel sind schwarz und weiß makes similar connections
between the changed political climate since 1989, the past, and individual
complicity — this time with reference to recent fiction and National
Socialism. For Schmitz, Schlink and Berkéwicz contribute to a new,
transformed approach to the Third Reich. Their two novels focus on
perpetrators from a sympathetic perspective, with Schlink forcing the
reader's participation in the protagonist's involvement with a woman
accused of heinous crimes. The tendency in recent fiction to focus on
private history arguably represents a seminal shift in the treatment of moral
and political issues associated with German national history.

In the final essay of the collection, Ulrike Zitzlsperger focuses on
the unique role of Berlin in political and cultural history and on the city's
ascendance in the 1990s. In investigating the presentation of the city in
international literature, Zitzlsperger brings a different perspective to the
volume. Above all, her discussion demonstrates that the wider
understanding of the events and issues of 1989 is determined to a
significant degree by perceptions of the Wende from abroad. Resolution of
some of these issues will be observed most closely in Berlin, the capital of
the new German republic and, as such, 'repräsentativ für die Entwicklung
der Einheit'.

The future path of the 'Berlin Republic' will, of course, influence
the debates surrounding 1949 and 1989, but some patterns are clearly
identifiable. Many of the essays point to patterns of continuity,
demonstrated, for instance, by the continued recourse to established
literary and film traditions in East and West even as this heritage is being
reinterpreted. Repeated historical questions such as complicity in
disgraced regimes inform emergent ones, including the future of narrative
literature and the persistence of 'Ostalgie' (and 'Westalgie'). In addition,
networks, whether 'professional' or 'personal', are confirmed as central in
the treatment of issues of division and unity in German society. This is
partly reflected in this collection in the emphasis on oral history. Recorded
memory and personal testimony appear not only as historical accounts but
also as fictional and artistic constructs. A constant theme is accordingly the
question of how to evaluate subjective experience and testimony, and how
to judge the extent to which Germans — in both 1949 and 1989 —
knowingly or otherwise succeeded in shaping their destiny.

What is the evidence from recent cultural sources and debate? Can
we compare blindness to the recent past in 1989 to the temptation to
neglect personal encounters with National Socialism? Do the forty years of

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the GDR require an acknowledgement of ‘Schuld und Sühne’? Have discussions of guilt, informed by the debates of 1949, become any more sophisticated since 1989? The diversity of answers to these questions, and the range of possible sources and approaches, clearly mean that this volume can only ever be provisional. It is hoped that it will inspire further work.

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